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## Trabajo Fin de Grado

### **A Change of Taste?**

Analysing the Changes in Children's and Young Adults' Literature by Comparing C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and S. Collins's *The Hunger Games*

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## **Abstract – Resumen**

### **A Change of Taste?**

When children grow up, parents usually wish their sons and daughters to get into the habit of reading. The main problem the parents face, is, that the books they liked to read when they were young and thus recommend to their children are often considered by the young readers as boring and dry. The reason may lie in the fact that many of the older books were either intended for boys, dealing with adventure and depicting a strong male hero, or for girls, describing a female world with household chores and activities proper for women. These are stereotypes present-day young readers cannot identify with. But there are exceptions to these stereotypes, and some older books can be as entertaining and challenging as contemporary books. The question is, where the recipe lies in an older book so that it might be equally read and enjoyed by young readers today as they do with contemporary literature. In order to find a similar pattern in those books, this essay compares C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008). The focus will lie on the way gender and the hero are depicted in the books, looking for similarities that might be attractive to the young contemporary reader and trying to show the discrepancy between the stereotypes defended in older children's and young adult's literature and the characters we can find in the two books presented in this essay.

### **¿Un Cambio de Gusto?**

Cuando los niños y las niñas crecen, los padres normalmente desean que sus hijos e hijas se inicien en el hábito de la lectura. Muchos padres se sorprenden cuando sus hijos e hijas no muestran interés por estos libros porque los consideran aburridos. La razón podría ser que muchos de estos libros más antiguos estaban dedicados o bien a chicos y éstos describían aventuras con un héroe fuerte y poderoso o bien a chicas y representaban la vida de la mujer en el entorno de la casa y el comportamiento correcto para una futura señora. Los jóvenes de hoy en día no se identifican con estos estereotipos. Pero hay excepciones a los estereotipos y hay libros más antiguos que pueden ser igual de entretenidos y fascinantes que algunos libros contemporáneos. La cuestión es, si hay un patrón común entre libros antiguos y libros contemporáneos para que puedan ser igualmente disfrutados por los lectores jóvenes de hoy en día. Para encontrar un patrón común, este ensayo compara *El león, la bruja y el armario* de C.S. Lewis (1950) con *Los juegos del hambre* de Suzanne Collins (2008). La atención se centrará en el tratamiento del género y del héroe en los dos libros buscando las semejanzas que puedan hacer atractivos los libros para los lectores jóvenes modernos. Además analizaré las discrepancias entre los estereotipos sostenidos en los libros más antiguos y los caracteres que podemos encontrar en los dos libros presentados en este ensayo.

## Introduction

When present-day parents were young, their parents offered them a wide range of books, mostly divided into books for boys and books for girls, adventure or love story, Bildungsroman or science fiction – depending on their gender and what their parents wanted them to read. Being parents themselves they often do as their parents did, they offer their children books to read, depending on their age and gender. Sometimes they offer them the same books they used to find interesting when they were the age of their children – and the children think the books boring. What has changed in the few decades between the parent's childhood and today? And how can it be that books that were already well read before today's parents were children are still cherished by their children? Is there a secret recipe in certain books making them irresistible for readers? And what is the attraction in contemporary literature for children and young adults? Is there probably a certain link between previous and more current best sellers?

In my essay I aim to point out the similarities and the differences between older and contemporary literature by analysing the second book in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), and the first book of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *The Hunger Games* (2008), by Suzanne Collins<sup>1</sup>. In the first part of my essay I will give a short overview of children's and young adult's literature since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then I will focus on the acceptance by the readers especially in the United States of America, before I introduce the books and their authors, taking into consideration the historical background that influenced the authors. Next, I will illustrate the genres represented in the books. The second part of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was the first book written and published by Lewis, and though it is now often placed second in the Narnia Chronicles according to Narnia time, many critics propose that it should be read first according to its publication (Sherman 1138).

my essay will be dedicated to the style represented in the books, setting these into context with the time of writing and the interests of the readers, and question why the books are so appealing to the readers and thus different to children's and young adults' literature of the past. Here, I will focus mainly on the question of gender by opposing the four main characters in the two works and the role of the hero, analysing especially the two main female characters in the books.

### **The Books in Context**

In the course of education, adults will try to show their children ways to fit into the social fabric of our society once they are adults. One of the means to do so is by the way of language which also includes deciding on the literature a child should read (Knowles & Malmkjær 43-44). At the beginning of children's and young adults' literature as a genre, tales were favoured that showed the reward of good and the punishment of bad behaviour, depending on the choice a character would make. Then, authors started to concentrate on the gender of the young reader: boys were to read adventure stories, while girls were given books advocating household and family issues (Pharr & Clark 5).

