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Divergence of Genre and Gender:

A Study on Suzanne Collins'

The Hunger Games Trilogy

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“There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children’s book.”

- Phillip Pullman, Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech

Abstract

Suzanne Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games* is, thus far, one of the 21st century's most well known young adult series, and Collins has been praised for challenging things such as gender stereotypes and genre limitations. It has been labelled as a contemporary young adult dystopian novel, and has a strong female protagonist. I explored the idea of *The Hunger Games Trilogy* being both a dystopian novel, as well as a *Bildungsroman*, and addressed the characteristics of both genres in a quest of finding agreements and deviances. I researched the field for information about the two genres, and about gender in literature. I found that Collins' has broadened the idea of both the *Bildungsroman* and dystopian Novels, while at the same time experimenting with gender assumptions.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Introducing Dystopia.....	2
Dystopia in <i>The Hunger Games Trilogy</i>	4
Introducing <i>Bildungsroman</i>	8
The Possibility of <i>Bildungsroman</i>	10
Gender and <i>The Hunger Games Trilogy</i>	13
Conclusion.....	17
Works Cited.....	19

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to examine the ways in which *The Hunger Games Trilogy* is loyal to the classic concepts of *Bildungsroman* and dystopian novels, and in which ways it deviates. In addition to this, different constructions of gender within the trilogy will be examined. To avoid confusion, the series as a whole will be referred to as *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, while the individual books will be referred to as *The Hunger Games (HG)*, *Catching Fire (CF)* and *Mockingjay (MJ)*.

In the last few years there has been a dramatic increase in the publishing of post apocalyptic and young adult dystopian fiction. These books seem to reflect the worries of today's society, and to shine a light on the dangers of what the potential future might hold for us if we do not change our unsustainable lifestyles (Mackay Demerjian 1). Young adult dystopia has changed excessively in the last few years, alongside the change in our worries and our hopes for the future. These novels question global concerns such as climate change, identity, freedom, social structure, governmental power, and technology. A few examples of modern young adult dystopias that do this are Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now*, Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games Trilogy*.

The contemporary young adult dystopian novels are very much connected to another genre of fiction, the *Bildungsroman*. The classic *Bildungsroman* can be explained as a coming-of-age story, and is a very conservative genre. Here the innocent protagonist is on a journey from childhood to adulthood. This development often includes at least two love interests, one that is bad for him and one that is good. The *Bildungsroman* was originally reserved for men only. It was not until much later that the "female *Bildungsroman*" was introduced, and when it was it looked quite different. In terms of *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, different aspects from both the female *Bildungsroman* and the male *Bildungsroman* might be applicable.

It is easy to apply some of these aspects to *The Hunger Games*, 2008, and its two sequels *Catching Fire*, 2009, and *Mockingjay*, 2010, otherwise known as *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. The trilogy has attracted a lot different readers of very varying ages. The novels tell us about a young woman called Katniss Everdeen who starts her journey as one of the female tributes in the 74th annual Hunger Games, only to end her journey as the face of the rebellion which sets the nation free. As previously mentioned, contemporary dystopia seems to reflect our everyday worries. Some of the concerns mirrored in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* seem to be the effects

that reality-TV might have, war, environmental issues such as global warming and climate change, poverty, and political tyranny.

As well as experimenting with genre assumptions by breaking the “genre-boundaries”, I would like to argue that Collins is challenging stereotypical gender assumptions. She does this by having a female protagonist as the hero, while at the same time applying what might be associated as stereotypical “masculine traits” to her. Not only is this done to the protagonist, but other female characters as well, while many of the male characters have “female traits”. I claim that Collins not only challenges dystopia and the *Bildungsroman* by breaking genre boundaries, but through the gendering and gender representations of her characters. In order to examine and analyse *The Hunger Games Trilogy* through the aspects of *Bildungsroman* and dystopia, I will present the contemporary types of the two genres.

Introducing Dystopia

An important factor in understanding the trilogy is to take different genres into consideration, and it is not difficult to find dystopian elements in the trilogy. They are visible both in the structure of the series, and in different aspects of the plots as well as in the characters. The genre has, of course, changed over the course of the years that it has existed. This essay will take contemporary dystopia into consideration, and apply the genre to the books series in question. This will allow us to see in which ways the trilogy follows the genre limitations, and in which ways it deviates. I will also take into consideration that the series falls under the category of young adult fiction, which in some ways conflict with adult dystopia.

According to Ames, the abundance of young adult dystopian literature had a noteworthy increase after the September 11, 2001, acts of terrorism in the U.S (3). The aftermath of the attacks include, for example, “restrictions to travel and civil liberties, changes to political discourse, and two wars” (Eisenberg 468). Hintz and Ostry point out that this sort of fiction can “mirror and criticize reality, forcing readers to consider reality, ironically at the same time as they are escaping from it” (6). Scott Westerfeld, author of the *Uglies* series, concludes that teenagers are, at all times, surrounded and defined by rules; “[I]n response they construct their identities through necessary confrontations with authority, large and small [...] Imagining a world in which those authorities must be destroyed by any means necessary is one way of expanding that game” (para 6). One could claim that the rush of young adult dystopia is based on the fact that there is a need for teenagers to get some kind of an outlet for living in a time where there is little one can do to change society if you are young.

