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# The Portrayal of Female Characters in Science Fiction

BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

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## Introduction

I seem frilly and shallow, twirling and giggling in my dress, although the others assure me I am charming. Peeta actually is charming and then utterly winning as the boy in love. And there I am, blushing and confused, made beautiful by Cinna's hands, desirable by Peeta's confession, tragic by circumstance, and by all accounts, unforgettable (*The Hunger Games*, 166-167).

For years this portrayal has been a standard for young women in science fiction. The second word is the reason for it. Seem. This portrayal conveys absolutely nothing of Katniss' character. All it does is show how she is perceived by society, how she can be acceptable for society. This description positions her as an object of desire which robs her of any agency. It fails to describe Katniss Everdeen. This issue, the lack of female character portrayal, has grown in importance in light of the growing emancipation of women in society. As they grow more emancipated it seems odd that science fiction novels still present women in passive roles. Because of this it is relevant to discuss the presentation of female characters in science fiction and the apparent signs of improvement and change.

*The Hunger Games* is a step up the evolutionary ladder of the female character in science fiction literature. It improved the standard by, among other things, using a female character as the protagonist and making the genders equal to each other. It is because Collins is advanced in her use of the female character that those in other novels become conspicuous in their absence or, when present, for their lack of an active role.

To explain this standard, this thesis will start by defining and discussing the common gender roles. This will be followed by a case study of two novels that can both be described as using the conventional, and demeaning, presentation of women, namely *Ender's Game* by

Orson Scott Card and *Bearing an Hourglass* by Piers Anthony. Finally, there will be an in-depth discussion of *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins explaining that she is revolutionary in her portrayal of female characters because she does not follow the conventional rules of science fiction. By discussing these stories I hope to provide a view of what was, what is and perhaps what may come for the portrayal of female characters.

## Section 1 Traditional Gender Roles in Science Fiction

This section focuses on the roles traditionally given to male and female characters to show that the portrayal of women is unrealistic and needs to be improved. In order to do that there will, firstly, be a look at the overall role usually laid out for female characters. This will be followed by a discussion of the stereotypes that are found most in the genre for those female characters that are present. This section will end by addressing the idea of some that women are unimportant in the genre.

John Wright, in his six part essay “Saving Science Fiction from Strong Female Characters” on his website, is of the opinion that “there are some, more than a few, heroines in boy’s adventure stories given little or nothing to do” (part 1). His main claim against the traditional role of the female character in the past is that she is often given only a passive role. According to Wright the most serious disadvantage that female characters have had to deal with is being noticeable in science fiction novels at all. Wright certainly has a point as the classic science fiction stories used in this thesis to illustrate the past have no wealth of female characters. The rest of this section, however, will show that simply putting in female characters without much thought to them does not solve the problem of the absence of realistic, active female characters.

Eric Rabkin seems to follow the same train of thought as Wright. He suggests that “the traditional attitudes seem chains that bind women to often false ideals of helplessness and men to often false ideals of physical bravery” (14). Both Rabkin and Wright seem to be of the idea that women are needlessly given passive roles while all the active roles are given to male characters. Rabkin, however, points out that following Wright’s traditionalist views without caution creates the current problem of female characters either being excluded entirely, or if they are present they will only be portrayed in a stereotypical way without further exploration.

[T]he Timorous Virgin (good for being rescued, and for having things explained to her), the Amazon Queen (sexually desirable and terrifying at the same time, usually set up to be “tamed” by the super-masculine hero), the Frustrated Spinster Scientist (an object lesson to girl readers that career success equals feminine failure), the Good Wife (keeps quietly in the background, loving her man and never making trouble) and the Tomboy Kid Sister (who has a semblance of autonomy only until male appreciation of her burgeoning sexuality transforms her into Virgin or Wife) (Clute and Nicholls, 1343).

This list, compiled by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, is to date the most comprehensive of the roles that female characters are stereotypically assigned in science fiction. As can be seen above, they consider the sexuality of the woman to play a large part in her characterization and part in the plot. It is not fair to define a woman or a girl based on her relationship status.