When the paperback industry started to flourish after World War II, children and young adults were able to purchase low-price books that were seen, however, as not that appropriate by the educational system (Pharr & Clark 6). Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was then considered as dealing with topics unacceptable for children (Knowles & Malmkjær 25). As Daniel Kirkpatrick states: "These books ran directly across a number of attitudes and taboos in children's fiction. [...] They contained violence, pain and death" (769).

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a change in literature when the moral lesson of previous times was combined with a thrilling narrative, though it was not seen as being as educational as previous writings (Knowles & Malmkjær 25). Today, the variety of books for young adults is staggering: Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark claim that online-bookstores like amazon.com at present offer over 175,000 novels for young adult readers, divided in subgenres like ‘literature & fiction’, ‘love & romance’ or ‘fantasy’ (1). And there are a good number of books dating back as far as to the first half of the century that are still sold on a regular basis.

Though readers in the USA have been interested in Lewis’ books since the 1950s (Derrick 109), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* had the most stunning success after the Walt Disney movie’s release in December 2005 (Derrick 123). The *New York Times* maintained the paperback version of the book in February 2006 on second position right after the Narnia Series, showing that it already had been on the list for 32 weeks (New York Times, 2006). The US-American web-site *Ranker* lists the book on the sixth position of its list of “Best Selling Books of All Times” (Ranker, 2016). Leland Ryken and Marjorie Lamp Mead explain that the book is not only interesting for children, but it is also widely read by adults who are more able to understand the nuances in the story (9).

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* four siblings, Peter, Susan, Edward and Lucy Pevensie, are sent to the countryside in order to escape the bombing of World War II London. In the country home of the shrewd Professor Kirke they discover a passage to the parallel world of Narnia by stepping through an old wardrobe. They find a fantastic realm held in a firm hold by the evil White Witch who has cast eternal winter on the land. Their destiny is to find Aslan, the all-powerful creator and guardian of

Narnia, fight and defeat the witch, fulfil the legend to free Narnia and to become kings and queens of Narnia, before they return to their own world.

After having taken part in World War I, Lewis started his teaching career in Oxford, soon becoming a fellow of Magdalen College for English Language and Literature in Oxford where he stayed until 1954. In 1933 a circle of friends in the Magdalen College began to meet regularly, calling themselves “the Inklings”. Lewis started then his friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien, a co-member of “the Inklings”, who encouraged him to write *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C.S. Lewis Foundation, 2016). When some schoolgirls were sent to C.S. Lewis in Oxford to escape the bombing of London in World War II, he began to make sketches for a possible story, taking into account his young visitors and the picture of a faun which he remembered from his youth: the faun walked with parcels and an umbrella under his arm through a snowy forest. But it took him until 1948 to pick up his ideas again and to write what was to be his first real success. In 1950, Geoffrey Bles Publishers released *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which was very soon also published in the USA by McMillan (Brown 11-12).

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* can be classified as belonging to several genres. The existence of speaking animals that help the children might be an indication for a fairy story or even a myth, but the desolate world of Narnia and the need to survive there represents more a dystopia, an action adventure or even a survivor story. At the beginning of the story, the children arrive without any intention to take part in the liberation of Narnia from the rule of the White Witch. Their involvement with the history of Narnia might be seen in this context as part of a Bildungsroman, a fantasy or even a romance (Ryken & Mead 105). This variety of possibilities might be what attracts so many different readers until today.

*The Hunger Games* was published in 2008, by 2012 the movie was released and by 2013 the book had turned into a bestseller. In June 2013, the *New York Times* held *The Hunger Games* on first position on their “Children’s Series Best Sellers List”, showing it for already 143 weeks on the list (New York Times, 2013). As Tom Henthorne points out, the book was not only widely read, but is now also studied in educational institutions up to the universities in the United States of America (26), thus being attractive to readers of all ages. He further states that “large numbers of adults did indeed begin turning to children’s books to find stories worth reading and talking about” (42).

*The Hunger Games* tells the story of Katniss Everdeen who is living in a post-apocalyptic North America. The country is divided into twelve districts and ruled by the Capitol that reigns mercilessly over the rest of the country, enforcing a regime of control and punishment. Each year, the Capitol forces 24 tributes between twelve and eighteen years, one girl and one boy from each district, to fight for their lives in a specially built arena – and only one might survive and win. When her younger sister Primrose is chosen as tribute, Katniss steps in and offers herself as tribute. She has to face the hypocrisy in the Capitol and the cruelty in the arena, before she manages to save the life of her co-tribute Peeta Mellark and herself and is finally allowed to return home.

Suzanne Collins is highly influenced by her upbringing: Her father was a member of the US Air Force and after having taken his family around the world, he became teacher at the West Point Military Academy. Though oblivious of politics, it was this military life and the pictures on TV that marked her life as a young girl. After graduating from the university, she started to work as a writer for children’s television.