The inhabitants of dystopian societies live under the oppression of its Government. However, one of the greatest causes of the deep unhappiness of the inhabitants in dystopian societies is living in great poverty, without being able to do anything to improve their situation. So not only do the people live under the oppression of their political leaders, they also live in extreme need. These people are not free to think whatever they want, or to do whatever they want. The governmental control is achieved by creating division of the people. The government weakens the people by cutting them off from each other, and creating big social clefts. According to Zuckerman, the Government is also in total control over information and facts (para 6). This means that the public relies solely on information, such as news and history, from the government that has total control over them. By being the sole source of information, the government then has the ability to portray themselves in better light, as well as spread propaganda to further control the people.

Barton argues that the protagonist in modern dystopia is more concerned with “loss of individual identity” (8) rather than the idea of dying. Here the protagonist is struggling to keep a sense of self in a society where the people do not belong to themselves. One is supposed to follow rules blindly, and to ask no questions (8-9). In modern works, such as George Orwell’s *1984*, personal heritage and history is annihilated by the Government (Barton 9). Any attempts to defy the regime are punished, so if one does challenge it this person will be considered a hero. And a hero might just be able to spark a rebellion if the society is fragile enough.

Contemporary dystopia is evolved from the modern idea of the genre. In many of the dystopias, especially young adult ones, published in the 21st century, the protagonist is an adolescent and a girl, something that has not always been the case. She is strong minded, confident in who she is, and is on a quest for a purpose. She is, however, a reluctant hero who is “forced into confrontation with a world beyond her power and her will [...] forced to emerge as a warrior and a symbol of defiance” (Barton 13). Until the last few years, the protagonist would most probably not be a girl. In well-known contemporary young adult dystopias, such as Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* as well as Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, there are great social clefts in terms of poverty and wealth, as well as severe inequality and limited personal freedom. The reluctant hero rises from poverty, repression and misfortune, and inspires those who are around them (Barton 14). He or she is put in a situation where one either rises to the occasion, or doesn’t.

There seems to be a need for young adult female protagonists to “resist limitations of gender and age” (Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 3) in contemporary dystopia. Therefore

gender and gender limitations will be discussed later in the essay. By having a female protagonist, the author and character question and challenge what it actually means to be a woman. However, a beauty ideal still remains. In many young adult dystopias, girls are still encouraged to take advantage of either their beauty or their innocence. Barton, nonetheless, argues that the female protagonists, although extremely beautiful, are still in control of the power over themselves and the power of creating revolutions (p 15).

Dystopia in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

It is clear from the first pages of *The Hunger Games* that Panem is a country that is under the oppression of its President and its capital. All 12 districts are enclosed by a high chain-link fence that is supposed to always be electrified, though it rarely is (5). The only time the people of District 12 can be sure to have electricity is during the Hunger Games, and when the Capitol uses one of their most intimidating tactics, propaganda. The Hunger Games is a competition between the Districts, where two tributes from every district are chosen to fight for their lives in an arena where only one may survive. The official reason for the fences is that they are there to keep flesh-eaters out. However, it is strictly forbidden to wander outside the enclosures, which gives off the feeling that flesh-eaters are not the only reason why the fences are there.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss describes their living situation by commenting on District 12 as the place “[w]here you can starve to death in safety” (7), only to look around to make sure no one overheard her. Brost points out that “in the districts, the citizens of Panem are concerned about the *possibility* of surveillance” (95). This explains why Katniss, amongst others, always watch themselves to make sure they do not say anything bad about the Capitol. It seems as if the Capitol has the means of surveillance everywhere. When asked why she wrote the book, Collins’ answer that she got the idea when she was channel surfing between real life war footage with teenage soldiers and reality TV (Conversation 1). Reality TV has come to take a big part in our society, but entertainment comes at a price. TV shows such as *Big Brother*, *Jersey Shore* and *Ex on The Beach* all have surveillance in common. Another place where surveillance is very common is in dystopian literature.

I believe that many people are familiar with the idea of being watched by Big Brother, especially those who have read George Orwell’s *1984*. In dystopian societies surveillance is a way for governments to invade on the privacy of its citizens, as well as keeping them in place. At the exact moment that the children of Panem are chosen for the Hunger Games, the fight for survival begins. Following the reaping the tributes can take advantage of the constant

surveillance and turn it into an asset (Brost 94). From that moment, the way in which the tributes present themselves might win them support in the Capitol, which is valuable in the fight for survival. Another reoccurring theme in young adult dystopia seems to be the idea of running away and escaping authority by entering and taking refuge in the wilderness. Westerfeld argues that the wilderness, in this case, stands for an escape from tyranny and rules, but foremost it stands for freedom (para 9). On several occasions Katniss and her friend Gale contemplate escaping into the wilderness with their families and the ones they love (*HG* 10, *CF* 117, *MJ* 61). By escaping the Government, they would also escape rules that has condemned them to live in need and poverty.

