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FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

MÁSTER INTERUNIVERSITARIO EN ESTUDOS INGLESES AVANZADOS E AS  
SÚAS APLICACIÓNS

**“Real or Not Real?”**

**Exploring Gender in Suzanne Collins’s**

***The Hunger Games Trilogy***

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Vº Bº

**TFM 2017**

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## Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
 <b>Part One</b>	
Chapter 1: Understanding Young Adult and Dystopian Fiction .....	8
Chapter 2: The Fragility of Gender .....	13
 <b>Part Two</b>	
Chapter 1: “She has no idea, the effect she can have:” Katniss Everdeen and the Thousand Faces of the ‘Feminine’ .....	19
Chapter 2: “He was too handsome, too male:” The Representation of Masculinity in Gale Hawthorne .....	36
Chapter 3: “I Don’t Want Them to Change Me:” Peeta Mellark and the New ‘Masculine’ .....	47
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	61
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	63
<b>Appendix</b> .....	68

### **Abstract**

My Masters final project deals with issues of gender in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. I analyse the main three characters—Katniss Everdeen, Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark—following Judith Butler's theories of gender proposed in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), as well as other theories about feminism and masculinity.

The aims of my project are, on the one hand, to demonstrate that the saga re-examines and re-defines traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity; and, on the other, that the portrayal of the aforementioned characters proves that The Hunger Games saga evidences that gender is neither fixed nor pre-established by questioning the legitimacy of gender stereotypes and roles.

## Introduction

“Ladies and gentlemen, let the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games begin!”

*The Hunger Games* (171)

A few years ago, I would have felt insulted if I was told I kicked “like a girl.” Girls were not strong fighters or praise-worthy heroes. They were either background characters in a male-centered story or passive female protagonists in need of saving. Now, I take pride in living life “like a girl.” The stigma attached to the phrase is slowly but steadily disappearing from our minds. This is due, in part, to the strength that the feminist movement has gained in the last few decades. However, it is fair to say that the appearance of a great amount of lead female characters in literature—especially in children and young adult literature—has played a crucial part in eradicating gender-biased ideas from the minds of young girls and boys.

In 2008, Suzanne Collins published *The Hunger Games*, the first instalment of the saga, which sold millions of books and quickly became an international sensation. Two other books followed, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, in 2009 and 2010 respectively. Movie adaptations followed the success of the books, with the first one released in 2012, and *Mockingjay: Part 2*,<sup>1</sup> the last one of the films, in 2015. The books tell the story of how a post-apocalyptic, dictatorial and oppressive version of the United States—called Panem—is brought down by a group of revolutionaries with the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, at its centre.

Over the course of the three books, the reader gets acquainted with the rules of life in Panem. The country is divided into twelve districts and the Capitol (where the wealthy and powerful live, and the government is located). Each district is assigned one industry that provides certain items to the rest of the country; for instance, District 12 is

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<sup>1</sup> The adaptation of *Mockingjay* was split into two movies, *Mockingjay: Part 1* and *Mockingjay: Part 2*.

in charge of mining, District 4 of fishing and so on. Unsurprisingly, equality does not exist among districts and there are great differences in terms of wealth from one to another. To remind the people of Panem of their place, and in many ways in an attempt to avoid a revolution, each year the government organises what they call The Hunger Games, a televised spectacle in which two teenagers—a boy and a girl which will be known as tributes—from each district are chosen at random and are forced to participate. They are thrown in an arena where they have to not only survive the circumstances but also fight each other to death until only one is left alive.

*The Hunger Games* begins on the day of the reaping, when the teenagers are chosen for the games. Katniss Everdeen, a poor girl from District 12, is worried that her little sister's name, Prim, might be drawn. When they call Prim's name as one of the District 12 tributes alongside Peeta Mellark, Katniss volunteers to take her place. From that moment on, the protagonist will find herself fighting for survival and for her family, and defying the government of Panem for what she believes is right. She will become a symbol of rebellion, which will put her at the centre of a secret revolution to end President Snow's reign of terror and oppression.

Both the books and the adaptations gained the favour of the public, readers and viewers alike, even though the story suffered some criticism due to the plot similarities with Koushun Takami's *Battle Royale* (1999).<sup>2</sup> In a review for *The New York Times*, author John Green states that *The Hunger Games* was a “brilliantly plotted and perfectly paced new novel.” He praises Collins's skills for world-building and calls Katniss a “memorably complex and fascinating heroine.” Similarly, Megan Whalen Turner affirms that the book tells a “gripping story” and presents the protagonist as a “new

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<sup>2</sup> *Battle Royale* is a Japanese novel about a group of high-school students who are dropped on an island with only a survival kit. They have to kill each other until only one of them is left alive.

Theseus, [who] is cold, calculating and still likable.” About *Catching Fire*, Gabrielle Zevin asserts that Collins has done a remarkable job by writing a sequel that only improves the first book and recognises the author’s writing accomplishments by saying that Collins is “a writer who truly understands writing for young people: the pacing is brisk and the message tucked below the surface.” The movies received equally good reviews. Robbie Collin wrote in *The Telegraph* that “*The Hunger Games* is an essential science fiction film for our times; perhaps the essential science fiction film of our times.” On his part, Justin Chang acknowledges how faithful the movie is to the original material, but at the same time he notes that the impact of “teen-on-teen bloodshed” is softened in comparison to the novel due to the PG-13 rating of the film. Finally, Manohla Dargis speaks about the success of the movies—*Catching Fire* became the first film with a lone female lead to top the annual domestic box office in four decades—as backing the liberation struggle that “[Katniss] has come to represent.”

During my time as a student of literature, I have found a passion for gender studies and feminism. I am interested in how females and males are represented in books, especially in young adult literature, and how the traditional ideas about femininity and masculine are either preserved or destroyed in said type of fiction. The reason why I am invested in studying gender and the depiction of women in such books is because minds are shaped at a young age, and I believe books play a crucial part in it just as much as the media and the Internet do. Books about strong, independent female leads will pave the path for strong, independent women in real life. Books which defy established gender roles will help teenagers understand a world which is progressively moving away from the patriarchal and binary system that has been imposed on us for such a long time.

Besides, gender and feminism have been the focus of several of my undergraduate papers as well as of my undergraduate TFG. These are fields I plan to specialise in when I write my PhD, thus the reason why I chose to use them for my Master's thesis too.

In this paper, I will explore the representation of gender in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series by means of the three main characters—Katniss Everdeen, Peeta Mellark and Gale Hawthorne. In order to do so, I will use an eclectic mix of theoretical approaches—gender, feminism and masculinity studies—that will provide a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of said characters. Judith Butler's theories of gender will be the starting point, and I will combine them with feminism and masculinity studies. The analysis will be carried out from the outside to the inside; that is, I will start it by focusing on physical traits to then move on to features about their respective personalities as to explore how their qualities fit—or not—into gender stereotypes.

I have divided my essay in two parts. Part One consists of two chapters, one devoted to explaining and understanding young adult fiction, as well as the dystopian genre; and another one in which I will provide a more detailed description of the theoretical approach of my dissertation. Part Two is split into three chapters—one one for the analysis Katniss, one for Peeta, and one for Gale. I will explore the three main characters in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series in order to demonstrate firstly, that the characters challenge stereotypical ideas about femininity and masculinity; and secondly, that the texts defy and redefine traditional ideas of gender and gender roles.

## Part One

### Chapter 1.

#### Understanding Young Adult Fiction and Dystopia

“As long as you can find yourself, you’ll never starve”

*The Hunger Games* (60)

The prejudices against young adult fiction, or YA, have plagued the literary sphere ever since it exploded, especially in the early 2000s with sagas such as *Twilight*, which were considered the standard for YA. Both scholars and readers deemed young adult literature as immature or not important-<sup>3</sup> However, most of these opinions, although valid, usually come from a place of unawareness when it comes to this type of literature and the topics that can be found in YA books, as well as the impact they have on their target audience. This chapter aims to shed some light on YA and dystopian fiction in order to, on the one hand, clarify some of the prejudices about it; and, on the other hand, to contextualize Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* saga within its genre.

The first issues that should be clarified before diving into the main points of this chapter is that young adult is not a literary genre, as opposed to dystopia, which is a subgenre of science fiction. It is a common mistake to use the term ‘young adult genre,’ when in truth ‘young adult’ is a label created by publishing houses to refer to the target

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Crowe addresses this issue in his article “Young Adult Literature: The Problem with YA Literature.” He claims that “attacks on YA books are nothing new. For more than a century there have been vocal parents, teachers, and librarians who have attacked books written specifically for teenagers. Their complaints have varied over the years, but most objections generally fall into one of two categories: YA books are bad because: 1. They aren’t the Classics. 2. They corrupt the young” (146). He agrees with detractors on the fact that some YA novels lack depth, but defends that others are very well written, and provide engaging stories and memorable characters. The problem, he continues, is that the label ‘Young Adult’ has been stigmatised because of some “bad YA apples” (147).



audience an specific literary work is aimed to. Therefore, a book labelled as young adult fiction could fall into any type of genre—fantasy, romance, science-fiction, etc.

Focusing on young adult literature, G. Robert Carlsen provides the following definition:

[Literature] wherein the protagonist is a teenager or one who approaches problems from a teenage perspective [...], [it describes] initiation into the adult world or the surmounting of a contemporary problem forced upon the protagonist by the adult world. (qtd. in Vanderstaay 48)

That definition alone seems a bit scarce, although accurate in its description. YA books dwell on the experiences and struggles of their adolescent protagonists, and, understandably, themes that would appeal to their target audiences prevail. For this reason, the stigma attached to YA fiction is rooted on the idea that it is, perhaps, too commercially simplistic, and juvenile. This conception, however, is very restrictive and based on the mainstream idea that it is a rather superficial type of literature. As Katherine Proukou brilliantly argues in her article ‘Young Adult Literature: Rite of Passage or Rite of its Own:’

[YA fiction] is about life, its histories and potentialities, transformations and choices; it is about conflicts between the claim of the individual and the claim of culture [...]. It is about new beginnings and other directions; of young heroes who wind up threads and carry wisdom, of the child one who sees, clearly, that the emperor has no clothes. (62)

Thus, Proukou not only broadens the concept of YA literature, but she also breaks the stereotype—perhaps perpetuated by mainstream media—of its implicit shallowness. The truth is that there are real YA masterpieces which deal with a wide variety of

issues, some of them as simple as trying to find love, and others as complex as the construction of the self in a way that is relatable to a young audience that has not experienced the trials of the world in the same way that a more mature audience might have. As a matter of fact, I strongly believe that young adult books help teenagers to make a smooth transition into adulthood.

YA literature, as it is today, developed during the twentieth century. Series such as *Nancy Drew*, a mystery fiction series written by Edward Stratemeyer and first published in 1930, and *The Hardy Boys*, published by Stratemeyer under the pseudonym Franklin W. Dixon in 1927, gave way to grittier fiction in the 1950s and 1960s with the publication of one of the most famous young adult works, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).<sup>4</sup> The 1970s have been considered the "Golden Age" of YA literature, with books that deal with important issues of adolescence in realistic, relatable ways. The tendencies in the following two decades returned to a type of more superficial and shallow YA literature. However, the turn of the twenty-first century has been regarded as a "Second Golden Age" due to authors such as David Levithan,<sup>5</sup> Med Rosoff,<sup>6</sup> and John Green,<sup>7</sup> (among many others), who have tackled topics of concern to contemporary teenage readers. These novels/publications deal with the challenges of friendship, romance, and maturation in a time of fear about terrorism, war, and the dangers of technology (Day et al.).