Only with 41 years of age she began to write and publish books (Wheeler 6-12). In an interview for the *School Library Journal*, Suzanne Collins was asked for her motivation to write *The Hunger Games*. She gave several sources for inspiration: on the one hand the Greek myth of the Minotaur, where Athens had to send young boys and girls to Crete to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, which she changed into a modern version of the Roman gladiator games. On the other hand she was affected by TV shows where young people compete to win a prize and by pictures of young warriors fighting in real wars. Her own father had been at the Vietnam War, and she explained that her memory of the news showing footage from the war zone had a great influence on her (Margolis 2008).

When talking to Tina Jordan, Suzanne Collins said: “People view the books differently – as a romance, as dystopian, as action adventure, as political” (*Entertainment Weekly*, 2010). The story takes place in a destroyed United States of the future, the people are depressed and the Capitol reigns in a dictatorial way. It is thus coherent that readers might at first think of science fiction, a dystopian novel or a political story. But Katniss’ struggle for survival and the love story she starts with Peeta might remind the reader also of action adventure, a survival story or a Bildungsroman (Henthorne 6). The different possible readings of the book allows a wide range of readers to enjoy the story.

### **Style – A Reflection of the Times**

Lewis uses in his book a heterodiegetic narrator with each one of the siblings in turn as focalizer. As we will see in the presentation of gender, the characters are so different from each other that the changing focalization gives the readers the possibility to identify with the character they might be most interested in. The narration is held in the

past tense and follows the structure of a fairy tale as we can already see in the beginning: “Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy” (111). The use of the past tense sets the story apart from everyday life and thus allows the readers to imagine that the adventures occur in a parallel world as it is hinted by the Professor when the children muse about going back to Narnia through the wardrobe: “You won’t get into Narnia again by *that* route. [...] don’t go trying to use the same route twice. Indeed, don’t *try* to get there at all. It’ll happen when you’re not looking for it” (196). The narrator takes the liberty of commenting on events in the book or addressing the reader when he comments for example: “And now we come to one of the nastiest things in this story. [...] And now, as you see, the story is nearly (but not quite) at an end” (129, 194). By editing the story, the narrator expresses his approval or criticism of actions carried out by the protagonists: he influences the young readers according to his ideas of good or bad behaviour. As can be seen in the example above, the narrator introduces a new twist in the story with a kind of teaser, thus heightening the expectations of the readers and ushering them forth in the story. Peter Schakel describes Lewis’s style as prose, rather to be listened to as to be read, with short sentences that are easy to follow<sup>2</sup>. Where there are long sentences, they are well structured through the use of “and” or “but” (79): “It was something he had never tasted before, very sweet and foamy and creamy, and it warmed him right down to his toes” (125).

The book is divided into seventeen chapters; each chapter’s title contains a hint about the content of the chapter. As the story is apparently a fairy tale, the chapters are short, usually not longer than four or five pages – enough to be read out loud as, for

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<sup>2</sup> In his book, Schakel refers to a letter Lewis wrote in December 1959 to an American schoolgirl giving the advice: “Always write and read with the ear, not the eye. You should hear every sentence you write as if it was being read aloud or spoken. If it does not sound nice, try again” (79).

example, a bedtime story. With the choice of narrator, time and style, Lewis follows the traditional way of writing novels, a technique that writers since the times of Chaucer mostly opt for (Macauley & Lanning 196). As the story has a strong fairy tale character, it seems logical to choose this technique – it facilitates the young readers’ identification with the story and its protagonists being already used to the fairy tales most young readers have been listening to in their infancy.

For her part, before Collins started on her career as author, she had been working for about twenty years as a script writer for children’s TV (Wheeler 10), which can also be seen in the writing style she applied to *The Hunger Games*. The book is divided into three parts: “The Tributes”, “The Games” and “The Victor”, though the chapters continue throughout the whole book until chapter twenty-seven, each part having nine chapters. As we can read with Peter Jones, King Minos would ask Athens every nine years to send young people to Mycenae to be sacrificed to the Minotaur (175). Here, we may see a connection to what Collins claims as one of her influences. Through her experience as a script-writer, she is able to maintain the action across the three parts of the book, always striving for the attention of her readers (Henthorne 28).

Collins’ narrator is homodiegetic, she uses nearly exclusively the present tense and the only focalizer is Katniss Everdeen herself. Therefore, the reader merely gets to know her point of view, thoughts and fears. The attitudes, feelings and ideas of other characters are solely presented through Katniss’ perception. The conclusions Katniss draws from other people’s behaviour can be misleading for the reader and sometimes this confusion may produce a feeling of disorder in the story (Henthorne 5). A good example for a possible confusion is the conclusion Katniss draws from Peeta greeting the residents of the Capitol:

All of the pieces are still fitting together, but I sense he has a plan forming. He hasn't accepted his death. He is already fighting hard to stay alive. Which also means that kind Peeta Mellark, the boy who gave me the bread, is fighting hard to kill me. (73)

This conclusion is far from the truth, but as readers we are asked to accept this version for the moment – until Katniss herself understands the real intentions behind Peeta's actions. This enhances the identification with the protagonist, as she is the only focalizer.

