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“Where there is power, there is resistance.”

— Michel Foucault

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BRAVE NEW GIRLS

Gender Roles, Heroines & Rebellion in Selected Works of Contemporary Dystopian Young Adult Fiction

Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; he slays the dragon, he battles giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep: she waits.

– Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Vol. 2, Part 1, Ch.2)

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where equality is an issue of the present and the future, and where fights for equal rights have dominated a major part of our past. Goals have been achieved successfully so far, but some aspects of the debate on equality and the distribution of equal rights are ongoing issues not only in the real world, but in literature as well. Books and written texts have been considered as mirrors of their time quite often. Divergence from norms and stereotypes was limited to rare occasions, but has been growing over time, when more and more writers began to use the influence they may have as a means to educate their readers subtly beyond the primary purpose of providing entertainment. Small changes became visible in the male-dominated world we have been living in from the beginning of humankind onwards when women emerged from their oppression and started to be writers, playwrights or actresses without the limitations which have been restricted to their sex in the past. It appears as if now the time has come to allow female book characters as much agency as their male counterparts have always been enjoying. The time has come, where female heroines are introduced and girls slowly begin to leave their spots as love interests, damsels in distress and sidekicks behind. Women have come a long way from early attempts in literary works to make the feisty and witty female an enjoyable character as well as a role model for female readers, yet it seems as if changes from tradition to the contemporary are not rushed, but there are interesting examples to engage further in.

It is not the aim of this thesis to summarize the injustice women have endured throughout history, captured and manifested in literary pieces, but to focus on the contemporary situation of a literary genre which has the potential of change. Even in times of the internet and the influence of popular culture on young people, it appears as if book characters still provide an important means of identification. The assumption that revolutionary thought, to express the

issue of liberation and equality slightly exaggerated, starts with the younger generations is not very far-fetched. Young people are at the centre of the modern world, and more importantly, they are the key to the future and to possible changes it might hold for humanity. With regard to the real world, it might seem blunt to centralise literary works to such an influential position, but recently it has become visible that changes have been happening in young adult literature. The reason why I have decided to focus on young adult literature as the genre providing the primary literature for the analysis in this thesis is because it has been growing immensely over the last decade or two. Additionally, young adult literature has reinforced gender stereotypes and limitations connected to sex in the past as well as in the present, but authors have recently begun to portray gender differently in some cases, not as conform with the archaic distribution of women and men, but more willing to deconstruct existing stereotypes. One of the main aims of this thesis will be the analysis of such potential changes in gender portrayal and the ways authors choose to present their female protagonists as far as the aspect of gender and the juxtaposition with the prevalence of male dominance are concerned. Furthermore, I will critically analyse gender portrayal in a selection of young adult dystopian fiction from a post-structural feminist perspective and point out the instances of female empowerment and heroism. The heroines will be analysed with regard to their status as feminist characters according to a rough theory outline of how feminist characters may be portrayed like. The dystopian context is not just a framework for the analysis, but provides a platform for the heroines to operate as leaders of rebellions and wars, and to unfold their abilities and potential.

The main research questions I intend to answer and give insight to within the analytical part of this thesis are the following:

1. Which instances of breaks with “traditional” character portrayal are visible in the selected texts?
2. How are the heroines in the selected texts of contemporary young adult dystopian literature portrayed with regard to their heroism?
3. How do rebellion and personal relationships influence the heroine?

2. CHILDREN’S AND YOUNG ADULT FICTION – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

While children’s literature has been a more or less established branch of literary publishing, young adult literature is a considerably new area. I would like to use this chapter as a brief

overview of how children's literature became a literary genre despite initial troubles to manifest itself as valuable and the resulting influence on new genres. Early versions of texts for young readers primarily include folk tales, fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Prior to the eighteenth century, children's stories were mainly expressed verbally, reaching back to Medieval, or according to some critics even Ancient times, but the second half of the century produced a number of interesting changes in the publishing world with regard to children's literature. According to Grenby, John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, which was published in 1744 and was promoted by the author as a combination of entertainment and education, is one of the works which are responsible for the development of children's literature to a printed, growing branch of literature (see 'Origins'). The reason for this influential position Newbery and his work occupy is his approach to successfully commercialise children's literature by fusing "the instructive material that adults thought their children would need within an entertaining format that children might be supposed to want" (ibid.). The general agenda to use children's literature as a means to convey education and entertainment simultaneously appears to be more or less universal with regard to the history of the genre, however, the exact point of origin might vary. Regardless of a definite point of origin, there are works which are unquestionably some of the pioneers of the genre. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) are regarded as classics, representing the times during which they have been written, in the twenty-first century, yet at the time of their publication and still long after, these books were considered suitable for children only, and thereby less valuable literary material. It has taken children's literature a long way to receive recognition as a literary genre which deserves a serious treatment and not only functions as a bridge for children to 'real' literature. The rising commercial success of children's literature in the eighteenth century, however, has paved the way for future development within the genre, and by the end of the century, Grenby claims "an author could start to think of himself, or more typically herself, as a writer for children only" ('Origins'). Initially, the genre with which children's literature was mainly associated was women's literature. As Hunt states, "children's books – from writing to publication to interaction with children – are the province of that culturally marginalized species, the female" (1). As mothers and stereotypically domestic, passive beings, women were in much closer contact with children than men, thus it is only logical given the context of the time that children and women in connection with literature were treated similarly. Not only were many authors of children's literature female, but professions like teachers or librarians were mainly dominated by women. Female authors had been around since the seventeenth century, but they were taken seriously

in their profession very rarely, thus the lack of recognition for both children's stories as well as women's writing was a mutual fate.

Children's literature had already been around for decades, but another literary genre focussing on a subsequent stage in human development rose to popularity in the twentieth century, particularly the second half of the century. The expression 'young adult literature' has only been coined in the 1960s, when authors began to portray serious issues in the lives of their adolescent protagonists and a realistic portrayal of such issues grew widely popular (see Strickland 'A Brief History of YAL'). Yet, the amount of children's and young adult texts which have reached a status of popularity similar to those of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Little Women*, or *Peter Pan* (1904) is rather low. In the past particularly, literary theory and criticism always remained more interested in a stronger focus on adult literature because it was "the real thing" compared to literature for young readers. Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, young adult fiction found new grounds to grow and develop, and a large amount of texts has been published since. Some of the works produced during that time are frontrunners of the genre of young adult literature just like the aforementioned works have shaped the field of children's literature. Influential works for adolescent readers include J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), the anonymously published *Go Ask Alice* (1971) or Judi Blume's *Forever* (1975). These novels deal with different issues, but what they have in common is a mutual interest in the lives of teenagers and their problems. Of course the young readership is also presented with a selection of supernatural or science fiction stories which include adolescent characters, but it seems that the realistic portrayal of teenage issues was one of the major themes of the growing branch of young adult literature at the time. Strickland points out that young adult literature enjoyed its first peak during the 1970s thanks to these works and numerous more, but that it seems as if the realistic approach on everyday issues adolescents face such as drug use, family troubles or misunderstandings lost their appeal and the spark of interest had not been refuelled successfully until the 2000s, which might be considered as a second golden era of adolescent literature during the twentieth and twenty-first century (ibid.).

Realistic approaches on teenage lives regained their popularity, but so did elements of the fantastic as a new major theme. The combination of adolescent protagonists and alternate worlds, vampires or wizards worked, and the field began to flourish immensely. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997) series is regarded not only as one of the most influential and popular series

in literature, but it has also marked the entrance of the genre into new spheres, new areas of interest and a much broader selection of works produced as a response to the growing popularity. *Harry Potter* has surpassed its status as a highly successful literary series and has become a phenomenon of popular culture, securing a stable status of young adult literature within the literary world. Since one of the major areas of interest of this thesis is the genre of young adult dystopia, the growing popularity of the fantasy and science fiction genre is a particularly important change in the field. After *Harry Potter*, the next phenomenon were the *Twilight* (2008) books by Stephanie Meyer, set in a world where vampires and werewolves are real, and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008), which is probably the most successful representative of the consequently booming field of young adult dystopian fiction. Dystopian literature for young adults has not originated with *The Hunger Games*, but the success of Collins's trilogy sparked a growing interest in the themes and settings of such stories. With regard to the massive popularity of supernatural and fantastic elements, Strickland refers to Jennifer Barnes, who states that "[t]eens are caught between two worlds, childhood and adulthood, and in YAL, they can navigate those two worlds and sometimes dualities of other worlds" (qtd. in Strickland). Teenagers might enjoy realistic novels because they are able to identify with the protagonists who are mainly normal people with more or less ordinary lives. Many of the fantasy and science fiction stories set in alternate worlds or imagined visions of the future are comparable to classical heroes' journeys, and apart from that numerous of them are exciting adventure stories featuring a variety of elements that offer possibilities of identification for the reader, but also ways to allow the reader to engage in his or her own imagination. Novels such as *Noughts and Crosses* (2003), *Uglies* (2005), *The Maze Runner* (2009), *Delirium* (2011), *Divergent* (2011) portray different worlds and governmental systems, but they share a focus on the lives of adolescent protagonists who fight against their respective systems. Rebellion and war are issues young people deal with not only in dystopian regimes, thus it seems fitting that these stories not only entertain, but might also provide food for thought with regard to some readers, especially if the main theme is presented as a subtle social critique. This may refer to the fulfilment of both an entertaining as well as a possible educational purpose books for young readers can present.

The field of young adult literature has celebrated great success over the recent years and has been established as a literary genre worth noticing. Texts for young adults might not yet share the ranks with the classics, but the way has been smoothed and the genre receives growing recognition. Adults appear to be just as drawn to those new, fantastical worlds which have been

created, and the genre is not as limited to a fixed target audience as it might seem with children's literature, even though the times when only children were the audience of children's literature are gone as well. Some literary works labelled as children's literature, especially some of those which have been classified as classics, attract a mixed audience. Despite the growing manifestation of CYAL as a valuable part of the literary world, the academic branch engaged in the topic is still limited. It is not an aim of this thesis to examine the existent framework of literary theory for children's and young adult literature as a whole, thus I will only briefly refer to Nikolajeva's summary of the discussion concerning contemporary critique. According to Nikolajeva, "[w]hile feminist, postcolonial, queer and ecocriticism, that McGillis refers to as 'low', have become [sic!] deeply anchored in literary studies, there is no comparable theory grown out of the particular conditions of literature for young readers" ('Introduction'). As Peter Hunt states, the marginal position of children's literature is equipped with the advantage that "it can be approached from any specialists viewpoint" (1) because as a theory it has not been claimed by any academic branch. An assumption which may be drawn from this lack of academic research on children's and young adult literature despite the undoubted success of the genre, is that it has not yet reached the critical acclaim of other literary genres. However, it appears as if the theory accompanying children's and young adult novels is ever-growing since the focus on childhood and adolescence as stages in human development from various areas of interest apart from literature, grows in importance as well. From what I have experienced during my research for this thesis, the amount of theory for young adult literature in particular is definitely growing, but the academic research primarily seems to focus on the most commercially successful and popular novels, even though there is a whole genre to be explored from a critical perspective.

2.1 GENDER ROLES IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT FICTION

One of the most important aspects in the lives of young people is gender and sexuality. Both socio-cultural and biological gender construction have shaped the human perception on the apparent differences between the male and the female. Children's and young adult literature functions as a mediator between childhood, adolescence and adulthood, thus it engages in various issues connected to these stages of human development because literature is not an exception from the way gender has been constructed in the past as well as the present and the influence such construction has on the individual, especially concerning a stage of life as sensitive as adolescence. While the way in which gender has been constructed either

biologically is not of great importance for this thesis, the forms the literary portrayal of boys and girls takes is important indeed, especially the focus on girls. I intend to use the following section of the thesis as a survey of the depiction of traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes in literature, particularly in literature for young readers.

In the past, identification with literary characters was frequently connected to the policies surrounding the distribution of books and the suitability of particular books for a selected audience. The target audience was often determined according to sex because not every book was considered suitable for boys and girls equally. Simons points out that “[b]y the mid to late nineteenth century, the separate fictional worlds of boys and girls were being demarcated with great clarity, each with its own internal laws and its own territory, from which the other sex is outlawed” (‘Gender Roles’). It was already mentioned in the historical overview on the origins of children’s literature that by the nineteenth century the genre had become more popular, and with the success came the appropriation of its content. Children’s literature was regulated by adults who attempted to reinforce the reproduction of dominant gender roles and thereby influenced the children in shaping their own identities. In the past more than today, children’s literature seemed to have a major educational purpose to it, additional to the entertaining function the stories fulfilled. Hunt reinforces this assumption by stating that books are “overtly important educationally and commercially” (1). In contemporary young adult literature, I would argue that the educational aspect is very subtly hidden within the text, if there even is an educational purpose since entertainment seems to be the major aspect as far as reader expectations are concerned. Young readers are not limited in their choice of reading material anymore, however, there is still a gender-oriented way of promoting not only books, but toys and items for children in general. Stereotypical gender roles are often reinforced in books as well as in television, cinema and popular culture as a whole. While children are influenced by the entertaining and educational material they receive at an early age, adolescents are shaped in their learning process of how the world works and how they fit into their world. Frequently this is a dominant issue in many young adult novels, particularly in those where freedom is not a given aspect of life as in dystopian settings, for instance. Occasionally, authors seem to make greater efforts in the creation process of their characters, trying to challenge persisting stereotypes which have already characterised apparent differences between boys and girls and may be considered as archaic today. Before I discuss the critical engagement in gender roles in CYAL and the possibilities of reversal, I will provide an overview of traditional gender roles

and stereotypes which have been connected to the patriarchal dominance and the ‘simplification’ of gender differences.

2.1.1. Defining Gender Roles and Stereotypes

The portrayal of gender roles in young adult literature is not entirely different from the depiction of gender in other literary genres, but especially since young adult literature is a genre quickly growing in popularity and demand, a critical glance at the way in which gender roles are portrayed seems essentially relevant not only in general, but as an important resource for this thesis. The values and expectations with regard to the idealised, conventional behaviour of boys and girls respectively in books have changed throughout the past centuries and offer greater freedom in the unfolding of a child’s or adolescent’s character and identity nowadays. Gender-neutrality appears to be an issue of little relevancy in the market for children particularly, which is dominated by the colour blue specifically aimed at boys and the colour pink at girls. As far as toys are concerned, the pseudo-suitability according to gender stereotypes is still frequently reproduced by divided categories that also suggest dolls for girls and cars for boys. I would assume that this strict distinction is beginning to decline since many parents want their children to play with whatever they like, but in general this is still an everyday issue which reinforces the division of the sexes and shapes children in their identities. A recent article by Allison Flood in *The Guardian* from 2014 refers to a campaign supported by authors for children’s and young adult literature such as Malorie Blackman or Philipp Pullman which is similar to the ‘Let Toys Be Toys’ campaign that promotes the end of gendered, stereotyped toys. ‘Let Books Be Books’ focuses on the depiction of gender roles in books and “seeks to put pressure on retailers and publishers not to market children’s books that promote ‘limiting gender stereotypes’” (see Flood 2014). As far as the context of literature is concerned, Kortenhaus and Demarest already argued about the issue in a study from 1993 where they claim that even in the 1970s an assessment of books “found that the books exhibited greater balance and sexual equality, with more females present in titles, central roles and illustrations” (221). They connect these changes in the representation of women with the changing role of women, the appearance of a ‘new woman’, towards the end of the twentieth century, and particularly with the civil rights movements later in the century, and point out further that “[o]ther studies of current children’s books do not share this conclusion, and indicate that most books are still sexist” (ibid.). However, the changing as well as growing genre of children’s and young adult literature in the twenty-first century may provide more noticeable changes in the portrayal and balance of

gender in the future. According to Lehr, children's gender identity is primarily influenced socially rather than naturally, and that parents and teachers as well as the repetition of particular experiences shape the way in which children perceive themselves (see 4). A constant reproduction of conventional masculinity and femininity as innately separate influences young people in their development. Such social influences range from the social circle and school to media output like television, games or literature. Authors have the advantage to create any character they want, thus there are texts used to establishing a 'new' portrayal of gender roles by allowing characters to display some of the qualities that have traditionally been associated with one sex only. The lack of equality between boys and girls in literature is particularly visible as far as hero stories are concerned. Boys are usually the paradigms of heroism, while girls function as love interests or sidekicks. Very few female protagonists are able to overcome obstacles without a masculine figure to help them. It is an aim of this thesis to analyse aspects of selected works of young adult fiction concerning the portrayal of female heroism, gender stereotyping and the possibility of changes in the depiction of gender roles.

Since there is no explicit terminology with regard to children's and young adult literature and gender, I will use both academic research on the stated topic as well more general research on the stereotyping of gender qualities. Within the context of male dominance as a Western ideology, Russ quite strongly argues that "[o]ur [Western canon] literature is not about women. It is not about women and men equally. It is by men and about men" (81). Male and female characters were and still are portrayed as separate entities with different characteristics according to their sex, and they have always been put in contrast with each other. Many researchers on the issue of gender representation in children's and young adult literature have concluded that the sets of characteristics which define the behaviour of boys and girls respectively, very rarely refer to both sexes. Lehr states that "[b]oys are described in popular culture as active, loud, aggressive, unemotional, independent, less mature than girls, strong, handsome, bold, curious, adventurous, tough and naturally smart" (1), while "girls are described [as] passive, quiet, sweet, nice, emotional, more mature than boys, dependent, hardworking, smart, shy, accommodating, beautiful, pretty, or cute" (ibid.). Such fixed patterns of gender portrayal can be harmful to some readers in a way that they reinforce stereotypical gender roles which have been co-existing for a long period of time in an unequal relationship without critical re-evaluation. The minds of young readers are influenced by the indication that boys and girls need to be portrayed differently to fulfil their respective purposes in society. These constructed

purposes, however, have changed from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century and might need a new contemporary definition and interpretation.

Research on children's and young adult literature with a specific focus on gender roles uses various approaches to identify changes in the convention of gender portrayal, but many academics share a similar view on how traditional gender roles are represented in literature. Before the stereotyping can be challenged, we need to point out which forms it can take and how it might be challenged. Maria Nikolajeva claims that gender roles are more fixed in adolescent literature, while literature for younger readers offers more interchangeable patterns of gender characterisation (see 'Chapter 7'). This seems to reinforce an opinion which claims that it is alright for children to explore beyond gender boundaries, but as soon as they grow older and are to become adults, they are obliged to fulfil a certain role in society which is mostly defined by sex. Nikolajeva points out that "[s]ince masculinity is traditionally given priority in power relationships, it would seem natural that in YA novels male protagonists must confirm their masculinity, while female protagonists must negotiate their power position in compliance with patriarchal rules ('Chapter 7'). The traditional connotation of the term 'masculine' in a patriarchal society is empowered and normative, whereas the term 'feminine' is defined as "disempowered, oppressed, deviant and silenced" (see *ibid.*). In patriarchal dominance the female is defined by the male. As far as hero stories, for example, are concerned, men have occupied the role of the hero predominantly in the past while women have functioned as supporting roles, rarely allowed to place themselves as equally empowered individuals alongside men.

Brown & St.Clair have researched the issue of the empowerment of female characters in young adult literature, and have traced back the path of development from the characterisation of the female role in earlier fiction as "mandating submission, conformity, and passivity in a world that positioned marriage [...] as her fixed destination" (2). In the past, female characters in fiction primarily had the same social purpose to fulfil as it was expected from women in reality. Simons states that literary critic Edward Salmon, who wrote in 1886, claimed that literature for boys was used to make proper men out of them and girls' literature should build up women (see 'Gender Roles'). However, Salmon also criticised the popular view that boys should read adventurous books and girls should read 'good-goody' books by wishing for girls' books to become more exciting and less preaching because "[g]irls might yearn for excitement as much as boys" (*ibid.*). A prominent concept of a well-known type of female

character is the *damsel in distress*, who is included in many works of fiction as a counterpart to the witty heroine, or as the passive and incompetent female protagonist in need of the hero's help. The damsel in distress is a stereotyped character, used as a stock character in comedic works that has become a prominent way to portray women in general. The female character manages to get herself kidnapped or in any other sort of trouble that acquires help, consequently the male character fulfils his active role as the chivalrous hero and saves the passive woman. As I have mentioned earlier, conventional female characters are defined by their relationship with the male hero rather than their own doings. Brown & St.Clair have also included early literature such as fairytales and folk narratives in their analyses and quote Ellen Cronan Rose, who identified that "[i]n fairy tales, boys are clever, resourceful, and brave. They leave home to slay giants, outwit ogers, solve riddles, find fortunes. Girls, on the other hand, stay home and sweep the hearth, are patient, enduring, self-sacrificing [...]" (qtd. in Brown & St.Clair 2). As we can see throughout literary history, the role of the girl has frequently been the passive one, not partaking in the great adventures of the heroes, but waiting in a tower to be saved, or waiting for the man to arrive back home after an adventure. As Brown & St.Clair state, it was the "good bad boys", who always appeared as the real heroes of the story because they were entertaining and fun, while the equivalent of "good bad girls" was simply not existent, since "good girls" were interested in staying at home and becoming a wife and mother someday instead of playing pranks and behaving mischievously (ibid. 6). The domination of the male over the female in a broader context is also discussed by Simone De Beauvoir, who points out that

[e]verything helps to confirm this [patriarchal] hierarchy in the little girl's eyes. Her historical and literary culture, the songs and legends she is raised on, are an exaltation of the man. Men made Greece, the Roman Empire, France, and all countries, they discovered the earth and invented the tools to develop it, they governed it, peopled it with statues, paintings, and books. Children's literature, mythology, tales, and stories reflect the myths created by men's pride and desires: the little girl discovers the world and reads her destiny through the eyes of men (Beauvoir Vol.2, Part 1, Ch. 1).

De Beauvoir's statement clearly expresses that an isolation from patriarchal dominance is difficult since it is the prevalent ideology and has always influenced the way in which behaviour is gendered. A majority of female characters in fiction is characterised as damsels in distress, angels of the house and 'good girls' avoiding trouble not only in the past, but frequently in a contemporary context as well. However, in contemporary literature gender stereotyping may take different forms, often appearing as if the female characters are empowered while truthfully they still are characterised by what would be associated with convention. Girls have been centralised by their roles as friends, companions and love interests, but boys still are the core of attention in many works of young adult fiction particularly.

As far as the contemporary portrayal of gender roles is concerned, Nikolajeva has established the terms ‘new masculinities’ and ‘new femininities’ as ways to express a less traditional way of defining girls and boys in literature for young readers. Primarily, the definitions of traditional gender portrayal separated to a sphere for the male and a sphere for the female will be further used to establish the contrast between the conventional view and possible contemporary, or different views. Since the main focus of this thesis is the contemporary portrayal of female protagonists in adventurous settings, the possible reversal of gender roles and the resulting possibility of a growing unisex appeal of literature for young readers, drifting away from a separate distinction of books for girls versus books for boys, are important aspects for my later analysis. Therefore, the contrast between tradition and instances where tradition is challenged proves to be a useful framework for analysis and comparison. I will focus on contemporary gender stereotyping as well as gender role reversal and unisex appeal in the following chapter in greater detail. My aim in the upcoming chapters of this thesis is to use the research that was already done on gender role portrayal in children’s and young adult literature as well as feminist theories and aspects of post-structuralism to identify deconstructed and challenged gender roles, and analyse whether breaks with the norm are an essential aspect of contemporary children’s and young adult literature.

2.1.2 The Question of a Unisex Appeal & the Reversal of Gender Roles

A distinction between the young readers’ taste in reading material according to their sex only reinforces the existing targeting of either girls or boys. A shift towards a more unisex appeal of books might emphasise the readers’ perception of gender, especially if they are presented with gender roles which offer traces of interchangeability. Of course before I continue, I need to clarify what I mean when I use the terms ‘unisex’ and ‘gender role reversal’. The term ‘unisex’ is illustrated by the Oxford English Dictionary as follows:

‘unisex’, adj. and n.

Of, pertaining to, or characterized by a style (of dress, appearance, etc.) that is designed or suitable for either sex; not peculiar to one sex, sexually indeterminate or neutral. (OED)

This does not mean that books may not be targeted at female or male audiences preferably, but the attempt to create a growing unisex appeal of literature might reduce the way gender roles are presented and display a larger variety of ways readers identify with their literary heroes

regardless of their sex. While nothing is wrong with books targeted at either girls or boys rather than both sexes as far as the number of readers and the distribution and marketing is regarded, such books might reinforce gender stereotyping in many cases. Series like *Twilight* (2005), which are aimed at girls primarily, are successful nonetheless, but they also emphasise traditional gender roles to an extent that might be considered as harmful with regard to the shaping of young people's opinions on their own identity and gender roles in general if they are not critically engaging with these materials. However, reinforcement of conventional gender roles is also present in literature that is not specifically aimed at a target readership. It might be a benefit concerning identification of the reader with any adolescent protagonist notwithstanding their sex if a unisex appeal is used to establish a balance between male and female characters, their skills and abilities, and a reduction of gender stereotyping. A primary example for a series which is attempting to target readers without limitations would be the *Harry Potter* series. J.K. Rowling might even have chosen a unisex pen name to appeal to a wider readership. In general, specific genres and plot patterns may have a greater appeal to either boys or girls, but especially the adventure and hero genre has been majorly dominated by white, male heroes. As a connection to this, Nikolajeva points out that "[t]he masculine stereotype has been dominant in juvenile literature because it has prevailed in Western culture at large, going back to myths and classics" ('Chapter 7'). Yet, the most commercially popular selection of contemporary young adult literature proves that the sex of the protagonist is not as important for a book's success as it might have been in the past. Young adult novels like *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950), *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), *The Outsiders* (1967), *Harry Potter* (1997), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), *The Hunger Games* (2008), *The Maze Runner* (2009) or *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) belong to different periods of time and various genres, even so, they show that both female and male main characters may carry a successful story on their shoulders. Girls are portrayed as smart and independent, as fighters and warriors, but they are rarely depicted outside of a romantic context. Frequently, they indicate that the male protagonist conventionally has a stronger claim for agency and that female characters are often reduced to being sidekicks despite their cleverness and active qualities, especially as far as adventurous fantasy or science fiction plots are concerned. Hermione Granger is a particularly good example for a resourceful female character with the potential and agency to function as the lead being a sidekick. The contemporary success of these books and the variety of characters they feature does not automatically prove the empowerment or equality of female characters, however, most works include complex female characters, either as protagonists or sidekicks, who allow young female readers to identify with a broader selection of female

characters, and take a step further out of the shadow of the male hero. It appears as if the future of young adult literature might hold the possibility of a growing number of empowered heroines, given the fact that some genres more than others are beginning to promote gender equality through the use of girls as heroic protagonists or a raised visibility of equality and agency between boys and girls. Trites expresses her wishes as far as a unisex appeal of literature for young readers is concerned by stating that “[her] hope for feminist children’s literature is that it can encourage readers of both sexes to question their own assumptions about gender and that ultimately such texts can demonstrate interrelationships sustaining all people” (82).

It was already mentioned that literary preferences have been determined according to sex in the past and have been applied with traditional gender stereotypes, thus girls were expected to read stories suitable for their sensitivity, while boys were rarely interested in “girly” stories, but rather adventurous tales, which suited their activeness and association with outdoors. I would argue that contemporary literature frequently aims for a more widespread, diverse audience unattached to gender values. With regard to early approaches on children’s literature, Reynolds states that during the 19th century, “[t]hose with the mechanisms of taste and self-control (deemed to be almost exclusively well-educated, wealthy, adult males) were allowed to read freely, but it was thought the poor, women and children – especially girls – needed to have their reading regulated” (ch. ‘Early Approaches’). Contradictory to such early views on children’s literature, contemporary girls seem to enjoy adventure stories just as much as boys given the success of *Harry Potter*, or *The Hunger Games*, for example. Maureen Johnson, an author of young adult fiction herself, deals with gender issues in her article “The Gender Coverup” and claims that female readers are universally able to read absolutely anything, notwithstanding the gender of the author or of the main character, but

[b]oys, on the other hand, are much more delicately balanced. To ask them to read “girl” stories (whatever those might be) will cause the whole venture to fall apart. They are finely tuned, like Formula One cars, which require preheated fluids and warmed tires in order to operate -- as opposed to girls, who are like pickup trucks or big, family-style SUVs. We can go anywhere, through anything, on any old literary fuel you put in us.