There is no doubt about the fact that there is famine in most districts, including in District 12. There are some fortunate families who can afford food, but even the Peacekeepers, the country's law enforcement who are sent from the Capitol, are as hungry as everyone else (*HG* 6). The notion of "hunger" has a very prominent role in the series, both actual and metaphorical. Not only does it reflect on the actual hunger and poverty that loom in the districts, but also on the strongest weapon that the Capitol use to keep them in place. The name of the nation, *Panem*, has an important, literal, meaning, signifying the political system of the nation. According to the *OED* *panem et circenses* is Latin, and translates as *bread and circuses*, more generally meaning *food and entertainment*. If this is analysed in terms of the books it could mean that the Government provides the district, and the Capitol itself, with food and entertainment in exchange of the citizen's political rights: "[A]s long as [food and entertainment] kept rolling in, the Capitol could control its little empire" (*MJ* 261). In this case the entertainment provided by the capitol, the annual Hunger Games, is a constant reminder of the capitol's unhindered power over the districts (*HG* 21).

Twenty-four tributes, one girl and one boy from each district, are the annual competitors of the Hunger Games. The idea of sparing women and children does not apply in Panem. Gender makes no difference in this case. In her analysis of the book series, Pharr suggests that the contenders in the games are called *tributes* to remind the people of Panem of the eternal debt they owe the Capitol (222). The rule is that once you have won the games you are forever safe from having to enter them again. Pharr found that, except for punishing the people for the Dark Ages, the main idea of the Games is to make sure everyone knows that the independent action of a hero is not possible (222). The rule of immunity for victors is revoked when President Snow argues that the fight for survival displayed by Katniss and fellow district tribute Peeta in the first game was an act of rebellion: "as a reminder to the rebels that even the

strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol” (*CF* 208). This results in a “Quarter Quell”, where all tributes are reaped from the existing pool of victors. This is just one of the few ways that the Capitol, continuously, is parading their strength over its people, and over Katniss.

The Games are the only time that the Districts interact with each other, and other than that they know very little about one another. Henthorne argues that by isolating the districts and making it impossible for them to communicate, it is also impossible to start an uprising. As well as this, the districts know very little about what is happening in the rest of Panem (74). Therefore it is not until the last book, *Mockingjay*, that it becomes evident that district 13 still exists. District 13 has its own President, Alma Coin. It does not take long for Katniss to see that she and her district is as controlling as the Capitol itself. By displaying Katniss as the Mockingjay, and filming war propaganda, 13 is trying to control the rest of Panem (Henthorne 75).

In Lem and Hassel’s essay, “‘Killer’ Katniss and ‘Lover Boy’ Peeta”, it is argued that male protagonists are often given the opportunity and encouragement to “rebel and challenge authority” while female protagonists are given less opportunity to do so (120). In *The Hunger Games Trilogy* this does not apply. The books, which are 21st Century young adult dystopias, are true to the idea of the strong female protagonist. Katniss is given the same opportunity as boys often are, to change the society she lives in, and to be the face of a revolution. She is, however, not a stereotypically female character, and some might even argue that she is very much like a male protagonist. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy Katniss is a hunter and, in the end, a warrior. Peeta, on the other hand, has from that he was little been helping his parents in their bakery, and has acquired an artistic talent from decorating cakes. He never felt comfortable in the role of a soldier. More about gender roles in literature will be discussed further on in the essay. Katniss might not be, what we would call the “typical hero”. She is reluctant, and not very good with words. She is, to use Johanna’s, a fellow competitor and winner of the Hunger Games, words “quite hard to swallow” (*MJ* 257). She is, however, a typical modern dystopian hero. Like Barton described, she is a strong-minded young woman who is forced into the role of leader of a revolution (13).

Katniss is a reluctant hero, as well as a character who sometimes acts without thinking of the consequences. She expresses that she does not want to be a piece in the Capitol’s games, but she is later used as a symbol of rebellion although she is not certain that she wants to: “I was their Mockingjay long before I accepted the role” (*MJ* 107). Before she had decided to take

on the role, all of the rebels already saw her as the face of their cause. In the end she is left with few options but to become the Mockingjay. When she finally accepts the role, it is to save the people she loves. So although she accepts her destiny, she does so without “heartfelt passion” (Pharr 225). There is always someone who is trying to use her in some way. While President Coin wants Katniss to be the Mockingjay, she does not want her to have any actual power. So instead of letting her fight for her cause, Katniss is given the assignment of acting in war propaganda.