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<sup>4</sup> Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* tells the story of Holden Caulfield, a sixteen year-old boy, as he struggles in his attempt to navigate the world. The novel was extremely controversial for its provocative language and its treatment of sexuality and teenage angst.

<sup>5</sup> David Levithan (1972) is the Award-winning YA author of books such as *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) or *The Lover's Dictionary* (2011).

<sup>6</sup> Meg Rossoff (1956) is the author of famous YA novels such as the dystopia *Where I Live Now* (2004) and *Just in Case* (2006), both of which granted her literary awards.

<sup>7</sup> John Green (1977) is a YouTube content creator and YA author that gained popularity in the Young Adult circle with his books *Looking for Alaska* (2005) and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012).

As for dystopian fiction, the genre emerges as a reflection of a dystopia, which is defined as “an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one” (“Dystopia”). Dystopian fiction is characterized by presenting the illusion of a perfect world in a society in which the people are actually heavily controlled.<sup>8</sup> In the introduction to *Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults*, Balaka Basu describes dystopian literature as a *reductio ad absurdum* of a utopia. That is, a utopia gone wrong. In many cases, a dystopian work serves as a way to criticise current society, or, given certain circumstances, warns about a possible terrible future. Generally speaking, we could say that dystopian writings deal with a broad range of topics, such as liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction, questions of identity, and the boundaries between technology and the self (Basu, et al.). In the literary landscape, it is generally accepted that the genre gained recognition thanks to two novels that are considered the pillars of dystopian literature: George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932).

With the publication of the first book from American writer Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *The Hunger Games* in 2008, young adult dystopias witnessed a growth in popularity only preceded by the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* crazes. It only increased after the release of the film adaptation in 2012. All of a sudden, the young adult literary market was full of dystopian novels, such as Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* (2011), and Kiera Cass’ *The Selection* (2012).

YA dystopia is a bit different from traditional dystopia in that the genre adds more popular forms and narratives to this particular type of fiction. For instance, young adult books evolved from children’s literature, from which they were eventually

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<sup>8</sup> There are different types of control: corporate, bureaucratic, technological, and philosophical/religious (“Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics”).

separated. However, the former hold onto a hopeful future of the world that is characteristic of the latter. Traditional dystopias tend to present a cynical vision, whereas YA dystopia can either embrace that or uphold the tradition of optimism typical of children's literature (Basu et al.). Young adult dystopias are brilliantly defined in *Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* as a dystopia that adds pinches of more traditional literary forms such as bildungsroman, adventure, and romance, to create an incredibly appealing combination for teenagers.

One question remains: why are these novels so popular among adolescents? Scott Westerfeld, author of the renowned young adult dystopian novel *Uglies* (2005), defines them as “an island where a misfit can shine, after traditional weights and measures of success have been discarded” (qtd. in Basu et al.). Thus, YA dystopias are considered a way for teenagers to escape a system where they feel lost, restless, threatened, and pressured.

## Chapter 2.

### The Fragility of Gender

“I want to start an uprising”

*Catching Fire* (144)

Discussing gender is not an easy endeavour. In fairness, it is never easy to approach issues related to cultural conceptions of what something should be and what it actually is. My Master’s thesis is not an attempt to dismantle the idea of gender *per se*; it is, as I stated in the introduction, an exploration of a set of characters from a novel with the aim of questioning the reigning notions about gender, specifically those about femininity and masculinity. In order to achieve my goal, I will devote this chapter to exploring the concept of gender, namely Judith Butler’s theory of performative gender.

In general, gender has been examined as a matter of culture, and it refers to certain patterns of behaviour and action that are connected to a particular gender (“Gender,” *Cultural*). Rivkin and Ryan attribute the beginning of the study of gender identity to the emergence of the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time when the movement shared some common ground with the Feminist Movement in the sense that both women and gay were “objects of oppression by a dominant male heterosexual group” (885). Gender studies bloomed, but separated from feminism in the 1980s when theorists in the former started to contemplate gender as variable (886), something that more orthodox feminists had not considered yet. Among other issues, gender studies focus on analysing the instability and indeterminacy of all gender identity (888) since, as I have already mentioned, scholars of this field do not see gender as static or determined.

Just to give an example, in *Gender and Sexuality*, Chris Beasley divides the field of gender studies into two: feminist studies and masculinity studies. However, the author states that as far as the use of the word ‘gender’ is concerned there are three main ongoing debates to define the field of studies. Firstly, the term Gender Studies seems to be restrictive in the eyes of some writers, in so far as it is associated with “the diminution of focus on particular sexed identities” (13).<sup>9</sup> This is to say, gender studies tend to focus on one of the two traditional genders—man or woman. Thus, the debate revolves around the discussion of whether, in a nearby future, focusing on particular identity groups would be helpful or harmful, as well as restrictive, for the development of gender studies. Secondly, the division between gender and sex seems to be even more problematic. Whereas some critics are in favour of this ‘culture/social assumptions versus biology’ debate—since the term ‘gender’ itself contests the idea of biological determinism—others assert that by confronting gender against sex, we are ignoring the interaction between society and biology (14). Lastly, there is a third debate, linked to the previous one, which focus on the connection between gender and sexuality. Some scholars seem to be concerned about the sharp separation between gender and sexuality studies, as well as the links between what is considered ‘gender’<sup>10</sup> and what we understand as ‘sexuality.’<sup>11</sup> Beasley writes that although most feminist and masculinity writers view these two terms as intertwined, there are some who affirm that gender precedes sexuality. On the other side of the spectrum, there are sexuality theorists who are inclined to assert the opposite: that sexuality is prior to gender (15).

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<sup>9</sup> Beasley uses the term ‘sexed identity’ when talking about gender, as opposed to ‘sexual identity,’ which he uses to discuss issues concerning sexuality.

<sup>10</sup> “Either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female” (“Gender,” *OED*)

<sup>11</sup> A person's sexual orientation or preference (“Sexuality”).

All in all, what we can gather from the existence of such arguments is that gender is a fluid, changing, and malleable term that has been constantly re-examined and contested even among the theorists in the field. Nevertheless, for the purposes of my essay, I will use the term ‘gender’ in its most general sense: a constructed idea of how individuals with either a male or a female body must act, look, and behave in order to fit and be accepted by society.

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir<sup>12</sup> wrote that “one is not born a woman, but becomes one” (qtd. in Butler, *Gender* 8). This often quoted statement propelled the discussion of the idea of gender. If women are not born, then what is a woman? What does being a woman mean? How does one become a woman? I believe the answers to these questions rely on understanding how the patriarchal system works. Broadly speaking, we could say that women are expected to act according to socio-cultural standards which have been established by those who have historically been in power: men. That binary system has stayed unchanged and unchallenged for years, so those standards have ended up rooting themselves into our psyche as ‘natural’ or ‘acceptable.’ As the result of the strength and popularity (especially in recent years) of the feminist movement,<sup>13</sup> many writings have emerged questioning traditional patriarchal notions with the aim of destroying essentialist visions about gender and denaturalizing, as it were, the idea that it is intrinsic to being.

As a consequence, the questioning of gender brought about a very significant crisis in modern masculinity standards in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Women had already started to look at themselves and analyse what constituted femininity and, most

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<sup>12</sup> Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was an existentialist French feminist whose work titled *The Second Sex* is key in the discussion of the oppression of women, as well as the conception of gender as a social construct during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to clarify that the feminist movement is constituted by a compendium of different feminisms, each of which is concerned with a particular aspect of the overall goal towards equality. Some examples would be black feminism, Marxist feminism, etc.

importantly, *how*; eventually, feminists turned their attention to men. Surely, if femininity is socially constructed and established by a socio-cultural system, the same applies to masculinity, too. In the same way that a woman is not born, but made, so are men (Carabí and Segarra 7). In her essay “Construyendo nuevas masculinidades,” Àngels Carabí claims that the definition of masculinity surprises in so far as it is “una definición en negativo.” That is, masculinity is *not* feminine, ethnic or homosexual (19). We understand masculinity by recognizing everything that it is not. The problem, Carabí asserts, is that men are their own enemies. Whereas women have been socially constructed by men (a fact that makes women inferior to men), males have constructed their own identity over the years, but it is only recently that they find themselves in the process of re-examining long-lived stereotypes as well as their position in a changeable society (23-25).

As stated earlier, I will analyse the characters in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* in light of Judith Butler’s theory of performative gender and her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990). However, to understand it better it is necessary to mention that Butler differentiates the existence of three dimensions in one’s own identity: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance (*Gender* 137). Thus, we can say that anatomical sex is biological—male or female—whereas gender identity and gender performance are cultural. The latter are different in so far as one can recognise oneself as one gender, be it man or woman, but act and look feminine or masculine, depending on the gender they are performing. To illustrate her point, Butler uses the example of drag<sup>14</sup> practices: individuals with male bodies who put up a show in which they act feminine. However, gender identity and performance are intimately linked, and it would

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<sup>14</sup> Clothing more conventionally worn by the opposite sex, especially women's clothes worn by a man (“Drag”)



be wrong not to acknowledge how the performance has always defined one's identity and *vice versa*.

The fact that practices like those of drag or cross-dressing<sup>15</sup> are possible allows Butler to formulate a theory based on performativity. Thus, according to Butler:

Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (140)

In a similar thread of thought, in her later work *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler defines gender as “a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing” (1). Interestingly enough, she also adds that “through performativity, dominant and non-dominant gender norms are equalized” (209).

In short, Judith Butler considers gender a performance, and the individual defines his/hers by executing certain acts that we perceive as typical of a particular gender. The author insists on the fact that gender is entirely imitative since establishing the origins of those acts is impossible (*Gender* 138). Accordingly, in Butler's words, we have learned to perform those acts, and that has been happening for a very long time, thus making very difficult to trace the beginning of what specific traits has made a female, female, and a male, male. Furthermore, she adds that the way those acts are perceived is also a determining factor in the establishing of the gender. That is, if one's acts are perceived as female, then one's gender identity would be female. However, if

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<sup>15</sup> Wear clothing typical of the opposite sex (“Cross-dressing”).

gender is performative, as Butler claims, it is also changeable. Thus, the slightest change in the acts that have traditionally defined a particular gender (whether as male or female) would completely change people's perception of that particular individual.

## Part Two

### Chapter 1.

**“She has no idea. The effect she can have:”**

#### **Katniss Everdeen and the Thousand Faces of the ‘Feminine’**

“It isn’t in my nature to go down without a fight”

*The Hunger Games* (42)

The Girl on Fire. The Mockingjay.<sup>16</sup> Katniss Everdeen is called different names throughout the three novels that constitute *The Hunger Games* trilogy. However, those are names that are given to her, not chosen. The question here is: who is Katniss Everdeen? Thus, the purpose of this chapter is trying to find an answer. To this end, I will analyse different aspects of the protagonist—the way she looks, how she acts, as well as the different roles she plays in the story—in order to demonstrate that Katniss represents a type of female character who not only does not live by, or identifies with, traditional standards of her gender but who also defies patriarchal expectations, thus questioning the legitimacy of gendered ideals of womanhood.