In his essay “Science Fiction Women before Liberation”, Eric Rabkin adds another role to the list. According to him “The lovestruck heroine, who fortunately grows rarer today, was a mainstay of science fiction before Women’s Liberation” (17). Rabkin points to a female character that has an active role in the story and the plot, until she falls in love. The moment she falls in love her activity is immediately switched to passivity and she has nothing left to do. From this it appears, then, that in the traditional role laid out for female characters in science fiction, they can have an active role in the story up until the moment they fall in love and are then thought of as harmless and finished. Rabkin’s point fits in with Clute and Nicholls’ list because it too has the female character’s personality defined through her relationship status.

Wright suggests that the traditional views on gender might contribute to the lack of active female characters. Following this suggestion, he explains that masculinity, according to him, means being:

direct in speech, confident in action, coolheaded in combat, lethal in war, honorable in tourney or melee, cunning in wit, unerring in deduction, glib in speech, and confident and bold in all things. Of the classical virtues, fortitude and justice are essential to masculinity, as is magnanimity: a real man neither complains nor says 'I told you so' (Part 1).

It is this view that is transferred to male characterization in science fiction, such as Dursten the spaceman in Anthony's *Bearing an Hourglass*, but also to Ender in Card's *Ender's Game*. In his writings Wright points to the largest contrast between the roles of the two genders, "The female concentrates on the doer; the male on the deed" (part 1). This contrast in roles is, if Wright is to be believed, translated to their characterization and part in the plot. Wright's argumentation has point but it is not completely correct. Following his opinion, it certainly is easier to create an active character that is already concentrated on the action, such as male characters, than it is to create one who concentrates on who is acting, which would be the female characters in his view. Collins, however, shows that it is still possible to create a story in which a female character, who is indeed more concerned with who is behind the action, has the leading position. Wright continues on what being feminine means to him.

Feminine in general means being more delicate in speech, either when delivering a coy insult or when buoying up drooping spirits. Femininity requires not the sudden and angry bravery of war and combat, but the slow and loving and patient bravery of rearing children and dealing with childish menfolk: female fortitude is a tenacity that does not yield even after repeated disappointments and defeats (Part 1).

As Wright discusses the difference between the meanings of being male and female, he proposes that it would be only natural that when men and women have different roles in nature, their characters would follow different paths as well. Although he seems of the idea that men and women are very different, he proposes that the vices and virtues are actually the

same in both genders, but that there might be a difference in how they appear. His explanation for the differences between the appearances of a vice boils down to this “A man who is crude can also inspire fear because he fears neither God nor men. ... a woman who is crude inspires contempt, because she has contempt for God and man” (Part 1).

Robin Roberts broaches a different problem all together:

In real life or fiction, the female scientist is depicted as unnatural, and science is presented as the realm of men [...] Much non-fiction or science fiction point to the incompatibility of women in science; in rare depictions of a female scientist, male authors stress the cost to the women. To become a scientist, a woman must renounce her femininity (280).

Wright, Clute and Nicholls, Hugo Gernsback, Cheryl Laz, Mary Kenny Badami, and other critics of the genre have noted either the same or what comes down to the perceived notion that women have no place in science. Whether opposed to or supporting the idea, these writers have all come to the conclusion that in science fiction women are apparently only allowed to play a part if they repress their feminine sides and take up masculine ideals. Card’s novel gives an excellent example of this problem.

Now another boy joined the conversation, a smaller boy, but still larger than Ender.

“Not bahn-zoe, pisshead. Bone-So. The name’s Spanish. Bonzo Madrid. Aqui nosotros hablamos español, Señor Gran Fedor.”

“You must be Bonzo, then?” Ender asked, pronouncing the name correctly.

“No, just a brilliant and talented polyglot. Petra Arkanian. The only girl in Salamander Army. With more balls than anybody else in the room” (85).

Petra is the first, and only, girl that Ender encounters in the novel, other than his sister. He does not even recognize her as female when he meets her because she has to behave as

masculine as possible to achieve and hold any status at all in Battle School. Regardless of her skills, the other boys in the school try to keep her as passive as possible.

Femininity may not be the only thing keeping women from an active part in the science fiction genre. Gernsback has come to the conclusion that women are not good science fiction writers “because their education and general tendencies in scientific matters are usually limited” (Donawerth, “Teaching Science Fiction by Women”, *The English Journal*, 39). Nowadays women have the same education opportunities as men and are thus equally capable of receiving good scientific schooling. Though Gernsback might have had a point in his time in 1927, he fails to fully explain these perceived general tendencies in women. That is why this is too short-sighted to fully explain the stereotypical portrayal of women in science fiction.