Barton’s theory about the dystopian hero’s fear of loss of individuality, as was introduced in the previous chapter, is very applicable to Collins’ trilogy. There is no doubt that the citizens of Panem are very influenced by the Government, both the Districts and the Capitol citizens themselves. The night before Katniss and Peeta enter the arena for the first time Peeta opens up to Katniss about his fear of the Capitol changing him, and not being able to die as himself, or as he expresses it “turn [him] into some kind of monster that [he is] not” (*HG* 171). He believes that he is “more than just a piece in their games” (*HG* 172). Though Katniss at first has difficulties understanding this, when Rue, a young girl from District 8 who has become Katniss’ ally, dies she remember his words. One could claim that this is when Katniss makes her first big act of rebellion. She does this by burying Rue in flowers to send a message to the Capitol, saying, “there is a part of every tribute they can’t own. That Rue was more than a piece in their games” (*HG* 286). This is also an opportunity to pay respect to all of the fallen tributes districts, as the Capitol will have to broadcast the death and the collection of the body. “I press the three middle fingers of my left hand against my lips and hold them out to her [Rue]” (*HG* 287). This is one of the acts that spark the fire of a revolution.

After the rebellion and the war, all Katniss wants to do is die. Along with losing her own identity and becoming something she never wanted to be, she has lost her sister, close friends, and, inevitably, her best friend Gale. Her last act of rebellion is, instead of killing Snow, to assassinate Coin. Katniss does not think that she has had the best interest of the Nation in mind. When she is reaching for the Nightlock, a pill that will end her life, Peeta’s hand is there to stop her (*MJ* 436). So in the end she does not get to make this final sacrifice. Saving others rather than herself has been a returning theme in all of the books: volunteering to take sister’s Prim’s place during the reaping; plotting with Haymitch, her mentor, to save Peeta; and to die for the greater good of Panem. Instead it is her sister who meets a heroic death, and Katniss is left to live in a world where suffering and memories of the past will always haunt her (Barnes 26-7). While the book ends on a more positive note where Peeta and Katniss have married, the future

of Panem still remains uncertain. As Plutarch, Head Gamemaker and commander of the rebel forces, says to Katniss after the war is over: “we’re in that sweet period where everyone agrees that our recent horrors should never be repeated [...] [w]e’re fickle, stupid beings with poor memories and a great gift for self-destruction” (*MJ* 442). This seems to reflect upon what the world is facing today. I claim that Collins is trying to plant a seed in us readers, a moral lecture. By indicating that the “sweet period” they are in has occurred before, Collins is asking us to learn from our mistakes, and to remember our past.

Introducing *Bildungsroman*

As mentioned in the introduction, young adult dystopia is often blended with the coming-of-age novel, which features suffering and a loss of innocence (Hintz and Ostry 9). The genre of *Bildungsroman* is thus not uncommon in contemporary dystopia. This genre has changed and evolved immensely over the years, especially when dealing with female protagonists as we are now. To be able to start considering *The Hunger Games Trilogy* as a part of this genre we must understand these differences.

According to Buckley, the *Bildungsroman* is “a novel of all-around development” (13). The man responsible for the popularity of the genre is William Dilthey who in 1870 wrote a biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher. The term, and the idea, however, is older than that. It is believed that it was suggested by Friedrich von Blanckenburg in 1774, but was not coined until 1820 by Karl von Morgenstern (Fraiman 3). The genre is not always referred to as *Bildungsroman* but has, over the years, acquired a few other names, such as “novel of formation”, “novel of development”, “coming-of-age story” and “apprentice novel”. Wojcik-Andrews identifies Jerome Buckley’s study of the *Bildungsroman* as the “theoretical starting point” (2) of the genre. It is evident in Buckley’s work that the genre is very much male centred. Buckley refers to the individual as “he” throughout his study, and in addition to that, there seems to be too many social restrictions for a story about a girl to be classed as a *Bildungsroman*. According to Fraiman, “the [*Bildungsroman*] has been defined in terms of works by, about, and appealing to men” (3). Looking at the broadest definitions of the coming-of-age stories shows us that the social options were only available for men, which indicates that the genre is very conservative.

The prototypical coming-of-age story will take the male protagonist on a journey into adulthood, as well as a literal journey into the world. The progress is that from early childhood and through the protagonist’s teenage years (Buckley 14). Wojcik-Andrews claims that the

early childhood can either be depicted by the narration being started there, or if the protagonist offers some childhood memories. He further argues that the reason for doing this is to base the story in stability (128-9). Frieden claims that the protagonist must leave his country home and life behind, “pull away from strong family ties” (304) and journey into a life of errors and risks, entering an urban city. As mentioned in the introduction, the protagonists will not only find themselves in an urban society, but will also find love. He will, preferably, have two love affairs; one that is bad for him, and one that is good. The end of his journey takes place when he has found love and a profession, and when he has at last adapted to the social structure (Frieden 304) He has by then “left if adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity” (Buckley 18). The development of the hero in the male *Bildungsroman* is linear, from child to adult (Wojcik-Andrews 128).