Katniss Everdeen is a sixteen-year-old girl who lives in District 12. Since her father’s death caused by a mining accident a few years before the starting point of the story, she acts as the sole provider for her mother and younger sister, Prim. Katniss dares to go hunting outside the legal perimeters of the district, and she trades whatever she has in the Hob<sup>17</sup> afterwards. In *The Hunger Games*, she volunteers to go to the arena so that Prim, who is chosen, does not have to. The Games are bloody, heartless, and

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<sup>16</sup> A mockingjay is a species of bird in the Hunger Games universe. It was created through the matting of other two species, jabberjays (a bird created by the Capitol to spy their enemies) and mockingbirds. During her first Games, Katniss wears a pin with the bird on it, which turns the mockingjay into the symbol of the Rebellion.

<sup>17</sup> The Hob is an old warehouse where the black market of District 12 is located. It is a place where people can buy, sell, or trade goods that have been banned.

cruel, and this is one of the main reasons for Katniss to take her sister's place. Katniss and the other tribute, Peeta, end up being the Victors of the seventy-fourth Games, but not without consequences. For example, Katniss' idea of having Peeta and herself eat deadly berries so that they both die at the same time, leaving the Games without victors, is seen as an act of rebellion by the Capitol. This leads to the second book, *Catching Fire* (2009), where Katniss and Peeta are thrown into the arena once again in a special edition of the Hunger Games that is conceived to punish Katniss, and show the consequences to the people of Panem. This time, two former victors from each district are chosen to take part in the Games. However, most of the participants end up being part of a conspiracy to dismantle the government of Panem. The main goal of the participants is to keep Katniss alive so that she can become the face of the rebellion. In *Mockingjay* (2010), the third book, Katniss' role is that of a fearless leader who will finally free Panem from a long-lived and cruel tyranny. However, as we will see later on, all these events will have a profound and lifelong impact on Katniss' biography

The first step in my analysis is to explore the appearance of the character which includes both physical traits as well as the clothes she wears. In Katniss' case, readers do not find many references to her physical appearance, which is probably a consequence of the first-person narrative voice. However, there are only two direct references to her looks. The first one appears when Katniss describes her friend Gale: "He could be my brother. Straight black hair, olive skin, we even have the same grey eyes" (*Hunger* 9). The second one comes towards the end of *The Hunger Games*, right before her post-Games interview: "I immediately notice the padding over my breasts, adding curves that hunger has stolen from my body" (413-414). Due to the lack of more specific references, we can infer that Katniss is not the type of girl who pays too much attention to her looks. As a matter of fact, she finds the 'beautifying' process, inherent

to the marketing of the Games, quite useless and annoying. Before the Hunger Games, each tribute is assigned a prep team who is in charge of making them presentable in public. In Katniss's case, she is never thrilled by the process, as we can see in the way she describes the compulsory routine as purely mechanical, and almost surgical: "The team works on me until late afternoon, turning my skin to glowing satin, stencilling patterns on my arms, painting flame designs on my twenty perfect nails" (*Hunger* 138-139). Taking all these facts into account, there is no doubt that Katniss does not fall into the category of the young girl whose only purpose in life is to look pretty and waste her time to do so. Overall, we can say that Katniss does not care about appearances. In contrast, she has a wide range of important things to do and think about that include: finding ways to keep her family fed, avoiding death during the Games, and, last but not least, trying to lead a Rebellion.

As part of the "beautifying process," fashion plays a crucial role in *The Hunger Games* trilogy as well as in the film adaptations. And, as we try to prove, Katniss's wardrobe is particularly well taken care of. Thus, Suzanne Collins describes in detail every one of Katniss's outfits, and the designers of the respective film adaptations do also a fantastic job in recreating them. The fact that Collins focuses so much on clothing means that Katniss, surprisingly, does too. Whereas the more physical part bores her (this includes processes such as waxing, getting her hair done, etc.), the fashion aspect of the aforementioned "beautifying process" catches her attention. The reason why she cares is because in Panem, the world of the Hunger Games, clothes are supposed to be a representation of who you are, thus linking fashion and identity. For Katniss, the Hunger Games are close to a performance, and she will do her best to play the role assigned so that she could gain the favour of the viewers

As a way to illustrate the point I try to make, here are some examples related to fashion. At the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss gets out of bed and puts on her hunting boots which are made of “supple leather that has molded to [her] feet” (4), a pair of trousers and a shirt. The movie replicates the outfit to perfection.<sup>18</sup> The cinematic wardrobe department even adds the leather jacket that later on in the story we learn has belonged to her deceased father. Here, we see a Katniss who wears clothes primarily designed for men, from the trousers and the shirt to her father’s leather jacket. If we add to that the fact that her boots are thought for hunting, an activity that is traditionally masculine, we get the picture of a rather unconventional female character.

In contrast, in her interviews with Caesar Flickerman<sup>19</sup> before the Games start, Katniss wears amazingly beautiful dresses with the aim of impressing the viewers and getting some sponsors who can help her while she is in the arena. This scene is played both in *The Hunger Games* and in *Catching Fire*. Although there is a large number of outfits that I could comment upon, I have decided to focus just on three that I believe are the most relevant for the purpose of this essay.

The first dress is the one she wears during her interview before the first Games she attends. In the novel, Katniss herself describes it as if it were a rare piece of art:

My dress, oh, my dress is entirely covered in reflective precious gems, red and yellow and white bits of blue that accent the tips of the flame design. The slightest movement gives the impression I am engulfed in tongues of fire. I am not pretty. I am beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun. (139-140)

In the film adaptation, it was decided to forgo the jewels, which were changed for a bright red material that clearly reminds of fire, but they choose to keep the flame

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<sup>18</sup> See Figure 1 in the Appendix.

<sup>19</sup> Caesar Flickerman is the flamboyant television host of the Hunger Games.

effect at the bottom.<sup>20</sup> This was a clever decision on the part of the wardrobe department, as it maintains the theme of fire that revolves around Katniss in the first book. It is important to pay attention to the last few sentences of the quotation: the fact that Katniss feels so incredibly beautiful speaks volumes of the transformative nature of the outfits in this story, as we will see later on.

The second dress I will talk about is the wedding dress<sup>21</sup> she is made to wear during her pre-Games interview in *Catching Fire*. In the novel, Katniss herself describes it as follows: “Heavy white silk with a low neckline and tight waist and sleeves that fall from my wrists to the floor. And pearls. Everywhere pearls. Stitched into the dress and I ropes at my throat and forming the crown for the veil” (279). In the movie, the design of the dress is completely different, although it makes more of a statement. The designers transform the dress in Collins’s novel into a strapless white dress consisting of a bodice and a flowy skirt that resembles the feathers of a bird’s wings.<sup>22</sup> In the upper part, they added a type of wire decoration embedded with pearls in the shape of the mockingbird, which represents both Katniss as well as the rebellion against a dictatorial system. Despite the differences, both dresses bring to mind a traditional wedding dress, with the movie version expanding the flavour of it by adding a concealed symbol of the rebellion.

Right after putting on the wedding dress, Cinna (Katniss’s personal fashion designer and dear friend since they first met in *The Hunger Games*) instructs Katniss to twirl at some point during her interview, just as she did the year before. Knowing that her friend has probably added a special and shocking effect to the dress, she does as he

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<sup>20</sup> See Figure 2 in the Appendix.

<sup>21</sup> In *Catching Fire*, Katniss and Peeta are forced to pretend they are in a happy relationship and about to be married so as to avoid punishment from the government for what they did during the previous Hunger Games.

<sup>22</sup> See Figure 3 in Appendix.

asks. The moment Katniss spins, her wedding dress starts to burn and is transformed into a completely different outfit:

I'm in a dress of the exact design of my wedding dress, only it's the color of coal [a reference to her home district, *my emphasis*] and made of tiny feathers. Wonderingly, I lift my long, flowing sleeves into the air, and that's when I see myself on the television screen. Clothed in black except for the white patches on my sleeves. Or should I say my wings. Because Cinna has turned me into a mockingjay. (284)

In the film, Katniss's dress is not exactly the same, but it conveys the same idea.<sup>23</sup> Instead of sleeves, it has straps; and the wings are not white, but as black as the rest of the outfit. It is undeniable that both the red dress and the wedding/mockingjay dress were conceived by Cinna to make a statement about Katniss. With the former, the designer wants to make sure that everybody would remember 'The Girl On Fire' during the Games, thus gaining sympathy and supporters for whatever might happen to her in the arena; with the latter, Cinna makes it clear that the dictatorial rules of the Capitol (represented by the traditional "virginal" wedding dress) will not have a chance to win against the coming and announced Rebellion (represented by the black mockingjay dress).

However, contrary to her personal taste, Katniss does not mind wearing those sophisticated fashionable outfits since they serve as a mean to her own end. Clearly, those exclusive designs—a dream come true for more superficial girls her age—do not represent who she is. As Noah Berlatsky highlights, "while Katniss admires these dresses (and shares a bond of deep affection with designer Cinna), she's wearing them because she has to, not because she wants to." She is not defined by, nor does she find

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<sup>23</sup> See Figure 4 in Appendix.



herself represented by none of those dresses. This is obvious towards the end of the first book, when she takes off her post-Games interview dress. This dress was especially designed by Cinna to make her look “innocent. Harmless” (*Hunger* 414). And here are Katniss own words where she describes this special dress that fits her like a glove (both physically and metaphorically):

The sheer fabric softly glows [...] The sleeveless dress is gathered at my ribs [...] eliminating any help the padding would have given my figure. The hem falls just to my knees. Without heels, you can see my true stature. I look, very simply, like a girl. (414)

The movie’s costume designers do not stay exactly true to the dress. Instead, they choose to capture that essence of innocence by using a subdued pastel yellow colour.<sup>24</sup> Katniss’ own words reflect her discomfort: “I feel so vulnerable in this flimsy dress” (422). Later on in the book, when Peeta and Katniss are already in the train on their way back to District 12, Katniss goes on to take it off, and she offers one of the most powerful and representative passages we find in the trilogy:

I excuse myself to change out of my dress and into a plain shirt and pants. As I slowly, thoroughly wash the makeup from my face and put my hair in its braid, I begin transforming back into myself. Katniss Everdeen. A girl who lives in the Seam. Hunts in the woods. Trades in the Hob. (432)

This excerpt perfectly summarises the importance of fashion and appearances in Collins’s trilogy *The Hunger Games*. The outfits Katniss wears, those luxurious costumes, are just part of a bigger game, a performance she has to put on display in order to survive. However, at the end of the day, when she is stripped of all the flair and influence from the Capitol, the protagonist keeps true to herself, Katniss Everdeen. She

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<sup>24</sup> See Figure 5 in Appendix

is not defined by who they want her to be; she defines herself and her choice of clothes brilliantly and accurately a fact that reflects Katniss personal ethical beliefs.

At the beginning of this chapter I stated that my analysis would explore both the actions of the character as well as the different roles she plays. These two aspects are intimately connected in Katniss's case; therefore, I will approach them simultaneously.