Badami takes a different perspective, namely that there may simply not be enough space in the market for strong women in science fiction. In her essay “A Feminist Critique of Science Fiction” in *Extrapolation*, she cites an unnamed science fiction researcher saying “Women have not been important as characters in science fiction. Women have not been important as fans of science fiction. Women have not been important as writers of science fiction” (6). Even though the scientist generalizes, there is something to say for his second conclusion. Science fiction is seen as a male-oriented genre, this makes it seem logical that most of the protagonists are male and that women take no important roles in the stories. Time has moved on in the meantime, however. The genre now has more female fans and female writers. *The Hunger Games* is written by a woman, has a female protagonist and numerous other female characters throughout the story and has a large group of predominately female readers. This does not mean that the researcher is wrong completely. His conclusions may have been right about the past, but the future holds all kinds of possibilities and opportunities for women.

This section has shown the science fiction genre as it has been and has shown that the portrayal of female characters is unrealistic, sexist, and demeaning. A new framework is necessary for the creation and portrayal of female characters. The following sections are a more in-depth discussion of science fiction as it has been and science fiction as it can be.

## Section 2 Case Study of Piers Anthony and Orson Scott Card

This section will look into how two stories, one novel and one part of a novel, both of which are seen as traditional science fiction, portray the female characters that are present. The first one will be Orson Scott Card's *Ender Game*. This novel has three female characters present in varying levels of activity. The other is Pierce Anthony's *Bearing an Hourglass* which has a science fiction adventure featuring one female character. Each of these characters will be discussed in-depth and it will be shown which stereotype they are.

Orson Scott Card wrote *Ender's Game* in 1985 as an idea after reading Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy as a child about what the future would be like. He thought "Human beings may be miserable specimens, in the main, but we *can* learn, and, through learning, become decent people" (13). With this in mind the reader may expect a story in which the characters are better people. It is entirely out of the interest of this thesis to discuss every character in this novel. What can be discussed, though, are the female characters of the story themselves. In this novel there are three female characters: Petra Arkanian, Valentine Wiggin and the mother of Ender, Valentine and Peter.

Before having a more in-depth examination of the three female characters, here is a look at the reason the novel gives for the absence of more female characters. Colonel Graff is trying to persuade Ender to enter Battle School. Children, in the world of the story, are monitored for militaristic reasons while growing up, so the colonel knows about Ender's relationship with his sister and tells him that she will not be in Battle School. "All boys?" "A few girls. They don't often pass the tests to get in. Too many centuries of evolution are working against them. None of them will be like Valentine, anyway" (47). Although the reasoning behind the absence of female characters might not be positive, Card does not

completely rule female characters out either. Card is not the only known writer who applied different criteria for the presence and subsequent portrayals of female characters. Rabkin explains why Jules Verne, one of the founding fathers of science fiction, for example did not feature any female characters in his novels:

Verne, for example, writes adventures: women need not apply. Yet Verne is not anti-feminist; Nemo hates men every bit as much as he hates women. Women are just absent and absent not because, as in Defontenay's case, the author disparages them but because the requirements of this form, as directed to a particular expectable audience, makes women characters almost unnecessary (21).

Expanding on this idea that the absence of female characters does not have to stem from malicious intent, Rabkin proposes that they may merely not be necessary in the novel or plot. In the case of *Ender's Game* there is certainly a case to be made for this point of view. It might very well be that Ender came across more girls in Battle School and Command School than just Petra; the readers are just unaware of them because there is no need for them to be told just how many girls Ender meets.

The following paragraphs are an in-depth analysis of the three female characters in *Ender's Game*. Ender first meets Petra Arkanian when he is transferred from his launch group to his first Army. Looking at the descriptions of the stereotypical females in science fiction as written down by Clute and Nicholls, it would seem that Card made Petra the Amazon Queen. Ender is still very young, he is only six when he is chosen for Battle School and within a year he is assigned to an army, even though usually nobody would be assigned until they were eight years old. Considering his age it is hardly any wonder that Petra is not given the sexuality that the Amazon Queen is traditionally portrayed with, according to the list of Clute and Nicholls. She does, however, have the same fierceness. Later on Ender has his own army to command, Petra is placed in it, and even later when Ender is at Command School and Petra

is under his command for the simulations, it can loosely be argued that Ender tamed Petra, thereby completing the stereotype.