Johnson’s statement appears slightly over-generalised and has a humorous tone to it, but she confirms the assumption that boys seem to be more selective in their choice of reading material. The main complaint Johnson is uttering in her article is the wide range of classical, male literature which is available, while literature written by female authors is often degraded as ‘chick lit’ or ‘an easy read’ (see Johnson). This leads to the conclusion that the gender issue in

literature is not solely applicable to characters, but to some extent to authors, their narrative voice and quality as well. As far as the narrative voice is concerned, Nikolajeva refers to the question raised by feminist and queer studies regarding the association of the narrative voice with gender issues. The use of first person narration creates an immediate image and accompanying expectations of the reader concerning gender-typical behaviour, but in contemporary literature, which attempts to find new ways of portraying gender, the narrative voice can differ from such expectations and surprise the reader ('Chapter 7'). When Katniss introduces herself at the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, the reader meets a female character in her teenage years, illegally hunting in the woods to provide for her fatherless family, and thereby she deviates from the expectations some readers might have had implied by the female narrative voice and the female author. Nikolajeva states that "[a] masculine voice implies confirming the existing norms of power, while a feminine voice interrogates and subverts it" ('Chapter 7'). I would argue that in the case of Katniss, a reader expecting convention would have interpreted her introduction as a male voice had she not indicated immediately that she is a girl. The fact that Katniss is a girl therefore subverts the male norm which might be associated with such a character. This is only a single example of the potential *The Hunger Games* offers as far as analysis of gender roles is concerned, but this will be a larger focus later in this thesis.

I have mentioned earlier that Maria Nikolajeva has established the terms 'new masculinity' and 'new femininity' to describe instances of contemporary gender portrayal which deviate from the traditional stereotypes that have already been pointed out in the last chapter. What contemporary young adult literature sometimes attempts to do differently from the past is to change the way in which characters are portrayed lacking the use of stereotypes that limits the full potential of a character if traits are considered as fitting for only one sex. Many works of young adult fiction have begun to interchange and deconstruct various characteristics which have conventionally been attributed to either boys or girls. Some character combinations, especially romantic couples, show signs of gender role reversal, but most of them are not executed to the extent that might lead to clearly visible changes in the portrayal of less stereotypical gender roles. Nikolajeva's analysis of 'new masculinities' and 'new femininities' establishes an accompanying theory to the instances where characters are equipped with traits that would not usually have been associated with their sex due to convention. Nikolajeva's concept of newly defined gender identities attempts for an "ambivalent mix of conventional masculine and feminine features" with regard to masculinity, and a growing distance from the stereotype that is often quite radical as far as femininity is concerned ('Chapter 7'). The

definition of the term ‘conventional’ which is used by Nikolajeva has the same notion of the term I am using in this thesis. To illustrate the difference between conventional and contemporary, she points out that

[a] convention implies that a majority of texts within a certain culture of timeframe follow a certain pattern. For instance, by convention, male authors use male protagonists while female authors use female protagonists. By convention, male protagonists appear in action-oriented genres while female protagonists appear in character-oriented stories. (ibid.)

We need such definitions which characterise what is referred to as traditional, conventional or stereotypical in this thesis in so far as to indicate difference between the stereotype and the deconstruction of it. I would argue that just as the literature of the past had a certain duty to illustrate the zeitgeist of the time stories were written, contemporary literature has the same duty with regard to contemporary issues, morals and changes in human perception. As we will see at a later stage of the analysis, there are instances where such conventionality is overthrown and depicted differently from what we have read so far. Convention is mostly the social construction of gender, and a contemporary opinion on the issue of gender portrayal was stated by Lehr in 2001, who shares the opinion of other researchers when she says that “[w]hen it comes to sex and gender, much of what we label ‘natural’ in Western culture is socially constructed” (4). As a representative of the second wave of feminism as well as the early times of French structuralism, Simone De Beauvoir had already written about the issue in 1949 when she famously stated in *The Second Sex* that “one is not born, but rather comes, a woman” (Vol. 2, Part 1, Ch.1). Influential feminists like Judith Butler have used the premise of De Beauvoir’s statement to develop their own arguments later in the century.

Feminist criticism in the context of this thesis is important because female characters seem to have to face a more difficult path as far as their evolution from stereotypical femininity is regarded. Male characters are allowed a growing ambivalence between masculine and feminine qualities, but it appears as if the creation of empowered female characters needs a balance between the masculine and the feminine as well as newly defined way to portray such a balance. A female character equipped with the exact same set of characteristics as her male counterpart is not what makes her empowered or unconventional, and, if a female character receives a large set of typically male qualities she might easily lose what makes her feminine in the first place. It is a difficult question to answer why the portrayal of less stereotypical gender roles is still an issue we face in today’s literature. I have pointed out Nikolajeva’s opinion on the radical distance ‘new femininity’ might go from the stereotype, while ‘new

masculinity' remains closer to what we know, and she further emphasises this view when she refers to contemporary Swedish literature as an example where a trend to portray girls in a tougher, less sensitive way, seems to have begun in the 2000s:

Here is a full-size portrait of the new femininity: ignorant, immature, solipsistic, focused on her own sexuality on a primitive, superficial level, perceiving herself as a sexual object, eager to please the male. There is a substantial difference from the conventional female stereotype we meet, for instance, in *Little Women*, but it is still a highly problematic stereotype. ('Chapter 7')

The type of 'new femininity' Nikolajeva sums up in the quote above seems more like an attempt to challenge the convention rather than depict a realistic portrayal of young people's lives. As she points out, this type of female protagonist appears just like another stereotype distanced from the existing one, but nonetheless one-dimensional. This female image that appeared primarily in Swedish literature illustrates a femininity that is isolated from the stereotype, but also attempts to create more empowered female characters that do not necessarily have to deviate from the stereotype completely, but display a more liberal way of behaviour that is not confined to sex (see *ibid.*).

In contemporary literature, many authors seek to disrupt the traditional images of women and men and adapt to the changes in gender perception which have become more prominent in the second half of the twentieth as well as in the twenty-first century. Female characters in particular are provided with character traits that would not have been associated with feminine behaviour with regard to the convention of the active male and the passive female. Boys and girls have become growingly interchangeable, thus the unisex appeal to the readership must be growing as well, as far as my opinion is concerned. Authors might not intentionally market their books for specific target groups, but when boys are not 'just adventurous' anymore and girls are not 'just chaste and good' anymore, young readers might not care about the sex of the protagonist as much as they have been "forced" to in the past. A less stereotypical portrayal of the sexes seems an inevitable step in the future of young adult literature, especially as long as feminism as a political issue is still present and people are interested in finding successful changes in the behaviour of previously stereotypically depicted girls and boys in their literary representatives as well. Huck claims that instead of producing unisex characters, "[w]e still have to capture the essence of femininity and masculinity, or children will have a difficult time identifying with the character" (ix). She uses her argument to point to the apparent innate difference between boys and their preference for action-oriented plots and the interest of girls in the depiction of emotion, love or belonging (*ibid.*) according to

tradition. Since such preferences are only based on the construction of gendered behaviour, Huck's arguments appear to reinforce the distinction of gender roles, especially when she refers to the necessity of staying "true to the nature of both genders" (viii). When gender stereotypes shall be challenged, it would not make sense to define the outcome as 'the essence of' because children and young adults should be able to identify with character qualities rather than gendered behavioural patterns which determine what she might define as an essence of femininity and masculinity in the first place. Huck continues to provide arguments which I find rather contradictory as far as a 'new femininity' is concerned. She justifies her previous statement by saying that one stereotype should not be substituted for the other in an attempt of portraying girls and boys in less stereotypical roles, and girls should experience both adventure-driven plots as well as plots which allow them to show their caring and responsible character qualities (see ix). What I find problematic about Huck's opinion is that she seems to argue that a girl may only be perceived as a girl when she has caring, nurturing character qualities. Huck's way of challenging stereotypes is to reinforce them while adding elements which occur as male stereotypes. However, girls should be allowed to be adventuresome without having to reveal a caring or responsible aspect of their character at the same time because in the end this would not challenge the tradition at all. Girls might be reckless and boys might be caring and sensitive. Substitution is not equal with empowerment, but only produces decals of existing characters rather than shaping new, complex ways of character portrayal. Once young readers can identify with the character notwithstanding his or her sex, reading preferences would possibly change towards a more naturally occurring unisex appeal as well. Bucher and Manning refer to a 2002 study by Smith and Wilhelm on the reading behaviour of boys which concludes that they prefer nonfiction, magazines and newspapers as well as short and visual texts, and that some boys enjoy fantasy and science fiction (see Bucher & Manning). Importantly, they point out that boys differ more in their individual reading behaviour and that gender-related preferences often refer back to teachers' methods of reinforcing gender stereotypes (ibid.). This relates to my assumption that ostensible differences in reading preferences between boys and girls are mainly socially determined. Flood summarises a report from 2012 which claims that the level of reading is not associated with sex anymore, at least with regard to the UK. According to the report, girls tend to challenge themselves more than boys, who generally seem to choose reading material that is regarded as too easy, while girls tend to like books with female role models (see Flood 2012). Since the reading behaviour of children is not something I want to focus on in great detail, I would just like to use the extent of examples for the existence of differences in female versus male reading preference to point out that with regard to children the unisex appeal

might be natural, however, the social circumstances of gender construction force them into pre-determined preference groups divided by gender norms.

Within the field of research that is concerned with gender representation in literature, some criticism regarding the singular focus on strength when female characters are concerned is expressed as well. McDougall, for example, has titled her newspaper piece “I Hate Strong Female Characters”, which at a time in Western society and culture where the empowerment of females and the decline of patriarchal stereotypes, appears interesting. In her introduction she claims that “Sherlock Holmes gets to be brilliant, solitary, abrasive, Bohemian, whimsical, brave, sad, manipulative, neurotic, vain, untidy, fastidious, artistic, courteous, rude, a polymath genius [while] [f]emale characters get to be [s]trong” (McDougall). The argument McDougall brings forward is mostly her criticism of the term ‘strong’ applied to female characters, while male characters are never simply strong, but a more complex and rich variety of different character traits. By using examples from film and culture mainly, McDougall states that characters labelled as strong and female often seem to think that fulfilling certain harshness and ‘badass’ criteria in their behaviour will make them appear more equal to the dominating strong male characters, who first and foremost are not even in need of the attribute ‘strong’. The red thread of the article is summarised as she mentions that

[n]owadays the princesses all know kung fu, and yet they’re still the same princesses. They’re still love interests, still the one girl in a team of five boys, and they’re all kind of the same. They march on screen, punch someone to show how they don’t take no shit, throw around a couple of one-liners or forcibly kiss someone because getting consent is for wimps, and then with ladylike discretion they back out of the narrative’s way (ibid.)

Instead of the single female character having to justify her existence, McDougall wishes for equally distributed characters in terms of their sex and complex female characters that are more than just weak or strong. By doing so, McDougall addresses what seems to be one of the most complex issues in the attempt of raising female empowerment in children’s and young adult literature, and the difficult question of how an empowered female character who can be considered as approved by feminist standards and values should behave and act like.

2.2 “GIRL POWER”: FEMINISM, FEMALE ROLEMODELS AND EMPOWERMENT

The political and socio-cultural achievements of the feminist movement are widely known and do not necessarily have to be repeated within the focus of this thesis, thus the major focus of

the upcoming chapter lies on the highlighting of various main aspects of feminism as a literary theory in general, and the connection of feminist literary theory with other schools of criticism that are of relevance in a later chapter. I will explore the relationship between feminism and children's literature and what a thoughtfully constructed feminist female literary character might look like, as well as the role contemporary research fields such as girls studies play for 'new' female protagonists.

In the mid-1800s the term 'feminism' was used to refer to "the qualities of females", and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term *féministe*, was used regularly in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Although the term "feminism" in English is rooted in the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th century, of course efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period of activism. (Haslanger *Stanford Encyclopedia* 'Topics')

Before there was a critical literary branch concerned with female issues, feminism was known as a political movement. As the passage quoted above explains, feminism as a political movement was primarily interested in the activism for women's rights and equality. Feminism is an issue which has already been around for centuries, however, at the beginning of the twentieth century and the successfully achieved goal of the female right to vote attributed to the suffragettes' endeavours, feminism became a larger movement influenced by philosophical theory as well as cultural and political events. The reasons behind the emergence of feminist literary theory as the offspring of feminism are connected to the growing deconstruction of one of the ideologies presented as a universal truth, patriarchal dominance, as well as the literary representation of political issues like gender equality. As Tyson points out, "[b]ecause the works of (white) female authors (and of all authors of color) do not describe the experience from a (white) male point of view, they were not considered universal and hence did not become part of the literary canon" (82). She continues by saying that "[e]ven when (white) women authors began to appear more frequently in the canon and on college syllabi in the mid-1970s, they were not represented on an equal basis with (white) male authors" (ibid.). The goals and principles political feminism and literary feminism share are very similar, but where political activism is functional, literary criticism is mostly theoretical and analytical. In literary theory, feminist criticism "examines the way in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson 81). The reason why feminist theory provides a functioning ground for the analysis attempted in this thesis, is the lack of one narrow definition, but a transformation and development over time and an addition of new areas of focus which might be relevant in a new

era of criticism and cultural, political or social issues. As Tyson points out further, “feminist critics hold many different opinions on all of the issues their discipline examines” (81). Feminism is a means of criticism which can be applied to literature without appearing archaic or less relevant to the issue because it transforms within the context of time and includes various branches that concern a multitude of issues relevant to one of feminism’s goals, which “has sought to disturb the complacent certainties of such a patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in transforming society” (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker 115). The perception of feminism depends on a subjective and theory-based view since there is no such thing as one single and clearly defined type of feminism, but various interpretations influenced by the time of their emergence, yet the goal quoted above is quite central to feminist philosophy in general and also with regard to my expectations for this thesis.

As far as representatives of feminism are concerned, there are figures who have influenced the political movement as well as women who have been engaged in theoretic feminist criticism, but many of them, especially after the literary branch began to grow during the second half of the twentieth century, have influenced both. They might not have been feminists in the sense of the twenty-first century, but the female playwrights and actresses who appeared during the Restoration Period in England, for example, may be considered as pioneers of a feminist movement, displaying early attempts to smooth the path for women in areas of life which have been dominated by men. Aphra Behn or Jane Austen as representatives of the eighteenth century are two of the most well-known female authors who gained recognition through their work, possibly even more so post mortem and after feminist literary criticism had emerged. However, while Behn or Austen may have included subtle political or social criticism in their work, either consciously or ‘accidentally’, they are not considered influential feminists in the sense that, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf or Simone De Beauvoir are. Tyson refers to these three women when she points out that all three of them, despite the historical differences between 1792, 1929 and 1949, have resisted patriarchal ideology in their primary works (see 93). The works of these women among others have smoothed the path for feminism to spread its messages to various disciplines and genres.

With its roots in feminist theory and political feminism, ‘girl power’ is an additional, more contemporary political concept which can be loosely applied to the literary context of the adolescent heroines I will analyse in this thesis. ‘Girl power’ is not a branch of feminism as

distinctive as feminist literary theory, however, I would like to mention it because it symbolises an important message as far as the cultural and social representation of the female is concerned. Since the term is rather vague and academic research is limited, I want to include the entry in the *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary & Thesaurus* that defines ‘girl power’ as “the idea that women and girls should be confident, make decisions, and achieve things independently of men, or the social and political movement that is based on this idea” (*Cambridge Online*). This definition matches the main aim of this thesis to analyse the levels of empowerment young female characters convey in contemporary literature. According to Fritz,

“[g]irl power” was originally developed as a slogan by the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s to refer to the resistance of patriarchy and passive consumerism that Riot Grrrls advocate, but it has since evolved into a multivalent term with implications and applications that often conflict with one another (‘Chapter 1’).

Among other things, girl power was linked to popular culture phenomena like the *Spice Girls* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* who have portrayed new types of girls and women in a commercially successful way in the 1990s.

Feminism has not only been connected to the issues of women and female empowerment, but to gender studies and the representation of gender in children’s and young adult literature as well. Trites claims that “[s]ince the resurgence of the women’s movement in the 1960s, many children’s novels published in the English language have reflected the goals of the movement” (ix). Women’s literature and children’s literature share a past of rejection within the world of literary publication, and children’s literature has only recently found critical recognition, while women’s writing has been accepted for slightly longer. As Vandergrift states with regard to the historical perspective on early women’s texts as well as children’s literature, “[a]lthough many women’s texts were published privately or by smaller presses and were not well marketed or widely distributed, children’s texts were probably less likely to be published [...]” (23). Therefore, the relationship between feminist literary theory and children’s and young adult literature will be examined further in one of the subsequent chapters engaging in the issue of establishing a relevant theory framework for the following analysis of possible feminist heroines in young adult literature.

2.2.1 Theory Framework: Liberal versus Poststructuralist Feminism

Scholars tend to favour either liberal feminism or post-structuralist feminist theory when approaching an analysis of children's literature, thus these two areas of feminism will be relevant for the theory framework of this thesis as well. Just as the term *liberal feminism* suggests, the main concern of liberal feminist theory is the freedom of women. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* suggests two types of liberal feminism, one of which is interpreted as a way to live a life of personal and political autonomy, while the other, which is also known as *classical-liberal feminism* or *libertarian feminism*, focuses on the equality of individuals despite their gender and seeks to benefit not only the right of freedom for women, but also criticises special treatment of women over men (see Haslanger *Stanford Encyclopedia*). Liberal feminism blames deficits in female autonomy on the predominance of patriarchal values in traditions and institutions as well as on the gender system, and pleads for a remedy (see *ibid.*). While liberal feminist theory focuses on gender fairness with regard to female rights and advantages, critics claim that the benefit of such a cause includes the violation of the rights of others through coercive interference (see *ibid.*). The emergence of such branches of feminism have not been present since the first feminist movements and attempts to establish more elaborate rights for women, but have been shaped and developed over time. Liberal feminism, for example, is regarded as a product of a feminist debate which considered difference and equality as oppositional and led to a split in beliefs within feminism (cf. Scott 38).

As far as literary theory is concerned, Trites criticises liberal feminist attempts to establish gender equality in their works by simply switching female and male traits because essentialist binary oppositions are still reinforced rather than challenged. In Trites' view, the reinforcement of stereotypes as well as 'essentializing', which she refers to as "the practice of linking specific characters traits to sex as if they are biologically determined" (81) are beliefs that stand in contrast with her own opinion, based on the social construction of gender-specific character traits and the critique of the biological manifestation of gender roles. This opinion stands in contrast to Huck, whom I have quoted earlier claiming that the feminine essence is necessary even with regard to 'new', complex types of female protagonists. In liberal feminism, positive traits are applied to girls, while negative ones are given to boys, thus this theoretic approach upholds stereotypes rather than criticising or deconstructing them. Influenced by poststructuralist feminism, Trites states further that gender roles are constructed by society and considered as 'performance' with reference to Judith Butler's work. Therefore discourses should be analysed, while simplistic binaries and the belief in the innateness of gender role stereotypes should be challenged (see *ibid.*). With regard to the rising academic status of

children's literature and the distance to prior marginalisation of the genre, Lissa Paul claims that "[i]f the destabilisation of hierarchical orders is one of the mobilising features of feminist theory then there is probably something hypocritical and arrogant about disenfranchising librarians, teachers – and children – from the ranks of stakeholders in the field of children's literature studies" (112). Paul's statement seems ironical even since the dismissal of these people from the importance and influence their roles had on the development of children's literature, shows the power of oppressive forces once again and pushes them to a marginalised position. The fact that teachers and librarians often are women only reinforces the assumption of hypocrisy Paul points out.

Feminism und Post-structuralism are theories which have emerged in the twentieth century and are both interested in challenging grand narratives, Western dominance, gender representation and the existence of a dualist world view. Patriarchy has been such a dominant concept in the history of humankind and it is particularly challenged by feminism, whereas post-structuralism focuses on language, power relations and the deconstruction of so-called norms. In the context of this thesis and the attempt to analyse the representation of gender roles in literary works, aspects taken from these theories will work well complimenting each other. As Hutcheon points out,

[f]eminism shares with post-structuralism a concern for power: its manifestations, its appropriation, its positioning, its consequences, and its language. Both reject rigid totalizing theories that rely on system over experience. Both challenge binary oppositions that in fact embody a secret hierarchy (such as, malefemale). Both investigate the possibilities of working at the borders, on the margins, decentering texts and readers, removing their traditional anchors: God, the father, the state, reason, order, Man (38).

While liberal feminist theory pleads for equality of men and women, *poststructuralist feminist theory* seeks to disrupt manifestations of power such as norms and 'grand narratives', which are also meant to be broken with. The feminist aspect is applied to issues where not only predominant belief systems shall be deconstructed, but grand narratives with regards to gender concepts and gender role classification as well. A poststructuralist perspective considers universal truths as constructed and therefore rejects dualistic ways of thinking. Just like it is impossible to narrow all the branches of feminism to one particular definition, post-structuralism offers a variety of branches of analysis as well. One focus of poststructuralist theory applied to literary texts is the 'other' from the dominant white male canon, a dominant category which includes both feminist and children's and young adult literature (see Paul 114). According to Paul, feminist children's literature criticism applied a variety of the theoretical branches of post-structuralism to pieces of literature,

using techniques from deconstruction (derived largely from Derrida) and from contemporary discussions of ideology (from Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu) and subjectivity (largely derived from Lacan), feminist critics began to look at the ways ideological [sic!] assumptions are played out in the text. They searched for a feminine tradition of 'other' stories: mother, daughter, sister stories (Chodorow, Hirsch); a preference for survival tactics over honour (Gilligan); a search for a 'both/and' feminine plot rather than an 'either/or' oedipal plot (Hirsch); a preference for multiplicity, plurality, jouissance and a valuing of pro-creations, recreations and new beginnings (Cixous, Gallop, Rich). (114)

Scott reinforces Paul's statements on the use of poststructuralist concept within feminist analyses and refers to the similarities between the two movements which have led to close connection points in the attempt to critically approach traditions and norms. Especially the discussion of binary opposition with regard to gender is an important issue in feminism and a part of poststructuralist deconstruction of dominant meaning. In the case of fixed opposition, meaning and contrast are not inherent, but constructed and defined by such socially or historically established opposites (see Scott 37).

2.2.2 Poststructuralist Feminist Literary Theory in Children's and YA Literature

What is a feminist children's novel? Defined simply, it is a novel in which the main character is empowered regardless of gender. A key concept here is 'regardless': in a feminist children's novel, the child's sex does not provide a permanent obstacle to her development. Although s/he will experience some gender-related conflicts, s/he ultimately triumphs over them. (Trites 4)

With the growing success of children's and young adult literature not only with the audience, but in academia as well, the necessity of appropriate means to analyse literature belonging to the genre has become more and more important. Of course there are aspects of any established literary theory which can be used to analyse children's and young adult literature, but some of the theories prove to be more suitable to the genre than others. Post-structuralism and feminism share a set of historical and analytical similarities, and as Scott claims strongly in the introductory passage of her article "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference",

[w]e need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals [...], that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy [...] in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about [...] gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them (33).

Feminism not only proves itself as a helpful tool of analysis with regard to the representation of gender roles in literature, but has shown parallels to the genre of children's literature

throughout recent history as well. In his essay “Children’s Literature as Women’s Writing”, Nodelman points out that the growth in relevance and importance of children’s literature as a literary genre has happened with the appearance of various literary theories which have not existed throughout all of the history of literary criticism. He claims that

[t]heories like reader-response and feminist criticism, semiotics, and deconstruction have pointed out the repressive limitations of the traditional ways of assigning literary value that were once considered absolute, and that excluded children’s literature from any curriculum of literary study that wished to be taken seriously (31).

According to Paul, children’s literary criticism emerged in the 1970s, freeing the genre from its marginal position within academia, and roughly at the same time when the second wave of feminism was current (see 113). She further states that by the 1990s both feminist criticism and children’s literary criticism had reached a status as “established participants in the academy with all the requisite structures in place to support establishment status – refereed journals, professional associations, graduate degree programmes” (ibid.). As Ellen Rooney claims in her introductory chapter to the *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, “[f]eminist literary theory resists generalization”. Thus, feminism has created a reputation for itself where it might be applied to a variety of literary texts and not solely focus on women’s causes, but on a more widespread subject of inequality, deconstruction and revolution. Feminism is concerned with gender representation just as well as the issue of diversity and the vocalisation of minorities, and feminist literary theory seeks to apply these concerns to literature in an effort of mirroring cultural and social achievements to the literary world, which functions as an influence and source of identification for young readers especially. In the editor’s introduction to Lissa Paul’s article in *Understanding Children’s Literature*, Peter Hunt writes:

‘There is’ Lissa Paul has written, ‘good reason for appropriating feminist theory to children’s literature. Both women’s literature and children’s literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities...’. At the turn of the millenium, the pattern changes. Feminist criticism has taught readers to see and hear the stories of women and children in ways not understood before. (112)

Children’s studies and feminism share their common target of equality and freedom. While feminism seeks to establish an autonomy for women in a world with less patriarchal dominance and less universal truths about gender roles and their manifestation, childhood is a time in each person’s life where freedom is a main aim to explore one’s self and identity. I have mentioned earlier that feminism is one of the theoretical fields where no single definition can be found, but where a variety of different views and definitions exist within the same genre of literary

theory. With regard to feminist literary theory, Rooney states that “[t]he effort to propose a definition, genealogy or history of feminist literary theory, whether for the sake of pedagogy, political clarity or even to establish an intellectual rationale for the field as a whole, threatens to simplify what is, in a stubborn, perhaps ineradicable way, complex.” (‘Introduction’). Although the complexity of feminist literary theory is doubtless, Nodelmann suggests that it is a suitable theoretical approach for children’s literature because of its accessible and unsettling revolutionary character as well as what could be described as the duty to ensure that contemporary children’s literature offers a diverse and non-stereotypical range of female and male characters (see Nodelmann 32). Rooney and Nodelmann agree that children’s and women’s literature not only share similar patterns regarding their popularity, critical relevance or lack of publication in the past, but also that women are indeed closely connected to the genre of children’s and young adult literature by working as editors, publishers, librarians or authors. In an attempt to define the grounds of feminist literary theory, Rooney argues that “feminist literary studies depend on the premise that women read and on the conclusion that their reading makes a difference” (ch. ‘Introduction’). Women have not always been encouraged to read, especially not any piece of their choice, but rather suitable texts for sensitive females. An adventurous story was not considered suitable for a lady, but rather one that reinforces gender roles and aims at the traditional and stereotypical preferences of women. The weakness which has been connected to the female sex ever since might have been considered unstable for certain stories and the image of the “good girl” would have been in danger to get disrupted by an unsuitable story. When women began to read according to their preferences and chose freely from the offered texts, the consequences resulted in feminist attempts to criticise the representation of female characters and the lack of female protagonists in comparison to male heroes. Women had not only started to read, but to write as well, and by doing so they began to utter their opinions and fight for their rights in a patriarchal world. The addition of female perspectives of literary history forces literature as a whole to experience development. An attempted shift away from the prevalence of passive damsels in distress dependent on male heroes to resourceful, clever and independent female characters as equals to their male pendants also brings development and growth to literature. Rooney cites a statement by Barbara Johnson regarding the relationship between feminism and literature in which she says that

literature is important for feminism because literature can best be understood as the place where impasses can be kept open for examination, where questions can be guarded and not forced into a premature validation of the available paradigms; Literature, that is, is not to be understood as a predetermined set of works but as a mode of cultural work, the work of giving-to-read those impossible contradictions that cannot yet be spoken (qtd. in ‘Introduction’).