At the start of *The Hunger Games*, on page five, the reader finds Katniss in the woods. It is a statement about who this character is: readers find her hunting from the beginning of the story. I believe this is a conscious decision on the part of Suzanne Collins. By placing Katniss in the wilderness, where the animals "roam freely, and there are added concerns like venomous snakes and rabid animals, and no real paths to follow. But there is also food if you know how to find it" (5), the author presents a very vivid image of Katniss: a hunter, a survivor and a fighter. This is a sixteen-year-old girl who wanders into the woods—which we later learn is illegal in Panem—armed with her bow and arrow in search of food. Thus, from the very beginning, Katniss is depicted as a strong young woman who is familiarized with the skills that help her to stay alive. The extent to how good of a hunter she is it is revealed later in the novel when Peeta proudly asserts: "She is excellent [...] My father buys her squirrels. He always comments on how the arrows never pierce the body. She hits everyone in the eye" (102-103). Later on in the trilogy, for Katniss, hunting will become a kind of therapy after her frustrating experiences in the Hunger Games. Moreover, in *Hunting Girls*, Kelly Oliver states that "the essence of Katniss is huntress" (128), which further stresses how important this activity is for the protagonist and to what extent it is part of her personality.

It is precisely during said Games that the survivor's side of Katniss comes to light even more: when she is in the arena, she does not have a bow or an arrow. She

manages to survive with just a backpack that she has to fight for at the Cornucopia.<sup>25</sup> It contains one thin black sleeping bag that reflects body heat, a pack of crackers, another pack of dried beef strips, iodine, matches, night vision glasses and an empty water bottle. This is enough for her to survive during half of the Games until she finally gets a weapon. Even Peeta's mother tells her son that "she is a survivor, that one" (104), and how her fighter's mentality might lead her to win the Hunger Games. In *Mockingjay*, Gale further highlights this side of Katniss when he claims that she "will pick whoever she thinks she can't survive without" (371). This comment, coming from her best friend and one of the people that supposedly know her better, stresses the idea that survival is intrinsic to Katniss's personality, thus anticipating that Katniss is no traditional, helpless female character. On the contrary, she can hold her own in the face of the most extreme circumstances. As Katniss herself puts it: "It isn't in my nature to go down without a fight" (*Hunger* 42). On her part, Roxanne Gay emphasises this side of Katniss's personality and describes her as "a young woman who has no choice but to fight for survival—for herself, her family, and her people" (137). Indeed, this seems to be the case for the protagonist of Collins's saga: after her father dies, she is forced to find ways for her family to survive; when she volunteers to participate in the Hunger Games in Prim's place, surviving is the only goal that keeps her alive as long as she does; and, after she joins the Rebellion, she is just a broken girl who has seen and experience too much suffering—she still fights back, but she can barely get by.

One of Katniss' most defining traits is that she is not perceived as a nice person. The protagonist of a book—the heroine, in particular—would be expected to be a likable character, both for the readers and for other characters in the story. However, Katniss comes up as too sullen and unapproachable at first; in fact, the only people who

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<sup>25</sup> The Cornucopia is a structure in the arena, and the point where the Hunger Games begin. There are usually weapons and backpacks under it so that the tributes can take them.

seem to like her from the start are Gale, Peeta and Prim. At the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss points out that “Gale says [she] never smile[s] except in the woods” (7). Later on, during her training with Haymitch<sup>26</sup> before the interview with Caesar Flickerman, her mentor complains: “when you open your mouth, you come across more as sullen and hostile” (135). In fairness, Katniss has grown up in a situation that has forced her to become an adult too fast and too soon in a world where only the strongest have a chance to survive. Since her father died, she became the sole provider for her family after her mother started suffering from depression and completely shut down. The weight of keeping the family fed fell on young Katniss’s shoulders when she was only eleven years old. In addition, Katniss’s apparent sullen attitude could very well be a mixture between her burdensome situation and a lingering trauma after her father’s sudden death.

There is one particular quotation that clearly illustrates that Katniss does not deal well with trauma: “he [her father] was blown to bits in a mine explosion. There was nothing even to bury. I was eleven then. Five years later, I still wake up screaming for him to run” (*Hunger* 6). Besides, in *Catching Fire*, Katniss suffers nightmares related to the events that happened during the Games, hence reinforcing that idea that she has yet to figure it out how to cope with traumatic experiences. The situation gets to the point that in *Mockingjay*, the doctors in District 13<sup>27</sup> classify her as “mentally disoriented” (21) due to her mental state after the Quarter Quell.<sup>28</sup> Taking all of this into account, I

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<sup>26</sup> Haymitch Abernathy is a former Hunger Games participant and the only victor from District 12, apart from Katniss and Peeta. His role is to mentor them for the Games, as well as finding sponsors (Capitol citizens who send valuable goods to a tribute during the Hunger Games) while they are in the arena.

<sup>27</sup> District 13 was believed to have been destroyed by the government years ago after a rebellion against the Capitol. At the end of the second installment of the trilogy, it is revealed that it still existed clandestinely. People from this District live in an underground compound under severe rules so as to make provisions last as long as possible.

<sup>28</sup> The Quarter Quell is a special edition of the Hunger Games celebrated every 25 years to mark the anniversary of the District’s defeat by the government. It is described as including some kind of twist to make the Games more interesting.

believe it is fair to say that Katniss' sullen attitude is the result of having loved and lost her father (as well as her mother, at least mentally). By seeming unapproachable, she creates an armour around herself so that she can protect herself against getting hurt once more. This leads me to another interesting feature about Katniss: her fear of weakness. She puts a lot of pressure on herself when it comes to avoid being perceived as weak. One clear example of this happens in *The Hunger Games*. Haymitch and Peeta come up with the strategy of the 'star-crossed' lovers of District 12. It is as follows: during his pre-Game interview, Peeta admits to being in love with Katniss, but since there can only be one victor, a relationship with her in the future is not possible. In Katniss' eyes, this makes her look weak, and she reacts furiously to Peeta's admission. Furthermore, she makes a connection between depending on people and weakness. As she very angrily states, "I hate owing people" (*Hunger* 37). She struggles fiercely with the idea of having to compete against Peeta in the Hunger Games because he has saved her life once. It all happened when Katniss was going through a tough time, she was struggling with hunger, and she collapsed outside Peeta's family's bakery. He saw her and threw her a few loaves of burnt bread, which saved the Everdeens from starvation. During the Quarter Quell, Finnick Odair<sup>29</sup> saves Peeta from death after the latter is hit by the force field that surrounds the arena. Peeta's heart stops beating and Finnick performs CPR<sup>30</sup> on him. The following words reflect Katniss' reaction:

All I wanted was to keep Peeta alive, and I couldn't and Finnick could, and I shouldn't be nothing but grateful. And I am. But I'm also furious because it means that I will never stop owing Finnick. Ever. (*Catching* 315)

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<sup>29</sup> Finnick Odair is a victor from District 4 who participates in the seventy-fifth Hunger Games that take place in *Catching Fire*. He is part of the Rebellion and one of the key figures in protecting Katniss and Peeta in the arena

<sup>30</sup> Cardiopulmonary resuscitation

In this instance, Katniss feels useless in the face of the possibility of Peeta's death. She depends on Finnick to keep her fellow tribute alive, in the same way that she depended on Peeta to keep her and her family alive when he was generous enough to give her some loaves of bread. The use of words such as 'hate' and 'furious' emphasises her aversion to being helped by and to needing the help of others. Katniss has been practically on her own for years and, thus, she is very protective of her autonomy. She rejects everything that would make her look anything but independent.

Another interesting and defining feature about Katniss' personality is her impulsiveness. Collins's protagonist tends to react first and think later. Even though it can be clearly observed throughout the trilogy's three novels, there is one very illustrative instance that mirrors Katniss' temperament and it occurs during the training period before the Games that take place in *The Hunger Games*. Every year, the tributes must demonstrate their skills before the Gamemakers<sup>31</sup> in order to be rated in scale from one to twelve. Tributes receive their ranking score later on TV, so that viewers know who is the strongest one, the most likely to win; for the tributes, it is a warning of who to look out for in the arena. During Katniss' demonstration, she chooses to shoot arrows at a target. She fails the first time, but is successful in the second one. However, the Gamemakers ignore her. She gets frustrated and angry, so she shoots an arrow into the area where the Gamemakers are (which is far away from Katniss) and hits the pig they are about to eat. After this astonishing shot, she leaves without being dismissed with a bow and the ironic parting words: "Thank you for your consideration" (118). Katniss's tendency to act first usually results in the Capitol taking measures against her. After the stunt with the Gamemakers, she is awarded a score of 12. Although this might seem that Katniss has won widespread praise for her fantastic skills, in truth it is only a tactic to

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<sup>31</sup> The Gamemakers are a people from the Capitol in charge of designing and controlling the arena.

turn all the other twenty-two tributes against her once they meet in the arena. By making her look as the strongest out of the twenty four competitors, she also turns to be the one that should be killed first in the kill-or-be-killed atmosphere of the arena.

Stating that Katniss is, without a doubt, an impulsive character stems from her predisposition to base her actions on feelings rather than, for instance, battle tactics. Katniss thinks with her heart, not with her head. Throughout the trilogy, her actions and choices are propelled by one single fact: she cares. In her own words: “Okay, maybe I don’t go around loving everybody I meet, maybe my smiles are hard to come by, but I do care for some people” (*Hunger* 141). Katniss’ moral decisions are based on what is called feminist care ethic, or the care perspective (Averill 168). This theory is based on the idea that women reason differently than men; the latter tend to follow a more impartial framework for moral reasoning called ‘justice perspective’ (166-167). In summary, the ethics of care are rooted on the fact that, when facing a moral predicament, “women [...] turn their attention to the concrete responsibilities and emotional bonds that arise out of particular caring relationships” (168). Averill highlights that this perspective has been undervalued because it is linked to women (168), and stresses that this process of moral decision-making is just as valid as following a more traditional and unbiased reasoning (165-166).

Thus, following the ethics of care, we could come to the conclusion that Katniss’s decisions, every single one of them, is fueled by her need to protect the people she cares about. The most obvious example of this is when, in *The Hunger Games*, she volunteers to take her sister’s place at the reaping. She is not concerned with the fact that she is almost certainly condemning herself to death by going to the arena; her one and only concern is to keep Prim safe. In fact, we could say that the story exists precisely because Katniss cares. If she had not care, she would have never volunteered

for the Games, her sister Prim would have soon found her death, and there would be no story to tell. Furthermore, her decision-making process leads her to eventually develop a 'social conscience' when she later joins the Rebellion. In *Catching Fire*, Gale is whipped as punishment for poaching. Seeing her best friend suffer atrociously awakes Katniss's caring instincts: "Deep down, I must know it isn't enough to keep myself and my family alive by running away. Even if I could, it wouldn't fix anything. It wouldn't stop people from being hurt the way Gale was today" (134-135). Later on, while reflecting on this very thought, she concludes that to protect Prim she needs to do even more: "Prim... Rue... aren't they the very reason I have to try to fight? Because what has been done to them is so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice?" (139). Rue was a fellow tribute during the Games with whom she had a close, albeit short, relationship, and who reminded her of her sister. She died in Katniss's arms after being attacked by another tribute. As for Prim, here Katniss refers to the fact that despite her best efforts, her own sister Prim is already a victim of the Capitol: she lost her father in the mines, and she was forced to witness Katniss in the Hunger Games. Hence, Katniss realises she needs to do more in order to protect the people she cares about—primarily Prim, Gale and Peeta, so she decides to join the Rebellion and take on the role of the protector, both for the people she loves as well as for the people of Panem, to fight for a better world and a better future.