Valentine Wiggin, Ender's sister, is the stereotypical Kid Sister "who has a semblance of autonomy only until male appreciation of her burgeoning sexuality transforms her into Virgin or Wife" (Clute and Nicholls, 1343). Furthermore, Card seems to use her to explain to the reader how women are perceived in Ender's society. "'We asked your parents to choose a daughter next – they would have anyway – hoping that Valentine would be Peter, but milder'" (47). Here Card is able to convey to the reader that in Ender's military society, the military thinks women are only second-rate people, because they are more emotional. The military had hoped that Valentine would have Peter's intelligence and aggression, but that she would not be as hateful. However, Valentine was found too mild for the military and Ender was requisitioned (47). Card made Valentine the focaliser in a part of a novel. That in itself would be positive, were it not for the fact that during that time she is acting under the orders of Peter, her older brother, and has very little autonomy. Her other role in the plot consists of the necessity of the military to have Ender maintain his balance between empathy and aggression for which he was requested. Whenever Ender is starting to lose his balance Valentine is summoned to talk to him and stabilize him. Valentine's role in the plot is completely governed by her brothers and the military.

Finally, there is Ender's mother. She can be seen as Clute and Nicholls' stereotypical Good Wife, in this case Good Mother, because in the book she does not act in any way to thwart society, except perhaps for giving birth to Ender and she had permission for that. When Colonel Graff comes in to her home and tells her that the military does want Ender, even though the removal of the monitor typically means that he is not chosen, her only opposition to him and what he stands for is sarcasm. "'And he passed?" Mother was incredulous. "Putting the Stilson boy in the hospital? What would you have done if Andrew had killed him,

given him a medal?'" (42). There is one argument, however, against this idea of her being the proverbial mother. After Ender accepts and goes to Battle School she actually forgets about him and they move to a different city so that if Ender ever comes back he will not be able to find them in the place where he knew them. She has effectively distanced herself and her family from her third son. She is proud of being able to have a third son in a society where you need permission to conceive a third, but also ashamed for going against society in this (43). As a truly archetypal mother she should have stood behind her son and stayed in his childhood home to give him that opportunity to find them again.

Card did not use any of the female characters for their sexuality simply because Ender's age prevents this. Petra was found good enough but only because she behaves in a very masculine way. Valentine's role is keeping Ender from becoming too aggressive. Ender's mother is afraid that society will shun her for giving birth to a third son even after she had permission for his conception.

On to Anthony's *Bearing an Hourglass*: in the relevant part of the story there is only one woman, and she is an alien. This novel has a description of females, named femmes, which is interesting. "'Pardner, where you been? You don't know what a Femme is? A human woman, or reasonable facsimile thereof, maybe twenty years old, shaped like that sand dingus you're holding, hot-blooded and not too smart'" (123). That is how Dursten explains to Norton, the main character, how women are perceived. The impression throughout the novel and the entire series *Incarnation of Immortality* is that everything is given a sense of sarcasm and parody. If this is correct then it should mean that Anthony does not actually think that women are only properly female if they are as described by Dursten. Parody, however, is only truly a parody if it has at least a grain of truth in it. This would mean that even if the idea and thought is not politically correct, it is a thought that actually exists. The adventure, and

the scripted people in it, is created by Satan and his minions. This would mean that the image of women as described by Dursten came from Satan and thus would be evil.

In this story, evil affects the way women behave. “He turned back to Dursten – just in time to see a young woman approaching the spaceman. She was absolutely luscious in her scanty costume, and her flesh jiggled like gelatine as she walked” (130). This woman is later found out to be an alien there to try and kill Dursten and Norton. The men are saved from this fate by Norton’s timely realisation of the femme’s true nature and her subsequent demise at Norton’s hands. If this is enough to place her on the evil side of the scales is a different discussion altogether: Norton perceives her as a woman who is out to seduce them. As it is later discovered that Norton was correct, she was indeed out to seduce them, it can be said that she consciously appeared in an as alluringly as possible body so that the men would not have enough mental abilities left to think clearly. Categorizing her under one of the stereotypes as set by Clute and Nicholls is difficult but the Amazon Queen would probably fit her best as she is sexy at first and terrifying after she has transformed back into her own body.