The close connection between feminist theory and children's and young adult literature utters a strong wish for feminist characters broken free from values and stereotypes which limited them in their range and personal development necessary to grow as a human being. As it has already been mentioned in an earlier chapter of this thesis, literature is said to have an impact on the shaping of a young readers identity and personality to some extent and thus might fulfil various purposes with regard to entertainment and education. It offers its young readers the possibility to identify with the heroes and heroines they read about and thus, the issue of gender portrayal is a relevant and important one. Young female readers, who, in the context of literature, have mostly been able to identify with the damsel in distress, or the princess, who needs a prince to save her because she is not able to fight for herself, might have a resulting misperception of gender roles and a lack of literary role models who may show them what girls can do. Even though the main focus is on the representation of girls, since many novels for young readers lack empowered female protagonists and round plots for female development, boys are included as well in the attempt of establishing a balance between the gender roles with a shift away from traditional and archaic values and pointed into a new direction of unlimited unfolding and balance of characters either male or female. Nikolajeva claims that "[a]lthough feminist approaches to children's literature have been prominent for many years, we still lack a more precise metalanguage to discuss gender-related issues and too often get entangled in rigid definitions of female/male, feminine/masculine [...]" (Nikolajeva ch. 7). It becomes clear that many scholars engaged in the study of children's and young adult literature propose that the traditional model of male and female functioning as binaries has to be appropriated to a more contemporary perception of gender roles and the purposes they inhabit. In the introduction to her book *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, Trites argues that

[p]rotagonists in novels influenced by feminism, [however] have slowly evolved an ability to think about their place in the community without becoming so community-oriented that they become self-effacing. The feminist protagonist cares about other people, but she cares about herself, too. (ix)

There is no set of rules or regulations for creating the 'perfect', self-reliant, empowered and independent female character in literary works, but scholars such as Trites, for example, have tried to point out what authors should be paying attention to in the creation process of their characters and how such newly defined characters might challenge the existing norms of gender stereotyping and female oppression.

In an attempt to provide a spectrum of character traits rather than a set of predetermined stereotypes, Trites refers to Heilbrun, who suggests a form of androgyny as an alternative to gender stereotyping. Androgyny is defined as “a reconciliation between the sexes” (Heilbrun qtd. in Trites 24), allowing to choose more widely from existing traits and applying them without restriction to gender identity or sex. Nodelmann mentions androgyny as well in his article, praising children’s literature which “salvages both masculinity and femininity as traditionally understood, and keeps both intact and in battle with each other within the hearts and minds of characters of both genders” rather than the kind of genderless androgyny that blends masculinity with femininity (34). Trites further points out that “[s]uccessful feminist characters are those who adopt the best traits of both genders to strengthen themselves personally and within their communities” (25). Instead of forcing female characters to the foreground to diminish the white, male dominance in the selection of literary characters and reinforcing stereotypes by placing girls in boys’ shoes, it seems more desirable for empowered and feminist characters, regardless of their gender, to receive autonomy and independence.

2.3 HERO / HEROINE

Self-terrorized, fear-haunted, alert at every hand to meet and battle back the anticipated aggressions of his environment, which are primarily the reflections of the uncontrollable impulses to acquisition within himself, the giant of self-achieved independence is the world’s messenger of disaster, even though, in his mind, he may entertain himself with humane intentions. Wherever he sets his hand there is a cry (if not from the housetops, then – more miserably—within every heart): a cry for the redeeming hero, the carrier of the shining blade, whose blow, whose touch, whose existence, will liberate the land. (Campbell 15)

In the real world, heroes are those who have been exceptionally brave or courageous, just like the fictional counterparts of these real life heroes save the world they live in, or sometimes even different, fantastic worlds, from crime, corruption, decay and destruction. Heroism has been present in human and mythological history ever since, and stories about heroes stretch back to ancient times because there have always been evils to fight or problems to solve, it appears as if only a single, preferably male person embodying the epitome of heroic qualities is able to fulfil such an ambitious task in many literary works. Although heroic deeds look different from what has been valued in the past in contemporary times, the basics of the concepts have stayed the same by valuing the embodiment of courage and goodness within a single person. Traditionally, every hero story more or less follows a certain pattern which contributes to the development of both the story and the character of the protagonist. The latter is especially important in young adult literature because an adolescent protagonist often experiences rites of

passage as well as changes in the perception of their own identity and the view on the world surrounding them.

The hero story is not just a story, a tale or a mythological retelling because by now it has earned a place within popular culture. Heroes, and super-heroes especially, are not only beloved characters in film and fiction, but role-models for children as well. In her book, *Deconstructing the Hero*, Margary Hourihan has decided to shed a critical light on the interpretation of the concept of the classical, male, white hero and argues that the message this image delivers in contemporary times is slowly becoming undone and getting questioned, since groups of people with ethnical difference to whiteness or people belonging to the female sex should not be seen as naturally inferior to the field of heroism (see 'Introduction'). Hourihan further argues that the hero story or the adventure story, as it is referred to as well, is always the same essentially, but adapted to different worlds, genres and contexts (ibid.). The archetypal hero has inherited central Western concepts of dualism and superiority that reach back to Aristotle and Plato, and are deeply anchored as the dominating image of heroism. Especially children's literature presents the hero as an important character in many works because he reveals good character traits and functions as a symbol for children to admire or to identify with as a role-model. Bernice Cullinan is cited by Hourihan, stating that "children absorb quest tales 'into the bloodstream', assimilating the values of human society past and present [...] [b]ecause most children unconsciously learn from experience that goodness is generally rewarded and wickedness punished [and] quest tales affirm their knowledge" (qtd. in Hourihan: 'Introduction').

In Western culture there is a story which has been told over and over again, in numerable versions, from the earliest times. It is a story about superiority, dominance and success. It tells how white European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skilful, rational and dedicated. It tells how they overcome the dangers of nature, how other 'inferior' races have been subdued by them, and how they spread civilization and order wherever they go. It tells how women are designed to serve them, and how those women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled. [...] It is our favourite story and it has been told so many times that we have come to believe that what it says about the world is true. (Hourihan 'Introduction')

In comparison to contemporary hero stories, the classical, ancient tales have always been portrayed as epic sagas, while many modern stories tend to appoint their heroes with a complex character rather than perfect abilities in every imaginable category and apply somewhat of an everyman-ingredient to some of the protagonists of adventurous stories. Heroic deeds are not necessarily linked to slaying dragons, fighting fantastical creatures or bringing peace to the

world, but become visible through courageous actions that show strength, humanity and compassion and lead to a heroic dimension regarding the impact such actions may reach. Not the same as the antagonist, who represents the villain in contrast to the hero, the concept of the anti-hero is present in contemporary literature as well. In comparison to the traditional hero, the anti-hero is a flawed person rather than the knight in shining armour, unlikely to fulfil a heroic task and lacking the qualities that have been commonly associated with the conventional hero such as moral goodness, nobility or courage. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines an anti-hero as

[a] central character in a dramatic or narrative work who lacks the qualities of nobility and magnanimity expected of traditional heroes and heroines in romances and epics. Unheroic characters of this kind have been an important feature of the Western novel, which has subjected idealistic heroism to parody since Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605) [...]. (Baldick *ODLit* 'anti-hero')

Anti-heroes inhabit an outcast position because they are unable to subordinate themselves and follow their own morally dubious rules instead of feeling morally or religiously obligated to any deed. As the entry quoted above suggests, cowboy-heroes in Western literature and film can be described as anti-heroes as well in some cases because they fulfil heroic deeds, but would not be considered as traditional heroes, but rather heroic personas with complex character qualities that are not only admirable. Additionally, the inclusion of anti-hero characters might offer a realistic, more human image of the hero and reduces the contrary between good and bad which is often presented as a binary opposition rather than a spectrum of complex character qualities. Contemporarily, more and more examples from literature and popular culture try to create characters who are relatable and not only defined by a single characteristic as villain or hero, but a more complex mixture of character traits. The villain should neither be defined by only his or her malignance, nor is the hero only characterised by his or her courage.

To gain more insight into the definition of the term 'hero' as a concept which has been manifested in humanity since its beginning, I have decided to refer to the entry on the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for a general definition and compare it to the entry in a dictionary of literary terms. Heroic personas have not only been featured in literature, but in cinema and television just as well as in reality, therefore it can be regarded as a concept of culture in general, especially popular culture and the popularity of various types of heroes. Simply to glimpse at the definition of the term within a literary context, I will compare the dictionary entries:

hero, n. /'hɪərəʊ/

1. Hist. A name given (as in Homer) to men of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods; at a later time regarded as intermediate between gods and men, and immortal.
2. A man distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; one who does brave or noble deeds; an illustrious warrior.
3. A man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, in any course of action, or in connection with any pursuit, work, or enterprise; a man admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities.
4. The man who forms the subject of an epic; the chief male personage in a poem, play, or story; he in whom the interest of the story or plot is centred. (*OED* 'hero')

The hero is not simply a dominant character in both fiction and reality, but a universal concept of strength, admiration and superiority. Every culture has established its own preferred type of heroic persona with specific character traits and qualities valued highly in the particular cultures, but with the dominant influence Western culture has, the male, white, Western hero has become the stereotypical protagonist of heroic and adventure stories. For the discussion of selected novels in a following chapter, however, it is important to establish not only a definition for the term 'hero', but to define what a 'heroine' is considered as and how the distinction between these two concepts is manifested in literature and culture.

heroine, n. /'herəʊɪn/

1. A female hero
2. In ancient mythology, a female intermediate between a woman and a goddess; a demi-goddess.
3. A woman distinguished by exalted courage, fortitude, or noble achievements.
4. The principal female character in a poem, story, or play; the woman in whom the interest of the piece centres. (*OED* 'heroine')

While the *OED* includes separate entries for the terms 'hero' and 'heroine' as I have pointed out by referring to them above, the *Dictionary of Literary Terms* offers 'hero' as a key word and relates it to its female pendant within the entry:

hero (heroine)

The main character in a narrative or dramatic work. The more neutral term protagonist is often preferable, to avoid confusion with the usual sense of heroism as admirable courage or nobility, since in many works (other than epic poems, where such admirable qualities are required in the hero), the leading character may not be morally or otherwise superior. When our expectations of heroic qualities are strikingly disappointed, the central character may be known as an anti-hero or anti-heroine. (*Baldick* 'hero')

As far as those dictionary entries are concerned, the term 'heroine' seems to lack independence from the male origin and is usually only a comparison rather than a concept with its own agency. For further reference I intend to use the expressions 'heroine' and 'female hero' as interchangeable since both terms fit the aim of this analysis and 'female hero' is to be understood in its own sense rather than as a decal of the male term. Ursula Le Guin addresses

the distinction between the terms by stating that “[t]he two English words are enormously different in their implications and value; they are indeed a wonderful exhibition of how gender expectations are reflected/created by linguistic usage” (9). In her essay, “What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can’t Write”, Joanna Russ attempts to discuss the question of what a heroine is able to do in a society that is patriarchal. Russ argues that male-dominated culture is not solely established by males doing as they please, but that the familiar stories and plots are “tales for heroes, not heroines, and one of the things that handicaps women writers in our – and every other – culture is that there are so very few stories in which women can figure as protagonists” (80). Female culture is identified as an underground culture, highly subordinate to the cultural perception which is male for both men and women (see 81). I would argue that the criticism Russ utters on the issue of male dominance in literature has to be viewed in context of the time it had been written, which was in the early 1970s, when female representation in literature had been different from the way women are portrayed today. Heroines are frequently mirroring their male equivalent, however, contemporary literature offers a larger variety of possibilities for empowered, female protagonists, who follow their own set of rules and in the end also shine on their own. A white, male hero is not the key ingredient to a successful plot in children’s and young adult literature anymore, instead the selection of primary literature which I will analyse in an upcoming chapter will prove that heroines can just as well function as the centre of attention of a story in which the female is not necessarily confined to the private space, or to the role of the carer only, but the one of the action hero too.

An aspect which has shifted slightly throughout the history of the hero story is the sex of the hero, who, as it has been mentioned already, can just as well be a heroine in contemporary pieces of literature. Female protagonists in the past, for example in the novels of Jane Austen, have begun to subtly question gender customs within the context of their time and have been given traits by the authors that allowed them some agency in comparison to other female characters, but these characters were confined to the stereotypes connected to their sex as well rather than acting different in a revolutionary way. While Lizzie Bennett could only differ from the feminine stereotype of her time in her way with words and her feisty character, contemporary heroines are more closely connected to the image of the classical hero. Contemporary action heroines are closer to the male equivalent, but at the same time they need to establish and manifest their own empowerment and agency without the direct linkage to being just a transfer picture of the male forerunner. A female protagonist does not automatically equal a female hero, and although many authors attempt to include heroines in their works, they

often fail to treat them as heroes in their own right. The definitions show that ‘hero’ and ‘heroine’ are defined similarly and it becomes visible that the male equivalent is described in more detail, while the heroine is defined as ‘a female hero’. The heroine is not a concept as dominant as the hero, and neither independent from the hero, but with regard to the definition, it seems that even though the male hero is the original, the female pendant is the one trying to inherit conventionally male traits to gain recognition as a heroine. Even though heroism can be defined in various ways, it includes certain expectations and qualities which need to be fulfilled, therefore the heroine has to share traits with the hero. However, the assumption arises that the hero is considered the superior concept and the male sex recognised as the true heroic figure, while the heroine functions as an attempt to follow the powerful footsteps of the traditional hero. Frequently, the female hero is nothing more than exactly what the combination of the words ‘female’ and ‘hero’ suggests – a female hero, a female character attempting to acquire the necessary masculine traits which are considered to be heroic rather than an individual concept based on an empowered and redefined femininity within the context of the hero tale. Before the heroine is able to slay the figurative dragon as a means to save the world, she has to slay the dragon within herself which embodies doubt and oppression, with the result that she can establish her own concept of independent female heroism. The attempt to provide a female protagonist with traditionally masculine character traits, however, establishes only an imperfect male rather than an empowered female. According to Barron, it is the existence of such ‘new heroes’ which is an important aspect for literature as well as for life because

[a]ll of us need heroes. And all of us, regardless of gender, age, or background, can benefit from such thoughtful portrayals of girls and women who break through the barriers that hold them back – whether those barriers exist primarily within themselves or without. (31)

In his description of the hero, Campbell uses the addition ‘or woman’ to define that a hero can be either male, or female, but at the same fails to use the term ‘heroine’, and solely addresses the hero as a man because he usually was:

The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore [...] is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed. (Campbell 18)

Contemporary classical hero stories have their roots in mythology and history, where figures like Alexander the Great, King Arthur, Achilles, Theseus or Hercules function as role models for strength, courage and sometimes divine abilities to save the world from various evils. Interestingly, all the classical hero sagas include male heroic figures, while females often appear as sources of trouble, as temptresses, easy prey for the godly males to trick or simply as damsels in distress who emphasise the importance of the hero and his qualities to save those in need of help. As Barron states, “[m]en almost always did the questing; men normally slayed the dragon, won the prize, or saved the kingdom. Men normally established the rules, as well as the symbols, of victory” (30). However, he further points out that “[n]ot every male hero, of course, is the stereotypical warrior – the one-dimensional character who possesses plenty of physical strength, and perhaps some courage, but no depth spiritually, emotionally, or morally” (ibid.). Roman and Greek mythologies include goddesses, but these female characters in powerful roles fulfil the traditional dichotomy between males and females almost as well as any other female stereotype of passivity by being equipped with the traits of wisdom or motherliness, while their male counterparts dominate the areas of warfare, or are considered as fatherly figures of the divine and the human world, whereas the motherly figures stay in the background. Furthermore, powerful female characters are sometimes connected to bad character qualities or cruelty and thus lack the basic traits, which are based on goodness, a heroine would need to successfully challenge the male dominance.

Susan Lichtman presents the alternative idea of a form of an originally female heroism and superiority in ancient cultures where motherliness and femininity were the traits that supported the belief of the divinity and heroic quality of women which was reversed after patriarchy inhabited a dominant position.

The difference between the female and male heroes can be explained as the difference between moral life and the eternal soul. In ancient human societies before the discovery of paternity and development of private property, women were perceived as immortal creatures because they could give birth to themselves through their daughters; men on the other hand, were perceived as strictly mortal beings. These perceptions were severely altered once paternity was established, and men could now identify their own children as long as the mothers were isolated from other men. [...] The true human experience had to be the male experience [...]. When novels of development are combined with feminist archetypal theory, the results for women are manifested in a pattern of life stages that mark a woman's growth and maturation from the uninitiated and self absorbed youth to the trials of reintegration into the social fabric and finally into a persona of wisdom and direction as legacy. In ancient matri-focused cultures, this can be seen in the goddess myths in which women were perceived as the original heroes – the movers and shakers of their societies. [...] [W]hen we think of heroes today, we usually envision males at the forefront of the hero myth with females taking place as the originators of the hero through maternity, or as the obstacles the hero must overcome and/or destroy represented by female sexuality, or finally as the end

goal, the prize, the *hieros gamos* the hero wins by asserting himself successfully through the hero cycle. (Lichtmann 10-11)

Despite the suggestion of such a model which would turn the established definitions of heroism and the traditionally male-dominated context of the hero story upside down, we cannot doubt that the perception of heroism is essentially built upon the patriarchal construction of masculinity and femininity. For the distinction between the terms ‘hero’ and ‘heroine’, Lichtman’s approach seems to seek a manifestation of female heroism in spirituality, importance and goodness rather than strength and the ability to save the world physically, and therefore establishes a more varied picture of the female hero than the one trying to imitate traditionally male aspects of heroism. As Hourihan refers to representatives of apparent female heroism such as Boadicea or Joan of Arc, she argues that “[...] in most retellings of their exploits they are little more than honorary men who undertake male enterprises in a male context and display ‘male’ qualities: courage, single-minded devotion to a goal, stoicism, self-confidence, certitude, extroversion, aggression. Heroism is gendered” (ch. ‘Gender’). Since the hero fulfils his conventional, masculine fate of experiencing adventures, saving those who are in need of help, and showing courage, bravery and many of the other traits commonly associated with the stereotypical, traditional hero persona, the heroine has a much harder task to fulfil because she seeks to break the female gender stereotype of passivity, which mainly includes staying at home, marrying and having children to take care of, and additionally aims to enter the gender sphere dominated by man. Critics agree that women in relation to the male hero are viewed as “as mother, wife, seducer, beloved, victim, or rescuable maiden” (Le Guin 163) and more generally “are, essentially, not ‘characters’ at all but symbols of events in the hero’s psyche” (Hourihan ‘The Women’). The patriarchal influence has oppressed females in hero stories to passive, functional roles which help the male hero to show his own strength and courage, but very often fails to depict an empowered and strong image of femininity, or a heroine.

2.4 WHY DYSTOPIA?

With its capacity to frighten and warn, dystopian writing engages with pressing global concerns: liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self. When directed at young readers, who are trying to understand the world and their place in it, these dystopian writings are distilled into exciting adventures with gripping plots. (Basu, Broad & Hintz ‘Introduction’)

The reason why I have chosen the context of dystopia for the selection of adolescent heroines I want to analyse in this thesis, is because the dystopian setting offers great potential for female

protagonists to display that their abilities exceed the traditional limitations a damsel in distress faces. The dystopian context offers a space that is distanced from reality and allows the heroines to explore their abilities in an adventurous setting which supports the argument that in contemporary times we need a female heroism. I include the following chapter primarily because in my opinion dystopia as it is presented in the recent hype around Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy needs a brief introduction. Dystopia is categorised as a subgenre of fantasy or science fiction, two genres which allow not only their male heroes to shine in glory, but their female pendants as well. Especially in fantasy and science fiction, male heroes have dominated the role of the central figure because in the past literary heroism has been commonly associated with men rather than women. What makes contemporary dystopian young adult literature especially interesting to analyse is the portrayal of female protagonists some of these works present. The momentary popularity which has primarily been sparked by the success of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy, both in the literary world and Hollywood, has led to a remarkable growth in the publishing of dystopian literature. As of 2014, the selection is broad and in the cases of the most successful examples, a movie adaptation is quickly produced to accompany the hype. What *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* respectively have symbolised for the genres of young adult fantasy and supernatural, *The Hunger Games* represents for dystopia. Even though it has not been the first contemporary work of young adult dystopia, it has triggered the hype and functions as the work with which newly published dystopian stories will be compared ruthlessly. Scott Westerfield's first book of the *Uglies* series, for example, had already been published in 2005, which marks it as one of the cases where the growing hype surrounding *The Hunger Games* had no impact on the author's motivation. Of course the rising success of young adult dystopian fiction is not based exclusively on *The Hunger Games*, but the genre has produced successful books before already, one of which would be Lois Lowry's *The Giver* in the early 1990s. Moreover, the popularity of post-apocalyptic visions of the future has certainly increased in the twenty-first century. The end of world in its various forms has been present at the centre of literature, film and popular culture for the last decade. In 2008, youth literature author John Green wrote an article for the New York Times called "Scary New World", in which he focuses on two young adult dystopian novels, one of the examples being Collins' *The Hunger Games*, which at the time had only been in the early stages of its success. It seems as if a rough starting point for the dystopian trend in young adult literature has bridged the hole that had been left after the seventh book of the Potter series had marked the end of Rowling's series. As Green points out in the article, "[t]he past year [2007] has seen the publication of more than a dozen post-apocalyptic young adult novels that explore what the

future could look like once our unsustainable lifestyles cease to be sustained. (Spoiler alert: It's gonna be bad.)". Therefore, before I delve deeply into the issue of heroines and their representation in the chosen works of literature, I want to briefly define the popular dystopian genre, so that the impact it has on its female protagonists and their empowerment will work within the established definition of dystopia. One reason why I have chosen to analyse works of dystopian young adult fiction is the frequent appearance of female leading characters. Dystopian young adult literature offers more visible agency for female characters and allows them to explore their boundaries in a setting that is not limited by the same frame as reality. The boundaries of many dystopian societies are narrow too at first, but in this literary genre one crucial aspect of a dystopian plot has always been rebellion against the dominating force of power. In the introduction to their book *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, Day, Green-Barteet and Montz point out that "the female protagonists of contemporary young adult dystopias occupy liminal spaces as they seek to understand their places in the world, to claim their identities, and to live their lives on their own terms" ('Introduction'). Thus, the combination of the dystopian setting and its anticipatory aspects of rebellion with the female lead characters promises potential for an interesting analysis.

Pointing out the connection between dystopia and the genre of children's literature, Zipes appeals to Hintz and Ostry and their argument that children's and young adult literature has contained utopian elements associated with dystopia ever since its beginnings in the eighteenth century by elaborating as follows:

It would be misleading to argue that every story written for children is utopian, or to assert that there is an "essential" utopian nature to writing for young people. There is, however, a utopian tendency of telling and writing in general that helps explain why it is we feel so compelled to create and disseminate tales and why we are enthralled by particular stories. The tales, novels, poems, and plays that incorporate this utopian tendency stem from a lack we feel in our lives, a discernible discontentment, and a yearning for a better condition or world. Paradoxically the happiness of the listeners and readers of utopian works depends on the unhappiness of the tellers and writers. Without discontent there is no utopia. Without projections of utopia, our world would be a dismal place, and this is all the more reason why we need utopia and dystopian literature for the young, and not only for the young." (Zipes ix)

It appears as if we need the image of a utopia in order to sustain hope for something better. What Zipes, Hintz and Ostry agree on with regard to the connection between utopian elements and children's literature is the need to protect children from evil. The symbolism of literature as an escape could also be related to a sense of utopia, just as well as happy endings, which are a key ingredient of the most popular children's stories and fairy tales. The distinction between good and evil is particularly present in many works of children's literature, possibly attempting

to teach the readership about morality in some cases, while serving an entertaining purpose at the same time. Yet, this distinction is not a realistic mirror image of the real world, but a means to present a world to young readers which is closely aiming towards perfection. I would argue that apart from the literary context, the term 'utopia' is more widely known than 'dystopia'. These two concepts share a connection which becomes visible through definition. It appears that we need to define 'utopia' first because its roots seem to be manifested in history prior to the appearance of 'dystopia' as a genre. The roots mentioned without doubt lie in the 16th century, when Sir Thomas More published his book *Utopia* (1516), which features a protagonist who tells the tales of an island named Utopia nobody except of him has ever set foot on. The remarkable aspect about Utopia, which in the end defines it as utopian, is the perfect political, governmental and social system the island has. Utopians are not driven by power and greed, but by kindness and altruism. More paints a picture of a flawless society as a critique on the circumstances within his own, morally flawed and chaotic society of the 16th century. It is a detailed system More offers with his creation of Utopia, giving insight to many aspects of the daily life on the island, some of which are blurry and clearly too idealistic for any real society to follow in its footsteps. As Zipes points out, "[t]o be a utopian is frequently to be somebody out of touch with reality" (x). The perfection that is presented by More may only exist in a work of fiction.

The entry on 'dystopia' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the first use of the term by John Stuart Mill back to 1868, in an attempt to find a less complimentary expression than 'Utopian' in reference to people (see *OED* 'dystopia'). Even though the terms are commonly used in literature, I have decided to use the definitions provided by the *OED* because I would argue that the concepts have reached a more or less general understanding of what they mean and further because they are not limited to literature. Dystopia and Utopia are referred to as opposites, however it could be argued that the perception of both terms is subjective to some extent as well, since 'paradise' and 'hell' cannot be universally defined as the same for everybody. Furthermore, dystopia can still function as a form of utopia for those, who are not suffering from a dehumanised life in in fear. The leading figures of dystopian societies are, in most cases, happy with their regime and the power it gives them over the rest of the population. Although the relationship between utopia and dystopia is without doubt close, there is space for argumentation. The *OED* defines the term 'dystopia' as "[a]n imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible", thus the general definition views it as quite contrarily to the paradigm of perfection that is utopia. As an opposition to utopia, a dystopian society is

one that should not attract, but repel, while the utopian society is the one that allures. Although both types of societies may reveal flawed systems.

In literature, dystopian fiction often includes a set of distinctive elements which mark a piece of text as 'dystopian'. The majority of dystopian novels, especially the selection within young adult literature that comes to my mind, follow a pattern which is more or less interchangeable in the genre. This pattern shows similarities to what Joseph Campbell has identified as the journey of the hero in particular steps. In the context of the genre of youth literature, it can be argued further that the heroic journeys of young protagonists feature elements from the *Bildungsroman*. Just like any other literary genre includes a set of key elements which establish a piece of text as belonging, dystopian literature is defined as such by the elements known as 'dystopian'. Spisak briefly summarises what dystopian literature usually is about in the introductory paragraph to her article "What Makes a Good YA Dystopian Novel?", when she says that

[d]ystopias are characterized as a society that is a counter-utopia, a repressed, controlled, restricted system with multiple social controls put into place via government, military, or a powerful authority figure. Issues of surveillance and invasive technologies are often key, as is a consistent emphasis that this is not a place where you'd want to live (Spisak).