Finally, it is important to highlight the fact that everything that Katniss does throughout the three novels comes with a price, and the fact that she cares so fiercely for people makes her pay personally. As a result of seeing so much death around her and after suffering in her own flesh the cruelty of the world, towards the end of *Mockingjay* we see a Katniss whose spirit is absolutely broken and her faith in people is gone: "I no longer feel allegiance to those monsters called human beings, despite being one



myself,” she says (424). In addition, among the chaos of defending the Districts and taking down President Snow’s dictatorship, she loses her sister Prim in a bombing attack, which leaves her in a state of deep depression and “emotional trauma” (*Mockingjay* 395). But nevertheless, Katniss still survives. She pushes on. She *lives*. The epilogue of *Mockingjay* shows Katniss, who is married to Peeta, while she is watching her children play in the meadow in a new District 12. In *Bad Feminist*, Roxane Gay provides an accurate depiction that summarizes Katniss’s physical and emotional journey:

Katniss is clearly a heroine, but a heroine with *issues* (...) She is brave but flawed (...) She is not sure she is up to the task of leading a revolution, but she does her best, even as she doubts herself (...) She is damaged and it shows (146).

Through these words, Gay perfectly explains the complex nature of the character. She appeals to her strength by calling her a heroine, but she also recognises that she is not perfect and that being a heroine comes with a high price. A price that Katniss pays several times in all three books that make Collins’s trilogy. But, as I have I have tried to show earlier, Katniss is a survivor and a fighter and therefore she keeps going on.

The ultimate aim of this analysis is to have a look at Katniss as a woman and how she expresses gender. We live in a world where gender roles are still the norm, albeit not to the same extent that they were fifty or sixty years ago. However, representations of the passive damsel in distress are still very present in popular culture. In YA literature, the clearest example is Bella, the protagonist of the *Twilight* saga.<sup>32</sup> She is presented as the object of desire of two male characters whose more predominant traits are being dominant and extremely possessive. Furthermore, every trace of agency

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<sup>32</sup> *The Twilight* saga is a series of four books written by American author Stephenie Meyer. The protagonist, Bella Swan, falls in love with Edward Cullen, a vampire who feeds on animal blood. The first book, *Twilight*, was released in 2005. It quickly became a worldwide phenomenon which resulted in movie adaptations, merchandising, and the like.

that she shows ends up on her needing to be saved. Katniss Everdeen, however, stands as the complete opposite of characters such as Bella's.

In chapter two of this essay I have referred to the difference between gender identity and gender performance. It is clear that Katniss' gender identity is that of a woman. There is no trace in any part of the story that hints otherwise. Following a hetero patriarchal reasoning, the fact that she identifies as a woman would mean that she is feminine. But is she?

Characteristics like breadwinning, physical and mental toughness, and fighting for survival are usually associated with masculinity, but these also constitute some of Katniss's most defining traits (Miller 147). In addition, she takes on the role of the head of the family when her father dies, a role that is traditionally reserved for men. Most importantly, she succeeds in doing it for a long time, which comes to question the 'maleness' of that particular role. Furthermore, rebelliousness and defiance are also traditional masculine traits (Miller 148), which again might highlight the fact that Katniss does not fit into the mould of femininity. Similarly, her love for hunting situates our heroine closer to the masculine side of the gender spectrum. In this sense, as Kelly Oliver claims, "in American culture, it is macho to hunt [...] Hunting is associated with masculinity because it is a way of providing for the family" (19). Another factor that adds to Katniss's apparent lack of femininity is her rejection of 'girl' clothes, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. When she is forced to wear dresses, she feels uncomfortable, thus distancing herself from the idea of girliness and femininity. It is only without makeup, wearing trousers and a shirt on that Katniss feels like herself.

Thus far, it seems clear that although Katniss is a woman, she is not *feminine*. As explained in chapter two, Butler's theory of performative gender defines gender as a

series of acts that have been historically associated to be either masculine or feminine. This also means that masculinity and femininity are not exclusive to males and females, respectively. Therefore, following Butler, we can say that Katniss is a woman that *performs* masculinity successfully. She breaks gender moulds by being shamelessly masculine without giving up her womanhood. Another question is whether Katniss is simply adopting masculinity as her way of performing her gender or unconsciously portraying a new type of femininity that is not conformed to patriarchal standards. If we understand that, as Butler argues, femininity consists of series of actions culturally associated to women, changing them would change the way ‘the feminine’ is perceived long term. Hence, Katniss can be regarded as an example of a different type of femininity that is constituted differently.

All in all, Katniss Everdeen is the representation of a new type of female who does not need to be feminine to feel like a woman. She does not like pretty dresses. She hunts. She fights. She takes care of her family and friends, and protects them fiercely even if she has to confront a whole government. She leads a Rebellion, and she wins. Suzanne Collins provides females around the world—and teenagers in particular—with a character that questions and re-examines the meaning of being a woman, much like second-wave feminists did. Katniss is a statement in itself: one’s own body and gender identity do not limit who you are. The possibilities for a female are endless.

## Chapter 2.

**“He was too handsome, too male”:**

### **The Representation of Masculinity in Gale Hawthorne**

“His expression says there are not enough mountains to crush,  
enough cities to destroy. It promises death”

*Mockingjay* (308)

There are a lot of male characters in *The Hunger Games* series. They all play a part in Katniss’s journey, however big or small their influence is. All of these characters showcase a wide variety of men proving there are many ways of being male, thus highlighting the fact that there is not just an only way to present masculinity. This chapter will focus on the different ways in which the character of Gale Hawthorne perpetuates the stereotype of the ‘manly man.’

Gale is seventeen years old at the beginning of *The Hunger Games*. He lives in District 12, like Katniss, and has been a constant presence in the protagonist’s life ever since their respective fathers died in the same mining accident five years earlier. He is her best friend, the person who, before the Games, represented freedom and happiness in a world where starvation and oppression were the norm. They go hunting together on a regular basis, confide in each other, and are each other’s safe haven. He is in love with Katniss, and struggles with the fact that she may or may not reciprocate his feelings. He is passionate, loyal and dedicated to causes that he feels strongly about, like the rebellion. In *Mockingjay*, readers see Gale at both his best and his worst, when he is planning ways to bring down the Capitol, as well as in his role as a soldier for District 13.

As in chapter 1 of Part Two, devoted to Katniss, I will begin my analysis with a close look at Gale's appearance. Sadly, the novels do not provide much information about Gale's physical features or overall appearance. Due to the fact that it is a first person narration, it makes sense that Katniss might not give a detailed account of how Gale looks. At the point where the first book begins, she is very familiar with him, which implies that she is not as prone to describe him as she may do with other characters. However, there are a few bits and pieces that can help the reader have an idea of how Gale would look. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss describes him as a boy with "straight black hair, olive skin" and grey eyes (9). There are other two references in *Catching Fire*. First, he is said to be "too handsome, too male" (13); and, second, Katniss describes his hands during one of their hunting excursions in the woods: "I watch his hands, his beautiful capable fingers. Scarred [...] but strong and deft. Hands that have the power to mine coal but the precision to set a delicate snare. Hands I trust" (109). Finally, in *Mockingjay*, Fluvia Cardew<sup>33</sup> refers to Gale as being "born with a camera-ready face" (91).

Apart from the fact that Gale seems to be extremely handsome and masculine, very little can be gathered from the information given in the novel. Even the description of his hands speaks more about his character as a hard-working and reliable man than it does about his physique. In Gale's case, the film adaptation portrays him in a more reliable fashion than the written trilogy as far as his physical appearance is concerned. Liam Hemsworth was cast to play the part of Katniss' closest friend, and it is fair to say that he is the embodiment of the beauty and masculinity that Gale represents.<sup>34</sup> With his height, sharp jaw structure and muscled body, Hemsworth turns Gale into a commanding presence.

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<sup>33</sup> Fluvia Cardew is a former Capitol citizen who later joined the Rebellion against the government.

<sup>34</sup> See Figure 6 in Appendix.

Regarding Gale's outfits, the books are once again of little help. The very few relevant instances that refer to what Gale is wearing appear in *Mockingjay*, and only to highlight the fact that he changes from District 13's uniform<sup>35</sup> into his black tactical gear when he visits a district under attack. However, in the film adaptations the costume designers seem inclined to make Gale's outfits more noticeable, at least to some extent. For instance, in *Catching Fire* (2013), he usually wears rather untidy clothes in cool colours,<sup>36</sup> a fact that helps us come to some conclusions. On the one hand, it highlights the poverty of the inhabitants of District 12 who cannot afford to pay for better clothes; on the other hand, the cool tone of his clothes seem to be in sync with Gale's sombre mood, as a result of his frustration with the government and his feelings of helplessness, which I will deal with later on in this chapter.

As to Gale's personality, the first trait that should be mentioned is the fact that Gale is a protector. Similarly to Katniss's family situation, the loss of his father turns him into the head of the family, the provider. The Hawthornes are a bigger family than the Everdeens, with Gale having to take care of his mother and three younger siblings, two brothers and a sister. Thus, the weight on Gale's shoulders is heavier than that of Katniss's, and even though they are not rich—no one in District 12 is—they get by with whatever Gale hunts in the woods and trades in the Hub. As far as his hunting skills are concerned, we can infer that he is quite good based on two facts: firstly, Gale is the one to teach Katniss how to hunt with snares; and, secondly, at one particular moment during the Games. Katniss and Peeta are moving in the woods in the arena. They are looking for food, and Peeta is being very noisy when he moves. Katniss's first thought goes to Gale, her best friend back in District 12: "I think of Gale, with his velvet thread.

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<sup>35</sup> One of the many rules in District 13 is that everyone must wear the same grey overalls. See Figure 7 in Appendix.

<sup>36</sup> Warm colours are associated with sunlight, heat and happiness, whereas cool colours are associated with night and shadows, and evoke feelings of heaviness (Wolfram 20).

It's eerie how little sound he makes, even when the leaves have fallen and it's a challenge to move at all without chasing off the game. I feel certain he's laughing back home" (*Hunger* 369). As mentioned above, due to the fact that there is very little information about Gale in general, it is important to pay close attention to every little reference we find. In this case, a single and short sentence evidences how good a hunter Gale is by appealing to his smoothness to navigate the woods silently, which turns out to be one of the most important skills for a hunter. The fact that he hunts—an activity that is punishable by death—perfectly showcases the lengths to which Gale is willing to go to make sure his family does not starve. This is further illustrated in the following quotation where we hear, once again, Katniss voice:

Gale has gone to work in the mines [...] I don't know how he stands it [...] [He does it] because it's the way to feed his mother and two younger brothers and sister. And here I am with buckets of money, far more than enough to feed both our families, and he won't take a single coin (*Catching* 5-6)

In this short excerpt there are two very defining traits of Gale's personality. Firstly, as I have been discussing so far, it speaks about the extent Gale goes to protect his family. He takes on a job that he positively hates just to keep them fed. Secondly, it shows his pride. As a victor, Katniss is entitled to receive a large quantity of money from the Capitol for the rest of her life. She attempts to share it with the Hawthornes, but he refuses. Gale would rather work twelve hours at the mines than accept anything from anyone, even from Katniss.

Moving on to a different side of his personality, we find that one of Gale's primary roles in the trilogy, especially in *Mockingjay*, is to play the role of a rebel. In Katniss's own words, "he was born a rebel" (*Catching* 135). From the beginning of the story, he makes his feelings about the Capitol very clear. He is very vocal about his

opinion, in particular, about the unjust and oppressive government of the Capitol. However, he only dares to share his views with Katniss, and only when they are in the woods, away from the controlling claws of the Capitol. As we have already mentioned, even hunting is a rebellious act in itself, since it is illegal. In spite of the deadly danger, Gale not only does enjoy hunting, but he “is only really alive in the woods” (*Catching* 5). Gale becomes his best self when he is not within the limits of the Panem *and* when he is breaking the rules. However, it is important to stress the fact that Gale is a rebel with a cause. We should bear in mind that he has suffered a great deal because of the rules of Panem.