It is very common that the protagonist is an orphan, or has at least lost the presence of a father, or a father figure. One could argue that that is the reason to why the protagonist must leave his home, to find a substitute parent or a mentor of some kind. As mentioned before, the term *Bildungsroman* is not the only name that is common for these books, but also that of “apprentice-novel”. According to the OED, *apprentice* means “a learner of craft”. The apprentice is someone who has a mentor, or an employer, to guide and instruct him. The mentor is necessary for the apprentice.

The female novel of development thus differs from what we would call the Classic *Bildungsroman*. In the first description of the genre there was no place for a female protagonist, as women would not be considered, or in fact able to, make these journeys that the genre advocates. According to Wojcik-Andrews, the idea of a female protagonist, as well as female writers, is missing in Buckley’s work *Season of Youth* (4). Abel, Hirsch, and Langland argue that the actual idea of development consists of many different contributing factors such as “class, history, and gender”(4). They also claim that there is a unique version of the genre, this being the female *Bildungsroman* (4-5).

In *The Voyage in Fictions of Female Development* it is argued that in the same way as fathers and sons have a special bond, as described by Buckley, it is the same for daughters but with their mothers (10). The idea of the mentor is a bit more problematic for the female protagonist. Fraiman suggests that the heroine does not have a role model in her mother, either because she is deceased or because she is flawed. As well as not having a maternal role model she also lacks in a mentor. If she does have a mentor, it is usually a man who seems to shape her into a good wife for himself (6).

Unlike the male protagonist, the classic female protagonist seems to avoid love. So while boys are expected to have at least two love interests on his journey, girls should disassociate themselves from romance. She is to “see the world while avoiding violation by the world’s gaze” (Fraiman 7). The female protagonist is in a constant battle between expressing and suppressing sexuality (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 12). According to Wojcik-Andrews, the female protagonist’s journey is most commonly that of being single, and to then settle down in a heterosexual marriage where she will have children (22). This means that while the male *Bildungsroman* is linear in its development, female *Bildungsroman* should always end in marriage, meaning it is more of a circular development (Wojcik-Andrews 77).

The idea of the classic *Bildungsroman* is further tested when the genre is placed in a dystopian setting. Basu, Broad, and Hintz argue that this is done by adding, for example, governmental issues, repression, or environmental disasters into the life of a protagonist who is trying to achieve adulthood (7). By setting the *Bildungsroman* in a dystopian society, that is, one enduring environmental disasters, political oppression, and such, the genre is further broadened. As the characters become aware of their dystopian societies the children and adolescents are forced to “fall from innocence and achieve maturity” (Basu, Broad, and Hintz 7).

The Possibility of *Bildungsroman* in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

For a novel to fall under the category of *Bildungsroman* it does not have to follow the exact narrative structure of the genre, but will have most of the aspects in the novel. To brand *The Hunger Games Trilogy* as a novel of development is not entirely uncomplicated, both because it does not exactly follow the rules of the *Bildungsroman*, and because it seems to be a mix of both the male and the female concept of the genre. However, in the sense of transformation, the series is not lacking. Throughout the trilogy we get to see Katniss’ journey from girl to woman, as well as seeing a child whom has been sent for slaughter, survive and become the symbol of a revolution.

The prototypical *Bildungsroman* follows the protagonist from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. When we first meet Katniss she is 16 years old and has taken on all parental responsibilities in her household. Through some flashbacks we get to see some of Katniss’ childhood, but only short fragments. I would like to claim that her journey into adulthood starts at the same time as the death of her father. Katniss is not an orphan, but we soon find out that she might as well have been. The first book stays very true to Fraiman’s idea

about the lack of a role model in a flawed mother. After a terrible mining accident, which left Katniss and her younger sister Prim fatherless, their mother became “blank and unreachable, while her children turned to skin and bones” (*HG* 10). The family, which is from a very poor part of the already poor district, is on the verge of starvation when Katniss is 11 years old. As the death of her father left her mother in deep depression, there is no way for the family to earn money, and it becomes evident for Katniss that she will have to be the sole provider for the family.

Buckley argued that there is a special bond between a father and his son, and that a mother has a special bond with her daughter. So in one way *The Hunger Games Trilogy* deviates from this, in the sense of the female *Bildungsroman*. It is, however, very true to the male *Bildungsroman*, had she been a boy. When Katniss was young her father would take her into the woods and teach her archery. It seems as if they had a special bond, in the sense that they were very alike. Prim, however, is very much like her mother. They have the same hand for mending those who are sick, and extreme empathy with other people.