Apart from the entertaining purpose dystopian novels fulfil quite successfully most of the time, the dystopian society is also something that has a cautionary meaning. Possibly not in an overt or didactic way, maybe not even intended by the author as a warning, but one of the core elements in dystopian societies is the question how such a society came to exist. We as readers ask ourselves whether these dysfunctional societies show similarities to the world we are living in and we might also ask ourselves how we would have reacted had we seen and experienced the world through the eyes of the protagonist. Additionally, as a reader one might notice that dystopian protagonists are not simply occupied with their role in the changes of society which happen with the help of rebellion, but they also engage in behaviour which is linked to their status as teenagers. Basu, Broad & Hintz point out the relationship between utopia and dystopia as well, linking it to the warning aspect literature might have in context of the real world and claim that "[...] the dystopia often functions as a rhetorical *reductio ad absurdum* of a utopian philosophy, extending a utopia to its most extreme ends in order to caution against the destructive politics and culture of the author's present" ('Introduction'). Escape is not just a thematic element in young adult dystopian fiction, but also something the readership might be

concerned with. Basu, Broad & Hintz claim that in many dystopian novels for adolescents, didacticism and escape are companions rather than oppositional concepts. They point out that

[t]ogether they speak to the possibility that adolescents can at once fit themselves to better meet society's demands and shape society to better reflect their own desires and goals, creating the world they need, the world they want, and the world that they deserve. ('Introduction')

Spisak's argument that "[w]ell-written dystopias, the most memorable ones, offer both: space for asking big-scale life questions along with plenty of adventure and danger to keep things exciting as one cogitates" (see Spisak) adds to the relationship between didacticism and escape as far as the reader is concerned. The didactic purpose young adult literature could offer to its readership would be linked to the downfall of society and the fact that many dystopias seem to subtly criticise wrongdoings of contemporary society, while the element of escape is present in the distancing from contemporary society, the adventurous action plots as well as the possible inclusion of the fantastic. Even though fantasy and science fiction, which are the genres dystopia is mostly associated with, offer no boundaries with regard to the creation of new worlds and futuristic technologies, I would argue that authors usually have our contemporary world in mind when they create ideas for their dystopian universes. Suzanne Collins, for example, has drawn her idea for *The Hunger Games* trilogy from watching reality television and war documentary on the news at the same time, while prior she had been inspired by classical history such as Greek mythology and Roman gladiators as well ("Suzanne Collins Part 2 – Contemporary Inspiration"). As I have already pointed out earlier, the rise of popularity in the genre of dystopian literature in the twenty-first century may also be connected to events such as 9/11, or reaching back in time to the Second World War. In popular culture, threats which endanger the existence of the world have appeared in large numbers, reaching from alien invasions to ecological catastrophes to zombie sicknesses. With regard to the individual orientation of the various dystopias, Basu, Broad & Hintz point out that the threat of environmental destruction, the post-apocalypse in the form of plagues, a Third World War or, as I have mentioned already, zombies, and exaggerated governmental control (see 'Introduction') are some of the main causes which provide ideas to create futuristic landscapes, where the primary instinct at some point or another will be survival. Whereas apocalyptic events such as wars and environmental problem caused by humanity are presented as reasons for the dystopian societies in the novels this paper will focus on, they all more or less share the setting of the conform society, guided by strict rules and pretending to be utopian in a sense. The society in *Delirium* is largely unaware of the underlying secrets of the government, while *The Hunger Games* lacks any traces of utopia, or even the basic structure of a well-functioning

society and both the reader as well as the majority of the characters are fully aware of the cruelty and senselessness of the Games. Fascination and dread dominate our perception of the various end of the world we are being presented with, but in dystopian young adult literature hope persists over complete darkness most of the time. Hope is one of the key elements in many works of dystopian young adult fiction because it provides the reader as well as the characters with optimism. Yet, the darkness linked to themes of violence, death and war present in many of the dystopian novels would exclusively label them ‘young adult’ and exclude the children readership from the target audience. A wide set of key elements could be listed as ‘typically dystopian’, however, I would argue that the basic pattern many plots follow is closely related to the journey of the classical hero in mythology or fantasy. In dystopias, the protagonist frees him- or herself from the oppression of the regime by small, but innately powerful acts of rebellion, sometimes not even consciously attempting to rebel. Rebellion in various stages is possibly the major theme in dystopian young adult literature. Spisak has identified four elements to establish a dystopian plot which she considers as ‘well-done’ young adult dystopia:

a setting so vividly and clearly described that it becomes almost a character in itself; individuals or forces in charge who have a legitimate reason for being as they are; protagonists who are shaped by their environment and situations; and a conclusion that reflects the almost always dire circumstances (Spisak).

Apart from the setting, the development of the protagonist shows similar traces in various dystopian youth novels as well. Very few of the dystopian protagonists are aware that something is wrong with the world they live in and if even, their motivation of rebellion is either non-existent or very low at the beginning of their journeys. Even if they disobey the rules or are dissatisfied with their society, like Katniss for example, they are not immediately willing to lead a revolution. Lena from *Delirium* is probably the most reluctant and scared as far as her personal rebellion against the system is concerned, but considering that rebellion is one of the primary themes in dystopias which are concerned with the structure of society and the governmental regime overpowering its population, Lena shows traces of ‘illegal’ behaviour soon enough. As Basu, Broad & Hintz point out regarding the eventual moment when the characters realise that their society is faulty which makes it dystopian in the reader’s view “[m]any novels feature an awakening, sudden or gradual, to the truth of what has really been going on” (‘Introduction’). Through such an awakening, whichever form it might take, the adolescent protagonist is forced to leave behind his or her status as ‘child’ and become more adult within a short span of time. This means that “[u]ncovering the failures of the dystopia often means leaving aside childhood and confronting the harsh truths of the adult world” (ibid.).

The dystopian novels show violence, fights and war scenarios in which the difference between teenager, or 'child', and adult becomes blurred. Instances where the teenager's adolescent status is an indication of innocence and thus a sign for the adversaries not to treat them as adults, are rare. In most of the works, it is teenagers fighting adults. In dystopian worlds, young adults inhabit more adult roles, especially within the rebellion, are presented with harsh truths and receive very little protection as a result of the innocence which could be ascribed to them. While the government in *The Hunger Games*, for example, is rather open about their motives behind the existence of the annual Games as a reminder of the failed rebellion of the districts many years ago, the destruction of District 13 and the secured establishment of the regime, the society in *Delirium*, for example, use manipulation of the population as means to keep the system running smoothly. The gathering of information which is necessary in order to gain knowledge about the lies and secrets the governments hide from the people, is an obligatory step on the way to rebellion and is considered as "the only way to become free" (see Basu, Broad & Hintz 'Introduction'). Along with survival, escape to freedom in some way or another is a key theme in young adult dystopian novels.

3. REPRESENTATION OF GENDER ROLES IN SELECTED WORKS OF YA DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Today, the heroine as the central character in a work of young adult fiction is not a rare instance anymore, but it seems that in one literary genre there seems to be a particularly high amount of female protagonists. The representation of gender roles in contemporary fiction is less reliant on stereotypes and more open towards the deconstruction of archaic portrayals of dismissive women and dominant men. While this is possibly the case in quite a wide range of contemporary literature for an adolescence audience, I have noticed a particularly high amount of female heroes in the dystopian genre and therefore have decided that the dystopian setting offers ground for the female protagonist to perform heroic deeds and act self-reliantly. The extent to which the heroines are able to free themselves from male and governmental oppression varies, but the instances in which change in gender representation and the interaction between male and female characters become visible, are interesting to engage further in. The dystopian framework provides its characters with situations that appear hopeless very often, especially to those who resist the mainstream structure of the totalitarian government. Even though the two trilogies which function as the primary literature in the following analysis, feature very different forms of society and oppression, the similarities between the lives of the central characters and

the decisions they make throughout their processes of growing up and seeing their world with different eyes, are strong.

Since Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy has joined previously phenomenally successful young adult works such as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, those three series could probably be described as the holy trinity of mainstream young adult literature as far as the wide readership and global success are concerned. Despite the booming trend in young adult fantasy and dystopia after the ends of Harry's and Bella's adventures, *The Hunger Games* has inhabited a special position within the ranks of a growing genre, not only because of the trilogy of books, but also because of the uncontested success of the movies which have been released so far. With regard to academic work on the particular texts I want to analyse in this paper, *The Hunger Games* has received the most attention by far. Thus, even though I will attempt to focus on each heroine and her world to an appropriate extent, I would like to use the academic work which has been published on Suzanne Collins' series as a guiding framework for the analysis of *Delirium* as well. Apart from the aspect of gender, which will be the main focus of the character analysis, the portrayal of the expression of female heroism as well as instances of rebellious behaviour will have central functions as well. Moreover, I will pay attention to the extent of feminist deconstruction providing the works with less stereotypical gender role portrayal, as well as cases of visible traditional association of male-female-binaries with the characters. Thus, the analysis will not exclusively focus on female characters and the way they are presented, but also their encounter and interaction with others, both men and women, as companions, love interests, confidants, authority persons and opponents.

3.1 DYSTOPIAN HEROINES: CHARACTER PROFILES

I have already pointed out earlier that one of the main reasons why I have chosen the dystopian young adult genre to function as the centre of this thesis, is the seemingly high frequency of female heroic protagonists. Katniss and Lena share vaguely similar experiences throughout the course of their individual journeys and face similar obstacles in life, but what is the most interesting aspect for my subsequent analysis of these two female protagonists is the way their femininity is portrayed and where the portrayal classifies in the range from 'traditional' to 'deconstructed'. The number of contemporary heroines in young adult dystopian fiction is a pool of more or less interesting characters. Without doubt, *The Hunger Games'* Katniss is possibly the most interesting with regard to the aspect of. *Delirium's* protagonist Lena proves

to be an interesting contrast to Katniss' challenge of the norm because she is very stereotypical in the beginning and is able to gain empowerment throughout her story. Heroines like *Divergent's* Tris or *Uglies'* Tally would have presented an interesting characterisation for analysis as well, however, I chose Katniss and Lena because they display the most contrarily portrayed character profiles. At the beginning of the first book in each series, the female first person narrator explains to her audience about an event which will or might soon change their lives. At the moment of their explanation, neither of the girls realises the full impact these events will really have on their lives. While the overall structure of events and experiences is similar in both series because they follow the dystopian pattern, Katniss and Lena are very differently portrayed in the expression of their femininity as well as their identity as heroic characters. Lena is happily awaiting her birthday because it is the day she will undergo the procedure that is going to prevent her from falling sick with the disease that is love. In contrast to the calmness and hopeful expectation depicted in the case of Lena, Katniss faces an event that fills her and the majority of her society with fear – the reaping of the tributes for the Hunger Games, an arena spectacle resulting in the victory of one tribute and the death of twenty-three others. In the following chapter I want to concentrate on the individual characterisation of the protagonists, the similarities they share as well the differences that distinguish them both as heroines and as empowered female adolescents. Heroines should not be limited in the way they act within the unconventional context that seeks to challenge the tradition, therefore my main interest lies on the depiction of strength and the quest for identity these female characters experience.

3.1.1 Katniss Everdeen

[...] Katniss Everdeen is a female character who balances traditionally masculine qualities such as athleticism, independence, self-sufficiency, and a penchant for violence with traditionally feminine qualities such as idealized physical female beauty and vulnerability. As a “male identified” female character, Katniss capitalizes on patriarchal values that privilege traditionally masculine characteristics while leveraging other, gender-appropriate qualities in ways that appeal to all readers. [...] (Lem & Hassel)

When Katniss introduces herself in the first chapter of *The Hunger Games*, she immediately rejects a stereotypical representation of role distribution within families because the audience is informed right away about the fact that it is Katniss who provides for her family. By doing so, as I have already pointed out, Katniss challenges readers' expectations on the sex of the protagonist when she identifies herself as biologically female and thereby reinforces Nikolajeva's statement that the female voice subverts, while the male reinforces the patriarchal

dominance. As critical readers, we are immediately interested in Katniss, her personality and the way she lives her life because doubtlessly she appears to be different from known female protagonists. One of the first aspects the reader learns about Katniss is her routine of disobeying the rules of her society, attempting to better the living situation of her family, if only just slightly, by hunting in the woods illegally. From a feminist post-structuralist view it becomes clear that Katniss might be what Nikolajeva has labelled as 'new femininity', a type of new woman who is given the possibility to evolve from the female stereotype by combining traits which are both feminine and masculine. Katniss is not a stereotype, but instead resists generalisation and, according to the wishes for a more diverse theory I have referred to earlier by quoting Scott, reinforces a shift from universals to pluralities. Katniss symbolises a change in the literary portrayal of female protagonists from a prevalent feminine passiveness and weakness to a more empowered, more active image of a 'new' woman of the future. Various aspects like character traits, family, friendship, romance or rebellion which influence Katniss' shift away from the stereotype will be at the centre of my analysis of Katniss in this chapter.

One of the most clearly defining aspects of Katniss' life and one of the main reasons why she is the person we meet at the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, is her family situation. In her family, Katniss represents a role which conventionally would be associated with the male, but the absence of the father as well as the unstable and difficult relationship Katniss hints at when she talks about her mother, make it her who occupies the roles of both parents. Although Katniss inhabits a male-dominated role during the times she is in the woods hunting because her father's death has left her without any other options, at home she partly fulfils the role of the mother by comforting her younger sister and acting as the only reliable and responsible person in the household. Scott and Dargis claim that

Katniss isn't locked into gender. She has assumed her dead father's responsibility as the family provider and is also a mother surrogate for her sister, Prim. But Katniss doesn't shift between masculinity and femininity; she inhabits both, which may mean that neither really fits ('A Radical Female Hero')

This would define Katniss as close to being an epitome of the deconstruction of the female stereotype because she inhabits both the male and the female. Moreover, it adds to the sense of androgyny that was pointed out by Trites and Nodelman with regard to a balance of the male and female gender. Lem and Hassel agree with this opinion by arguing that

[o]ne of the ways that *The Hunger Games* bridges the divide between boys' and girls' culture is Collins's portrayal of a heroine who embodies traditionally masculine characteristics – in her role within her family, in her behaviour, and in her adherence to patriarchal expectations regarding masculinity ('Chapter 7').

One could easily state that Katniss is portrayed as the adult in her family who takes care of her sensitive sister and broken mother. What she does best is survival, thus Katniss is already prepared quite well for the Hunger Games. Everything she does has a purpose and it appears as if she is already beyond her age, not living the life suitable for a teenager as we might imagine as readers, but one should not forget that the districts with the highest numbers are also the poorest, which means that fun and shenanigans are far-fetched in District 12. District 12 is not portrayed as a place where happy childhoods are a natural part of people's lives, but Katniss provides an extreme example of a child having to grow up fast. All the children in Panem lose parts of their innocence and the experience of childhood to the fear of the Games. Nevertheless, Katniss is presented as a serious young woman who honours her responsibilities and does what is necessary to provide for her fatherless family because she cares for them. Katniss was willing to give up her own childhood for the sake of her family because she is its strongest link. The consequences of losing her father result in a loss of childhood, especially because her sick mother was unable to fulfil her purpose as parent. Interestingly, Panem is a society in which children have greater power to bring wealth to their families and save them from starvation. On the one hand, they can order food rations which cost them one addition of their names to the reaping pool of possible tributes. On the other hand, by winning the Games the victors are able to save their families from an insecure financial fate. However, even the victors will never be able to keep other children safe from the Games. The government of Panem obviously plays with the expectations and hopes of people to secure its power. As Ming Tan points out, "the system is constructed to turn children into agents of their family's survival; adults cannot provide, but children can. Childhood is stripped away as families and adults offer up their children as potential sacrifice" (56). In the case of the Everdeen family, Katniss takes her duty to provide seriously, but instead of playing along with the Capitol's rules of ordering the food provisions in exchange of another addition of her name in the reaping pool, she attempts to spare herself and her sister this fate by hunting. She puts herself in danger to undermine the power of the government. They attack the children because they would not expect a girl like Katniss, who belongs to the margin of society, to draw strength from the injustice her country has presented her with. Even on the fictional level, Katniss challenges the stereotype.

Since Katniss has lost a part of her own childhood, she feels responsible to ensure that her sister is allowed to be a child for as long as possible. While she seems rather practical and harsh at times, Katniss is very motherly and soft in her interactions with Prim. Especially in contrast with the heightened sense of traditional femininity her mother and sister display, Katniss appears particularly different from them as far as gender is concerned, portrayed in a way that is less feminine, seemingly belonging to the masculine sphere more than to the feminine. Lem and Hassel emphasise this by saying that

[o]ther female characters serve as foils to Katniss due to their stereotypical femininity, which almost always highlights her male-identified strength against their feminine weaknesses: Katniss's sister, the innocent and naïve Prim; their emotionally fragile mother, whose inability to care for the girls after their father's death earns Katniss's contempt; Effie Trinket, shallow, vain, and twittering. This use of feminine foils gives Collins an opportunity to stress Katniss's survival instinct, which fulfils traditional narrative expectations for a heroic protagonist. ('Chapter 7')

Due to her mother's suffering from depression after her husband's death, an illness they cannot afford according to Katniss – especially not in District 12 –, she cannot rely on the remaining parent and only adult to support her, who is still the child having lost her father despite everything she does to make herself and her family survive. At first, it seems as if Katniss is the only person with relevant skills and the ability to take responsibility, but later in the plotline, Katniss' mother proves to be stronger and more helpful than one might have given her credit for. The fact that we as readers perceive everything from the perspective of Katniss, leaves us with less understanding for what her mother thinks, or how she is trying to show her daughter that she is better and able to fulfil her role as the adult, the mother and the provider again. What Katniss' mother is good at is caring for people. Her family had an apothecary and she worked as a healer in the past, so her medical knowledge is what she contributes when it is needed. By subtly fulfilling her tasks, she slowly earns back her daughter's trust and gains new confidence and purpose in life. At one point in the book, Katniss describes the situation prior to the reaping, which is emotional and frightening for any family, and her mother offers for her daughter to wear one of her old dresses (see Collins *THG* 15). The relationship between mother and daughter is captured in four short sentences: "I'm trying to get past rejecting offers of help from her. For a while, I was so angry, I wouldn't allow her to do anything for me. And this is something special. Her clothes from her past are very precious to her" (ibid.). Even though Katniss treats her mother rather harshly sometimes, I would argue that as a reader one never doubts that she loves her family, and has a connection with her mother that functions without words. The relationship between Katniss and her mother also reveals about Katniss that she has ceased to need her mother because she was able to teach herself the necessities of survival, and

of taking care of her family in place of her mother. It also further indicates how Katniss challenges the female stereotype with regard to various circumstances. In one chapter, she explains that once her mother got better mentally,

Prim was thrilled to have her back, but I kept watching, waiting for her to disappear on us again. I didn't trust her. And some small gnarled place inside me hated her for her weakness, for her neglect, for the months she had put us through. Prim forgave her, but I had taken a step back from my mother, put up a wall to protect myself from needing her, and nothing was ever the same between us again. (Collins *THG* 53)

Katniss admits that one reason for her disappointment in her mother is her weakness, a trait stereotypically associated with the female that Katniss herself challenges so successfully. She thinks that her mother should have been able to endure the pain because she managed to at an even younger age, where she would have needed her mother to keep her from fulfilling all the duties that her father's absence has left them with. During the Hunger Games, it becomes clear that Katniss has not only learned survival skills from her father, but also knows how to treat wounds and take care of people medically and emotionally, even though she lacks confidence and is unable to see that she is not just her father's daughter, a hunter, a survivor, but also her mother's daughter, a healer, to some extent. It appears as if they understand each other, and even when Katniss volunteers to take her sister's place in the Games, her mother understands and avoids complicating things for both her daughters by remaining calm. She promises to remain in her role as responsible parent when Katniss is torn away from her home to do what she has done best for a large part of her life, particularly since her father's death – she tries to survive. With her skills in hunting and her resilient and fierce character, Katniss has a much higher chance as a participant in the Games than Prim would have had. Despite that, however, Katniss still expects to sacrifice her life when she volunteers because she realises that the Games are a much more difficult and cruel obstacle to overcome than providing for food.

While Katniss is a fighter, Primrose is more fragile, soft and unable to harm any creature. Her fragility and obvious femininity educes the motherly side in Katniss, just as her cooperation with Rue in the arena has a similar effect on her. Prim fulfils her tasks within the family as well, caring for her goat which was given to her by Katniss and which is another source of income for the poor Everdeen family. Katniss has taken over her father's role in the family, acquiring abilities which appear more masculine as far as traditional gender role distribution is concerned, while Primrose has a character too sensitive for the harsh world Katniss has entered and which includes not only breaking the rules, but taking lives as well. In contrast to Katniss, Prim shows

character traits which have been established as traditionally female, such as tenderness, a certain kind of weakness and fragility. Under different circumstances, Prim might be considered a damsel in distress, and Katniss would be the hero who saves her. In a sense, this is actually the case at the reaping, when Prim's name is chosen and Katniss saves her life by taking her place. Still, despite the strongly feminine portrayal of Katniss' sister, Prim comes after her mother as far as her skills in healing are concerned. Although she appears to be too fragile to kill, Prim is able to face injuries and treat the wounded. Prim is reinforcing the female stereotype by being the nurturer mainly, but she also shows that with regard to certain situations she can be fearless and brave. Gilbert-Hickey points out that after Katniss' victory in the Games, when her family enjoys a relatively wealthy life, Prim fulfils the image of the Victorian "Angel" because she invests her time in helping the sick and wounded (see 'Chapter 5') and thereby reinforces her status as a traditionally feminine character. By taking on the responsibility of providing her family with food by selling her hunting game, Katniss is unable to allow herself the same set of mind as her sister's. If Katniss were alike her mother or Prim, the family probably would have starved soon after the loss of the father. Early in the novel, Katniss is presented as focused on her role as hunter, not guided by her feelings or any sentimental relationships. This, for instance, becomes visible in her interaction with animals. She does not have a caring relationship with her sister's cat and even tried to drown it once because she believed that they would not be able to feed it (see Collins *THG* 3), and neither does she spare many feelings for other animals. In chapter 1, Katniss remembers a lynx which followed her around and which she considered a form of company, but she had to kill the lynx because it scared her game away. Even though she admits that she almost regretted it, she values the price she got for the animal's pelt as well (see Collins *THG* 7). Katniss forbids her feelings to reign over her practical thinking which is another indication of an attitude which is not traditionally found within women and adds to the image of the hunter that Katniss represents. She needs these character traits in order to represent not only a female hunter, but a female hero as well since many of the character qualities that have defined the dominant image of the male, white hero have been primarily regarded as typically masculine. What makes Katniss unique, as I would argue, is that we believe in her identity. She is not portrayed as the decal of a male hero, a substitution of femininity with masculinity, but rather as a symbol of ambivalence who is not stereotypically anything. This gender-ambivalence can also be related to the unisex appeal of young adult literature that would be found within Katniss' character. I would argue further that Katniss, due to her unconventional occupation of both gender roles combined to a non-stereotypical heroine, reaches a wider, more diverse readership than a more femininely portrayed protagonist would.

As a hero, Katniss could be described as reluctant. She struggles with the basic concepts of heroism and rebellion despite her rebellious actions because she is not used to being somebody's symbol. So far in her life, most of the decisions she has made were her own because the only person she fully trusts is herself. Katniss wants the change, but due to her celebrity status as both a victor as well as a resister she is afraid of how her actions might cause others harm. Her main goal is survival rather than heroic glory or the attempt to save the world. All she wants to save is her personal world. Katniss is unconventional in both her femininity and her status as a heroic persona. She does not willingly adapt to the image of the Mockingjay for a long time, and even after she agrees to appear as the symbol of the rebellion, Katniss does not represent a typical hero persona. She is not eager to storm the Capitol, overthrow the government and save the world from evil, and neither is she presented as a type of person who leads. Katniss is more of a loner than a leader and finds it difficult to successfully co-operate with others. The only efforts she makes to gain control are for her own well-being, for example when in *Mockingjay* she convinces the authorities of District 13 to allow her and Gale to hunt in the woods, or ensures her family's and friend's benefits, for instance when she compiles a list of those who should be spared from trial.

In her expression of heroism, Katniss shows similarities to the Western "cowboy hero", who is one of the most iconic heroic figures in popular culture, and also one of the most individualist. The cowboy hero is often characterised as a loner, unwilling to join the community, but prepared to fight for what is right in his or her personal view. Levinson provides a definition of the cowboy in her article "Genre and Gender", in which she says that

[t]he Western hero is as tough and stony as the landscape that he inhabits. His identity is not dependent on his relationships or his possessions, since he has few of either. Rather, he defines himself through his ability with a gun and through his understanding of Western codes of behavior, particularly those pertaining to violence. He is a man who does what he has to do, sometimes reluctantly but always with a sense of duty that borders on fatalism (Levinson).

Of course Katniss is not fully characterized as a "dystopian cowboy heroine", but the definitions provided for such types of Western heroes, offer aspects applicable to her. Scott and Dargis also compare Katniss to the cowboy persona and claim that the archetypal Western hero is "a socially marginal figure, a loner who defends the fragile society of the frontier without ever becoming part of it" (see Scott & Dargis 'A Radical Female Hero'). The cowboy hero is also a type of persona traditionally used to portray a sense of masculinity, thus it adds an interesting

aspect to Katniss' character. Like many cowboy heroes, Katniss fulfils her tasks, not because it is heroic glory and appraisal she seeks, but the safety of her family and a life in peace, as a marginal member of the community she helps saving. There is little doubt any reader of Collins' series could imagine Katniss riding into the sunset on a horse, indifferent about her belonging with the community, but always prepared to come back and help if necessary. However, as Scott and Dargis suggest, "[s]he is different, though, not only because she is a woman but also because she is anything but a free, rootless figure of the wilderness. The paradise she comes from has been colonized and enclosed" (ibid.). Prior to the rebellion and the overthrowing of the government, Katniss lacks the freedom of the cowboy hero, but manages nonetheless to gain some freedom by her hunting activities. Additionally, another characterisation which would fit Katniss is that of the anti-hero, at least to some extent. The anti-hero is connected to the image of the cowboy hero, and, as I have identified already earlier in this paper, is characterised as a person on the margin of society as well, not particularly interested in heroic deeds, possibly scared or emotionally damaged. In her reluctance to be the hero – the Mockingjay – Katniss shows her disinterest in the heroic deed and throughout the series there are numerous instances where she establishes herself as sceptical, not particularly fond of social interactions and people in general, at least not the handful of people she trusts. Scott and Dargis suggest further that

[a]ll of this means that, as she sprints through the forest, Katniss is carrying the burden of multiple symbolic identities. She's an athlete, a media celebrity and a warrior as well as a sister, a daughter, a loyal friend and (potential) girlfriend. In genre terms she is a western hero, an action hero, a romantic heroine and a tween idol. She is Natty Bumpoo, Diana the chaste huntress of classical myth, and also the synthesis of Harry Potter and Bella Swan — the Boy Who Lived and the Girl Who Must Choose (ibid.)

Similar to any other successful young adult novel which comes to mind, romance plays a role in *The Hunger Games* trilogy as well. As the quote cited above suggest, among other identities, Katniss is also a romantic heroine. Both of the young men portrayed as love interests for Katniss fulfil their function to influence and shape Katniss' identity and her way of thinking. I will discuss Katniss' relationships with Peeta and Gale in greater detail in one of the following chapters, but at this point I want to highlight how Katniss' usually rational way of thinking is affected by her feelings.