Looking at the stereotypes and how they can be found in these novels an argument could be made that the more sexual, or sexually aware, a female character is the more evil, whereas the more virginal and demure she is the more likely she is to be characterised as good. Anthony’s Femme is very sexually aware in her role of the Amazon Queen and can be classified as evil. Card’s Valentine, on the other hand, is virginal in her role of the Kid Sister and would thus be classified as good.

In this section a deep analysis has been given of the different appearances and portrayals of the female characters in the works of Orson Scott Card and Piers Anthony since they are representative of traditional science fiction. Card’s Petra Arkanian and Anthony’s female alien can be classified as the Amazon Queen. Valentine Wiggin and mother Wiggin from *Ender’s Game* can be classified as the Kid Sister and Good Wife respectively. What

makes these characters so traditional is that the authors did not move the characters beyond their stereotypes. The next section will take a look at how the genre is able to create stories in which the female characters have better opportunities.

### **Section 3 Collins evolves female science fiction character portrayals**

In the previous section it has been established that both Card and Anthony did very little justice to the female characters in their novels and that these portrayals could use much improvement. This section aims to show how Collins has escaped the stereotypical portrayal of women in her trilogy *The Hunger Games*. One of the ways is that she used the science fiction genre in a way that does not focus on an adventure. Moreover, Collins made all her characters equal to each other and made an effort to destabilize gender as it is seen by having her female lead be both masculine and feminine and personifying this in the two men who play an equally large part in her life. Although Collins' novel houses a multitude of interesting characters, this thesis will only have room to discuss the role of three or four of these characters in depth. Ending this section is a discussion between critics who think that Katniss is not a good character from a feminist point of view and those who, together with this thesis, think that Katniss is.

One of the most significant differences between Collins' work and that of Card and Anthony is the subgenre. Collins wrote dystopian fiction which, according to Clute and Nicholls' definition, is "the oppression of the majority by a ruling elite [...], and the regimentation of society as a whole [...]" (361). In the case of the *The Hunger Games*-trilogy the Capitol is the ruling elite who oppress the rest of Panem and, with the exclusion of the people in the government, nobody in the Districts, or the normal people in the Capitol, knows about how the people who do not live in their area really live. This idea in itself does not improve the characterization of the female characters in her work, but it does provide a better opportunity to improve. Rabkin, using the subgenre utopia, the opposite of dystopia, explains it as follows:

One branch of science fiction that habitually considers alternative roles for women is utopian fiction. Literature which takes as its major aim the exposition of a culture is able, even compelled, to treat its characters largely as representatives of social niches. Freed of the necessity of presenting a hero, as in adventure stories, the utopian writer can dwell on the general qualities of society (21).

Rabkin's view of the utopia might seem out of place in a discussion on dystopia but is actually usable because both take a look at society as a whole, from different perspectives, instead of focusing on the journey and progression of one main character. Collins has created a story in which ultimately there does not appear to be one single hero, even though it does have a single focal point through which everything is perceived. Since Collins does not need to have a hero, or the adventure on which the hero habitually embarks upon, she can focus on society and the kinds of people found in all levels of it. Collins' choice to focus on a central narrator and focaliser in a densely populated world is what gives her the chance to create a more gender-equal story.

Another way in which Katniss and the other women are equal to their male counterparts is that both genders have strengths and weaknesses. Gale's strength is, like Katniss', his skill at hunting but his weakness is, unlike Katniss', his lack of empathy for the opponent because Gale sees his human opponents as animals and has no trouble with killing them. Katniss, on the other hand, is continually struggling with her hunter's instincts and her empathy for the people. Primrose's strength lies in her skill in healing and comforting, and her weakness is that her empathy is all encompassing making her unable to hunt and thus survive. Haymitch has already proven that he has the skills, the intelligence, and wits to win his Hunger Games. He did this with even worse odds than Peeta and Katniss because his Games were special and he had double the number of competitors. His weakness lies in him having become a complete alcoholic because he cannot deal with the thought of losing children from

his District any more. Every character seems to be balanced out by another character. They all have their time in the spotlight in some way or another and no gender or level of society is left behind. Making everyone equal is one of the ways in which Collins has improved the characterization of female characters.