In 1950, when Lewis published his book, the use of a homodiegetic narrator speaking in the present tense was quite innovative. Though it had been applied before, it was not until the 1960s that this style implemented itself. Robie Macauley and George Lanning criticize that “[the homodiegetic narrator] became the most frequent cliché of technique in the new fiction” (197). Henthorne defends this technique and explains that it makes thus “Katniss' world more immediately available to the reader” (38). The use of the present tense enables the author to make the story more believable, as if the readers witness the action as it happens. Though many writers still prefer a heterodiegetic narrator or the past tense as narrative style for their stories, readers today do not feel overwhelmed by the way Collins is writing her books.

## **Gender – The Typical Boy, the Typical Girl?**

As Simone de Beauvoir explains, the definition of sex can be seen as a biological one, while gender is defined as a cultural construct (28). Therefore, the general idea of gender may result from the way the readers have been taught to distinguish between

male and female (Goodman & Smith 2). As Henthorne points out, from the very beginning children are treated differently according to their gender which leads to different behavioural patterns that will stay even during their adulthood (45). It is therefore no wonder that these patterns influence young adult literature. In traditional juvenile fiction, the female is always connected to love, tenderness and purity, while the male is associated to strength, courage and wisdom (Knowles & Malmkjær 87). Lizbeth Goodman and Alison Smith claim that the Women's Liberation Movement has influenced the reader's perception of the traditional male and female role towards an awareness of the limitations of these stereotypes (2). In the following we will see how far Lewis and Collins follow the traditional pattern of masculine and feminine gender and where they divert from the pattern.

Karin Fry claims that Lewis' view on gender is more considerate than in many other works of his time, but there are still moments in his books when gender stereotypes are present (155). This duality can be seen quite clearly in the roles of the four brothers and sisters. On the first pages, Lewis assigns to each of the siblings his or her personal characteristic. Peter, the oldest, is depicted as the cheerful leader; Susan, though pompous in her manners, has the role of a motherly elder sister; Edmund seems to be rebellious and deceitful; and Lucy as the youngest is described as good-natured and honest (Brown 31).

Peter's leadership already starts with the children's arrival at the Professor's house. When he decides to go exploring, everyone follows his lead (112). At the beavers' home, he helps Mr Beaver to catch fish, fulfilling thus his role as the oldest and as the provider of the family (143). When Father Christmas hands out his gifts, he

tells Peter: “These are your presents and they are tools, not toys. The time to use them is perhaps near at hand” (159). Peter gets a shield and a sword, tools of war, and receives them solemnly and earnestly (160): he seems to know that he will be finally expected to fight in battle. Then, he is distinguished as a leader by the great lion Aslan, when Aslan explains to him his plan of campaign (177). And finally it is Peter that leads the warriors into battle to challenge the army of the White Witch (191). When the battle is won, all four of the children become kings and queens of Narnia, but Peter is called “King Peter the Magnificent” and it is said that he becomes a great warrior (194).

In his role as the leader and mighty warrior Peter is the representative of the male hero, the example a young boy should follow. He might ask his family for advice and make minor mistakes, but in the end he is the defender of the weak and the winner of the battle. Peter can thus be seen as the stereotype of the classical hero represented in adventure books for young male readers.

Susan is the second oldest of the children and wants to fulfil the role of the mother in absence of the parents. But the way she intends to manifest her role is often affected due to her lack of experience. When she tells Edmund that “it’s time you were in bed”, she is told off by him: “And who are you to say when I’m to go to bed?” (111). At the beavers’ house she is helping with the household chores, draining the potatoes and laying out the table (143). Father Christmas gives her a bow and a quiver full of arrows – but they are not to be used in battle. And she gets a little ivory horn in case she needs to call for help (160). On their wanderings, all children get tired, but it is Susan who “had a slight blister on one heel” (167). Her reaction to the mice nibbling away the cords holding Aslan to the stone table can be seen as typical for a girl: “‘Ugh! How beastly! There are horrid little mice crawling over him. Go away, you little beasts.’ And she raised her hand to frighten them away” (183). After the battle, she is crowned

Queen Susan the Gentle, and “the kings of the countries beyond the sea began to send ambassadors asking for her hand in marriage” (194).

Susan represents the Angel in the house, she is more concerned with the well-being of the people around her than with the general situation in Narnia. She seems to be weak and not up to physical exercise and always needing support and guidance. When she is finally grown up as Queen in Narnia, we only learn about her that her hand is sought in marriage – the sole expectation in life for a queen: to have a husband who cares for her.