In the second novel of the series, *Catching Fire*, Katniss is not only occupied with the fame that accompanies her victory in the Games and the duties connected to that victory, but also with her feelings for Peeta and Gale. The president of Panem is not convinced by her

apparent reasons for offering the poisonous berries to Peeta in the finale of the Games and blames Katniss for the uprisings in the districts. To remain in his powerful position, able to control the country and the existence of the Hunger Games, President Snow threatens Katniss and the people she holds dear to her heart. He wants her to act appropriately according to the expectations of a victor and do nothing to raise doubt on the epic love between Peeta and her which was presented as the main reason for Katniss' actions in the finale of her first Games. Apart from the media spectacle surrounding the '*Star-crossed Lovers of District 12*', Peeta and Katniss are anything, but happily in love since they have returned home and it was revealed that while his feelings were true, hers were part of her goal of survival. This is another example of how Katniss is portrayed in a way that is often used for male characters. She has used Peeta's affection as a strategic element in the arena, is overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity of such a display of emotion, and in the end Peeta feels deceived by her behaviour. In their relationship, as well as in the relationship between Katniss and Gale, Katniss as the woman is the one maintaining the power. However, she is unable to use that power and primarily seems almost unable to cope with the way in which her enemies as well as her apparent allies use her feelings for other people against her. After I have already pointed out a number of examples for Katniss' unique personality with regard to gender portrayal, her status as a romantic heroine supports this argument further. At the beginning of her story, we learn that she never intends to marry, or have children, and thereby rejects one of the most dominant stereotypes of femininity. Katniss shows a lack of interest in typically feminine aspects of life like falling in love or having a boyfriend because for most of her life she has been preoccupied with more existential issues. While she has to fight and struggle for her own and her loved ones' well-being and safety throughout the whole narrative, it seems understandable that at times the mere concept of romance feels overwhelming and unnecessary to Katniss because she has other issues to worry about.

In *Catching Fire*, Katniss suffers from the aftermath of her experiences in the arena and her mental state is visibly shattered, but at home she is able to find comfort in familiarity. However, Katniss is not safe only because she arrives safely at home in District 12. The consequences of her actions in the arena haunt her, and she receives more attention than she would have ever wanted. She is also aware of the danger she has put her loved ones in because they are her Achilles heel. The change of the rules as a reminder that the seemingly powerful are not powerful at all prior to the special 75th Hunger Games includes a reaping out of the pool of existing victors and Katniss is forced to face the arena again since she is the only female

tribute in her district. This action proves that the government feels intimidated and sends a message to the rising rebellion that diminishes the safety of the victors. Katniss has never felt safe, and even though she accepts the fate of attending the Games a second time, she is not focused on her own survival like she was in the first Games. One of the first things she does after a mental breakdown that only reinforces the image of the broken warrior having to gather her remaining strength to survive again, is an arrangement with Haymitch where she attempts to secure her position as the one who saves Peeta. During their first Games, Peeta wanted to keep Katniss alive, thus she is convinced that the second time she should be responsible for his survival. With regard to the other one's survival, Katniss and Peeta are equally portrayed as masculine, attempting to slay the dragon to save the other. Both of them want to be the hero with regard to the other, and save one another. What Trites has said about the feminist heroine and her balance between caring for others and caring for herself, Katniss fulfils rather well. After all, she still is the hunter we got to know in *The Hunger Games*, still the survivor, and she has not lost the spark which made her the girl on fire. However, we are also reminded that the first Games have damaged her mentally, and that this damage becomes worse when she faces another Games. In a quite anti-heroic expression of her thoughts Katniss contemplates running away.

I can't let President Snow condemn me to this. Even if it means taking my own life. Before that, though, I'd try to run away. What would they do if I simply vanished? Disappeared into the woods and never came out? Could I even manage to take everyone I love with me, start a new life deep in the wild? Highly unlikely but not impossible. (Collins *CF* 56-7)

Katniss is brave and skilled, unafraid and angry, but at the same time she is forced to allow the president more control and power over her than she would let him have in different circumstances. In the arena, Katniss was a trained hunter, able to fight for her survival, but in Panem, she must bow to the president in order to keep her people safe. In comparison to a traditional hero, Katniss is not eager to fight, but would rather escape if she could, even take her own life before she would accept being a puppet of the Capitol that keeps the rebellions in the districts controllable. With each novel, Katniss' frustration over the role she plays for various political and social parties becomes clearer and the fact that she is portrayed as mentally unstable and severely damaged by the beginning of *Mockingjay* only illustrates further that Katniss is not a conventional hero, but a young girl trying to finish what her actions have triggered involuntarily. Her main focus in her role as the Mockingjay is not saving the country, but saving Peeta, and seeking retribution by killing the president who has caused pain and suffering for decades. Furthermore, President Snow drew Katniss' hatred onto himself when he

threatened her personally. The mere wish of taking somebody's life deconstructs the feminine stereotype because conventionally women would have been much too fragile to harm anyone. Katniss' ability to kill reinforces the masculinity she displays as well as the heroic image because she kills not for fun, but out of necessity.

Towards the end of *Mockingjay*, the rebellion is successful, but the only reason the country is at peace and the political situation becomes democratic, is Katniss' personal decision when she chooses to kill Coin instead of Snow because she realises that Snow was already defeated, while Coin proves to be another source of danger in the fight for Panem's and Katniss' peace. Even though she goes against the plans and acts solely under her own command, Katniss' actions at the end of the book may be defined as heroic. I agree with Fritz, who points out that "by removing Coin from power (albeit in a violent way), Katniss demonstrates that she is capable of thinking and acting as an independent political entity. In this way, Katniss performs a compelling iteration of girl power [...]" ('Chapter 1'). She decides against killing Snow for the mere pleasure of finally taking revenge, and instead saves Panem from a fate that might have been similar to what it was under Snow's rule. In the end, she is not only the figurehead of the rebellion, but also the heroine who performs one of the most integral aspects of the rebellion all by herself. After the successful rebellion Katniss might have had a wide range of possibilities as far as a career is concerned, but it still is not glory or celebrity she seeks. What she wants instead is a calm family life in District 12. Of course the fact that an empowered heroine like Katniss, who is praised for her feminist characteristics and the burning example of female heroism portrayed equally to male heroism, is living her life as a wife and mother after she has been a survivor and warrior, allows for criticism to appear. Despite the unconventional aspects of Katniss' character and her largely masculine portrayal, one should not forget that she combines masculinity and femininity given the fact that she kills, but she nurtures as well. Katniss unites the hero and the woman by representing an empowered female hero, combining many feminist qualities in one person. The question remains whether marriage and children are the 'fitting fate' for a heroine who has such a distinctive influence on our perception of a 'new' female protagonist and who teaches us that girls are as able to slay a dragon, whether it is physical or symbolic, just as well as boys. As far as the ending of *Mockingjay* is concerned, Katniss turns her back on the revolutionary potential she has shown throughout three books and seems content with settling down in a conservative setting. When a heroine like Katniss ends her rebellion with marriage and children, her story partly reinforces the stereotype. However, we could also argue that by reinforcing the stereotype as far as the epilogue of the story is

concerned, Katniss might as well challenge the expectations put on her deconstruction, a new kind of stereotype that puts certain expectations on the portrayal of a new femininity. Wetta points out an important message with regard to the portrayal of strong and empowered, feminist protagonists when she argues that

[...] strong heroines are dynamic: they struggle, and through those struggles, they change. They are agents of action, rather than passive or reactive. Female characters can fall in love and still be strong. They can be bold or reserved. They can be feminine or they can be tomboys. There is no one way of being strong, just as there is no one way to be a girl. When we talk about what it means to be a strong heroine in young adult fiction, let's make room for all the ways girls can exhibit their strength. (Wetta)

The ending might weaken Katniss' status as an empowered, unconventional female protagonist and offers similarities to the stereotypical romance plot, but Katniss has subverted the traditional portrayal of girls, who have been sidekicks, damsels in distress, sensitive and bound to the home, whereas boys have been adventurous, heroic and out in the world. When she subverts her own empowered fate back to the plot of the stereotypical romantic heroine, she appears to lose parts of herself which have made her unconventional in the first place, however, given her personal history I would argue that it makes sense for Katniss to wish for a normal family life instead of a political career which would remind her each and every day of the tragedy she has experienced during the Hunger Games and the rebellion. Broad criticises that the epilogue of *Mockingjay* "ensures that Katniss's rebellion serves to keep her an appropriately gendered, reproductive, and ultimately docile subject" ('Chapter 7'). We cannot take away from her that she proves to deconstruct the stereotype in more aspects than she does not. It seems difficult to imagine a girl like Katniss become a woman who reinforces traditional gender roles in marriage and as a mother, so the question that remains is whether the heroine is able to act accordingly to her status even in a setting that is less challenging and more stereotypical with regard to the roles each sex fulfils. One of the most important aspects of adolescent life, however, is change and development, personal growth and perception. Katniss has known fear and poverty for the majority of her life, but when she is finally free to make different decisions than before because the circumstances have changed, she is able to reconsider her opinions. She could have reinforced the stereotype of the happy ending resulting in marriage and family life if she had chosen Gale, the stereotypical male. The issue is interesting and debatable because of Katniss' status as a praised feminist role model for young female readers and a challenge to persisting gender role stereotyping in literature for young adults. Of course girls and women may choose freely how they want to spend their lives, but a true warrior like Katniss might have had other opportunities for her future with Peeta included than settling down to get married and

have children. The fact that she chooses to be a wife and mother challenges the expectations of the reader once again, similar to how Katniss' sex challenges it at the beginning of *The Hunger Games*. It appears as if by the end of the book she has discarded the spark which made her the girl on fire because there is no need for the girl on fire, or the Mockingjay, anymore. One of my assumptions is that after two arenas, many deaths and a successful rebellion, Katniss is probably relieved that she could bury the Mockingjay. At the end of her story as we know it from *Mockingjay*, Katniss admits that she will never be truly free from her past, explaining how she still struggles:

I'll tell them how I survive it. I'll tell them that on bad mornings, it feels impossible to take pleasure in anything because I'm afraid it could be taken away. That's when I make a list in my head of every act of goodness I've seen someone do. It's like a game. Repetitive. Even a little tedious after more than twenty years.
But there are much worse games to play. (Collins *MJ* 455)

As far as romance is concerned, Miller raises an interesting point when she mentions that "[t]he hero makes the heroine accept what she craves while she gets to deny how much she craves it" ('THG vs Twilight'), which is one of the most prominent key elements of romance literature and refers particularly to Peeta's wishes of having a family with Katniss. Even though a heroine like Katniss proves that she is empowered and has the set of abilities needed to make her own decisions, Broad claims that it is the two men involved in the romantic triangle surrounding Katniss who make the choices for her (see 'Chapter 7'). Nonetheless, I would argue that the trilogy offers various passages where Katniss makes her own decisions, even though they might be influenced by her attachment to her loved ones. Despite the influential roles the men play in Katniss' life, they do not take away her agency as the heroine of Collins' novels.

To conclude with my character analysis of Katniss, it seems relevant to once again refer back to the character qualities which have been associated with conventionally feminine and masculine portrayal because the position Katniss inhabits with regard to these 'spheres' is both interesting and unconventional. First and foremost, Katniss without doubt is one of the most remarkable female characters in contemporary literary history, particularly as far as an audience of young readers is concerned because she challenges traditional views on femininity as much as she proves that heroines have the same agency as heroes do. However, the epilogue of the trilogy suggests that Katniss adapts to conventional gender roles in the end when she has children. Even though it is being criticised that after deconstructing typical femininity throughout her journey Katniss chooses the conventional fate of a romantic heroine, those two pages of an epilogue should not be weighed more than three books with numerous instances

where she proves that she might be the most prominent example of a ‘new femininity’ and an option to choose freely, whether it is a career, a family, or both. I want to refer to the quote by Wetta I included earlier because in my view it is very important as a general message to point out that a possible deconstruction should not put the same pressure and expectations on a female protagonist as tradition does. If there were a stereotype for empowered, feminist heroines, we would face yet another norm to challenge. What is most remarkable about Katniss is that she is a new kind of female personality, a possible role model for the future of young adult literature and a ground-breaking character as far as gender portrayal is regarded.

3.1.2 Lena Haloway

After the procedure I will be happy and safe forever. That’s what everybody says, the scientists and my sister and Aunt Carol. I will have the procedure and then I’ll be paired with a boy the evaluators choose for me. In a few years, we’ll get married. [...] (Oliver *Delirium* 2)

In the previous chapter, the character analysis of Katniss Everdeen proves that the praise of her as a type of new female character which has rarely been seen before in young adult literature, is justified mainly because of the combined traits of masculinity and femininity that establish her challenge of the female stereotype. Katniss will therefore function partly as the model in the analysis of Lena. In comparison with Katniss, *Delirium*’s protagonist Lena Haloway is a rather disappointing heroine as far as her displayed abilities to challenge the norm of feminine gender portrayal are concerned. Lena believes fully in the benefits of her society. When she is introduced to the reader, she is eagerly awaiting the brain operation which will cost her the ability to experience heightened emotions like love in particular, since love, or *Amor Deliria Nervosa*, is considered an illness that is regarded as highly dangerous in Oliver’s alternate universe dystopian America. Katniss challenges gender stereotypes and disobeys her government already at the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Lena, on the contrary, seems to follow a more classical line of involvement in dystopian fiction and needs to experience a revelation. When she introduces herself, we learn that she is a convinced member of her society. In Lena’s society, those who love illegally are either cured, punished or outlawed, and even the families of those who have been disgraced are watched suspiciously. The society Oliver presents in her novels is reinforcing conservative perceptions of gender in general. Boys and girls are separated to avoid the disease, which is inside everybody until one is cured, to break out, homosexuality is said to be cured by the procedure as well, and an evaluation test matches boys and girls as couples to be wed. Separation of the sexes and arranged marriages symbolise

anything, but a challenge of the norm, thus the manipulation of people's emotions causes Lena as well as the majority of the population to believe in the righteousness of the system. Many reviews praise Katniss as a new type of female protagonist with feminist ambition and a character which parts with the stereotype women often have been reduced to, even in leading roles. Lena, however, is described as passive, dull and weak, and there is quite a number of passages in the book which reinforce such an opinion. In the first chapter, Lena explains that she willingly accepts to have the procedure because she is not afraid, not resisting and eagerly awaiting for her fears to vanish as a result of the cure (see Oliver *Delirium* 1). This establishes Lena as a young woman who is portrayed as another sheep in the herd, uncritical and unaware of what the cure does to people and how she has been manipulated for her entire existence. It is difficult to compare Lena's life to Katniss' because despite the similarities they share as far as the influence of family is concerned, Lena is an ordinary teenage girl, while Katniss is a resister, a fighter and an adult at an age younger than Lena. Additionally, according to the sequence of the novels Lena develops from one book to the next whereas Katniss already has a distinctive personality at the beginning of the first book in Collins' series. The experiences Katniss lives through are much more dangerous and cruel, and I would argue that Lena would never have been able to endure what Katniss has survived. Both girls change throughout the course of their stories, but in different ways. Even though we believe that Katniss has the necessary set of skills to do well in the Games, Lena needs to prove herself and her agency as protagonist until the last novel in Oliver's series. This is the reason why the following character analysis of Lena is structured according to the chronological sequence of events in the novels, to indicate the steps of development she experiences and the factors that contribute to her changing identity.

Similar to Katniss' life, Lena is also strongly influenced by her family situation as well as her relationships with others. In the case of the Haloways, Lena's mother was incurable and is said to have committed suicide, which is an explanation for Lena's belief that once she is cured she will be safe from the fate that destroyed her mother. Since she is an orphan, Lena lives with her aunt and uncle, who are entirely different in their display of affection than she was used to from her loving mother. The only rebellious spirits inside Lena's mind at the beginning are the dreams and fears she experiences over the anxiety her family history causes her, however, since she is afraid of these images and thoughts in her head, the rebellious notion is barely existent at this point. Apart from that, she is the epitome of a 'good girl' and good citizen, and therefore, the shock she feels when her best friend Hana engages in illegal

behaviour by listening to forbidden music, and even more outrageously in Lena's eyes, invites her to a party where segregation between boys and girls is absent, is understandable. She is afraid that the disease may run in her blood and catch her like it caught and affected her mother.

I don't like to think that I'm still walking around with the disease running through my blood. Sometimes I swear I can feel it writhing in my veins like something spoiled, like sour milk. It makes me feel dirty. It reminds me of children throwing tantrums. It reminds me of resistance, of diseased girls dragging their nails on the pavement, tearing out their hair, their mouths dripping spit. (Oliver *Delirium* 2)

Lena is portrayed as a believer in the cure because she has seen what the 'disease' does to people, and while she seems to be very secure in her high hopes for the day she will finally be cured, Lena is always haunted subconsciously by her memories. Most of the time she pushes these memories and fears away by telling herself that the cure will fix her, but as soon as Lena comes into closer contact with small acts of resistance and people associated with the resistance, her past as well as her mother's 'disease' become more intriguing for her, mainly in a frightening way at first because sympathising with the deliria is followed by a cruel fate. The ultimate natural consequence of the deliria is death, thus the brainwashed society is understandably frightened of the possibility of getting sick. The society is controlled by fear, stemming from both the deliria and also from the fear of sympathisers and the association with these people. Fittingly dystopian, the punishment for sympathisers is execution masked as the protection of the city. Given what Lena knows about her mother's condition, which was presented as a difficult case of the deliria because she had no intention of wanting to lose her ability to love and pass it on to her children, she is scared that a similar fate might await her. Lena dismisses the qualities she remembers about her mother as abnormal. In the early chapters of the novel, Lena appears almost boring, the model citizen she is, anticipating the procedure, fearful and timid of the deliria and constantly reminded that she has to prove that her family is 'normal'. At one point, Lena admits to herself that the fears she tries to suppress until she will finally be freed of them after the curing procedure, sometimes reach the surface of her consciousness.

Sometimes I feel as though there are two me's, one coasting directly on top of the other: the superficial me, who nods when she's supposed to nod and says that she'd supposed to say, and some other, deeper part, the part that worries and dreams and says "Gray." Most of the time they move along in sync and I hardly notice the split, but sometimes it feels as though I'm two whole different people and I could rip apart at any second. Once I confessed this to Rachel. She just smiled and told me it would all be better after the procedure. After the procedure, she said, it would be all coasting, all glide, every day as easy as one, two, three. (Oliver *Delirium* 50)

In general, Lena's fears are not too different from typical fears teenagers face in this sensitive stage of life, however, they are adapted to the circumstances of a controlling, manipulative society. Young people might experience similar feelings of insecurity about their own identity and instability in one's emotional world, it is only the dystopian setting that makes it more dangerous. At the same time, one might wonder whether it could be a human response to fear and insecurity to allow the brainwashing to happen. What Lena knows is that her mother was supposedly suffering, that she brought shame upon her family and that she consequently died from the effect of the deliria. She also knows that her sister, or her aunt, or any other cured adult she knows, experiences no such rush of emotion. The brain procedure which is propagated as the ultimate cure from the danger feelings of love may cause, leaves behind empty shells of people with a lack of compassion and joy. The cured even lack the emotion necessary to care properly for their children sometimes, as Lena points out when she refers to a mother who was unable "to bond normally, dutifully, and responsibly" (Oliver *Delirium* 7) with her children, whom she only had because the evaluation had decided so. In Lena's world, parenting appears to be a task on a checklist prepared by others and loving care is not an aspect in raising children that is considered as normal. Of course Lena, who was raised by her uncured mother, has experienced a different kind of family bond than the one she experiences with her substitute parents after her mother's death and her being left an orphan. Family life is very practical in Lena's world. Concerning the loss of parents and the feeling of abandonment from the adults, Lena shares experiences with Katniss, but instead of developing an individuality that leads her to break the rules, Lena affirms to them because it is the normal, the safe option. Apart from the similarity with regard to an absence of parents, Katniss and Lena might be found on opposite ends of a spectrum, with Katniss symbolising the empowered and strong female hero, who challenges the norms of gender portrayal, while Lena needs to fall in love. The impact of love as a motivational force is strong in the cases of both girls, but given the circumstances and the main theme of the power of love in Oliver's novel, Lena is 'doomed' to a strong relationship with the romance aspect of her story and thereby reliant on the stereotype. The way Katniss is motivated by love partly adds to her strength, but as long as Lena has the boy she loves by her side, she appears dependent on him.

Whereas Lena is unhappy with Hana's suspicious behaviour and attendance of illegal parties, she is immediately fascinated by a boy named Alex as soon as she meets him. The feelings she has for him are confusing to Lena because all she knows is that symptoms of the deliria might be her downfall, her chance at a normal life destroyed. Given the fact that Lena is

an eighteen-year-old girl, and the novel's attempts to promote the power of love, her society's ideology is not strong enough to stop the impact Alex has on her life, even though at first her thoughts are conflicted, her fears heightened and Lena fights against what she believes is endangering her future. On her path to enlightenment, Oliver's heroine relies very strongly on her love interest and thus, romance occupies a much more dominant space in the story than in *The Hunger Games*. The romance plotline is also reinforcing of stereotypical gender roles because Alex is portrayed as the hero saving Lena not only from the police raid at the illegal party, but also from a fate as another empty shell. The relationship between Alex and Lena portrays him as the hero, while she resembles the stereotype of the damsel in distress to a great extent, despite the fact that it is actually Lena who should be the heroine of the novel. By relying on Alex so heavily, she transfers her agency to him and thereby reinforces the stereotype of the relationship between the hero and his female love interest. She also chooses the male hero over her best friend whom she has known for many years. In contrast to Katniss, Lena leaves her loved ones behind voluntarily, and shows very little consideration for their well-being because she is pre-occupied with building the fairy tale happy ending she dreams of with Alex.

The influence the relationships with Peeta and Gale have on Katniss in the *Hunger Games* trilogy is undeniably strong, but in comparison to *Delirium*, the relationship between Lena and Alex is typical of a romance plot, reinforcing the stereotype in almost every aspect. Alex is the strong leader, the one who passes on knowledge about their society to Lena, while she simply does what he says. Throughout the narrative in *Delirium*, Lena learns to critically question her society and government because she begins to trust Alex and allows herself to be drawn into his world, which promises more freedom, but also more danger. There is no doubt that Alex has Lena's best interest in mind when he gives her instructions on how to escape because he is portrayed as having the necessary knowledge, whereas Lena would be unable and unwilling to escape on her own, but the symbolism with regard to traditional gender roles of him telling her: "When I say go, you drive. And when I say jump, you jump [...]" (Oliver *Delirium* 436) is strong and reinforces his power over Lena which is mainly expressed because she needs somebody to guide her. Alex has full control over the situation and Lena only follows the instructions. Even after Alex and Lena plan to leave Portland for the Wilds, and Lena is aware of the fact that being in love will not do her any harm, she relies too heavily on the male protagonist to be taken seriously as an agent herself.

I haven't even thought about the other obstacles that stand in the way of my escape – like the fact that I'm strung up like a salami, or the fact that either Carol or Uncle William or Rachel or Jenny is always

stationed just outside the door. Call it denial or stubbornness or craziness, but I just have to believe that Alex will come and rescue me – like in one of the fairy tales he told me about on our talk back from the Wilds, where the prince springs a princess from a locked tower, slaying dragons and fighting forests of poisonous thorns just to get to her. (Oliver *Delirium* 420)

By comparing herself to a fairy tale princess waiting for her prince to save her, Lena weakens, or even diminishes the possibility of making herself appear as empowered. She wishes to be the stereotype. The quote cited above classifies Lena as a damsel in distress, one of the passive princesses in their towers and the female protagonists who would rather have their heroes slay the dragons than attempt to do so themselves. According to Childs, “[t]he social narrative and gender roles demand a passive romantic heroine for the hero to protect, regardless of the heroine’s desires” (‘Chapter 10’). What Lena wishes for is the fairy tale happy ending with Alex, in her romanticised, naïve image of the Wilds, with him citing poetry to her. She does not think about how she would need to slay some figurative dragons herself once she has fled the city and her main focus should be on survival in the Wilds. When Alex and Lena make plans to escape the city, it is obvious that Lena’s motivation derives from her newly-found love more than it does from rebellious feelings towards the city. Her wish of being with Alex exceeds any other, possibly stronger reason she might have had for her decision to escape, even her friendship with Hana. She does not want to fight against the brainwashing and manipulation of thousands of people, but for her own happiness away from those who might destroy it. When Alex and her begin to fight over what even Alex knows is Lena’s simplified imagination of life in the Wilds, she accuses him of talking, but never acting: “You’re just like everybody else. You’re as bad as the rest of them. Talk, talk, talk – it comes so easily to you. But when it’s time to do anything, when it’s time to help me – “ (Oliver *Delirium* 376). She further accuses him of not caring for her as properly as she expects him to when she wants to fully rely on him and argues that if she were important enough to him, he would take her away (see *ibid.* 377). When Lena tells Alex not to treat her like a child as he tries to explain the dangers and hardships of the Wilds to her, he tells her that she should stop acting like one, and even though he apologises at the same time, we know that he is right (see *ibid.* 376). Lena is relying completely on her love interest, demanding for him to help her and thereby taking any possible agency away from herself. *Delirium* portrays not a single incident where Lena helps Alex. It could even be argued that at some point, Lena’s best friend Hana might be more suitable as a heroine as far as a partly deconstruction of the passive female stereotype is concerned, with her challenging the rules of society by attending illegal parties, uttering thoughts that express her interest in boys and sexuality and by seeming more open-minded than Lena in general. I will focus more closely on

Hana and her role in the series in the next chapter, and move on to discuss the development of Lena's empowerment in the following paragraphs.

When their plan to escape the city fails and they are caught in the act, Alex sacrifices himself to ensure Lena's safe arrival on the other side of the fence. He acts typical according to the image of the hero. Furthermore, as far as Lena's personal growth is concerned, the loss of Alex might be the most beneficial event to happen to her. As we can expect, Lena's moment of realisation happens when she understands that she cannot return to the city and has to continue on her own, and with that she begins to leave behind one of the selves she has referred to earlier in the book. The Lena she leaves behind is the one with the anticipation of coasting through life with a damaged brain. Very suddenly, shortly after she realises that it is Alex whom she will be leaving with a part of herself on the other side of the fence since he is assumed to be dead, Lena sounds very convinced of her own agency as a resister.

[...] You can build walls all the way to the sky and I will find a way to fly above them. You can try to pin me down with a hundred thousand arms, but I will find a way to resist. And there are many of us out there, more than you think. People who refuse to stop believing. People who refuse to come to earth. People who love in a world without walls, people who love into hate, into refusal, against hope, and without fear. (Oliver *Delirium* 441)

Lena transfers her anger into a mission statement against the society she was part of only recently before falling in love with Alex and learning about her mother's fate which contributed to her perception changing. To me, it is difficult to take Lena seriously at this stage of her development because only pages prior, she compares herself and Alex to a fairy tale princess who wishes for her hero to save her. Lena has yet to prove her words with actions.

As far as Lena's qualities as an agent are concerned, the second book in the series, *Pandemonium*, begins with a metaphor of birth. The old Lena is dead. New Lena is born when she leaves behind her old home and her first love, who has not succeeded in climbing the fence and apparently was killed in the attempt to ensure that at least one of them achieves their goal. She has found a place with a group of Invalids who present her with a new way of life that Lena has to adapt to. During the process of surviving in the Wilds, the rebirth of Lena becomes visible in Oliver's choice of separating the chapters into 'Nows' and 'Thens'. The reader is presented with a main protagonist who is actively engaged in a mission started by the rebels and behaves differently from where we left Lena at the end of *Delirium*. Dedicated to the cause and more

reliant on herself than on anyone else, Lena's process of developing to the empowered woman of the 'Now' chapters is depicted.

But the old Lena is dead too.
I buried her.
I left her beyond a fence, behind a wall of smoke and flame. (Oliver *Pan* 3)

Despite her claiming that she has been reborn as a new Lena, she still has to prove that to the reader. Oliver decides to let the reader know early in the second novel that Lena in fact has changed. In the 'Now' chapters we get to know a completely different young woman, showing less insecurity and relying on herself rather than on others. In the 'Then' chapters her development towards said young woman is portrayed, thus it is understandable that we still see much of the weakness of old Lena. Even after Alex's death, she relies on him to help her through the day, to help her fight and adapt to her new life in the Wilds. Lena still wishes for familiarity, even though the people and the system connected to this familiarity are those, who have killed her boyfriend and who would have killed her as well. Lena uses Alex as a symbol for survival, motivates herself by promising herself that he will be alive if she is able to carry water buckets and still relies on him with regard to her own well-being.