Katniss' character is debated by feminists and other people interested in literature. Wright, Taber, Woloshyn and Lane, Lem and Hassel, Mitchell, Murphy, DeaVault, are only a couple of the people who discuss various aspects of Katniss' character and role in the novel. Although none of them completely agree with each other, there is one aspect that everyone who writes about Katniss agrees with: Katniss Everdeen shows signs of masculinity. From the very first chapter Katniss is shown as having taken over the place of the father in the family. She is the one that hunts; she makes sure that there is food on the table. According to Nancy Taber and Vera Woloshyn, in their article "Issues of exceptionality, gender, and power: exploring Canadian children's award-winning literature":

Female characters who responded to the call for adventure and/or who took up male-dominated actions usually did so only after male characters were no longer available, able, or willing to do so.

The death or absence of a parent(s) is common in children's literature, with their absence providing opportunities for children and youth to assume positions of leadership and responsibility (899).

Placing this next to *The Hunger Games* Taber and Woloshyn's argument is right. Katniss' father died, after which she took up the hunting and taking care of the family role that her father used to occupy. Of course it can be argued that Katniss would have eventually taken up hunting anyway, simply because she shares a lot of her character with him, the same way that Primrose takes after her mother. However, Taber and Woloshyn are correct in saying that Katniss would not have had to provide for her family if her father had not died in the mining

accident, causing her mother to drown in depression and letting her daughters almost die of starvation. Taber and Woloshyn researched four girls while they were reading *The Hunger Games*, discussed in “‘She's more like a guy’ and ‘he's more like a teddy bear’: girls' perception of violence and gender in *The Hunger Games*” in *Journal of Youth Studies*, and these girls have come up with a summary of Katniss’ masculinity “they perceived Katniss to be a strong and independent female, who was a competent hunter and unconcerned about her physical appearance” (1031). They show that they understand that the core values of masculinity, as described by Allan Johnson in *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, "control, strength, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values (such as invulnerability)" (7) are to some degree all found in Katniss.

The biggest point of discussion on the subject of Katniss Everdeen, however, lies in the question of whether or not she can be seen as feminine. In this part the discussion will be on showing that is also feminine, but later on in this section will be a discussion on what might cause Katniss to display actions which causes the people who do not believe that Katniss is feminine to argue so. The girls in Taber and Woloshyn’s research, among others, do believe that Katniss displays qualities of femininity as described by Johnson “cooperation, mutuality, equality, sharing, compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking” (7). According to these girls Katniss displays, at least some of, these qualities “from the perspective of a caring protector” (1032). Rodney DeaVault shares this opinion in “The Masks of Femininity: Perceptions of the Feminine in *The Hunger Games* and *Podkayne Mars*” saying “maternal defection has forced Katniss into the role of family protector” (193) explaining that she not only took on the role of the father, but also that of the mother. It is true

that Katniss is not comfortable with the traditional role of femininity as it is occupied by her mother and little sister Primrose. This does not mean, however, that she does not show any sign of femininity. Whitney Jones in “Katniss and Her Boys: Male Readers, the Love Triangle and Identity Formation” says that “Katniss—a singer and, most importantly, an actress—has the qualities of an artist. She creates just as surely as Peeta does, though instead of baked paintings, she creates symphonies of melody in the trees and multiple, believable personas for the capital and viewing audience” (66). Jones argues that Katniss’ femininity is also portrayed in her singing and acting. If she were only masculine she would not have taken up the challenge of playing the other part of the star crossed lovers. She herself says that she is not masculine enough to take up the usual masculine roles, as seen by those of the boys competing against her in the Hunger Games. “If only I were his size, I could get away with sullen and hostile and it would be just fine!” (*The Hunger Games*, 153). Katniss remarks on fellow competitor Thresh from District Eleven, who makes no attempt at being popular or vying for favour. Had Katniss had the same rugged, big, masculine build she would have had the opportunity to play masculine roles, as Johanna Mason from District Seven eventually does when during her Games she started killing people with an axe and dropped her sweet girl image. As it is she takes on roles and acts in ways that the audience expect from her and plays in on what she knows what the Gamemakers will be looking for to give herself airtime when she wants to and make sure that she does not get airtime when she does not. Through her singing Katniss is able to express her emotions in ways that she cannot with words because she does not have Peeta’s way with words and she is too confused and double binded, to be discussed later, to show them otherwise. In the first two novels of the trilogy Katniss is too focused on surviving. She does not allow herself the time to sing, except when asked by Prim or Rue who she looks upon as a mother and a sister. It is not until the third novel *Mockingjay*, in which immediate survival is less of an issue and the future can be seen, that Katniss takes

the time to feel her emotions. Because Collins allows Katniss to have qualities seen in both men and women and gives her the space to choose who and what she really wants to be that improves her portrayal.