Edmund is the second youngest of the siblings and at the beginning he is presented as a cheater and rebel. At first, he is not loyal to his brother and his two sisters: when he meets the White Witch and is asked to bring them to her to Narnia, he says: “There’s nothing special about *them*” (126). When he meets Lucy in Narnia and gets back with her to the other two children, he lies and “decided to let Lucy down” (129). After dinner at the beavers’ house he takes off to join the White Witch, a fact the other children at first cannot accept: “‘Can’t he?’ said Mr Beaver, looking very hard at the three children, and everything they wanted to say died on their lips, for each felt suddenly quite certain inside that this was exactly what Edmund had done” (149).

The situation only changes when Edmund is taken prisoner by the White Witch and is forcefully driven through Narnia’s spring. At one point, the Witch transforms some animals into statues and “Edmund, for the first time in this story, felt sorry for someone besides himself” (163). The ultimate change comes when Aslan speaks to him: “There is no need to tell you (and no one ever heard) what Aslan was saying, but it was a conversation which Edmund never forgot” (174). From that moment on, Edmund is loyal, honest and even prepared to fight in the last battle. Though he is badly wounded, he is saved by his sister Lucy and has undergone a complete change of attitude: “[...]”

not only healed of his wounds but looking better than she had seen him look – oh, for ages. [...] He had become his real old self again and could look you in the face” (193). In later years he is known as King Edmund the Just, great in council and judgement (194).

Edmund is not the male hero young readers should follow as a model. He represents the character who makes major mistakes and therefore has to suffer severe consequences. But as in every Bildungsroman Edmund learns from his mistakes, follows the lead of an older and wiser being – here Aslan – and turns to the better. His decision to leave his bad behaviour behind is finally rewarded when he becomes King Edmund the Just.

Lucy is the youngest of the children, she is trusting and honest, but also courageous and adventurous. She is the first to enter Narnia and trusts the Faun Mr Tumnus unconditionally. When she returns home and tells about Narnia, no one wants to believe in her story (121). Even when she meets Edmund in Narnia, her hopes to be believed are shattered as he decides to let her down. Though she is known for her honesty, the older siblings do not believe in her story of a fantastic realm and only the Professor defends her: “For the moment then and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume that she is telling the truth” (131). Besides Aslan, the Professor is the only adult male voice in the book and has thus a great influence on the children and their decisions.

When the siblings are finally together in Narnia, they have to acknowledge the truth and Lucy is asked to take the lead (135) which she does without having any doubts or fears of leading the wrong way. She is the one who suggests to follow the robin which brings the children eventually to Mr Beaver (137). Her gifts by Father Christmas are a bottle with a potion that can save lives and a little dagger, “[...] for you also are



not to be in the battle', says Father Christmas. But Lucy answers: 'Why, sir? I think – I don't know – but I think I could be brave enough'" (160). Though Lucy is prepared to play her part in the liberation of Narnia she is stopped by Father Christmas for women are not supposed to fight. When Aslan lies like dead on the stone table, Lucy is the one to turn around and to realise that Aslan has been restored to life again though she is at first frightened by the noise (184). After the final battle she does not shrink back from the cruelty of the battlefield but uses her potion to save lives. She becomes then Queen Lucy the Valiant, "and all princes in those parts desired her to be their Queen" (195). Being the younger sister her hand is not requested by kings. We do not know if she ever considered to get married, but even before this would be a topic the siblings return to our world.

Lucy is by far the most interesting character in the book. Here, we can see that Lewis does not always follow the ideas of the classical gender role, he represents an interesting female character with whom more adventurous girls can identify. Lewis himself declared in his essay "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" that Lucy is his heroine (*On Stories* 31) which can be seen in the fact that important parts of the story are focalized through Lucy: she is the first to step through the wardrobe, she establishes the first contact to Narnia, she animates her brothers and sister to follow Mr Beaver, she takes on a leading role in releasing the Narnian creatures that had been transformed into statues and she fearlessly hurries over the battlefield to help the wounded warriors.

With her book *The Hunger Games* Collins has challenged the classical division of gender roles in literature by deciding on a teenage girl to take on the role of the hero. Katniss needs to unite typically masculine and feminine characteristics in order to survive the slaughter in the arena. For a better comparison between the two books, I will

not only explain Katniss as a girl in a cruel world, but I will also take into account the other characters around her: her friend Gale, her sister Primrose and her co-tribute Peeta Mellark.

Gale Hawthorne is Katniss' only friend in District 12. He is two years older than her but since their fathers' deaths in the coal mines both take on the role of "breadwinners" and thus of heads of their respective families. They are not only connected by friendship but also by responsibility as both their families depend on what they hunt in the woods and exchange on the Hob, the black market of District 12: they take on this responsibility together and are prepared to step in for each other in difficult times. When Gale visits Katniss for the last time before her journey to the Capitol, he promises her that he will take care of her family when she is no longer able to do so (48).