Firstly, when he loses his father. Although the accident was not caused by anyone in particular, both Gale and Katniss blame the Capitol for it because the people of the Districts have very little choices career-wise, so they end up working in their assigned industry, which, in the case of District 12 is mining. Secondly, he is coerced to witness Katniss while she is competing in the Games, which only helps to increase his hatred for them. He is forced to see his best friend, the girl he loves, while she faces death. Thirdly, in *Catching Fire* Gale is whipped publicly as punishment for poaching. He literally experiences the injustice of Panem laws in his flesh. But his rebelliousness does not waver. It would be easier for him to abide by the rules from that moment on; on the contrary, the experience only fuels his desire to fight and join the Rebellion, as the following quotation proves: “I’m not going anywhere. I’m going to stay right here and cause all kinds of trouble.’ [Katniss says] ‘Me too,’ Gale says. He manages a smile before the drugs [for his wounds after the whipping] pull him back under” (*Catching* 135).

In view of his changing personality, Valerie Estelle Frankel describes Gale’s character development as follows: “[when he] reaches adulthood, he’s still Katniss’s



best friend, but he's becoming someone new as he grows up—a revolutionary [...] a revenge seeker, one willing to kill the innocent in pursuit of victory." Thus, Gale goes from being an idealist rebel in *The Hunger Games* and in *Catching Fire* to a revolutionary soldier in *Mockingjay* when he becomes part of the actual Rebellion, a role that fits him to perfection. His loyalty, which is one of his most defining features, makes it easy for him to enrol in the cause. He is so committed that, in the process, he loses the person he values the most—Katniss. Gale's loyalty to the protagonist is unquestionable. In Katniss own words: "Gale is not one to keep secrets from me" (*Catching* 439). In this sense, one very illustrative example takes place in *Mockingjay*. A mission is about to be carried out, at Katniss' request, to save Peeta from his captivity in the Capitol. It is supposed to be a volunteer-only mission. When Katniss asks Haymitch who has joined for it, her former mentor responds, "you know who stepped up first." Katniss knows: "Of course I do. Gale" (185). Gale's willingness to put his life at risk to do something *for* Katniss speaks volumes of how committed he is to her, of how much he loves her. However, at times, his loyalty to the cause seems to be stronger than his faithfulness to Katniss. For example, there is one particular instance when he keeps a secret from Katniss—which, in Katniss's eyes, is a terrible breach of their trust in each other—because he was asked to do so by the leaders of the Rebellion. The secret concerns one of Capitol's propos<sup>37</sup> and it shows Peeta in the Capitol in a deteriorated state asking Katniss to stop the rebels. She actually sees the propo by accident, but waits for Gale to tell her about it. When he does not utter a word, she recriminates him for it, and they get into an argument. At that moment, he gets summoned by Alma Coin, the leader of the rebels, and this is Katniss's reaction: "There she is. Better run. You have

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<sup>37</sup> Propo is the name that Collins uses in the trilogy to refer to any kind of message, footage or image with propagandistic purposes.

things to tell her” (132). Immediately after, Gale turns and leaves in anger. In short: he chooses the Rebellion over Katniss.

Gale ultimately finds the perfect balance towards the end of *Mockingjay*, the last instalment in the trilogy. A team of rebels, which includes him, Katniss and Peeta, is sent to the Capitol in order to film some propos. Katniss’s actual plan is to leave the team and infiltrate into President Snow’s mansion to murder him. Once this is revealed, Gale follows her blindly. The question lingers whether he would have made the same decision, that is, whether he would have stayed loyal to Katniss if her choice had not been in favour of the Rebellion. Taking into account that Gale’s role throughout Collins’s trilogy is that of a born rebel, it is safe to believe that he would have chosen the cause over Katniss had he been forced to do so.

Therefore, throughout *Mockingjay*, we witness how Gale and Katniss drift apart little by little, as he stands firm in his belief that everything is acceptable to win while Katniss takes a different approach. She refuses to accept that innocent people would suffer as collateral damage. In *Mockingjay*, they get into arguments because Katniss questions the way he justifies certain battle strategies. For example, while they were visiting District 2, the rebels destroyed the Nut, the Capitol’s military command centre. This institution is situated in a mountain where avalanches are a common disturbance. Gale thinks they should bomb the mountain surrounding the Nut to bury building. By doing so the dwellers will have no options but to die or escape through the train tunnel where the rebels will be waiting for them to take prisoners. Katniss is against Gale’s plan, arguing that innocent people will be killed in the process, but her sound opinion is obviously ignored. Later on, when discussing this operation with Gale, he justifies it as a way to prevent further attacks on the Districts, since all the Capitol’s military decisions are made from the Nut. In contrast, Katniss furiously complains: “But that

kind of thinking... you could turn it into an argument for killing anyone at any time. You could justify sending kids into the Hunger Games to prevent the districts from getting out of line” (247). This helps to demonstrate that Gale’s and Katniss’s moral values are absolutely opposite. As, explained in chapter 1 of Part Two, Katniss’s decision-making process is driven by her tendency to care and protect people. In contrast, Gale simply focuses on the end goal, no matter the consequences.

In this sense, it could be concluded that the event that definitely separates them concerns Prim’s death, or rather the way Prim dies. Katniss’s little sister is killed towards the end of *Mockingjay* as a result of a bombing attack. Gale is to blame for this action because he had apparently designed the weapon with the help of Beetee.<sup>38</sup> The rationale behind the ideas is the following: “A bomb explodes. Time is allowed for people to rush to the aid of the wounded. Then a second, more powerful bomb kills them as well” (*Mockingjay* 208). Although it is never confirmed to what extent this tactic caused Prim’s death, it is certainly implied that events occurred in that order and the same manner. Prim was killed by a bomb dropped after she and other doctors and nurses from District 13 went to tend to a group of children and adults that had been bombed just a few minutes before. From then on, Katniss “will never be able to separate that moment from Gale” (*Mockingjay* 413), a tragic and excruciating event that completely destroys their relationship. Ultimately, their separation is a result of them choosing different paths that divert from one another—Katniss is a nurturing person, in the sense that Katniss’s motivation to join the Rebellion stems from her need to protect her loved ones as well as the weak, whereas Gale’s personality is destructive. The moment Gale’s harmful attitude kills the person Katniss loves the most there is no way for them to regain their friendship.

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<sup>38</sup> Beetee is a former victor from District 3 who was a tribute in the Quarter Quell alongside Katniss and Peeta. As a member of District 3, he is very knowledgeable in technology.

Finally, it is important to highlight one more aspect about Gale that seems to be consistent all through the trilogy. He is angry. There are numerous references that link Gale with feelings of anger and rage, thus suggesting that these emotions are an intrinsic part of his personality. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss confesses that some days “deep in the woods, [she has] listened to him rant [...] His rage seems pointless to me” (15-16). Apart from the use of ‘rage,’ the verb ‘rant’ also implies hostility, which further stresses the point. For example, in *Catching Fire*, the protagonist points out: “Gale’s already so angry and frustrated with the Capitol that sometimes I think he’s going to arrange his own uprising” (37). In this same vein, in the epilogue in *Mockingjay*, Katniss affirms that Gale’s “fire” is “kindled with rage and hatred” (436). I believe this is the result of Gale’s inability to channel his frustrations in a positive way, especially as far as the Capitol is concerned. As a member of such a dictatorial society, he cannot freely express his disagreement with the government’s policies, which results in keeping his anger inside to take root and fester. There is no doubt that Gale is a passionate young man, and he has every reason to be angry. However, his passion is expressed in negative terms—his dedication to better Panem translates into anger and, as we have seen, destructiveness. Even his love for Katniss is shown through jealousy and possessiveness. When discussing the possibility of running away, Katniss mentions that she wants both, Peeta and his family as well as Haymitch, to go with them. Gale’s reaction is to “snap” at her and complain about “how large [the] party was” (*Catching* 112).

Analysing Gale has led me to the conclusion that, in terms of gender studies, he is the perfect representation of traditional masculinity. Many of his character traits are considered masculine, as explained in chapter 1 of Part Two when discussing Katniss—he is a breadwinner, he hunts, he is a rebel. Even his physical appearance stresses his

“manliness.” In her article “De la facultad de ver al derecho de mirar,” Victoria Sau discusses the formation of masculinity and to what extent it has been counterproductive for men, since gender expectations have put limitations on them in the same way they have on women. She provides a list of aspects that conform traditional masculinity: absence of feminine features; to be successful; to be respected and earn a lot of money; “ser un roble”—that is, “to be as strong as a rock”—in the sense that masculinity requires men to display fortitude and confidence at all times; and, finally, to be aggressive (36-37). The only requirement that Gale does not fulfil is the one related to money, and this is simply the case because he lives in a society that does not allow him to advance economically. Therefore, going back to Butler’s terms, he does not only *identify* as a man, but he *performs* traditional masculinity to perfection. If we take from Sau’s list the ‘acts’ that constitute the masculine, Gale proves to be the perfect example.

In short, Gale Hawthorne is a character that represents the image of the ‘manly man.’ He is virile and handsome. He possesses outstanding physical skills that allow him to show his positive side—to be the hunter, the provider, the rebel, and the soldier. He is extremely aggressive both as far as his passion for a cause is concerned as well as for his love for Katniss, which showcases his manliness to perfection.

Although Gale might stand as the prototype of what it has been culturally perceived as male and he does not have the same ground-breaking impact in the re-interpretation of gender as Katniss, he plays an important part in the discussion about masculinity. Collins seems to use him to criticise traditional masculinity when the author takes from Gale his happy ending with the protagonist. While he achieves his goal of saving Panem, it costs him his relationship with Katniss. In doing so, Collins conveys the message that traditional maleness is, as Sau argues in her article, counterproductive for men, since it may come at a high price. Hence, it could be

concluded that Gale is not a revolutionary character gender-wise, but he represents the disadvantages of extreme masculinity and the negative effect it might have on men in the long term.

### Chapter 3.

#### “I Don’t Want Them to Change Me”

#### Peeta Mellark and the New ‘Masculine’

“I can feel the steadiness that Peeta brings to everything”

*Catching Fire* (48)

If there is one character in Collins’s trilogy that readers love that would be Peeta Mellark although one would expect that the protagonist, the heroine Katniss Everdeen, would attract all the affection. However, Peeta’s soft strength, devotion and loyalty steal the spotlight on more than one occasion. This chapter is devoted to the examination of this character in order to prove that he represents a shift in the perception of gendered ideas about males by filling a traditionally female role without jeopardizing his masculinity.

Peeta Mellark is the baker’s sixteen-year-old son in District 12. During the reaping, his name is drawn from the bowl, thus making him the male tribute alongside Katniss Everdeen, the girl he has loved from the moment he set eyes on her. From then on, his only goal will be to protect her at all costs and make sure she becomes the winner of the Games. Thus, in *Catching Fire*, he volunteers to take Haymitch Abernathy’s place and go to the Quarter Quell with Katniss. As in the previous Games, he wants to keep Katniss alive no matter what, even if his life might be at stake, though Katniss does a lot of the saving herself. As for *Mockingjay*, Peeta is used by President Snow to cajole Katniss into ending the Rebellion. He is brutally tortured, and his memories are tampered into believing that Katniss is the enemy. This transforms him into a human killing machine whose only aim is to put an end to the protagonist’s life.