In the previous part it has been discussed that Katniss shows both masculine and feminine qualities. Now those qualities are given further consideration by looking at the argument from Jones who says that Katniss' masculinity and femininity are personified in Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark (62). Gale is cast as the overly masculine representation of Katniss by virtue of him being male and sharing a distinct likeness in appearance and interests. According to Jones Gale's appearance is "tall, dark, and handsome—is the picture of the swoon-worthy hero of romance" (62). From the start Gale is typified as being hyper-masculine, the picture of what men are supposed to look like and how they are supposed to act. Going back to Johnson's list of masculine qualities and laying this list next to Gale's character there is a very clear resemblance. Gale's hunting is a sure sign of his control, strength, toughness, self-sufficiency and coolness under pressure. As the first two novels spend a large part in the Hunger Games there is more attention for Peeta there, however, in the last novel Peeta is completely absent for some time and Katniss has more time on the page with Gale rebelling against the Capitol. In the last novel, *Mockingjay*, Gale's other masculine qualities have the time and space to surface. Here is where Katniss, and the reader, truly sees his forcefulness, decisiveness and control over any emotion that interferes. Gale has no qualms killing people if it will help win the war and take over control from the Capitol. Throughout the three novels there is not one moment in which Gale is seen losing his control over his emotions regarding Katniss and being in a love-triangle with her and Peeta. He continues to look at it rationally. Gale is competitive, he wants to have Katniss and is willing to fight for her and make her doubt her feelings for Peeta so that she might chose Gale. However, he is looking at it from a logical perspective, saying that "Katniss will pick whoever

she thinks she can't survive without" (*Mockingjay*, 385) and in doing so shows a cool and male assessment of the situation. Peeta, on the other hand, shares a rather feminine physical resemblance to Katniss' living female relatives. He has "golden hair, pale skin, and blue eyes—bears the physical markers of the pure and innocent romantic heroine" (62). Peeta is a sensitive baker who has "an imagination capable of envisioning beautiful works of edible art as well as of taming nightmares by bringing the Games "back to life" on canvas (*Catching Fire*, 66)" (62). Other critics have also commented on Peeta being more feminine than masculine, the girls that Taber and Woloshyn researched, for example, thought that Peeta was "more like a teddy bear" (1031). In the first novel Peeta comes out for being in love with Katniss, catching just about everyone by surprise. Throughout the rest of the novel it is then revealed that he had always had his eyes on her ever since he went to school and his dad pointed her out to him saying that he had almost married her mom and that her singing voice in their first music lesson caught him (*The Hunger Games*, 365-366). Peeta tells of how he had always watched her and this silent adoration is very similar to that of girls who keep looking at cute guys without ever making any move toward him. Laying Peeta's character next to Johnson's list of feminine qualities, Peeta shows his cooperativeness and readiness to negotiate and compromise in the Games by being willing to work with Haymitch and the Careers, and when later on he and Katniss get back together he also works together with her to get food even though he does not have Katniss' skills. He could easily have stolen Katniss' shine in the pre-Games interview because he is better with words and in social conduct, but instead he keeps the two of them equal and shares his knowledge and skills with her. His throwing bread to a starving Katniss shows his compassion and caring, also his intuitive knowing that she was starving and not lying under that tree for a different reason. He is vulnerable and expresses his emotions when he opens up in the pre-Games interview about his love for Katniss. That is not to say that Katniss also exhibits all of these masculine and

feminine qualities. It is just that Katniss' masculine qualities and values are found in Gale, while she also shares feminine qualities and values with Peeta. In the end the love-triangle that Katniss, Peeta and Gale are in is not resolved because Katniss loves one more than the other. The end is much more symbolic, because Katniss ultimately chooses a set of gender qualities (Jones, 64). Collins way of showing Katniss' masculine and feminine sides by having them personified increases the layers of Katniss' portrayal and improves the genre's portrayal of women.