The rules of Panem have made it impossible for Katniss ever to leave her district. But as mentioned, the protagonist of a coming-of-age story must go on a journey to be able to reach adulthood. Katniss’ literal journey starts when she volunteers to take her sister’s place as tribute, and leaves for the Capitol (*HG* 26). She leaves her country home and enters the city. After the second games, and the bombing of District 12, Katniss, her family, and the rest of the survivors of 12 move to District 13. Although free from the governmental rules of the Capitol, 13 is also very strict about not leaving the district. According to Frieden, the protagonist is supposed to uproot themselves from the family. Katniss is involuntarily uprooted, on several occasions, but always returns to them.

Katniss has several mentors over the course of the different books. The most self explanatory one is Haymitch, the actual mentor of Katniss and Peeta in the games. In the sense of staying true to the genre, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* definitely stays true to the female *Bildungsroman* in this aspect. Haymitch and Katniss are very similar in many senses. They both become consumed by their pain and have a hard time allowing themselves to love others out of fear that they will be taken away from them. They also have a special way of always knowing what the other one is thinking. But Haymitch is a very difficult mentor. He is always drunk, and he seems to have given up on life. Over the course of the trilogy we get to meet a different Haymitch who plays a big part in the planning and execution of the rebellion, but in

the end he always returns to drinking. Peeta is, in one way, a mentor to Katniss as well. He teaches her to be humble, and to be empathetic.

Katniss has two love affairs in the series, Gale and Peeta. Gale, who is a childhood friend to Katniss and a fellow hunter, expresses his love for her in the first pages of the books, though not in many words. Katniss, however, makes it clear to us that she has no such feelings for him. Their relationship is quite complicated, where one is more keen on a future together than the other. It gets further complicated when Peeta and Katniss portray themselves as star-crossed lovers in the Capitol to survive. Peeta, like Gale, is in love with Katniss, but without her knowing it. Through all of the books Katniss seems to be unsure about how she feels for him, as well as for Gale, even though we as readers get clues to her loving them both. In the end Katniss choose Peeta, who is the one that complements her. Katniss explains her decision in the end of the book, and it is true to Buckley's idea of romance in *Bildungsroman*.

“[W]hat I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that” (MJ 453).

Katniss tries to avoid love at all costs, and is confused as to why Peeta and Gale compete for her affection. She believes that she “can survive just fine without either of them” (MJ 386). It might be due to the fact that there is so much going on around them, that Katniss does not see the idea of trying to have a romantic relationship with either of them. She has also made it clear from the beginning that she is not interested in getting married and having babies, as this is one of the few things they get to decide for themselves. By not having children, the people of Panem never have to see their own children fight in the Games (HG 378-9).

When Katniss' journey is finished only one year has gone by, and she is 17 years old, but has long since had to become an adult. A few years after the rebellion Katniss and Peeta get married and have two children. They seem to have chosen to take a step back from the politics and the building up of a new Panem. According to Abel, Hirsch and Langland, 19th-century protagonists of female development stories would often end up marrying and taking on a nurturing role “rather than to take a more active part in shaping of society (7). This is easily applied to the end of Katniss' story.

The Hunger Games books deviate from the traditions of both the male and female *Bildungsroman*. Henthorne argues that “[Katniss] changes the world as much as it changes her”

(35). Not only does she not adapt to society as it is, but she also seems to grow down instead of grow up. As a child Katniss is extremely independent, provides for herself and her family, and is a very capable young woman. But as time passes she is less sure of herself, is not allowed to be independent, and is “eventually becoming passive to the point that she no longer eats or cleans herself” (Henthorne 35). In the end of the story she has found herself somewhat, but she has also committed to marriage and children, although this was the one thing she was most certain of never having, nor wanting. I think that, by getting married, Katniss allows us readers to accept that the Games belong to the past, and that there is a brighter future ahead.

In the same ways that Katniss changes her dystopian society as much as it changes her, Collins changes the classic characteristics of the genre by sometimes conforming to them, and by sometimes overthrowing them. This is done by, for example, having a female protagonist who is not a stereotypical girl. It is possible to place her in both the traditional *Bildungsroman* and the female *Bildungsroman*, but perhaps in different stages of her development. In the beginning of the trilogy she is more of a typical male protagonist, in the eyes of the genre, while the ending of the books leaves her in the female *Bildungsroman*. By doing this the concept of the genre is broadened, and seems much more modern than the conservative starting point of the genre. I believe that writing a modern book according to the classic *Bildungsroman* would seem very retrogressive, seeing as society has developed greatly in the last two hundred years.

Gender in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

It could be argued that we as a society depend on stereotypes, due to the fact that we in that way can categorize people into different groups. This could be done by, for example, cultural profiling, racial profiling and gender profiling. So what happens, in the literary world, when we meet a protagonist who seems to break away from the norms that society has built up? This section will consider different ideas about gender, such as stereotypes, gender performance and gender flipping.