Both Katniss and Peeta will eventually find a way around the Capitol's trick, but Peeta will never be the same anymore.

As with Gale, none of the novels in the trilogy provide much information about Peeta's physique. According to Katniss, he is "stocky built," has "medium height, ashy blond hair that falls in waves over his forehead," as well as "blue eyes [that] show the alarm [she has] only seen in prey" (*Hunger* 29-30). From this description alone, Peeta does not come across as a strong, masculine person, as it happens with Gale. Furthermore, it could be said that the two male characters are polar opposites. It is also interesting to highlight the fact that Katniss uses the word 'prey' to define the look on Peeta's eyes. This account of Peeta's physical appearance is given right after his name is drawn during the Reaping. Thus, the word 'prey' could be easily associated with the fact that, as a tribute—that is, his status during the games—the future that lies ahead of him could not be more terrifying: Peeta will be either hunted, or killed. However, it also anticipates to some extent one of the roles Peeta plays in the story, that of President Snow's puppet against Katniss, an issue that I will discuss more in depth later on in this essay. Another remarkable trait of Peeta's physical built is his strength. During one dinner after they arrive at the Capitol to train for the Games, Katniss points out to Haymitch that she has "seen [him] lift hundred-pound bags of flour" (103), and that he is also a wrestler. Therefore, although at first glance he might not seem threatening, Peeta possesses one of the features that have been traditionally associated with masculinity—strength. All of these traits translate perfectly into the film adaptation with Josh Hutcherson playing Peeta's role. Hutcherson is considered to be fairly short for a



male,<sup>39</sup> but he has the same stocky build as his character, as well as broad shoulders, and muscled arms.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding Peeta's outfits, Collins seems to focus on those which link him to Katniss in some kind of manner, stressing the interdependence relationship that will develop between them throughout the trilogy. For instance, before the Games, the tributes from each district participate in a chariot parade as a way of presenting them to the audience. In this parade, Katniss and Peeta wear matching outfits, both in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games and in the Quarter Quell. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss describes her outfit as a "simple black unitard that covers [her] from ankle to neck" (77) which will be set on fire during the parade because the official custom designer Cinna wants "the audience to recognize you [Katniss] when you're in the arena" (77). A moment later, Peeta shows up "dressed in an identical costume" (78). It is interesting to see how Peeta's outfit seems to have been tailored to match Katniss's and not the other way around. It demonstrates how Katniss is also meant to be perceived as having the lead role, while Peeta follows her. Furthermore, later, in the Quarter Quell chariots parade, they wear matching costumes once again: "a fitted black jumpsuit that covers [Katniss, and thus Peeta as well] from the neck down" (*Catching* 232-33). As simple as the outfit may seem at first, Katniss later reveals that it has a button in the wrist that makes it glow, "first with soft golden light but gradually transforming to the orange-red of burning coal" (233). These clothing choices have one important thing in common: they are both non-gendered outfits. In having Katniss and Peeta wear exactly the same type of clothes, none of them is above the other—they are equal, even though the outfits might have been designed to favour Katniss. In the respective film adaptations, the producers

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<sup>39</sup> Both Jennifer Lawrence (Katniss) and Liam Hemsworth (Gale) are taller than Peeta which works on screen because it emphasises Peeta's non-threatening looks.

<sup>40</sup> See Figure 8 in Appendix

stay faithful to the costume description in *The Hunger Games* (2012). However, in the film version of *Catching Fire* (2013), the clothes keep the flaming aspect that Collins describe in the novel, but Katniss is wearing a dress while Peeta wears a sleeveless shirt and trousers.<sup>41</sup> Not only does this change contradict the philosophy of the trilogy, but it also perpetuates gendered fashion stereotypes.

Moving on to Peeta's special skills, he diverts from both Katniss and Gale. Whereas the other two characters excelled for their physical abilities, Peeta Mellark's talent is more artistic. For example, in his family's bakery, he is in charge of decorating cakes. In addition, he also has an aptitude for art—he is a skilled painter. His artistry even helps him stay alive during the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games. After suffering a leg injury—which eventually will result in the loss of the limb—he conceals himself in the bank of the river in the arena in such way that he is imperceptible: "It's the final word in camouflage. Forget chucking weights around. Peeta should have gone into his private session with the Gamemakers and paint himself into a tree" (*Hunger* 295). Moreover, after they return from the Games and they settle down, Peeta uses his baking skills to keep everyone in the Victor Village—the Everdeens, Haymitch and himself—well-fed and taken care of. Besides, he also applies his abilities to deal with the traumatic experiences suffered in the arena. We learn this in *Catching Fire*, when he tells Katniss that he too has nightmares about what happened in the Games, but uses painting as an outlet for his anxiety. This is how Katniss describes his paintings:

Peeta has painted the Games. Some you wouldn't get right away, if you hadn't been in the arena yourself. Water dripping through the cracks of our cave. The dry pond bed. A pair of hands, his own, digging for roots. Other any viewer would recognize [...] And me. I am everywhere. (60-61)

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<sup>41</sup> See Figure 9 in Appendix

When Katniss asks him if painting helps, he replies: “I don’t know. I think I’m a little less afraid of going to sleep at night, or I tell myself I am” (61). In this vein, when he is rescued from the Capitol and brought to District 13 in *Mockingjay*, we learn that his memories have been tampered with and altered, making his behaviour erratic and aggressive, especially towards Katniss. One way to keep him calm is by asking him to bake and decorate a wedding cake for Finnick Odair and his bride. Thus, Peeta’s abilities might not be as physical as Katniss’s and Gale’s are but he works with them to turn supposedly useless skills into something good and positive, especially for him. Moreover, the fact that he bakes to keep everyone fed turns him into a provider for those he loves, a nurturing role that he shares with Katniss. In the protagonist’s words: “I hunt. Peeta bakes” (*Catching* 17). This statement is really interesting as far as gender expectations are concerned. While the female goes out into the woods, the male stays home and prepares some baked goods. The dynamic between these two characters questions and challenges the validity of traditional gender roles in heterosexual relationships.

Unlike Katniss and Gale, Peeta seems to enjoy a very nice life in District 12. As the baker’s son, the Mellarks have never experience near starvation like the Everdeens or struggled to keep everyone fed like the Hawthornes. From an outsider’s point of view, Peeta’s life looks easy. He does not need to break the law to put food on the table, nor does he need to work in the mines after turning eighteen if he does not want to. However, there are traces that lead the readers to believe that Peeta has grown up in an abusive home. The first instance happens when he gives Katniss the loaves of bread that prevent her and her family from starving. Katniss hears Peeta’s mother yell at him: “Feed it to the pig, you stupid creature! Why not? No one decent will buy burned bread!” (*Hunger* 35). Had this been an isolated event, nothing could come out of it. After all,

those are words said in anger and, albeit unacceptable, they probably mean nothing. However, the parting words between Peeta and his mother before he leaves for the Games are significant. Peeta's mother tells him that Katniss might actually win the Games because "she is a survivor" (104). Thus, her last words to her son, who is most likely to die in a few weeks in the arena, are not of love or encouragement, but a clear message that she is not expecting him to come back to District 12. Lastly, during the Quarter Quell, Peeta has an honest conversation with Katniss about what is at stake for them. He is trying to convince her to stop protecting him in the arena because one of them is meant to die and it should be her. He says, "I don't want you forgetting how different our circumstances are. If you die, and I live, there is no life for me back at all in District 12" (*Catching* 394). This suggests that his relationship with his family is strained, to say the least, if such a relationship might exist. Moreover, throughout *Catching Fire* there is no mention of Peeta in the company of his family. Surprisingly enough, in the whole trilogy there is not one moment in which Peeta complains about his personal situation. I believe this demonstrates that Peeta possesses exceptional emotional fortitude, as well as a really positive attitude. He lives his life the best way he can even though his family could not care less about him. When he returns from the Hunger Games, he deals with his trauma by channelling negativity into his art in such a way that nobody notices how much the horrifying experiences have affected him. After being tortured by the Capitol, which leaves him in a terrible mental state, he decides to go back to District 12, and start a new life with Katniss once the Rebellion is over.

Some of Peeta's most remarkable traits are his charisma and ease with words. In the three novels, there are constant references to Peeta being easy to like, as well as witty. Katniss notes that "Peeta was always surrounded at school by a crowd of friends" (*Catching* 259). In both his pre-Games interviews with Caesar Flickerman he is said to

be captivating when he talks, and that he needs “nothing but his wits” (289) to make people love him. Even Gale, who dislikes him for the only reason that he gets all of Katniss’ attention, struggles to hate him because of his magnetic personality. Peeta is a boy who seems to know that saying the right thing at the right time has a deeper effect than a simple attack. As Katniss points out, “the ease with which he manipulates words is his greatest talent” (*Mockingjay* 166). The use of the verb ‘manipulate’ is interesting, for Peeta is indeed capable of being manipulative, albeit always well intentioned. For example, during the Hunger Games, the Gamemakers try to lead the tributes out of their hiding places by announcing that they will find something they need at the Cornucopia. At this point of the story, Katniss and Peeta have taken shelter in a cave by the river waiting for Peeta to get a little bit better from the wound in his leg. After the announcement, Katniss is convinced that she will find the medicine he needs at the Cornucopia and is decided to go. Peeta, in his want to save her from a clear trap, appeals to Katniss’s tendency to protect the helpless—and him in particular. He tells her: “I can follow you. At least part way. I may not make it to the Cornucopia, but if I’m yelling your name, I bet someone can find me. And then I’ll be dead for sure” (*Hunger* 321). Instead of arguing with her (something that Gale would have done), Peeta opts to use his words and touch one of Katniss’ weak spots to try to protect her.

Although being manipulative would usually be perceived as a negative trait, in this case, it does not influence the portrayal of Peeta as a good person, since he uses his talent for good purposes, especially when it comes to protecting Katniss. Another instance of Peeta’s manipulative skills is clear in how he changes the way Katniss is perceived by the audience of the Capitol during the Games. In his first interview in *The Hunger Games* he publicly confesses his love for her to make her look desirable so that she can get sponsors to help her during their time in the arena. Katniss stresses that “I

think of words and I think of Peeta. How people embrace everything he says. He could move a crowd into action, I bet, if he chose” (*Catching* 140). It is clear that Peeta possesses an incredible talent which could give him a lot of power. Nevertheless, the fact that he decides to only use his talent when necessary and for a good purpose speaks volumes about Peeta’s kind personality.