Katniss tells us: "In the woods waits the only person with whom I can be myself. Gale" (7). She gives the reader a good description of Gale when she explains: "He's good-looking, he's strong enough to handle the work in the mines, and he can hunt" (12). When he visits Katniss for the last time before she is taken to the Capitol, he gives her a piece of advice on how she should defend herself: "'Listen, getting a knife should be pretty easy, but you've got to get your hands on a bow. That's your best chance'" (47). Thus he does justice to his role as the man who has to protect and guide the weaker woman. Though in the *Hunger Games* he has only a short appearance in person, Katniss often refers to him, for example when she shoots the boy from District 1: "Numerous animals have lost their lives at my hands, but only one human. I hear Gale saying, 'How different can it be, really?'" (294).

Even though Gale is not always present, he influences Katniss' actions and reasoning. Hawthorne calls Gale a "stereotypical man's man – that is fearless, direct, aggressive, and compelling" (57), claiming him to be one of the models often found in

conventional fiction (58). Taking the traditional gender roles into consideration, Gale would be the stereotype of the male character that all male readers would want to follow.

Katniss' sister Primrose is only twelve years old, it is the first time that she has to take part in 'the reaping', the selection of the tributes for the Hunger Games. Though she has just one entry, she is chosen to be a tribute. That is when Katniss steps in to offer herself instead of her sister, because Prim "is the only person in the world I'm certain I love. [...] I protect Prim in every way I can, but I'm powerless against the reaping" (11, 18). Katniss describes her sister as pale with blue eyes and light hair (9), she is soft and weak as we can see when Katniss wants to teach her how to hunt: "The woods terrified her, and whenever I shot something, she'd get teary and talk about how we might be able to heal it if we got it home soon enough" (42).

But she is good at household chores and at taking care of people: When her mother feels ill after the death of her father, Prim takes care of her mother's hair before going to school (33), and for the day of the reaping she prepares a cheese for Katniss (4). Prim seems to represent traditional feminine qualities: She is blonde and has blue eyes, she appears to be soft and weak, she worries about her sick mother and hurt animals, and is mostly occupied with chores at home. Jessica Miller calls her "the clearest example of a traditionally feminine character in *The Hunger Games*" (150), the Angel in the House.

Peeta Mellark, the baker's son, is not only the co-tribute who will have to fight with Katniss in the arena, but he is also the boy who gave the family hope after her father's death. When the family was nearly dying of starvation, Peeta gave Katniss a loaf of bread he had burned on purpose and thus gave her enough courage to continue struggling: "To this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope. [...] I feel like I owe him something, and I

hate owing people” (39). Katniss believes she owes him a debt she will have to pay back some day, and the prospect of having him as a co-tribute makes her feel uneasy: she does not know how to compensate him for his help if she is expected to kill him (39). His position in the novel is ambiguous. On the one hand he is characterized as a mild, soft young man, more interested in bakery and decorating cakes than in picking fights, but on the other hand he can be tough and he is able to use his skills in order to survive in the arena. When the two tributes face their mentor, Haymitch Abernathy, Peeta gets angry with his drinking habits to which Katniss remarks: “I’m surprised to see the hardness in his eyes. He generally seems so mild” (69). And when Peeta has to disguise himself after having been hurt, his decoration skills help him to survive: he completely blends in with his surroundings (306). Peeta is not the typical male character that abstains from feminine characteristics. Henthorne concludes about Peeta: “Indeed, one could argue that Peeta is presented in a manner that challenges traditional ideas of gender” (58).

Katniss Everdeen has to position herself outside the stereotypical feminine patterns in order to survive: First as the only provider of her family, then as tribute in the arena. With Katniss, the traditional feminine attributes of beauty, obedience and weakness do not hold firm: she is interested neither in clothes nor in a closer contact with the other sex. By entering the woods illegally to hunt she disobeys the rules implemented by the Capitol and follows an occupation traditionally assigned to men. This situation changes when she enters the machinery of the Capitol’s Remake Center where the tributes are prepared to be presentable to the audience. Katniss feels out of place, but she understands that she has to be attractive in order to survive: as the spectators in the Capitol are mainly interested in appearances, they even undergo major beauty operations to conform to the actual trend. Octavia, a member of Katniss’

preparation team, has dyed her whole body “a pale shade of pea green” (75). Katniss knows that only her femininity will gain her the support of the masses and thus an access to gifts; items that she may need to remain alive in the arena (Henthorne 53). Therefore, she bears the preparations by using her typically masculine characteristics, her strength and courage, to get through the unpleasant procedure and later the presentation and the interview, always trying to gain an advantage over the other tributes even if that means behaving like a silly girl.