In the 1950s it was scientifically and theoretically acknowledged that there is a difference between sex and gender (Henthorne 45). In her book about race, class and gender, Lorber argues that our sex is determined by the genitalia we are born with, whilst gender is the role that we are given and taught through, for example, name, clothing and how we are treated (277). In toy stores as well as in toy commercials we can see this gender division. Whilst in commercial for boys we often see them running around outdoors, girls seem to be more

confined inside and often in the kitchen (Lem and Hassel 118). Lem and Hassel thus argue that by doing this girls are “steered away from risk taking and adventure filled paths” at the same time as the depiction of boys in toy commercials “do not provide encouragement to explore creative talents in the kitchen or other domestic spheres” (119). So is gender innate or is it constructed? It would seem as if the latter is more probable. Lorber points out that from the moment the sex of a child is discovered, that child is treated in a special way, either as a boy or girl. (277). The child is then shaped into its gender by the way in which we, for example, talk to it, what we name it, and how we treat it. Lorber further suggests that “as soon as [children] can talk, they start to refer to themselves as members of their gender” (277), as well as practicing their constructed gender roles.

The same has been the case when we embark on literature, as with toys and toys commercials. It is a fact that there have been, and still are, girls’ books and boys’ books. Lem and Hassel quote a 1986 essay by Elizabeth Segel titled “As the Twig is Bent ...”, which refers to girls’ books as focusing on the “female domination on the domestic world” and typical boys’ books as “an escape from domesticity” (120). So where do we place *The Hunger Games Trilogy* in this description? There has definitely been a change in children’s and young adult’s literature since 1986, but having a female protagonist in a male dominated genre, meant for readers of all genders are still quite unusual. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy we have a female protagonist living in a male dominated literary genre, dystopia, and the books seems to appeal to wide groups of both male and female readers. Brendler argues that since gender is taught we can cross gender boundaries when it suits us (226). We can then, for example, act in a way that is more expected from boys if we find ourselves in a situation where this would favour us.

As mentioned before, stereotyping of people is commonplace. There are ethnicity stereotypes and there are gender stereotypes. According to Lem and Hassel, some masculine stereotypical traits seem to be control, strength, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and “control over any emotion that interferes with other core values” (122). By contrast, stereotypical female traits include, for example. “cooperation, mutuality, sharing, compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking” (Lem and Hassel 122). Katniss is an, undeniably, strong character who sometimes seems to be female-gendered and male-coded. Perhaps even a male hero in a girl’s body. We get to meet a protagonist who is ever changing. The stereotypical maternal feelings that are often associated with female characters, such as warmth and kindness, do not really apply to

Katniss. Although she is protective of people such as Prim and Peeta, her protectiveness is, stereotypically, more paternal and masculine, rather than maternal. She will go to any measures to keep her loved ones alive, and is strong and forceful in doing so (Miller 147). This is displayed in the first pages of the books when Katniss is remembering how she tried to drown the household's cat, as "the last thing [she] needed was another mouth to feed" (*HG* 4). She knows that it is her task to keep the family fed.

Collins further deviated from stereotypical norms when she gives Finnick Odair the role of a person who is sold by the President to rich citizens and politicians in the Capitol, a role usually kept in reserve for women (*MJ* 198). Finnick, like Katniss, is a very complex character. In terms of anger toward the Capitol, killer instincts, the need to protect, and loyalty, he is very much like our female protagonist. But unlike Katniss he has a much closer relationship with his own emotions. When Katniss chooses anger, he has the ability to choose sadness. When some of the tributes are rescued from the Quarter Quell by District 13, Finnick mourns that he was not able to rescue Peeta and Johanna. He is asking Katniss for forgiveness, and she thinks to herself: "I can hear him weeping but I don't care" (*CF* 468). To accept that it is okay to show emotions like sadness does not come easily for Katniss, but is something that both Finnick and Peeta teach her throughout the trilogy.

Judith Butler argues that gender is a performative act. She claims that "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" and that "*appearance of substance* is [...] a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (179). Katniss is a very complex character with many different sides to her, and it is sometimes difficult to know when she is genuine and when she is acting. She probably does not know for herself most of the time. Katniss balances both traditionally male characteristics with traditionally female characteristics. She is resourceful, independent, strong, stubborn, empathetic, vulnerable, and has an ability to distance herself from emotions. I would like to claim that the one personality trait that follows her, unyieldingly, through the whole series is that she is a survivor.

Many different critics have claimed that Katniss is, without a doubt, a ground breaking and important character in contemporary young adult literature, or as Lewit calls her "a heroine for the ages" (para 8). In all three books, people of the Capitol, and later District 13, are trying to transform Katniss, and to make her perform. As Cinna is trying to save Katniss from the

Capitol, he dresses her in girly clothes and gets her to act innocent. She is not the only one being objectified. All of the tributes in *The Hunger Games* are given an image. The girl from District 1 is objectified as a sex object, “looking provocative in a see-through gold gown [...] she’s sexy all the way” (*HG* 151). One boy is a “ruthless killing machine”, one girl is “sly and elusive” and little Rue is an innocent young girl with a “gossamer gown complete with wings” (*HG* 152).