Alex was the one who understood things here. He could have built up this collapsed street for me, turned it into a place of sense and order. He was going to lead me through the wilderness. With him, I would have been okay. (Oliver *Pan* 45)

Once again we are reminded that Lena is a type of a damsel in distress. She wishes for her prince to save her, to build things for her and lead her through this new life. At that moment, Lena does not consider leading herself. She never had a reason to fight for survival like Katniss. Without Alex by her side, she relies on the people who are taking care of her. The process of leaving behind and burying this passive and dependent version of herself is slow and exhausting, but it also shows that there is more to Lena than the impression she has left us with after the first novel. When she remembers her past in one of the 'Now' chapters, Lena points out the changes she has experienced and which have helped her to bury her old self. She considers herself different than before.

That is the girl I was then: stumbling, sinking, lost in brightness and space. My past had been wiped clean, bleached a stark and spotless white.
But you can build a future out of anything. A scrap, a flicker. The desire to go forward, slowly, one foot at a time. You can build an airy city out of ruins. (Oliver *Pan* 46)

Lena acknowledges her previous lack of agency and is determined to engage more actively in the resistance. She succeeds to prove that she has indeed developed to a different girl, one that relies not simply on other people, but who takes action herself. This is particularly visible at the time when Julian and Lena are imprisoned, and Lena has no one to rely on but herself. Instead of waiting for rescue like the old Lena would have done, she scans the walls of the prison for possible ways to escape shortly after she wakes up and realises the situation in which she is (see Oliver *Pan* 132). After she realises that her confidant Tack made her bring a selection of random items, Lena finds hidden notes, which lead her to discover a knife in Tack's umbrella. Even though the tools for an attempted escape are with her, provided by someone else, it is Lena who develops a plan to attack the people responsible for the kidnapping and actively attacks someone to gain her and Julian's freedom. First, she tricks one of the kidnappers into entering the room, then she attacks him from behind with her knife. While she threatens him to stay quiet by holding her knife to his throat, Lena admits to herself that she is shaking and hopes the man does not notice it (see *Pan* 202). Despite the success of the first part of Lena's escape plan, we are subtly reminded that she is not a warrior, not a hunter. In one of the chapters referring to her recent past in the Wilds, Lena is unable to kill a rabbit because she claims she does not have the stomach for it (see Oliver *Pan* 161), but when Raven provokes her by reminding Lena that Alex died and as a result of it she is still alive, Lena attacks her. Her hateful thoughts towards Raven are particularly interesting in comparison to her reluctance towards killing the rabbit. With regard to gender stereotypes, Lena's inability to do tasks because she feels too fragile reinforces her femininity, while her surprisingly aggressive behaviour is not a character trait which would be usually associated with a woman. However, the irrationality this aggressive behaviour is based upon is traditionally associated with femininity because masculinity is dominated by rationality. Moreover, Lena's way of fighting and attacking seems very violent because she has neither the weapons, nor the skills that Katniss has. The anger Lena shows towards her friend Raven in the following quote may be linked to the instance in *The Hunger Games* when Katniss attacks Peeta for making her appear weak by confessing his love for her (see 134-6). Situations like these weaken the goodness of these heroines because the hero is not supposed to attack friends, but protect them.

I am in midair, lunging at her, before I realize I've moved. The knife is in my hand and I am going to drive it straight into her throat, bleed her and gut her and leave her to be picked apart by the animals. (Oliver *Pan* 164)

It is evident that Lena has indeed developed from her previous passiveness, and is driven by hatred and a wish for revenge. At the end of *Pandemonium*, Lena is more empowered and has quite possibly learned more than Alex would have been able to teach her had they been together. After she managed to climb the wall which separates the city from the Wilds, Lena left her previous life behind and buried the past, but as the final lines of the second novel reveal, Alex is still alive. With Alex “brought back from the dead” (*Pan* 375), Lena’s buried past becomes unearthed again.

In the Wilds, where Lena and her companions, which include Alex, prepare for the rebellion, the number of Invalids and resisters is growing and the city is responding with attempts to extinguish them once and for all. Lena is torn between her feelings for Julian and the re-emerging feelings for Alex, who is not the boy from her past anymore after he was imprisoned and tortured. As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, the love triangle is a very dominant element in young adult fiction, and like in *The Hunger Games*, Lena experiences such a triangle with the boy who taught her that love is not a disease and the boy whom she taught not to be afraid of love. The love story is an element which is particularly prominent in Oliver’s trilogy since it is not just about teenage protagonists who learn about the non-threatening nature of love, but love and the risks it is worth taking for is also one of the main themes. Lena has empowered herself in *Pandemonium* and in the ‘Then’ chapters she is portrayed fighting for survival. She is nowhere close to being the survivor and warrior which Katniss is, but she is willing to fight for the resistance and by doing so, is actively involved. However, while *Requiem*, the final book in the series, could primarily be about the revolution and the fight for independence, freedom and the individual’s choice of free will, it is not. To a large extent, it is about Lena’s preoccupation with the boys she has feelings for. There are situations which prove that she has experienced character development from the girl who wanted a boy to save her like one of the princes who save their princesses from towers protected by dragons to the girl who has become less afraid and even saves Alex from a bear (Oliver *Requiem* 30), for example. It becomes clear in the tense interaction between Lena and Alex that she is not dependent on him anymore, but he still has an impact on her. She has enabled herself to do the saving, as she proves in *Pandemonium* when she saves Julian and herself from their imprisonment. At one point in *Requiem*, Lena’s friend Tack even refers to her qualities as a leader when they plan to take down the dam which blocks the water supply outside city. He tells her that they trust her because she is a leader and because they need her, and Lena remembers that she was never a leader before, but that it was Hana’s role rather (‘Lena’ 9). The leader qualities Lena seems to

display are very rarely portrayed explicitly. The majority of the series deals with her journey to a more independent and empowered young woman, but I do not agree that Lena is a leader. She proves that she can develop to a different person than the weak, passive girl she was in *Delirium*, but I could not find more than two scenes in the novels which indicate that Lena has what it takes to be a leader. Even Katniss lacks leading qualities. What both of them have in common regarding that lack is that neither of them wants to be a leader. In the case of Lena it is more difficult to analyse whether she might want to, but as far as Katniss is concerned it is clear that she has no intention to take any leading position willingly.

3.1.3 Hana Tate

Even though Lena's best friend Hana appears as a sidekick character in the first novel, I found her role in the series as a whole very interesting, thus I decided to include her in the analysis. Particularly because given the fact that Hana receives her own narrative voice in a companion short story to *Delirium* titled *Hana*, as well as in *Requiem*, makes her a protagonist as well. Lauren Oliver has chosen a different perspective for each of the novels in the trilogy, and while Lena's first person narration guides *Delirium*, her angle becomes dual in *Pandemonium*. In *Requiem*, the final novel in the trilogy, it is not only Lena who narrates the story from the perspective of the resisting Invalids, but her former best friend Hana as well, narrating from the point of view of a cured citizen, preparing to become the mayor's wife. Despite the small part Hana spends actively telling the story from her point of view in comparison to Lena, the fact that she has a voice makes her a heroine as well, especially considering the impact of her actions during that small part. Compared to Lena further, I would argue that Hana uses the little "screen time" she is given more effectively and manages to make an impression nonetheless.

When Hana is introduced as Lena's prettier, more outspoken and self-confident friend, Lena refers to herself as Hana's sidekick (Oliver *Delirium* 106). This is a very typical situation with regard to female friendship, a certain inequality that is probably used to make Lena's subsequent development throughout her journey more effective because she refers to herself as quiet and behaves rather passively. At the same time, however, it becomes clear very early in the novel that the outspokenness that seems to be one of Hana's major character traits is used to express her rebellious feelings towards her society. While Lena is a rule-fearing citizen, Hana is portrayed making Lena nervous with the things she utters. The type of female she is portrayed as is well-known in contemporary literature and culture. Similar to Lena, she does not contradict

the feminine stereotype, but at least she is not as passive as Lena and dares to act against the rules of her system. Actually, I would argue that with regard to gender, Hana is portrayed somewhat neutral. She neither reinforces the stereotype, but does not exactly challenge it either. However, the fact that she realises that she would prefer not to have a brain procedure without the assistance of a boy to tell her that, makes her more empowered than Lena. We cannot compare her to Katniss either because Hana's illegal activities are more closely connected to her being a rebellious teenager, attempting to have fun before the cure will change not only her life, but her entire existence. There are some instances in both *Delirium* and *Hana* where Hana's words and views are responded to by Lena with reprehension. Particularly one scene in *Delirium* displays this very well when Hana tells Lena about the illegally uploaded music she discovered:

“And you found one.” A sick feeling has settled in my stomach. Words keep flashing in my brain, like a neon sign going in and out: *illegal, interrogation, surveillance. Hana.*

She doesn't seem to notice that I've gone totally still. Her face is suddenly animated, as alive and energetic as I've ever seen it, and she leans forward on her knees, talking in a rush. [...] [“]You should see some of the things people write. About – about the cure. It's not just the Invalids who don't believe in it. There are people here, all over the place, who don't think...” [...] (Oliver *Delirium* 104)

While Hana is critically engaging with the society she is living in, Lena panics when she only hears Hana talk about such things. Hana knows that she cannot escape the cure, but in contrast to Lena she is aware that there is something wrong with their society and all the rules and regulations people have to follow so strictly. She invites Lena to an illegal party, telling her that they should have fun during the remaining time as people who can choose “before they cut out half of our brain” (ibid. 109). All Hana wants is a normal teenage experience as we know it from numerous other adolescent stories, feeling alive because she knows that once she will have had the cure, she will not be alive in the same sense ever again.

The relationship between Hana and Lena is one of the most interesting relationships in my whole analysis. It is also the only friendship I analyse in the context of this thesis that is not connected to romantic feelings like the friendship between Katniss and Gale, or not elaborated enough on to even play a large role. The friendship between Hana and Lena has an impact on both of the girls as well as on the whole plot in Oliver's series. As Childs points out with regard to the aspect of female friendship, “for a text to be a successful feminist novel, female friends must be just as important if not more so than the male love interest” (‘Chapter 11’). Concerning Lena and Hana, this is not entirely the case because Lena rejects her best friend to escape to the Wilds with her boyfriend. It appears as if Hana was more willing to draw Lena into her world

of underground parties than Lena is trying to persuade Hana to accompany them. Childs points out further that “[a]lready the premise privileges romance over friendship as it designates romance as the most dangerous” (ibid.). What they have in a world where simple friendly gestures like embraces are rarely seen, is a true friendship based on trust. This becomes clear when Lena accepts Hana’s rebellious behaviour even though she is afraid of it and considers it dangerous. Furthermore, one of the very few instances where Lena shows courage and self-dependency in *Delirium* is when she tries to warn Hana that a police raid is on its way to the party she is at. However, Hana never actually needs Lena’s help. The other way round, this is different because Lena needs Hana’s help more than once. When she begins to meet Alex and Hana accidentally finds out about it, she remains silent, even though Lena did not show any understanding for Hana’s rebellious activities. Hana, on the other hand, must feel like some of what she has been trying to show to Lena by telling her about the illegal activity and uttering the critical thoughts on the cure, has finally caught: “[...] Hana again gives me that look, like we’ve never met before, and I realize that she’s actually – and possibly for the first time in our lives – impressed with me. In awe of me, even” (Oliver *Delirium* 252). Without the knowledge of *Hana*, we might be as unaware of the fact that Hana had a similar experience of falling in love, or catching the disease because even Hana believes there is a disease, with a boy named Steve. Whereas the relationship between Alex and Lena is dominated by feelings of love and the wish to be together no matter what, Steve just wants to have fun before he will be cured. Hana realises that it was meaningless and we realise that she would have wished for an experience similar to the one her best friend makes shortly after. When Hana learns about Alex, she puts herself in the same position Lena does at the beginning of *Delirium*: “I’ve never felt ugly next to Lena, but suddenly I do. I feel tall and ugly and bony, like a straw-colored horse” (Hana ‘Ch. 5’). Hana reveals that she is happy for Lena, but at the same time jealous (ibid.), which leads her to betray her friend and enter the life she struggled to accept was her fate. However, Lena betrays Hana as well when she values her relationship with Alex, which of course is based on true romantic love as a means to fulfil the premise that love conquers all, higher than the friendship, based on platonic love, that lost its importance very rapidly throughout *Delirium*.

While Hana might have been an intriguing heroine in *Delirium* because she appeared more rebellious and active than Lena, it is revealed in *Requiem* that she had her procedure, but struggles with what seems to be an insufficient outcome: “[...] For all my life I have been Hana Tate. But the girl in the mirror is not Hana Tate. She is Hana Hargrove, soon-to-be wife of the

soon-to-be mayor, and symbol of all that is right about the cured world. A path and a road for everyone” (Oliver *Requiem* 12). Hana receives her own narrative voice and thereby a chance to redeem herself from the mistakes she has made in the past. The evidence that the cure has apparently not worked efficiently in Hana’s case is presented through her behaviour, which still displays instances of rebellion, not particularly against the system of the cure, but against the person she should be and is expected to be by those around her. Hana is unable to control her emotions as she should be, and at one point Fred even utters that her behaviour worried him in case he could have gotten “ a defective one” which causes Hana to contemplate whether she might really be defective as far as her status as cured is concerned (ibid. 39). She is expected to be a supportive and obedient wife to her future husband, who follows his father’s footsteps after his death and becomes the new mayor. Perfection is expected from Hana, but instead she behaves curiously and notices that she is different from the other cured people because she still cares, and worries, particularly about Lena and the family she left behind in poverty and social marginalisation, but also about the mysterious case of Fred’s previous match which did not work out. However, Hana is not actively rebellious, but tries to redeem herself by ensuring that Lena’s family is well as a means to deal with her guilt over the past. She reveals to the reader that she was responsible for the night the authorities found Alex and Lena together, and caused them and their plans to escape trouble. She further reveals that the reason for her actions was jealousy of what Alex and Lena had, and what the rebellious, curious part of Hana would have wanted for herself too. It might also relate to Lena’s choice of a boy she knew for a short while over her best friend whom she had known for years. The compassion she is able to feel for her former best friend and the guilt which is still present even after the cure enable Hana to disobey the system as well as her fiancé, who is portrayed as a cruel man. Before Hana and Lena meet again at the end of *Requiem*, Hana is so upset about the attacks on her city that she deliberates whether she might kill the girl they capture on the way home herself (see Oliver *Requiem* 351). This is one instance where Hana challenges the feminine stereotype. The girl, however, is Lena. Hana takes Lena home with her, to the house where a bomb has been placed to kill Fred Hargrove, and she confesses her betrayal. The friendship between the girls is clearly gone, but some of the memories and compassion they shared remains between them. Hana reveals that she is unable to feel the same remorse over her actions because the cure has muffled her ability to feel (see ibid. 367). Hana allows Lena to escape nonetheless before Fred finds and kills her, while Lena warns Hana about the bomb (ibid. 368-70). They might not be friends anymore, but they care enough about one another to make attempts to ensure each other’s safety.

“Don’t go out there, Fred,” I say. “Please. The girl said – the girl said the others were armed. She said they’d open fire if you do so much as put your head out the door –”
 “I’ll be fine.” He jerks away from me.
 “Please,” I repeat. I close my eyes and think a brief prayer to God. I’m sorry. “It’s not worth it, Fred. We need you. Stay inside. Let the police do their jobs. Promise me you won’t leave the house.”
 [...]
 “All right,” Fred says at last. “I promise.” [...]
 [...]
 I think about going upstairs, into what would have been my room. I could lie down and close my eyes; I’m almost tired enough to sleep.
 But instead I ease the back door open, cross the porch, and go down into the garden, being careful to stay out of sight of the large kitchen windows. The air smells like spring, like wet earth and new growth. Birds call in the trees. Wet grass clings to my ankles, and dirties the hem of my wedding dress.
 The trees enfold me, and then I can no longer see the house.
 I will not stay to watch it burn. (Oliver *Requiem* 374)

In the end, Hana plays a key role in the rebellion because not only does she allow Lena to escape, but she ensures that her fiancé stays at his house and thereby is the person responsible for his consequent death because she would have been able to save him, but instead saves Lena and herself. Without Hana’s ultimate rebellion against what she has believed to be a safer life, the rebellion might not have been successful. Additionally, she is able to disobey both her fiancé as well as the rules of the society and has successfully freed herself from various forms of oppression by acting independently. I would argue that Hana’s actions at the end of *Requiem* prove that she deserves her own voice because she might have achieved more in a few chapters than Lena achieved in three novels. As far as Hana is concerned, we do not see much of what might be gender role reversal, but the fact that she act self-dependently and manages to play a more important role than it might seem at first, adds to her qualities of an empowered female protagonist. Referring to what Day, Green-Barteet and Montz claim regarding the fact that the most important aspect is that these girl protagonists are active agents rather than passive bystanders is exactly what applies to Hana (see ‘Introduction’). She might not be a Katniss type of fighter, portrayed as the ultimate challenge of conventional gender roles, and she might not be as involved in her passive, fairy tale wishes as Lena is at the beginning of their journeys, but Hana is indeed actively portrayed.

3.2 GENDER ROLES REVERSED

How lovely to see Peeta hang back behind her as they move through the forest, Katniss with an arrow cocked in her bow for their mutual protection. How amusing the hear Peeta joke that he’ll take the bow to hunt, and to watch Katniss’s incredulous reaction. How nice to see the girl save the boy, helping him into a sheltered cave when he’s hurt, risking everything to get medicine for him, and masterminding the actions that in the end will save them both. (Dolan ‘The Hunger Games’)

When the portrayal of gender roles distances itself from the traditional distribution of roles for men and women according to their sex, we can speak about instances of gender role reversal. Of course most cases of such reversal are not as exaggerated as the term might suggest, but the way gender is presented in the selection of dystopian youth novels relevant for this analysis, there are quite a number of references which point to the fact that the distinction between masculine and feminine traits is blurred. The boys are not always the heroes, and the girls are not always the damsels in distress anymore, but while gender roles are certainly challenged at some point, they are also reinforced occasionally. Collins appears to have paid great attention to the aspect of gender portrayal in her trilogy because even though the protagonists are at the centre of this analysis, the number of characters challenging the norm is quite vast. For example, Finnick Odair is presented as a male victor engaging in sexual favours for the people in the Capitol, trading in secrets for his own and his fragile girlfriend's safety. The fact that a prostitution plotline is surrounding a male character is different from what we would expect. Additionally, female characters such as Coin, who is portrayed lacking absolutely any compassion or Johanna Mason, a fierce warrior who confesses that nobody can hurt her because she does not have any loved ones left (see Collins *CF* 418).

[...] [T]he book [The Hunger Games] complicates gender binaries of masculine and feminine in its portrayal of war and romance, fiction genres traditionally targeting gendered readerships even when those readers are adolescent consumers. Collins posits the romantic story line as a delicate balance between farce and spectacle, strategy and inevitability [...] (Lem & Hassel)

In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, gender reversal is visible to a greater extent than in the *Delirium* series. This might be because Katniss is a heroine who is associated with a wide range of character traits which have usually been affiliated with male characters and thus the femininity she lacks is substituted by other characters showing feminine traits. Especially in comparison to Peeta, a case of reversed, or blurred, gender roles is clearly noticeable in the series. However, both series offer potential for reversal and interesting scenes to emphasise the possibly changing nature of gender role stereotyping.

The quote by Dolan, which I have chosen as an introduction to this chapter, indicates the relationship between Katniss and Peeta as well as a reversal of gender roles from traditional to unconventional. As I have mentioned before in the character analysis, Katniss Everdeen has been praised as a new kind of female protagonist, and as Broad points out, "Collins boldly flouts literary stereotypes that keep female protagonists waiting at home, and proclaims that girls can do anything boys can do, including strategize, make demands, and even hunt and kill" ('Chapter

7'). Even though the heroine is at the centre of appraisal as far as empowerment and the abilities of girls to portray a similar kind of hero persona that has been established historically and traditionally by boy protagonists, it is not just Katniss who displays character traits which are not conventionally associated with the female sex, but Peeta, with regard to the male sex, as well. As a male character, Peeta is almost as unconventional as Katniss as a female. The first thing the reader learns about Peeta is a memory that comes to Katniss' mind when the name of the male tribute for the 74th Hunger Games is announced. While he displays a quality which is usually associated with masculinity when he saved Katniss and her family from starving with a small, but kind action by burning a loaf of bread in his mother's bakery so that he could throw it away for Katniss to take it, Peeta risks to draw his mother's anger to himself, but his deed can be described as heroic and good. He fulfils his role as the male because he saves the female. Although the saving of Katniss counts as a rather masculine quality, Peeta has a distinctive caring quality to his character. Everything Peeta does from the reaping onwards is dedicated to his mission of keeping Katniss alive. Prior to that, however, an interesting contrast between Katniss and Peeta is portrayed before they board the train to the Capitol. I would argue that their reactions count as one of the strongest instances of gender role reversal in the whole series.

I've been right not to cry. The station is swarming with reporters with their insectlike cameras trained directly on my face. But I've had a lot of practice at wiping my face clean of emotions and I do this now. I catch a glimpse of myself on the television screen on the wall that's airing my rival live and feel gratified that I appear almost bored.

Peeta Mellark, on the other hand, has obviously been crying and interestingly enough does not seem to be trying to cover it up. (Collins *THG* 40)

Crying would not have been the most surprising reaction from someone who had just been chosen to enter an arena and fight to the victory of a single person, but in this case Katniss, who would have been stereotypically associated with the action of crying because of her female sex, refrains from making herself appear weak, while Peeta, who is the male and therefore would have to be the strong one in a conventional sense, is the one who sheds tears. According to Huck, "[b]oys may show fear if they overcome it with bravery, but they seldom are allowed to cry or show love" (viii). Interestingly, another prominent scene which is clearly indicating that Katniss and Peeta challenge the norms of gender, is only featured in the movie *The Hunger Games* (2012), and even though I do not intend to include the movie franchise in this paper, I want to refer to this particular scene only to point out that it might have been a superb addition to the novel, and of course because it further emphasises the break with tradition by Katniss and Peeta that was even recognised by the filmmakers. In the scene I am referring to Katniss and Peeta attempt to hunt for food after they have found each other again, when Peeta announces

that he will take the bow, smiling at Katniss' surprised reaction and telling her that he is just joking. Peeta is aware of his status as the more feminine character and he accepts that Katniss occupies the masculine role more than he does without undermining his masculinity. In the novel, this is shown by his overt acceptance of his role. He is not portrayed as a male lacking masculinity and therefore being somewhat less of a man, but as someone who is confident with his own identity. Peeta is a baker and artist, not a warrior, however, while he shows rather feminine traits, he is also strong and protective, thus inhabiting the masculine sphere as well. Katniss has the physical abilities to survive and the experience in killing, even though she has only killed animals, not humans before, whereas Peeta adds his sense of strategy to conduct his mission of saving her by making Katniss appear desirable. As a result of his confession on live television, Katniss thinks that he makes her look weak because he makes her an object of love, a more feminised, romanticised version of herself, but as Haymitch explains to her, Peeta's confession of love adds an aspect to her profile which she possibly would only have been able to show Panem in an unstaged interaction with her sister (see *THG* 135). Peeta's affection towards her heightens Katniss' sense of a lack of trust towards him, especially because she is aware of the fact that in the arena they will be rivals. Her emotional unavailability becomes explicit when she presents the reader with her wish of Peeta's death, not because she wants him dead necessarily, but because she is scared of the possibility of having to kill him herself (see Collins *THG* 49, 60). At the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss has conflicted feelings for Peeta because she believes that he is fighting for his life when in reality he has accepted his fate and is only ever trying to help her. Peeta's behaviour towards Katniss reminds me of the difficult relationship she has with her mother and the passage where she says that she has distanced herself from needing her. Katniss has never really needed anyone because she is the person responsible for everybody. The fact that somebody who is a stranger to her, like Peeta, is trying to save her instead of himself, is understandably confusing for her. However, their status as characters with potentially reversed gender roles causes instances which reinforce Katniss' identity as the one taking care of Peeta. For example, when the tributes are presented to Panem in the opening ceremony, another moment happens between Peeta and Katniss which emphasises the notion of gender role deconstruction:

It's not until we enter the City Circle that I realize I must have completely stopped the circulation in Peeta's hand. That's how tightly I've been holding it. I look down at our linked fingers as I loosen my grasp, but he regains his grip on me. "No, don't let go of me," he says. The firelight flickers off his blue eyes. "Please. I might fall out of this thing." (Collins *THG* 71)

In a situation as overwhelming as the absurdness the tributes experience in the Capitol when they are about to face death in the arena, Katniss holds on to Peeta as well, but once again he is the one uttering his feelings openly, unafraid to fulfil the feminine convention.

Much of what happens between Peeta and Katniss in the arena romantically is strategically used by Katniss once she figures out the advantage their symbolism as the star-crossed lovers provides them with, but beyond her emotional unavailability in the context of the cruel games, Katniss does not stay unaffected by Peeta's obvious difference from herself. She finds herself even more conflicted about her feelings for him and wonders whether the lines between fake and reality have begun to blur: "For a moment I'm almost foolishly happy and then confusion sweeps over me. Because we're supposed to be making up this stuff, playing at being in love, not actually being in love. But Peeta's story has a ring of truth in it...could it all be true?" (Collins *THG* 301). Katniss has been in control over her life for a long time, she made it her responsibility to hunt as a necessity to keep her family safe, but when she admits to herself that her feelings for Peeta might be more real than she has thought before, Katniss transfers some of that power to Peeta. However, Gilbert-Hickey raises an interesting point with regard to Katniss' feminised behaviour in the arena when she realises that this is what is expected from her as a part of the star-crossed-lovers pretence. She argues that

when Katniss performs femininity and heterosexuality, thereby exposing to us, as readers, the extent to which her femininity is an act, she is doing so in accordance with what we have traditionally labelled feminine reasoning: the desire to win bread not just for herself but also for vulnerable, kind Peeta. It's circular and very muddled: her femininity is performed, but the very notion that she's willing to perform it is an act of "feminine" nurturing ('Chapter 5').

Katniss is not used to behaving as feminine as she is supposed to because the romance between Peeta and her is marketed so publically. For a girl like Katniss it must seem absurd that she is expected to perform the role of the caring girlfriend while they are fighting for their lives. Nevertheless, Katniss proves various times that she has feminine nurturing qualities she acts upon even without having to give a performance. At the same time, instances where Katniss behaves accordingly to feminine expectations are often useful to her cause, as well as to a certain disguise of her true intentions and resisting motives. Mitchell argues similarly with regard to the advantages Katniss has, stating that

[...] for Katniss, the most useful form of power at her disposal is her ability to perform – both consciously and unconsciously – various genders. Tellingly named after the unisexual *Sagittaria* plant, Katniss becomes the prime site of constantly shifting gender variance throughout the series" ('Chapter 12').

Pulliam also captures the importance of performance in Katniss' case, noting that

[i]n her role as a normatively feminine young woman, Katniss is extremely powerful: not only is she someone with whom the audience is more comfortable because her behaviour conforms to existing gender norms, but she also shows viewers the potential for resistance within her restrictive gender role, subtly implying that they too can rebel even within the confines of their own restrictive roles as citizens of the Capitol ('Chapter 10').

Everything Katniss does until she becomes the Mockingjay and thereby the official symbol and unofficial leader of the rebellion, is presented subtly. Her rebellious actions are never overtly expressed, and sometimes she is not even aware herself that she is presenting a challenge to the norm.

Towards the end of the first novel, the relationship between Katniss and Peeta is portrayed interestingly once more. After they have tricked Panem into believing their love story, Katniss uses it as an advantage to receive food for a sick Peeta, whom she kindly takes care of because she knows they provide the necessary romance the audience seems to love, and as a strategy to stay alive, the star-crossed lovers ironically are the final two tributes left in the arena. The announcement that the Games will have two winners is revoked, which leads to a situation neither Katniss, nor Peeta would have ever wanted to face.