When Katniss meets Rue in the arena, she has the feeling of having to protect her as Rue reminds her of her sister Primrose. But this feeling of protection is two-sided, it is not only Katniss protecting Rue, but Rue giving Katniss a certain feeling of safety:

The warmth of Rue at my side, her head cradled on my shoulder, have given me a sense of security. I realize, for the first time, how lonely I’ve been in the arena. How comforting the presence of another human being can be. (252)

We can see here Katniss’ duality, her masculine trait of wanting to protect the weak and the feminine trait of caretaking and of acknowledging loneliness. Though she is strong and used to providing for a family, she also craves for the warmth and companionship her sister was giving her at home.

Katniss’ relationship to the male characters, Gale and Peeta, is equally ambiguous. For her, Gale is her intimate friend and her hunting companion, she does not consider him as a possible partner: “There’s never been anything romantic between Gale and me” (11). At the interview in the Capitol Peeta declares his love to Katniss and she reacts with outrage and shoves him so that he hurts his hands: “He made me look weak”, she complains (164). She does not understand that with this declaration Peeta had singled her out as alluring, something she could not have achieved on her own.

Peeta's scheming has given her an advantage over the other tributes: being attractive may ensure her survival in the arena when her 'admirers' send her gifts she might need desperately. And though she resents Peeta for his move, Katniss starts looking for him as soon as the Game Makers declare that two people from the same District might survive. Her goal now is not only her own survival, but she wants to bring both of them home. Her playing along with Peeta's love game seems to be for her only a means to get out of the arena alive: "Impulsively, I lean forward and kiss him, stopping his words. This is probably overdue anyway, since he's right, we are supposed to be madly in love" (315).

That not everything in Katniss' relationship to Peeta is calculation we can see when they return home. She is confused and does not know how to react and thus she justifies herself:

That I can't explain how things are with Gale because I don't know myself.  
That it's no good loving me because I'm never going to get married anyway  
[...]. That if I do have feelings for him, it doesn't matter because I'll never be  
able to afford the kind of love that leads to a family, to children. (453)

Katniss is caught between the necessity to be strong and fearless, which are considered to be masculine attributes, and the fact that she is a girl and supposed to react differently with warmth, affection and love.

Gender is an important issue in both books, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and in *The Hunger Games*. The contemporary young reader can find in both books models to follow and personalities that are not only the stereotypical male or female, but show traits that are likely to be admired by any kind of reader. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Peter, Susan and Edmund follow the traditional characteristics of the male hero, the Angel in the House and the character depicted in a

Bildungsroman, respectively. Here, it is Lucy that represents the more diverse characteristics with her fearlessness, loyalty and courage. In *The Hunger Games*, Gale is the typical male hero, while Primrose represents the Angel in the House. Peeta embodies the male character with feminine traits while Katniss due to the circumstances in her life embodies the heroine with masculine traits. Thus, these two books are not only interesting for only one group of readers, boys *or* girls, but for both groups.

### **The Heroine – Girls Can Also Be Tough**

What makes a character a hero? Joseph Campbell explains that most heroes are exiled, “the abused youngest son or daughter, the orphan [...]” (301). The hero has to cope with many challenges which he encounters often in a foreign environment (Knowles & Malmkjær 88) and frequently the hero is a strong and active male character. Valerie E. Frankel, however, describes a heroine, a girl that might be totally feminine, but still “dynamic, valiant, clever and creative” (3).

As has been explained above, the hero is often an orphan and alone in a hostile environment. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensies are sent alone without their parents to the countryside to escape the bombing of World War II London. When they enter Narnia they see themselves without any kind of adult chaperone in a dystopic world that is ruled by the ruthless White Witch, who they have to overcome in order to bring peace to the land – just as the prediction says. Once they have decided to cross the wardrobe they have to face their responsibility as future kings and queens of Narnia and even forget about going back.

Lucy is the first to enter the world of Narnia and she does so by chance and out of curiosity and not because she hears a “call to adventure” as Campbell would put it (Brown 41). When she encounters Mr Tumnus, the Faun, she is not afraid but follows him to take tea with him in his house. The moment all four brothers and sisters are in Narnia, Peter apologises and asks Lucy to take the lead: “I think Lu ought to be the leader. Goodness knows she deserves it” (135). When the children encounter Mr Beaver, they are first unsure what to do and Peter asks Lucy for her opinion not trusting his own lead (140). After dinner the Beavers and the children discuss what to do about Mr Tumnus who had been caught by the Witch. Lucy says: “But, Mr Beaver, can’t we – I mean, we must do something to save him. It’s too dreadful and it’s all on my account” (145). She would be prepared to face danger and fight for her friend instead of leaving him in a miserable situation. Father Christmas rebukes her for her desire to fight when he says: “Battles are ugly when women fight” (160).