After the Quarter Quell, and Districts 13’s rescue mission, Katniss has now gone from being “The girl on fire” to being the Mockingjay, and the difference between the two is, according to Henthorne, not so great (75). The gendering and making of Katniss in the Capitol follows her to 13. She is managed by other people who teach her to be someone that she might not really be. As Cinna points out in the first book, the only time the people believe Katniss is when she is herself (*HG* 148). Gale points out the same thing in *Mockingjay* when they are trying to have Katniss perform the part of the Mockingjay. The only time she is and was convincing is when “No one told her what to do or say” (*MJ* 89).

The gendering of the adults in the series is quite interesting. While characters like Katniss, Peeta, Finnick and Johanna break gender binaries, no adults do. Katniss’ mother is described as the housewife, and her father as the breadwinner. In the first book Katniss does not have any female mentors to speak of. There are differences in how the adult female and male characters are described as good or bad. When Katniss remembers her father he is described as strong, kind, and the one who shaped her into who she is. She believes that all of her positive traits were inherited from him. Katniss is constantly comparing her parents, one as strong and one as weak. In *The Hunger Games*, Mrs Everdeen is depicted as weak and someone who disappeared when they needed her the most. However, she does evolve and change for the better. When she is given a second chance at being the mother that Katniss and Prim need her to be, she prospers. Two other adults whom Katniss has in her closest circle of acquaintances are Haymitch and Effie. Effie is a socialite who cares for little more than beauty and appearance, and although she means well she is quite useless in the sense of keeping Katniss and Peeta alive. Haymitch is a stereotypical drunken man. He, however, turns out to be the reason why Peeta and Katniss survive not just one, but two Hunger Games. Although flawed, he is a mentor to Katniss.

As mentioned before, Butler claims that gender is a performance. Although Katniss might not be a stereotypical girl, she is able to perform a female-coded gender when she has to. In the first book this is done by wearing “girly” clothes, and acting as Peeta’s star-crossed lover. She

is made to wear dresses, make-up and describes herself as a “silly girl spinning in a sparkling dress. Giggling” (HG 165). At first, the acting is simply to win sympathy from the Capitol citizens, as well as to become more likeable. She constantly has to remind herself to act like a girl in love. Miller argues that “[a]ll of those things Katniss does to convince the world she’s in love with Peeta don’t just express her femininity; they also *constitute* it” (156). After the first games, the act needs to be upheld, as a matter of survival. The show must go on. So who is Katniss? Miller argues that Katniss does whatever it takes to survive, and does not “meekly accept her fate” (147). She is a survivor, and we get to see that part of her very early in the first book when she remembers her father’s death and the realization that it was now her job to keep her family together by illegal hunting and trading (HG 6, 10).

Conclusion

Along with the two more prominent genres of dystopia and *Bildungsroman*, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* cover genres like Survivor Stories, young adult Romance Novels, and Epics. I have discussed some common aspects of contemporary dystopia, such as the reluctant hero, the female protagonist, poverty, propaganda, objectification and social worries. Social criticism and social worries are, as mentioned, some of the most prominent foundations on which the genre of young adult dystopia is built. Except for the idea of the contemporary female protagonist being in total control and power over herself, I would claim that the series stays true to the contemporary idea of the genre.

The idea of the *Bildungsroman* is somewhat more difficult. If one were to pick and choose from the different ideas of the conservative *Bildungsroman*, as well as the female *Bildungsroman*, it would be easier to apply the genre to the books. By taking into consideration Gender in the trilogy, even more complexities in the books are prominent. Because Katniss is, as some might say, a male-coded woman, it complicates the idea of the *Bildungsroman*. In the end, she has a strong bond with her mother, and her mother is less “flawed”. But more importantly, she has an extremely strong bond with her father when he is alive, which would deviate both from the female *Bildungsroman* and the male *Bildungsroman*, simply because of her gender. Also, the books deviate from the idea of the *Bildungsroman* following the protagonist from early childhood into adulthood. Literally, Katniss is not an adult when her journey is over, but hardship and loss has made her one.

A question that I hope this essay will raise is whether or not it is important to focus so much on the gender of people, or if we should perhaps focus on the individual instead? Should

we really, in the 21st century, be expected to raise our eyebrows to the fact that there is a strong, capable young female protagonist? Does there need to be a male *Bildungsroman* and a female *Bildungsroman*? Is it important to describe people as male-coded and female-coded? An important thing that the books achieve is that they make us aware of social problems that we live with today, for example, the uncertainties of personal freedom, when many powerful world leaders seek to divide people according to race, religion and sexuality. Mackay Demerjian argues that “[d]ystopian works reflect society’s worries” (1), and for *The Hunger Games Trilogy* this certainly seems true.

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