"If you think about it, it's not that surprising," he says softly. I watch as he painfully makes it to his feet. Then he's moving toward me, as if in slow motion, his is pulling the knife from his belt – Before I am even aware of my actions, my bow is loaded with the arrow pointed straight at his heart. Peeta raises his eyebrows and I see the knife has already left his hand on its way to the lake where it splashes in the water. I drop my weapons and take a step back, my face burning in what can only be the shame.
"No," he says. "Do it." Peeta limps toward me and thrusts the weapons back in my hands.
"I can't," I say. "I won't." (Collins *THG* 342)

In a moment of tension, Katniss acts accordingly to her reflexes as a hunter, and attempts to attack Peeta before he would be able to attack her. Peeta, however, never plans to harm Katniss in any way, but to keep her alive still. He is not the survivor she is, and even his own mother told him that their district might have a winner this year, hinting at Katniss, after the reaping (Collins *THG* 90). When she realises that Peeta has never intended to claim the victory for himself, Katniss feels ashamed. As a heroine, she is supposed to be able to distinguish good from evil, and by the end of the narrative she knows that Peeta is on her side, possibly more than anyone else. She would never be a true hero if she hurt Peeta, especially after it becomes clear that he wants to ensure her victory. Katniss, influenced by Peeta's words earlier in the novel, does not want the Games to turn her into a monster and make her someone she is not. It

is clear that she would have the skills and survival instincts to kill Peeta, but Katniss protects those she loves because despite the advantages their romance offers in the Games and the unromantic setting they are in, there is definitely compassion and friendship enough to protect him rather than kill him. Katniss fulfils the expectations of her role as the hero by developing a strategy to defy the rules of the Games and gains power over both Peeta's life and the Capitol. She fulfils her role further because she protects the weak and thereby behaves heroically. Peeta might not be weak in the exact sense of the term, but he is wounded and made it clear that he intends not to lose his humanity in the Games, so we as readers can be certain that Peeta would never harm Katniss and is therefore inferior to her, who is still unsure whether she may trust him completely. Her actions reveal that she is not only heroic in the physical sense, but also that she has the intelligence to save both of them and defy the Capitol by one small action. This also shows quite well that Peeta trusts Katniss fully, and that he accepts his role in the story.

Peeta is the baker, Katniss is the survivor. This does not change in *Catching Fire*, where Katniss explains that "Peeta keeps all of us in fresh baked goods. I hunt. He bakes" (Collins *CF* 18). Their favourite ways to pass free time already symbolise the gender role reversal quite clearly. Similar to Gale and Katniss, who provided their families with hunting game, Peeta and Katniss provide their families with the benefits of their victory, which is a life away from starvation and poverty in the case of the Everdeen family. Hunting is a familiar and soothing activity for Katniss, whereas for Peeta it is baking and painting that helps him through the time after the Games, back home in District 12. However, while being home presents the victors with a sense of safety and familiarity, it also triggers new problems of various scales. Katniss and Peeta have to deal with the aftermath of their experience without being able to comfort each other because their epic romance story is only pretence for the cameras. President Snow puts Katniss in a position where she resumes her role as the person responsible for the well-being of others because he wants to use her to extinguish the sparks her fire has benefited the rebellious movements in Panem. Moreover, the triangle between Katniss, Peeta and Gale becomes more prominent and we are able to analyse Gale in contrast with both Katniss and Peeta as a character whose masculinity is portrayed differently, and more accordingly to the stereotype than Peeta.

Although Katniss and Gale are actually quite similar in their behaviour, they represent different types of characters as far as tradition is concerned due to their sexes. Gale is the oldest son in the family, and his role as a hunter, who ensures his family's safety is manifested in his status as a member of the male, white norm. He does what is expected from him as far as

convention is concerned. By joining the male stereotype of the head of the family Katniss establishes herself as less stereotypical than it would traditionally be associated with her status as a woman, and as Gale's equal. Regardless of their sex, they provide for their families not for the glory of the forbidden heroic deed, but out of necessity in a hopeless world. As far as Katniss is concerned, she is Gale's partner and friend, but she is also his equal because they are trusting each other and relying on each other when they illegally visit the woods. However, despite the similarity of the mainly masculine attributes they can both be described with, Gale still notices Katniss' femininity when he acts jealously as a response to Peeta's and Katniss' relationship. Dolan claims that this realisation of his feelings for Katniss as a response to her relationship with Peeta, which is an aspect of Katniss' life Gale has not taken part in or has even been aware of because it was partly constructed for the audience, and the embarrassment he might feel over the fact that he has to watch it being broadcast on television, "makes him sweet and rather feminine himself" ('The Hunger Games'). Apart from that, Gale fits the image of the stereotypical male protagonist who considers himself head of the family after his father's death and provides not only for his family, but also for his close friend Katniss' mother and sister, just as she looks out for his family as well. Gale and Katniss are portrayed very similarly, however, while she challenges the norm, he reinforces it. Katniss and Gale show very little reversal, even so, according to the stereotype, the man leaves home for his journey and the woman stays at home. In the case of Katniss and Gale, these roles are reversed and masculine Gale is the one to stay at home while Katniss fights in her adventure. Gale and Katniss have a relationship built upon trust, friendship and love, but his absence from the arena forces Katniss to fight on her own. The only alliances she accepts are Rue, who reminds her of her own sister of roughly the same age, and Peeta, whose feelings for Katniss are true and who is dedicated to her survival more than to his own, even though she is not aware of his intentions. Still, in comparison to the year-long friendship between Gale and Katniss, the parallels of their lives and the trust they have gained towards each other, Peeta is considered a stranger in her life. I would argue that as readers, we never doubt Peeta's loyalty to Katniss, but the suspicious person she is, Katniss is sceptical with regard to her district partner's motives because in her life it has always been Gale and her relying on each other. The similarities they share, and the traditional masculinity of Gale might be reasons why Katniss chooses the less stereotypically portrayed Peeta as her partner. By doing so, the more stereotypical character is stripped of a part of his typical masculinity because the girl rejects him at the end and thereby the novels offer yet another instance of deconstruction as far as gender stereotypes are concerned. To Katniss, Peeta represents not only a sense of home, but also peacefulness. Much of what they endured

throughout their time in the Games and during the revolution, they experienced together, or trying to protect one another when apart. While Gale's priority is the revolution and the goal of leading the people of Panem to freedom and independence, Peeta's priority is always Katniss, the girl who had to grow up faster than others to provide for her family, to care for her family and sacrifice her life for those she loves.

Gale and Katniss share a close friendship, whereas Peeta entered her life as the boy with the bread who saved her life and whom she has not had anything to do with despite this shared memory until they are chosen as tributes. Peeta quickly proves that his act of kindness towards Katniss was not random, but an example of his character, which could be simplified to being described as morally guiding and kind. After Katniss has volunteered as tribute, she is not convinced of her ability to win, but without doubt she will fight for survival, just like she has been doing since her father's death. Peeta, however, has no intention of losing his humanity and kindness in the Games.

"I don't know how to say it exactly. Only...I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?" he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not."
I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self. "Do you mean you won't kill anyone?" I ask.
"No, when the time comes, I'm sure I'll kill just like everybody else. I can't go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to...to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games," says Peeta. (Collins *THG* 142)

This is a very different opinion from what Gale tells Katniss shortly after the reaping, when he claims that the difference between hunting animals and people may not be as big as one thinks (ibid. 40). In comparison to Peeta, Gale might even seem cruel. We can suspect that Gale would have had a different role in the Games than Peeta. In the arena, Peeta manages to adhere to his wish of not allowing the Capitol to change him into a bloodthirsty monster, and whereas Katniss tries to survive on her own, he enters an alliance with the career tributes as part of a plan to help Katniss, who is the main target of the careers as a result of her high training score. While Katniss does what she has done for quite some time and kills other tributes, not because she is hunting, but because she is surviving, Peeta only kills a single tribute by accident.

In *Mockingjay*, Katniss contemplates her relationships with each of the boys and realises that she needs only one of them to survive. Katniss thoughts are expressed as follows:

What I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that. (Collins *MJ* 388)

As I have mentioned before, Gale and Katniss are very alike in many of their character qualities. This might be due to the fact that Gale represents the masculine stereotype with only subtle exceptions, while Katniss and Peeta challenge their respective gender roles to a much larger extent. What Katniss has always wanted was a calm life in District 12, and a reason why Peeta is able to provide such a life for Katniss is because the only instance in which he is not true to himself and to his mission of keeping Katniss safe, is when the Capitol brainwashes him, and thus he is absolutely innocent with regard to his actions towards Katniss. Gale, on the other hand, has always proved himself loyal and trustworthy, but the possibility of his involvement in her sister's death, his active engagement in the war and the violence distance him from the future Katniss desires for herself. In this case, the gender role stereotype is once again challenged when Katniss refers to Gale and herself as fire, while she associates Peeta with a dandelion. With regard to her future, Katniss prefers the dandelion over the fire because the events portrayed in the books seem to be enough for her as far as adventures are concerned. It also becomes apparent that the boys know much about Katniss' feelings as well. Gale proves that he also contradicts the stereotype to some extent when he discusses Katniss' feelings for both of them with Peeta in *Mockingjay*. Even though they are rivals, I would argue that Peeta and Gale behave very friendly towards each other because they know that Katniss is able to decide on her own. They challenge the stereotype of the love triangle at least to a small extent by acting less typically masculine. By claiming that he should have volunteered for Peeta to protect Katniss, Gale partly reinforces the masculine stereotype of the protector, but as we know that Katniss and him are basically family, it only makes sense that they both feel the need to protect each other, however, at the same time know that theoretically each of them individually would be able to survive.

"She loves you, you know," says Peeta. "She as good as told me after they whipped you."
"Don't believe it," Gale answers. "The way she kissed you in the Quarter Quell...well, she never kissed me like that."
"It was just part of the show," Peeta tells him, although there's an edge of doubt in his voice.
"No, you won her over. Gave up everything for her. Maybe that's the only way to convince her you love her." There's a long pause. "I should have volunteered to take your place in the first Games. Protected her then."
"You couldn't," says Peeta. "She'd never have forgiven you. You had to take care of her family. They matter more to her than her life."
"Well, it won't be an issue much longer. I think it's unlikely all three of us will be alive at the end of the war. And if we are, I guess it's Katniss's problem. Who to chose." Gale yawns. "We should get some sleep."

“Yeah.” I hear Peeta’s handcuffs slide down the support as he settles in. “I wonder how she’ll make up her mind.”
“Oh, that I do know.” I can just catch Gale’s last words through the layer of fur. “Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can’t survive without.” (Collins *MJ* 384-5)

The way in which they handle the situation prioritises the rebellion and the dangerous situation rather than their own egos, and makes them behave maturely. While Alex and Julian in *Delirium* are portrayed showing many instances of tension and rivalry, which is even shown in a physical fight in one scene, Gale and Peeta discuss Katniss’ possible choice, but they never try to influence it overtly. Additionally, the passage shows quite well that Gale, in particular, knows Katniss better than anyone else. Yet the fact that towards the end of the conversation he presents Katniss as calculative enough to make her choice about whom she is unable to survive without adds an interesting aspect to the conversation. It fits her character that everything about her is about survival, but she reveals her shock about Gale’s words picturing her as cold and decides that she can survive without either of them (see Collins *MJ* 386).

At this point I need to clarify that even though Katniss and Peeta show switched elements of masculinity and femininity which would not have been associated with their respective sex in literary works reinforcing traditionally established gender roles, neither of them is portrayed as less of a woman, or a man than others. Katniss is never portrayed as a masculine woman in Panem, while Peeta is never portrayed as a feminine man. Apart from the analysis with regard to gender, the books do not mention that the unconventionality these characters offer is perceived as unusual, or worth of criticism in their world. Even though Katniss and Peeta are amongst few couples in young adult literature which promote attempts to challenge the pre-existing gender role distribution, their reversal is not absolute or unique, but could be emphasised even more. In Broad’s opinion “[t]hat Peeta is associated with utopian gentleness and Katniss with dystopian violence, upsetting stereotypical gender associations, should not lead us to think that their gender roles are truly reversed or that the text offers more open examples of gender possibilities” (‘Chapter 7’). Characteristics of personality and behaviour are reversed, but the roles which Katniss and Peeta inhabit in their society as adults is not challenging the conventionality of heterosexual relationships. Katniss is a girl, Peeta is a boy, and they are married with children by the end of the final book in the series.

In the *Delirium* series, I would argue that the portrayal of gender in the love-fearing society is rather conventional, but this is partly due to the society’s system, which matches girls and boys in what could be described as an arranged marriage with an arranged number of

children to have and a predictably comfortable future without a very broad spectrum of loving and caring emotions to establish credible happiness. Marriages are exclusively between men and women, boys and girls are separated from each other because the deliria is said to travel in the space between them, spreading with every forbidden interaction. By portraying a society so conventional and conservative, Oliver offers space for criticism, but also for resistance. As I have already pointed out in the chapter on Lena, she is presented as a very stereotypical feminine character, especially in the first novel of the series. Alex, her love interest, on the other hand, features subtle character traits which could be identified as feminine besides his more or less typical masculinity. For example, Alex is the one who is aware of the beauty of love, while stereotypically it is women who are presented as more romantic. He definitely challenges the traditionally male sphere of the hero to some extent by reciting love poetry to Lena under a starlit night sky, while Lena is still in the process of learning that she is not sick with the deliria, but simply experiencing feelings of teenage love. Despite his gentleness and the preference for poetry, or possibly even because of these aspects of his character, Alex is portrayed as a rather typical love interest – a romantic hero. He is presented as slightly mysterious, drawing Lena's attention onto himself easily, and of course he is the one to fulfil the purpose of guiding her towards the moment of realisation that her society is not having its people's best interests in mind. In their relationship, Alex is always the one in control. His knowledge about the brain procedure and the lack of disease that romantic love truly is makes him appear superior to Lena, who is naively awaiting her own procedure. In comparison with Gale and Peeta, Alex might provide a superficial in-between of these characters, typically male, saving the girl in need if necessary, physically strong, but at the same time invested in his feelings and touched by the beauty of words. As Lena points out concerning to the preparation of their escape, "Alex isn't exactly a master hunter-gatherer" (Oliver *Delirium* 381). Alex is neither as distinctively male as Gale, nor as femininely portrayed as Peeta. What makes him appear more stereotypically male are Lena's visibly feminine character traits and her dependence on his skills to protect her, but in general the gender roles in *Delirium*, particularly regarding to Alex and Lena, are only reversed to a very small extent, and only so in the case of Alex. It is the apparent death of Alex which leads to Lena's transformation and her development towards more agency and her acquisition of new skills which help her to challenge the female norm. Alex's death also adds to his heroism because he sacrifices himself in the attempt to save Lena.

While Alex's character is closely linked to a rather conventional male love interest, Lena receives a new love interest in *Pandemonium*, and her relationship with Julian is portrayed both

differently, but also similar to her relationship with Alex. For once, their roles are subverted, not with regard to gender, but the fact that Julian is the son of an influential politician, who would see his son dead rather than uncured, whereas Lena is the Invalid pretending to be a cured citizen, offering him the truth about the deliria and the deception of the people, just like Alex offered her before. Lena and Julian display a variety of situations where gender role reversal can be identified, not as strongly as between Katniss and Peeta, but definitely deviating the norm to some extent. Julian is presented in a different way than Alex, giving Lena more agency because this time she is in the knowing position. Alex was the intriguing boy, secretly living in the city, working for the resistance and convincing Lena of what the novel presents as the truth worth taking risks for. She is attracted to him immediately, but her cautiousness, fear and the belief in any kind of fling or rush of emotion might trigger symptoms of the disease withholds her. Lena clarifies that she hates Julian because he is a symbol of what she is fighting against, but as she spends time with him, it becomes clear that even though Julian is not presented as particularly feminine, he shows similarities to Peeta as well as a slightly feminised masculinity which is connected to Lena's heightened empowerment and agency. Because Julian is not an alpha-male in the traditional sense, Lena is given space to become an alpha-female in his company.

"So what now?" Julian says. There's a small note of desperation in his voice. I realize that he isn't in denial. He isn't calm, either. He's scared, and fighting it.
I lean my head back against the wall and close my eyes. "Now we wait." (Oliver Pan 135)

The reflection of the old Lena in Julian is apparent in her observation of him. He behaves very similar to how she has before she met Alex, the only difference being the fact that Julian is a public symbol, the son of an influential man who attempts to present his son as an example of courage and duty to the rest of the country, and not just one of many faces in a crowd like Lena is. Later in the novel, before Lena attempts to escape and save them both, Julian admits to her something we might also expect from Peeta: They admit to each other that they are both scared, but Julian adds that he is less scared with Lena around, indicating that he is trusting her and considering her as safety in some sense (see Oliver Pan 237). Similarly to Lena in *Delirium*, Julian agrees to join the Invalids because of his growing love for Lena and might not have made such a decision under different circumstances. However, Julian adapts more rapidly to the life in the Wilds, and while Lena worries and attempts to protect him, he finds his own agency and is eager to fight against those who would have performed the procedure on him, knowing he would die just to give people a symbol of sacrifice.

Lena might not be compared to Katniss with regard to their experience in fighting and battle, but throughout her journey she takes responsibility and involves herself actively, risking her life for a cause she believes in. Oliver decided to end her trilogy rather openly, leaving questions which remain to be answered by the readers' imagination, but she also leaves room for questions with regard to the love triangle between Lena, Alex and Julian. It is indicated at the end of the trilogy, however, that Lena and Alex are most likely to share a future together, an aspect which reinforces gender roles insofar as to crown the boy with the more typically masculine character traits the winner of the girl's heart. Oliver may not have ended her trilogy with an explicit epilogue, but despite being rather open, the ending is suggestive enough as far as the influence of the reader's imagination is regarded. Despite the openness of the ending, we may predict that Lena's and Alex' future might look similar to how Katniss' and Peeta's future as a married, traditional couple is portrayed as soon as the resistance will have been successful.

With regard to gender portrayal in physical terms, Ross raises an interesting point in her article "Must Every Young Adult Action Heroine Be Petite?", which focuses on the physical portrayal of contemporary female heroines, by claiming that "[i]t seems literature only goes so far in its message of female empowerment, routinely granting its most kickass heroines classically masculine-levels of strength (physical or otherwise) only when cloaked within the trappings of a more delicate—and recognizable—femininity" (see Ross). Even though I do not intend to assume about authors' attempts to manipulate the status of their heroines as strong and equal to their male counterparts, it appears as if such empowered characters need body image or the fragility of their mental state as evidence of their femininity. A physically tiny heroine seems to have to overcome even greater obstacles to achieve success according to the physical image authors provide the imagination of their readers with. It is especially the audience writers of young adult literature aim at which should be presented with a reflection of realistically portrayed female heroes, who offer as much of a diversity as young girls around the world do. These heroines are presented as extraordinary young women within their society, gifted with courage, strength and endurance, but as far as their physical portrayal is concerned, they appear to be very ordinary, primarily reinforcing the beauty trend of our contemporary society. Once again, however, it appears to be Katniss Everdeen who is the least confined to such beauty standards, at least with regard to her own opinion and not that of her Capitol stylists and the propaganda used to adapt her appearance to the image she publically symbolises. Another aspect which seems to be partly challenged by Katniss is the fact that she is referred to

as physically small and thin throughout the series, but never implies that it weakens her or presents her in a child-like manner. Ross further points out the double standard which is included in popular culture and the representation of 'kickass' females by saying that

[...] this is the same double standard that we've been subjected to again and again; just as women are expected to be sexual but not slutty, pure but not prudish, heroines should be strong but not buff. Powerful, yet still delicate enough to be cradled by their male love interests. Mature enough to lead those around them, yet so small that people confuse them with innocent little girls (ibid.).

At the end of *Delirium*, when Lena announces her motivation as a resister and states that she will always find a way to resist after she has learned about the power of love, she refers to herself by saying: "I am five feet two inches tall and I am in-between in every way" (Oliver *Delirium* 441). Lena wants to proclaim that neither her being in-between in every way, nor her physical smallness will stand in the way of her resistance, but instead of giving herself more agency, she contradicts the empowered statement by referring to herself with regard to her body height as if it might strengthen her motivation and credibility because she is not muscular or tall and strong. Katniss fits neither of these descriptions, but she still manages to refrain from such obvious attempts to make her achievements look bigger by making herself look smaller. However, as far as Katniss is concerned, her mental state makes her appear weaker and more irrational than she acts before the Games. By referring to themselves as petite and small, even the most empowered heroines seem to contradict their own agency, especially when said petite body description serves the purpose of pointing out the difficulties smaller girls might have with fighting and physical strength. The male main characters are primarily portrayed as more or less typically masculine, with Gale being tall, dark and handsome and Peeta being described as stocky and of medium height, but strong due to his assistance in his parents' bakery (see Collins *THG* 25). In *Delirium*, both Alex and Julian are described by Lena as broad, muscled and strong, and beautiful (see Oliver *Pan* 240-1).

3.3 FEMALE REBELLION IN *THE HUNGER GAMES* AND *DELIRIUM SERIES*

It appears as if the popularity of dystopian themes can be partly related to the key element of rebellion and revolution. Especially in young adult literature, where hope almost always remains visible to some extent, the rebellion is a necessity no dystopian plot can live without. It is not simply the element of fighting, war and action sequences which make a rebellion gripping and full of tension, but also the growth of hope and the victory of good over evil. According to Day, Green-Barteet and Montz, it is important to notice that

[t]he rebellious nature of many adolescent women protagonists [...] must be viewed not only in terms of the dystopian mode defined by their situations and surroundings, but also in terms of the generic conventions that these novels frequently blur, reimagine, and, to some degree, reinforce ('Introduction').

I have already discussed that the dystopian setting allows female protagonists to prove that they can be as active and strong as their male counterparts. At some point the main characters of the stories are able to see the injustice, lies and oppression which characterise their society and consequently make it dystopian. As Day, Green-Barteet and Montz further point out, "adolescent women protagonists in such dystopian novels both recognize their liminal situations and, over time, use their in-between positions as a means for resistance and rebellion against the social orders that seek to control them" (ibid.). The heroines would not be proper heroic characters if they of all people could not see the necessity for change, but the roles they play within their respective rebellion are interesting to look at in more depth and detail.

With regard to the problems a society faces, whether it is overtly presented as a means to remind the population of the government's power as in *The Hunger Games* or portrayed as a pseudo-disease to avoid people's strongest emotions to cloud their judgement in the case of *Delirium*, the obligatory rebellion to end the dystopian regime uses individual ingredients in the attempt to lead to freedom, and succeeds in both of the texts in the focus of this analysis. Each of the heroines is at the centre of her country's rebellion, but these rebellions are conducted differently from one another, and very often those who appear to be the core of the revolution are mere puppets in a game played by others. However, as we have seen in earlier chapters of this paper, the heroines of the selected novels are frequently portrayed deviating from the traditional female protagonist. They may differ with regard to the extent of their challenge of the norm, but each of them plays an important role in the attempt to fight for their rights. In the following chapter I want to focus on the aspect of rebellion and how it influences the heroines' identity and character. Additionally, aspects such as family and romance, which have already been discussed to some extent, are relevant aspects to analysis in relation with the rebellious actions the heroines conduct as well.

In both of the series discussed in this thesis, prior to the rebellion are many instances where the heroines' display rebellious actions which are often conducted independently from a revolutionary thought. I want to use this following chapter to illustrate the journeys of the heroines from more or less ordinary people to rebels and the way they disobey rules

subconsciously even before to the revolution. When Katniss hunts in the woods, she does so because her family needs food for survival. She faces her fears in order to keep her family safe. When Lena defies the rules of her society and sneaks out at night to warn her best friend of a raid while Hana is at an illegal party, she does so because she cares for her friend's well-being. Before these girls are actively involved in the rebellions the underground associations of their societies have built, they seem mostly unaware that there is such a thing as an active rebellion. Their initial positions, however, are very distinct, which is why the sequence of events, despite being similar in a more general sense, differs from one another. Katniss is fully aware of the danger the Capitol presents and the injustice of the Hunger Games. She may have a rebellious set of mind, but she has learned to keep the spark burning low to avoid complication or punishment. Early in *The Hunger Games* Katniss tells the reader that

[w]hen I was younger, I scared my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about District 12, about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called the Capitol. Eventually, I understood this would only lead us to more trouble. So I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts. (Collins *THG* 5)

Her people – the people from District 12 – are among those who suffer the most under the strictness of the government and the superiority of the Capitol, thus it seems reasonable for her to scrutinise the system which rules the country. After she becomes a tribute, Katniss is unable to control her anger when she participates in the final training that will calculate her overall score and the game-makers appear to be more interested in their dinner than in the tribute whose life is partly at their hands. Katniss fights for her right to receive at least the attention she deserves when she fires one of her arrows at their table (Collins *THG* 102). This is one of the instances where Katniss is portrayed as aggressive rather than instinctive or calculative as she is usually depicted. In contrast to Lena, Katniss has always been critical of the way her country is governed. With her having gained somewhat of a loner status and her general social disinterest, Katniss, who should possibly be a fierce and highly motivated rebel given the poor life she and her family live, is reluctant and sceptical, careful with her trust and relying mostly on the few people she knows best, or who have proven their loyalty before. The heroines are presented as critically evaluating their society at some point, but it is not always them who trigger such thoughts. Nevertheless, the small and subtle rebellious actions show that the protagonists have potential, an aspect which is further developed throughout the respective series. Katniss needs no outstanding moment of realisation because even though she knows nothing about the events in other districts or the mind-set of the people in her own district, she knows that her society's government is dysfunctional and cruel. It is fear that holds people back

from fighting for their rights, just as well as the fact that the Capitol uses the annual Hunger Games as a means to reinforce their power, to show the rest of Panem what will happen to them if they revolt like District 13 once did. Every year, they show the footage of a destroyed District 13 to spread fear all over again. In comparison to Lena, who experiences her moment of truth roughly in the middle of the first book of the series, Katniss only becomes actively and willingly involved in the rebellion of Panem during the last book despite her previous knowledge about uprisings. With regard to Katniss' status as a heroine, Laura Miller raises an interesting point as she states that Katniss' actions reinforce that status because one of the most dominant qualities of a hero is his or her goodness. Miller claims that

[i]f Katniss sought to be the center of attention, if she chose to string along two handsome young men more than willing to give their lives for hers, if she wanted to have her every movement photographed and admired, if she dreamed of leading the revolution, if she longed to compete and to win — if she had any ambition at all — she would be a bad girl by such a standard. ('THG vs. Twilight')

It is the reluctance that Katniss displays so frequently which makes her a humble heroine, not seeking the attention that is given to her. We believe in Katniss' ability to separate good from bad and decide accordingly to her heroic qualities on how to serve the rebellion best because even though she occasionally acts for her own benefit, most of the time she is driven by keeping others safe. Heroic figures are often characterised by a destiny to fulfil their role rather than their own choice to be heroes. This is the same in Katniss' case. She is quite reluctant to be the Mockingjay, but since it is the only way to gain the power necessary to save Peeta and destroy President Snow's regime of oppression, she agrees.