Another interesting feature about the character is that Peeta is constantly linked to the idea of kindness all throughout the trilogy. If there is one character that is intrinsically good, that is Peeta Mellark. Haymitch Abernathy refers to him as “always so reliably good” (*Catching* 75), and Katniss recognises that his “undying goodness” (379) is one of the reasons people tend to gravitate towards him, the protagonist included. He radiates a sensation of calmness that simply attracts people to him. In addition, unlike Katniss, he is neither afraid nor ashamed of appearing vulnerable. When they are leaving for the Capitol the first time, Katniss realizes that “Peeta Mellark has been obviously crying, and interestingly enough does not seem to be trying to cover it up” (*Hunger* 47). It would be easy to think that Peeta’s good nature and emotional openness would paint him as soft and delicate. However, he also shows that he has a temper. During the Victory Tour<sup>42</sup> in *Catching Fire*, he finds out that President Snow is putting pressure on Katniss to subdue the Districts by threatening her and her family. He gets upset because Katniss and Haymitch have been lying to him about the situation and he reacts as follows:

Suddenly he strikes out at a lamp that sits precariously on a crate and knocks it across the room, where it shatters against the floor. “This has to stop. Right now. This—this—this game you two play, where you tell each other secrets but

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<sup>42</sup> Every year the Victor of the Hunger Games travels around Panem to give a speech in favour of the Capitol.

keep them from me like I'm too inconsequential or stupid or weak to handle them." (75)

Thus, Peeta makes it clear that being good and open to vulnerability does not make him weak. This outburst demonstrates that there is another side of Peeta, that of a fighter, similar to that of Katniss's and Gale's. The difference is that Peeta does not fight with violence; he uses his kindness, wits and brain to do so. He fights against the Capitol by trying to protect Katniss in the Quarter Quell. He makes a stand before the Gamemakers during his private session in *Catching Fire* by painting a picture of Rue on the floor to remind them of the cruel and heartless nature of the Games. Most importantly, Peeta represents a break in the connection between vulnerability and cowardice. In fact, he proves his courage several times: a) when he agrees to eat the poisonous berries with Katniss during the Seventy-Fourth Games; b) when he volunteers to go to the Quarter Quell in Haymitch's place, sentencing himself to death; and c), especially, during his captivity in the Capitol in the first half of *Mockingjay*. At this time, President Snow decides to use propos featuring Peeta—who is being forced to do them by means of torture—to try and manipulate Katniss into convincing the rebels to surrender. They are usually in the form of interviews with Caesar Flickerman, but there are also times when the propo consists of Peeta talking to a camera and addressing Katniss directly. During one of them, he warns Katniss that the Capitol plans to bomb District 13 in just a few hours, thus saving everyone from a sure death. Needless to say, this is the ultimate demonstration that Peeta is just as brave as characters like Katniss or Gale, who show their courage by going into battle.

Finally, it is important to highlight the fact that Peeta is a born nurturer. He always tries to help people, regardless of who they are, if they need it. One clear example takes place in *The Hunger Games* when he and Katniss meet Haymitch for the

first time in the train on their way to the Capitol for the Games. Their drunkard mentor lashes out at them, and then leaves. Peeta's first instinct is to go and make sure he is fine. It is this side of his personality what eventually pulls Katniss towards him.

Peeta's and Katniss's relationship is nothing short of complications. Their love story starts off as a scam during the Seventy-Fourth Hunger Games to gain the audience's sympathy. In other words, it was a fake. The feelings, however, were very real. Peeta has been in love with Katniss for years, but he does not confess it until this interview with Caesar Flickerman. And Peeta's love for Katniss only wavers when the Capitol tampers his memories of hers and modifies them to make Peeta hate Katniss to the point of wanting her dead. "It isn't possible. For someone to make Peeta forget he loves me... no one could do that," she thinks in *Mockingjay* (203). His feelings are so deep and strong that even the protagonist does not believe he can feel anything but love for her. In fairness, Peeta constantly demonstrate his dedication to Katniss. After telling him that everything she did—the kisses, showing affection—in the Games was for show, he gets momentarily mad at Katniss. However, in *Catching Fire*, he apologises: "I wasn't fair to hold you to anything that happened in the arena" (58). His attitude towards her does not change in spite of the rejection. During the Victory Tour, Peeta finds out that Katniss has nightmares and starts spending the nights with her to help her keep calm when she wakes up. This excerpt illustrates the case:

Peeta, who spends much of the night roaming the train, hears me screaming [...] he climbs into my bed to hold me until I fall back to sleep [...] Every night I let him into my bed. We managed the darkness as we did in the arena, wrapped in each other's arms, guarding against the dangers that can descend at any moment. (*Catching* 82-83)



We have to bear in mind that Katniss and Peeta are teenagers and they naturally struggle to understand their feelings for each other. When you add on the fact that these two characters have to make a whole country believe that they are in love, things can get messy. This is especially the case with Katniss. One of the storylines of the trilogy is whether Katniss will end up choosing Peeta or Gale. Although Gale would be the most obvious choice (they have known each other forever, they rely on one another, and are best friends), it is Peeta the one she chooses in the end. The question is why: why him? What can Peeta offer her that Gale cannot? The answers are related to Peeta's nurturing personality. As already explained in chapter 1 of Part Two, Katniss has been carrying a heavy weight on her shoulders for a long time. She has been taking care of her family, but no one has done the same for her. That is, until Peeta enters into her life for good. He has already shown he cares for her when he gave her the loaves of bread but, as they enter the Games and throughout the entire trilogy, he will be Katniss's safe haven. She refers to him as being "as steady as a rock" (*Hunger* 81), and says that she "can feel the steadiness that Peeta brings into everything" (*Catching* 48). Peeta provides Katniss with much needed calmness and stability, and allows her to grow as a human being. In addition, he also represents a symbol of hope for the protagonist, a feeling that goes back—once again—to the bread he offered her. That was the first time Katniss felt like she and her family might actually survive, and it was thanks to Peeta. In the last chapter of *Mockingjay*, the protagonist explains the reasons why she chooses to stay with Peeta:

What I need is the dandelion<sup>43</sup> in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth [...] the promise that life can go on no matter how bad our loses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that. (436)

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<sup>43</sup> This refers to the day after Peeta offers her the bread. At school the next day, Katniss looked down and saw the first dandelion of the spring. When she looked up, she saw Peeta. From that moment on, she linked the two together as a symbol of hope. In her words: "To this day, I can never shake the connection

Hence, it is clear that Katniss decides to stay with Peeta because she *needs* him. In chapter 1 of Part Two, I argue that the protagonist is a strong and independent female character. However, strength and independency are not exclusive terms when a woman takes a partner. At the end of the story, Katniss has suffered so much that all she needs now is warmth and peace in her life. And that is exactly what Peeta offers her. My point here is that she does not choose *a man, per se*, to move on with her life and find happiness, but she chooses *what* Peeta has to offer her. This is to say, Katniss falls in love with Peeta not because he is a man, but because of what he adds to her life.

As I anticipated at the beginning of this chapter, Katniss's and Peeta's relationship challenges and questions traditional gender roles. In the book *The Panem Companion*, V. Arrow points out that "Katniss and Peeta are, essentially, each playing gender roles that would usually be assumed by the other in Western culture" (98). Katniss hunts while Peeta bakes. Peeta loves Katniss unconditionally, and waits for her to make up her mind. During both editions of the Hunger Games, Peeta is repeatedly rescued by her. In *Mockingjay*, he becomes the Capitol's puppet to cajole Katniss into stopping the Rebellion. For all intents and purposes, Peeta does indeed fill a role that has traditionally been filled by a female character. Furthermore, even in their post-war life, Peeta defies gender expectations when he begs Katniss to have children—not the other way around. On her part, Jessica Miller also deals with this topic and affirms that "the romance between Katniss and Peeta offers a welcome foil to the many romances in popular culture that hew [sic.] closely to the expectations of the stereotypical femininity and masculinity" (155). I also agree with Miller when she states that they represent "a partnership that helps us imagine an alternative to dominant romance narratives and a way of valuing both masculine and feminine roles, regardless of who fills them" (159).

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between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the dandelion that reminded me that I was not doomed" (*Hunger* 37).

Put in a nutshell, it could be said that Collins's novels offer young readers the opportunity to broaden their minds thanks to Katniss's and Peeta's special relationship, and learn about relationships under a different light from that of stereotypical Western gender standards.

One more question remains, though: if Peeta fills a feminine role, is he still masculine? I would argue that yes, his masculinity stays intact. As in Katniss's case, Peeta simply *performs* his gender differently than other male characters, namely Gale. His masculinity comes into question only because he does not show a dominant personality. Due to the fact that Peeta seems to be kind and soft, and he is really open about his feelings, Western readers tend to struggle with the idea that he is still a masculine character. However, it is crystal clear that Peeta exhibits traditional masculine traits such as self-confidence, strength (both physical and emotional), and he becomes the pillar of his family (in his case, it consists only of Katniss since his family died during the bombing in District 12). He even provides for the people he loves with his baking. This is not to say he does not possess traits that are considered feminine, because he does. These would include being a born nurturer and his fearlessness to be open about his emotions. As in Katniss's case, there is no trace that indicates that Peeta does not consider his gender identity as male. Therefore, if he thinks of himself as a man, the performance of his gender should be considered masculine. When Butler affirms that gender is constituted by stylised acts, she speaks of acts that have been culturally established and engraved in individuals by society itself. But if they have been ingrained they can also—in due time—be changed, thus transforming the way gender is perceived. A character like Peeta asks for a re-examination of what masculinity is and what it can be. In fact, by giving Peeta his happy ending, Suzanne Collins seems to indirectly imply that it can be extremely enriching and rewarding to allow men to step

outside of gender expectations and to explore, for lack of a better word, their feminine side.

To sum up, what Peeta has come to represent is a new type of masculinity that allows men more room for personal growth. By showing a blend of masculine and feminine traits, he opens the possibility for the development of a kind of masculinity that breaks traditional gender expectations. Like Katniss, Peeta is a statement: regardless of what they do, how they feel or how they choose to express their gender identity, a man only ceases to be a man if and when he chooses to.

## Conclusions

“And may the odds be *ever* in your favor”

*The Hunger Games* (22)

When I started my TFM, my purposes were to demonstrate, on the one hand, that the three main characters of *The Hunger Games* trilogy challenge stereotypical ideas about masculinity and femininity; and, on the other, that the texts defy and redefine traditional ideas about gender and gender roles. My analysis and reflections have led me to the following conclusions:

Firstly, that in the world of *The Hunger Games*, gender does not define masculinity or femininity. The character of Katniss Everdeen proves that being a woman does not imply that one should be feminine. By creating a female character with prominent masculine traits, Collins shows that performing one’s gender can be a choice instead of a cultural imposition. Katniss is a character that lives and acts in ways that have historically been reserved for men, and she does so successfully. Her gender identity—woman—does not dictate the way in which she decides to perform her gender. As for the male characters, the author uses the characters of Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark to compare and contrast two different types of masculinities: one stereotypical, and another that takes on more feminine traits. By doing so, Collins demonstrates that masculinity, like femininity, is not fixed or pre-established, but subject to be expressed freely.

Secondly, the way in which the characters perform their gender evidences that women and men do not need to behave a certain way to assert their gender identity. In fact, Collins criticises this idea by not giving Gale, the only character who falls into standard gendered patterns, a happy ending. She provides two revolutionary characters,

Katniss and Peeta, whose personalities and relationship question patriarchal ideas of gender and the legitimacy of gender roles. Katniss Everdeen is a female character that opens the door for women to express their femininity in whichever way they choose, even if it includes portraying traditionally male traits. Peeta Mellark does the same for men, for he is depicted as a boy who takes on a traditionally feminine role without jeopardizing his masculinity.

Before going into the arena the first time, Peeta tells Katniss that his only wish is to die as himself, not as the Capitol's pawn. What Suzanne Collins transmits in *The Hunger Games* trilogy is that being yourself, whoever that person might be, will always lead to a happily ever after. The road is not easy—it has bumps, curves and a thousand obstacles, and it will leave scars. But, like Katniss and Peeta, we will be able to make it through as long as we stay true to who we are, regardless of what history and society have taught us.

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