Lucy still finds herself in several dangerous situations: watching Aslan die and his resurrection, freeing the creatures in the Witch’s castle and finally her help on the battlefield. Aslan is the most powerful creature in Narnia, a being not easily dismissed. But when he reminds Lucy of her duties towards the other wounded warriors, we can read: “‘Yes, I know’, said Lucy crossly. ‘Wait a minute.’” (193). No other character in the book would have dared to treat Aslan this way. Though she cries and wrings her hands, is afraid and hesitates in some situations, she is still valiant and tough and not the nice girl that stays at home and only takes care of her chores.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss does even more fulfil the requirements for a heroine: she lives in a dystopic world, her father died in the mines, she is the one responsible for the wellbeing of the family and finally she is thrown into the deadly



horror of the arena. Though she can only react to the circumstances she is thrown into, she does not allow herself any weakness. Her weapon of choice is a bow which she can handle expertly. The bow in her hands is a deadly tool, but one that she can use with a distance to the opponent, she nearly never is forced to face hand to hand combat. And the one time she is attacked by Clove, the girl from District 2, she gets help from Thrash, Rue's co-tribute from District 11 (350).

Off from the beginning Katniss has to fight. When Katniss and Peeta ask Haymitch to give them advice regarding their survival in the arena, Haymitch attacks Peeta and Katniss reacts: "When he turns back to reach for the spirits, I drive my knife into the table between his hand and the bottle, barely missing his fingers" (69).

At the Capitol, each tribute has to show the Gamemakers what he or she can do best. But when Katniss finds herself ignored by them, she tells us:

Suddenly I am furious, that with my life on the line, they don't even have the decency to pay attention to me. [...] Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Gamemakers' table. (124)

Her reaction could have come from a male character. She has a strong belief in justice and reacts with aggression when her personality and beliefs are not respected by others. In the arena she sometimes slips into a more feminine role when she takes care of Rue and then of Peeta when he is wounded. And though she takes on the responsibility for Peeta willingly, at one point she thinks:

and trying not to dwell on the fact that by teaming up with him, I've made myself far more vulnerable than when I was alone. [...] I'm just going to have to trust that whatever instinct sent me to find him was a good one. (319)

Thus she is always trying to negotiate between her heart and her calculating mind. Katniss is the one who finally manages to get the injured Peeta and herself out of the arena. First, she guides him through the terrain asking him to take his boots off: "I have to remind myself that he's still not used to the woods, that it's the scary, forbidden place beyond the fences of District 12" (383). Then, she decides on a final trick to save both Peeta and herself and suggests to pretend eating poisonous berries. She reckons: "Yes, they have to have a victor. Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers' faces" (418). It is due to Katniss' scheming, her strength, stealth and courage that both tributes of District 12 survive the Hunger Games. She is the heroine who unites the male and the female characteristics in the same person.

Boys and girls alike will not only like the two books for their variety of characters, but also for their representation of the main hero: Lucy is girl enough to appeal to female readers but brave enough to also appeal to male readers due to her strength and courage. Katniss unites even more so the masculine and the feminine traits: she is calculating, strong and fearless and a good fighter, but she also shows the soft side and warmth of a female character.

### **Conclusion - So, Why Do Contemporary Readers Love Both Books?**

Children's and young adults' literature has seen many changes over the last century: Where once was a division concerning gender – adventure books for boys, romance novels for girls – now one and the same book can be interesting for both sexes. The

books from the past are today considered by many young readers as being dry and boring, the stereotypical roles and the themes shown in these books seem to be outdated. As society has changed towards a more equal distribution of characteristics between the sexes, topics have changed, too.

C.S. Lewis' book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was very innovative for its times, it was even thought to be too cruel. Lewis depicts many of the characteristics a contemporary book might contain: there is an adventurous girl that is prepared to fight for her beliefs, children stand up to adults and take up arms, blood is shed and one main character nearly dies of his wounds. The setting is in a dystopic world, the main protagonists have to lead the oppressed to victory and the book ends on a positive tenor. This variety of topics and characters is not only appealing to the young male reader of today, but also the young female reader that also cherishes adventures in a dystopic world with strong characters that finally overcome all obstacles.

If we compare this pattern to Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, we will find just the same topics again: here, too, we find a girl that has to fight, the setting is also in a dystopic world and eventually the protagonist defeats the Capitol by outwitting the Gamemakers. Though the main character is a heroine, both sexes, boys and girls, are fascinated by Katniss and can easily identify with her dual character of masculine and feminine traits.

Both books have been so successful that they served as bases for movies which were equally successful. One could claim that only by converting the books into movies, the books themselves were so well read, but *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was already studied at high schools and universities before the release of the movie. The recipe of combining adventure with male and female protagonists and

putting the setting in a dystopic world seems to work as well with a contemporary book as with a book that was published sixty six years ago.

Young contemporary readers do not necessarily look at the date of publication to decide if a book is worth reading or not. They seek the thrill of diving into a challenging story that catches the attention and provides a possibility to identify with its protagonists. Many older books do not satisfy these needs, but thankfully there are authors like C.S. Lewis who can hold their own against contemporary writers like Suzanne Collins. As parents we should be grateful to these writers, they make our task to get our children to read so much easier.

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