Apart from the influence romantic as well as family relationships have on the actions of the heroines, both of them have people in their lives who influence their perception of themselves and the world they are living in. In many instances, some of which I will illustrate further in this chapter, the influence of others shapes the rebellious behaviour of the heroine. For example, Katniss' best friend Gale's open discontent with the social and political structures of Panem undoubtably affect her as well. Katniss shows a potential for rebellion, but all she really desires is her family's safety. However, the more she feels that she and her loved ones are threatened, the more she experiences the wish to act in order to change the way Panem is being ruled. On Katniss' side, it is mostly personal revenge that fuels her rebellion. With regard to her rebellion prior to the 'official' rebellion, Ming Tan claims that "Katniss's experiences in the woods immediately set her apart from the rest of her society. Her sense of self is characterized by inherent rebellion, by independence and self-sufficiency" (57). By defying the

rules of the Capitol once again when she offers the poisonous berries to Peeta in the finale of the Games, knowing that either the Capitol will have to bow to her will and let them both exit the arena as victors or they both will die, Katniss unknowingly endangers all the people she intends to keep safe and makes herself a target of the President's suspicion and manipulation. Many of the decisions Katniss makes are based on her survival instinct, or on simply having no other choice because her family and friends are closely linked to how satisfying the Capitol finds her actions. At the time when Katniss has already become a symbol of the rebellion in the districts as a result of her decision to offer Peeta the berries, she herself has neither fully realised, nor plans to take advantage of her seemingly powerful role. Katniss's priority has always been survival rather than revolution. Frequently it appears as if others are taking advantage of Katniss' role as the girl on fire. Interestingly, however, it is the phase of the active rebellion which indicates most visibly that Katniss lacks agency with regard to her voice and presence as the symbol of the rebellion. The decisions she makes are primarily motivated by others, by her wish of keeping her loved ones safe. Her actions are also connected to her lack of motivation for seeking heroic glory.

What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn't enough, what I've done in the past, defying the Capitol in the Games, providing a rallying point. I must now become the actual leader, the fact, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution. The person who the districts – most of which are now openly at war with the Capitol – can count on to blaze the path to victory. I won't have to do it alone. They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances – as if that doesn't sound horribly familiar – and all I have to do is play my part. (Collins *MJ* 12)

Even as the Mockingjay, Katniss is bound to follow the rules of others and, as Broad points out, [d]espite her brief moments of rebellion, she is deeply preoccupied with obedience [...]" ('Chapter 7'). The rebellion in Panem is not a grassroots movement, but involves powerful people who stand as one party against another powerful party they wish to overthrow. Katniss realises that it would only be a change with regard to the person holding the power, but not necessarily a benefit to the lives of the people. The rebels use her against the Capitol just like President Snow attempted to use her against the districts' uprisings, but at the same time Katniss, always trying to survive and never giving up a fight, establishes her own rules for being the symbol of the rebellion. As a rebel, she remains an individual rather than a part of the group, but as she is forced to work with a team, she accepts them and works with them anyway. Katniss always seems to have her own goals in mind, even if these goals develop rather spontaneously. This is another characteristic which links her closely to the anti-hero, or cowboy hero type of heroic persona. Katniss does not fight in a team, and neither attempts to be a leader, but she

fights for what she believes is right and for those she feels responsible for. She could easily be one face in a crowd of rebels, but since she is pushed to act as *the* face of the rebellion, everything she says and does in front of a camera has an impact the rebels want to use against the Capitol. Katniss shows little interest in the rebellion in general and is only involved in the causes that are her required duties as the Mockingjay or which help to keep people safe and prefers to be involved in real action rather than propaganda videos. Katniss ensures us frequently that being involved in the rebellion is not what she wants, but what she has to do because she considers Peeta's survival and Snow's death her responsibilities. Furthermore, she uses the powerful position she inhabits as the Mockingjay to secure her own goals. This is indicated by Prim, when she tells Katniss that important people like her usually may utter any demand they might have (see Collins *MJ* 40). The rebels, however, know that their Mockingjay is not as easily handled as they would have hoped for, and at one point Coin admits that they should have rescued Peeta in Katniss' place. The thoughts she presents the reader with reveal that Katniss fully agrees and claims that "[h]e would've been an excellent mouthpiece" (Collins *MJ* 13). In *Panem*, even the rebellion is dominated by superficiality, likeability and the way to make an impression. Katniss has made an impression before, but she always had Peeta by her side who made her appear more likeable and who was the charming one of the couple. After she has agreed to be the Mockingjay, Katniss notices that the rebellion is constructed very similarly to the Hunger Games when she points out that her prep team has to eradicate the visible signs of exhaustion and fighting from her physical appearance only to make her appear damaged from fighting in a more attractive way (see Collins *MJ* 71). Furthermore, she thinks that as a rebel she should be able to look more like herself rather than portray a puppet for the rebels just in the same way as she portrayed a presentable tribute and a victor for the Capitol.

Lena may lack the empowerment and the unconventional character traits which make Katniss one of the most remarkable contemporary female characters, but in her resistance against the system she appears more actively involved than Katniss because she *wants* to be involved. Katniss has lived with the injustice in her country for all her life, but Lena's realisation about the deception she and the people of Portland have been victims of, leads her to take action against those, who are responsible for it. Similar to Katniss' cause of personal revenge, Lena's resistance is also fuelled by the wrongdoings of the government against her loved ones. Whereas Katniss would prefer to be left alone completely as long as those who are important to her are safe, Lena is willing to fight against the injustice of brainwashing that turns people into masses of heartless 'zombies'. Lena inhabits no such position as Katniss' symbolisation of

the Mockingjay and she is just one resisting face in a crowd, involved, but not leading. It becomes clear from what we know of Lena's past that she has always been surrounded by people with a character that appeared to be stronger, while she herself was more of a follower. Her best friend Hana was more outgoing prior to receiving the cure, and according to Lena, outshining her with her looks and generally more of a leader-type than her shy friend. Alex was the one who introduced her to the idea of a completely different life and who made her realise that love is not a disease, but that it is actually worth taking risks for. As I have mentioned in a previous chapter, Lena relies on Alex completely, trusts him with her life and safety and gives him full control over her life. She cannot follow Hana anymore, so she wants to follow Alex. According to Day, however, "Lena's relationship with Alex allows her to overcome her inhibitions about her body and desires, a point that is reinforced by her increasing willingness to rebel against community rules and restrictions" ('Chapter 4'). Although I would agree with this statement, it is also important to point out that Lena might not have undergone the same development with Alex by her side. His influence has both triggered her willingness to rebel, but also confined her to the stereotypically feminine role as the passive damsel in distress. Without neither Hana nor Alex, Lena slowly learns that she may follow herself instead of others. In *Pandemonium*, Lena still refers to Raven as a leader, later she even refers to Raven and Tack as "friends, parents, siblings, [and] mentors" (Oliver Pan 182). Without Alex' death and Raven's qualities as a fierce leader, forcing her to develop the necessary skills to survive in the Wilds, Lena might not have managed the transformation from the girl who wanted her boyfriend to save her like one of the princes in the fairy tale, to a young woman who fights as a member of the resistance. Katniss shoots her own arrows and is only supported by her family and friends, while Lena remains the one needing help quite often despite the decline of passiveness in her character. She has gained agency fuelled by pain and anger, and she also seeks revenge for her personal suffering along with a better future. Katniss is invested in the rebellion because she seeks a calmer future, a life in peace for herself and her country. The respective way of rebellion is very different with regard to each of the heroines and the structure of the society they live in. Even though the Capitol is powerful, the rebels in *Mockingjay* have advanced technology as well, while the resisters in the *Delirium* series are outsiders, cut off from society, living very simple lives in nature. Lena and her companions have to rely on their personal skills and motivation to bring change upon their country. They are easily attacked and do not have effective weapons to cause great damage like their enemy, but similar to the attempt to kill President Snow in *Mockingjay*, the target in *Requiem* is the future mayor, who is also Hana's fiancé and one of the main advocates of the cure. In the midst of each rebellion, either

of the girls plays a huge role, potentially the most crucial role that might decide whether the rebellion is a success or not. At this stage, the difference between Lena and Katniss is once again clearly noticeable. Katniss decides to do what she believes is necessary for her society to change, but Lena is put in a position where she has to rely on somebody else to succeed. Without Hana's help at the end of *Requiem* and her decision to let Lena go, the resisters might not have achieved the same success. In the end, Hana is responsible for the killing of her husband, and by doing so, Lena's apparent qualities as a leader and all the skills and empowerment she has gained throughout three novels, are weakened. This puts emphasis on the aspect of the impact relationships have on the rebellious attitude of the heroines and which forms such an impact may take.

I have already discussed the impact of relationships on the identity of the heroine earlier, but now I would like to engage in the issue again and add the aspect of rebellion as a connection to the discussion. I have mentioned previously that Katniss is mostly preoccupied with keeping the people she cares for from harm, so obviously relationships play a large role as far as her involvement in the rebellion is concerned. Once the people close to her are threatened in their safety, Katniss' revolutionary potential rises. By volunteering for her sister Katniss triggers the events that are to follow. Under different circumstances she would not have come to be the Mockingjay and the revolution might not have happened as it did. This sense of destiny as well as the fact that Katniss displays an extraordinary act of selflessness added to her heroic qualities.

Despite the fact that romance is not as much of an integral element in *The Hunger Games* as it is in other young adult novels, or in *Delirium*, the relationships Katniss has with Gale and Peeta and Lena has with Alex and Julian, prove that another important aspect in the lives of the young women is romance. With regard to the selected novels for this analysis, romantic relationships seem to provide much of the fuel necessary to spark the heroines' potential for rebellious behaviour and involvement in revolutionary acts. The aspect of romance adds a possible layer of analysis because it influences not only the way gender roles are portrayed in general, but is particularly interesting as far as the connection between rebellion and gender is concerned.

Romance may advance the political aims of the narrative when a new boyfriend or girlfriend encourages the protagonist to develop a new perspective or embark on a new experience. But romance is historically a conservative genre and just as often serves to affirm traditional norms, advancing the primacy of heterosexual couples while associating such relationships with growing up and finding a place in the world. (Basu, Broad & Hintz 'Introduction')

The opinions of critics on the impact of romance on the storyline of *The Hunger Games* differs, but it is without doubt a driving force in the development of the story (see Broad 'Chapter 7'). I would argue that romance is not the main concern in *The Hunger Games*, but an element which is essential in young adult fiction, even if the setting is dystopian and therefore occupied with other issues as well. In Katniss' case, as Broad claims, "[...] each boy represents a different path out of dystopia, making the outcome of the romantic choice nothing less than what the future society will be" (ibid.). Gale is more eager to rebel against the Capitol, but his vision displays a lack of humanity, while humanity is one of Peeta's most prominent character qualities. Gale is war, Peeta is peace. Gale is more outspoken about his discontent with the world he is living in and is presented as a rebellious spirit from the first time the reader meets him. Katniss is very silent in her rebellion and seems to have accepted her fate as long as she is able to provide for her loved ones' safety. In the first chapter, Gale illustrates his basic set of mind and relationship with the society of Panem and the Capitol quite well, by suggesting to run off into the woods because they appear to be a happier place to live in.

"We could do it, you know," Gale says quietly.

"What?" I ask.

"Leave the district. Run off. Live in the woods. You and I, we could make it," says Gale.

I don't know how to respond. The idea is so preposterous.

"If we didn't have so many kids," he adds quickly.

They're not our kids, of course. But they might as well be. Gale's two little brothers and a sister. Prim. And you may as well throw in our mothers, too, because how would they live without us? Who would fill those mouths that are always asking for more? (Collins *THG* 9)

With regard to his rebellious character, Gale has a large impact on Katniss through the overt uttering of his thoughts and critique on the country and therefore should provide the motivation for Katniss to join the revolution, but the point in the story which sparks her willingness to be the Mockingjay, is when she knows that she needs to save Peeta from the Capitol. In fact, Katniss is quite sceptical in her perception of Gale's involvement and motives. Broad even admits to her disappointment of Katniss being with Peeta in the end and justifies that by stating that "Gale is the revolutionary figure, the one who rails against the Capitol, seeks to initiate change, and actually does things besides get injured and pine for Katniss" ('Chapter 7'). Even though Gale is the one who has not participated in the Games, he seems to be the angriest at the situation in his country and uses this anger to fuel his revolutionary thinking as well as influence Katniss' reluctance towards change. In contrast to Katniss, Gale is willing to take the risk. Broad states further that after reading the series again she realised that "[...] the novels present Gale as the necessary but ultimately undesirable underside of revolutionary politics. Instead, Collins

supports Peeta, loyal lover who dreams of a quiet and private home life as the end goal of utopia and the reason for social change” (ibid.). Prior to the rebellion, it is Gale whose opinions push Katniss to see that she is not the only person critical of the Capitol and the government in Panem. With regard to the actual rebellion, Gale’s and Katniss’ views and expectations differ and it is noticeable throughout *Mockingjay* that they begin to drift apart as far as important decisions for the future are concerned. Gale wants to achieve success and retribution against those, who have caused him and his people suffering, while Katniss and Peeta, partly due to their participation in the Games, seek peace, and life away from politics and power.

Safe to do what?” he says in a gentler tone. “Starve? Work like slaves? Send their kids to the reaping? You haven’t hurt people – you’ve given them an opportunity. They just have to be brave enough to take it. There’s already been talk in the mines. People who want to fight. Don’t you see? It’s happening! It’s finally happening! (Collins *CF* 121-2)

While she is certainly affected by Gale’s views, Katniss primarily agrees to be the Mockingjay because she feels responsible to save Peeta. After all, Katniss realises that the Games are not over until she is free from manipulation and threats (see Collins *MJ* 35-6). An interesting aspect about the role romance plays with regard to Katniss’ motivation to participate in the revolution is raised by Broad who points out that even though Katniss decides to become the Mockingjay, and with it the face of the rebellion, it is still manipulation which causes her to agree because everyone in Panem is aware that the Achilles heel of Katniss Everdeen are the people she loves, thus it is them who are used as bait for her involvement. As Broad states, “[r]omance cements Katniss’s cause to the revolution at the same time that it renders her a docile subject manipulated by both sides of the war” (‘Chapter 7’). Katniss may be pragmatic, but she is not heartless. For example, despite Katniss’ successful attempts to manipulate the authorities of District 13 insofar as to grant the people of her choice immunity in the trial once the revolution has been successful, President Coin uses the affection Katniss feels towards her family and friends as a means to gain power over her once again. As a response to Katniss’ wishes of declaring the information publically, President Coin ensures the district and Katniss that

[...] in return for this unprecedented request, Soldier Everdeen has promised to devote herself to our cause. It follows that any deviance from her mission, in either motive or deed, will be viewed as a break in this agreement. The immunity would be terminated and the fate of the four victors determined by the law of District Thirteen. As would her own. [...] (Collins *MJ* 69)

To ensure the safety of Peeta in particular, Katniss has to dedicate herself to the cause of District 13. The power which Coin has over Katniss and the way in which she uses it is very similar to how President Snow threatened to kill her family and friends if she would not try and behave

in a way which could end the uprisings in the districts. By attempting to use threats and manipulation on Katniss, Coin establishes herself as another possible enemy.

With regard to the influence family has on Katniss' rebellion, Broad argues that Katniss' changing thoughts on the possibility of having children in a future without the Capitol's power play threatening the well-being of those children, are connected to her rebellion, which is "largely fuelled by her desire for a stable family and home" ('Chapter 7'). Good-natured and kind Peeta is a link to this desire of a peaceful future for Katniss, thus, as Broad further points out, "her heroism is highly limited and determined by their romance and by her idealized vision of family life" (ibid.). Katniss' rebellion is dominated by her wish for survival and safety for both herself and her loved ones. She was never interested in the politics of her country and the state of the government is not described any further at the end of the third book because Katniss' perspective lacks interest in such issues. It is mainly the dominance of the Capitol and particularly the existence of the Hunger Games which have always proved a threat to the safety of Katniss' family, therefore, as soon as her hopes in her personal act of rebellion are set on a better future, a less dangerous, peaceful life, Katniss is able to re-organise her own future. She is able to imagine a different future as a result of the rebellion she is a part of. As Broad claims, "[t]his utopia is less a political arrangement than a conception of home as a stable, loving home and nuclear family, insular and protected from the outside world" ('Chapter 7'). This adds to my argument that Katniss is not interested in politics, but in safety. It is not Peeta who disrupts the close relationship between Gale and Katniss, but the fact that Gale is a rebel since birth and is defined by this identity primarily as far as his portrayal in the series is concerned. Katniss is very critical of the way in which Gale is involved in the revolution because, similar to Lena, he is fuelled not only by the wish for a better future, but by feelings of vengeance and hatred.

Pandemonium displays an instance where Lena's thoughts really seem to belong to a transformed person, since we would not be able to imagine the girl from *Delirium* to think in such a rebellious way, but after she has loved and lost love more than once, she views the cities and its inhabitants with hatred.

[...] I imagine that one day I will fly a plane over Portland, over Rochester, over every fenced-in city in the whole country, and I will bomb and bomb and bomb, and watch all their building smoldering to dust, and all those people melting and bleeding into flame, and I will see how they like it.
If you take, we will take back. Steal from us, and we will rob you blind. When you squeeze, we will hit. This is the way the world is made now. (Oliver Pan 147)

Lena wishes for the resistance's enemies to experience a similar fate to the bombings of the Wilds to eliminate the Invalids and the resistance. Thus, her rebellion is fuelled by hatred and vengeance. Julian's presence in Lena's life at the stage at which their interaction happens only adds to her cause and beliefs. When she gains more and more sympathy for the boy she hated earlier, Lena learns that he is not only a symbol of the deception and manipulation of the government, but can also be a symbol for the resistance. Julian's story of how his father used to beat him until he blacked out because he read a forbidden book as a young boy proves a point that sparks the flame of rebellion in Lena as she imagines Julian's father burning (see Oliver *Pan* 173-4).

While *Mockingjay* presents its readers with a hopeful outlook on the future and a reflection of the positive changes in the opinions of the heroine on her own views, the rebellion portrayed in *Pandemonium* and *Requiem* is less secure. As I have pointed out before, the revolution in *Mockingjay* is conducted by powerful people against powerful people. It might have happened anyway, but the involvement of influential Capitol citizens has certainly benefited the speed of things to change. The rebellion Lena is a part of happens more slowly because despite the involvement of city citizens, people in the Wilds are not equipped with technology. They even have to rely on their allies from the cities to provide them with items necessary for survival. In this case, the rebellion is indeed a movement from the bottom and therefore looks different than in Panem. The circumstances influencing Lena's personal rebellion, however, is similar to the situation of Peeta and Katniss. While Katniss agrees to be the Mockingjay when she realises that it is her best chance to keep Peeta from harm, Lena realises that she wants to resist when she loses the boy she loves. Both of the girls are driven by a feeling of loss, and a need of retribution. Without Alex and the experience of falling in love with him, Lena would have continued her life as one of the mentally damaged, emotionless faces in a crowd, but instead she learns that love is not a disease. Lena learns that much of her life consisted of lies, brainwashing and manipulation. Primarily, it is the experience of love and compassion, as well the resulting fear of the procedure destroying her happiness that trigger Lena's wishes of escaping the city, but after Alex's death her cause changes. The more Lena learns about the wrongdoings of her society and the power the government holds over the people, the more involved she wants to become with the resistance. One of the major differences between Katniss and Lena during the respective revolutions is that whereas Katniss still has her family to consider, Lena has no family left. Most of the people she considers her family in the

Wilds are in no need of particularly her protection. Lena is not as easily manipulated, however, she lacks the agency and survival skills of Katniss.

4. CONCLUSION

Heroes will never cease to draw our fascination towards them, but as much of the background research as well as the analysis in my thesis prove, the way we perceive heroes might be in a process of change. They are not necessarily male anymore. The male prevalence within the field of heroism is forced to clear space for the multitude of heroines appearing particularly in children's and young adult fiction since the 2000s and the moments where the female slays the figurative dragon herself. The main aim of this thesis was to analyse the way contemporary heroines in dystopian settings are characterised with regard to their gender as well as heroic identity, related to aspects such as family, friendships and, of course, rebellion. The heroines I have chosen for the analysis are Katniss from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, and Lena from Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* trilogy. I have analysed these female protagonists in the context of a theoretical framework that consists of various aspects of feminism and post-structuralism, focussing on gender representation and the challenge of universal truths and patriarchal dominance. Additionally, I paid attention to concepts such as a potential unisex appeal as well as the influences the dystopian setting and the issue of heroism have.

The question that remains at the end of my thesis is whether characters such as Katniss and Lena, among numerous other contemporary female heroes, have what it takes to change the perception of gender role allocation? The analysis has proven that Katniss is indeed an interesting, outstanding character as far as the interaction between her sex and gender identity is concerned. She is audacious, brave and courageous. She helps people, and she keeps people safe. She is one of the good ones, and she has the ability to recognise the true evil that helps her to truly lead the rebellion. Katniss makes Panem a better place, and thereby allows herself a different outlook on her own future than before. She constantly reconsiders her options and makes her own decisions in the end. The decisions she makes are influenced by the people in her life, but Katniss is never dependent on others. While she is primarily dominated by a selection of stereotypically masculine traits, we are also presented with her feminine side occasionally. Frequently this feminine side is more of an act than what comes to Katniss naturally, but especially in her interaction with Prim or Rue she displays motherly affection which is connected to the distinctive protective quality she has in herself. Katniss protects the

people she loves. We cannot doubt that the expression of heroism is quite strong regarding Katniss, but what clouds the otherwise perfect image of the female warrior is the passiveness she displays and the mental damage she suffers from. Katniss is not a typical hero, but neither a typical woman. I would argue that while Collins has attributed her heroine with a highly complex set of character qualities, it also becomes visible that Katniss is a human being. The fact that she is not locked into gender, as Scott and Dargis express, gives Katniss the sense of androgyny I have referred to by quoting Nodelman and his opinion on an androgyny that balances aspects of both sexes rather than be regarded as genderless, and the question of a unisex appeal I have referred to in the theory outline of this thesis. Boys as well as girls are able to identify themselves with Katniss, who shows us that girls are indeed able to do anything that boys do. From hunting as a means to provide for their family, to the clever, subtle disobedience of the rules as a means to save Peeta, to killing the enemy in the name of justice. Some people may not be satisfied with the way her story ends, as a married mother, however, Katniss comes close to the new type of feminist heroine literature has needed for quite a while now. Not entirely what Nikolajeva suggests as far as 'new femininity' is concerned, but given the idea that it deviates rather strongly from the stereotype, Katniss might fulfil that type of femininity in her own sense. One of the most important aspects of the analysis is that Katniss is not a substitution for a male hero. She displays qualities borrowed from the hero, but she is not a decal of him. The fact that the series as well as the character has gained a large popularity proves that the distinct gender market that exists as far as children and adolescents are concerned, might hopefully begin to lose its impact. The aspect that even masculine characters are portrayed femininely, with Peeta being extraordinarily feminine for a male protagonist, emphasises a consistent break with tradition in Collins' series. Gender boundaries are indeed blurred with regard to a selection of characters in *The Hunger Games*.

Where Katniss symbolises a dream come true with regard to her satisfactory behaviour as a feminist heroine and as a challenge to the patriarchal ideology, the second female protagonist I have included in my analysis, Lena Haloway, is less of a satisfaction. Lena lives in a society that deviates less from the real world of her readers than Panem does, thus her life is primarily that of a more or less ordinary teenager. Given the premise of the novel that love is worth being fought for, this is already an indication that Oliver's trilogy might rely heavily on the romance aspect. And it does. Not only is romance at the centre of the story, but the heroine is typically feminine, weak, passive and always reliant on the help of others, especially her boyfriend, whom she chooses over her best friend. Lena portrays the stereotype, which is a

particular disappointment given the fact that she stands in comparison with Katniss. Lena compares herself to a fairy tale princess captured in a tower and wants to wait for her hero to save her. This might be one of the most powerful things that define Lena not only as a disappointing heroine as far as her lack of character complexity and agency are concerned, but even more so as a damsel in distress. However, over the course of the remaining trilogy, Lena manages to free herself from the passiveness that characterised her and displays a development to a young woman who is able to fight her own fights and slay her own dragons. She might still not be compared to Katniss, and she might still need help from others quite often, but at least the person we meet in *Requiem* has distanced herself to quite some extent from the girl who disappointed severely in *Delirium*. Lena might ruin the potential unisex appeal of her story because she is so distinctively feminine in the first novel, and because the romance aspect might be too exaggerated for boys to enjoy it as far as the stereotyping of reading preferences is concerned. Lena's femininity still is more traditional than 'new', but she adapts skills as well as a set of mind that would usually not be found in definitions of the feminine and thereby proves that she can indeed be defined as a new type of female protagonist as well.

Katniss and Lena display different types of heroines, but the fact that they both are, or become, agents in their own stories and live up to their status as protagonists in one case more than in the other, proves that female protagonists can be just as successful as male heroes. They prove that they are able to fulfil the notion of 'girl power' that girls are able to act independently and without the necessity of male help. As predicted, the dystopian setting allows the girls to grow beyond themselves as females and as heroines, they are able to display their abilities and engage in activities that girls have been prohibited from for a long time. Earlier I referred to Trites who claims that a successful feminist female protagonist is defined by the best qualities of both sexes to strengthen her personal agency. Moreover, Trites points out that the key aspect with regard to a successful deconstruction in the perception of gender roles lies on the aspect that the protagonists are agents regardless of their sex (see 4). A powerful reversal of gender roles is based on the heroine's rising awareness of her agency, the ability to assert her personality and to make her own decisions over the course of the novel (see Trites 6). Katniss and Lena both fulfil these premises. They are indeed representatives of a type of brave, new girls who are beginning to challenge the grand narrative of male dominance in action-oriented and heroic plots as well as the stereotypical portrayal of the passive woman.

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Abstract

The last two decades have been dominated by a growing popularity and demand of literature for young readers and the genre has not only secured a place of relevancy in literature, but in film as well. The break with tradition which is displayed by a number of the increasingly female protagonists in young adult literature liberates the female from a life that has primarily been lived in the shadow of the conventional male hero. The analysis in the thesis at hand will examine Suzanne Collins' protagonist Katniss Everdeen from the *Hunger Games* trilogy as well as Lena Haloway and Hana Tate from Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* trilogy with regard to the expression of their female, as well as heroic identities in the dystopian setting that is provided by the selected works. The theory framework used in the analysis is combined of feminist literary theory and poststructuralist theory. Moreover, the dystopian setting, featuring instances of war and rebellion, provides the narrative with elements from the adventure and action genre, and therefore allows the female protagonists to display skills and agency in an environment which has been traditionally dominated by men. The impact of romantic as well as family relationships on the identity of the heroine and the potential of gender role reversal in the selected novels will be of further relevancy with regard to the main aims of this thesis.

Zusammenfassung

Die Jugendliteratur erfreut sich besonders in den vergangenen zwei Jahrzehnten sowohl in Literatur, als auch in Film an zunehmender Popularität. Im Zentrum der Analyse in der vorliegenden Masterarbeit steht die wachsende Zahl von weiblichen Protagonistinnen in diesem wachsenden, an Bedeutung gewinnenden Genre, die durch den Ausbruch aus traditionell definierten Geschlechterrollen sowie aus auf Nebenrollen limitierten Schatten konventionell männlicher Protagonisten beeindruckt. Im Rahmen des dystopischen Subgenres werden die Heldinnen Katniss Everdeen aus Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* Trilogie und Lena Haloway sowie Hana Tate aus Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* Trilogie in Bezug auf ihre Identität als Frauen und weibliche Heldinnen in einer auf feministischer sowie post-strukturalistischer Theorie basierenden Analyse untersucht. Das dystopische Setting bietet zudem einen Handlungsrahmen für Aspekte des Abenteuerbereichs, in den die weiblichen Protagonistinnen in Kontrast zur Tradition eines männlich-dominierten Genres aktiv eingebunden werden, wie auch für Rebellionen die zusätzlichen Einfluss auf die weibliche Identität haben. Weitere Aspekte mit denen sich die Arbeit beschäftigt sind die Einflüsse von romantischen, beziehungsweise familiären Beziehungen auf die Heldinnen und das Potenzial der Charaktere einer möglichen Umkehrung von geschlechterspezifischen Rollen.

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