Having discussed Katniss' double gender and her personifications another argument can be made. Cultural feminists, as explained by Linda Alcoff, have the need to show the positive qualities of women. However, they do not want to do this to show that women are better than men, but rather to show that women are undervalued, but also equal to men (*Cultural Feminism versus Post-structuralism: the identity crisis in feminist theory*, 408). According to Roberts "Science fiction, [...], has a tremendous and unique opportunity to rehearse issues about feminism and science. Only in science fiction can we begin to imagine worlds in which women are treated as the full equals of men" (281). Although Collins may not necessarily be a cultural feminist, she does try to make Katniss equal to the men in her life like Peeta and Gale. Her equality to Gale is known from the start. Their relationship is based on the fact that both live in the same kind of situation, father dead and nobody else to provide for the family and get food on the table, and both have taken to the same solution, namely hunting. Even though Katniss goes through a time of emotional turmoil and she is often conflicted about what she should do, Gale never acts like she is inferior to him, that she is somehow less. On the contrary, in the third novel he is the one who makes sure that she is informed, he stands behind her decisions. Other characters in the third novel value Gale more than Katniss because he is not in the midst of emotional turmoil, he stays cool and composed and makes decisions. Katniss' equality to Peeta takes the whole three novels to build and

complete. From the moment that they are thrown together into the Games they too share a similar situation which equalizes the playing field for them enough that the characters can build on it further towards being interdependent on each other and equal to each other. It does not matter that Katniss is not immediately equal to Peeta, when Katniss and Gale became friends they also had to learn to be equal to each other. What matters is that Collins gives Katniss the space and the characters to be equal with and the opportunity to grow into equality with characters that she is not equal with at the start. In the novels written by Card and Anthony the women are all seen as inferior. No matter how good they are, even Valentine Wiggins and Petra Arkanian, they are still seen as merely women who will never be as good as men. In Collins' novels all the characters are treated as equals, all the characters get the same opportunity. In giving that opportunity to her female characters which is different from the ones that the female characters in Card's and Anthony's novels were given, she evolved the way that women can be present in Science Fiction.

One of the main roles women are often given is that of the damsel in distress. Wright explains that the reason there is such a problem with a character being the damsel in distress is that "by virtue of the plot, she does not have much to do, aside from perhaps knifing a too-familiar dungeon guard" (part 1). That someone needs to be rescued is not necessarily a problem. The problem with when this scenario is used is that the character needing rescue is usually completely passive because all the action is given to the rescuer. In *The Hunger Games* none of the characters are ever in that passive damsel in distress scenario. In *Mockingjay* Peeta, Johanna, and others are locked up and tortured by the Capitol, in an attempt to break Katniss and consequently the rebellion. Even during his time locked up and being under constant scrutiny of the Capitol, Peeta manages to find a way to get through to Katniss and warn her.

Snow plows forward, saying that clearly the rebels are now attempting to disrupt the dissemination of information they find incriminating, but both truth and justice will reign. The full broadcast will resume when security has been reinstated. He asks Peeta if, given tonight's demonstration, he has any parting thoughts for Katniss Everdeen.

At the mention of my name, Peeta's face contorts in effort. "Katniss... how do you think this will end? What will be left? No one is safe. Not in the Capitol. Not in the districts. And you ... in Thirteen..." He inhales sharply, as if fighting for air; his eyes look insane. "Dead by morning!" (156).

The Capitol had Peeta filmed and interviewed on television to counteract the propaganda films the rebels aired. In each of these Peeta talked to Katniss, trying to get her to stop the rebels and stop the war. The rebels knew that stopping the war would solve nothing and that everyone would continue living under the Capitol's regime. This time Peeta's appearance was live, the others were filmed and aired on different dates and times and any messages could have been edited out. During this live appearance Peeta finally had the chance to actually say something to Katniss that was not scripted. His words gave District Thirteen enough time to prepare for the bombing that was ordered and struck just after everyone reached safety in the underground bunker. Peeta knew that President Snow was not going to like it that he gave them that information, but he did it anyway. Whenever someone is in trouble in the trilogy they do not sit idly while waiting for rescue, everyone tries to make the situation better, improve chances of survival and such. In doing so Collins made sure that none of the female characters, or the feminine male characters such as Peeta, are ever considered passive heroines waiting for the heroes to rescue them. She improved one of the traditional female gender roles by changing any distress situation from a passive into an active one.

In Section two besides a general discussion of each of the female characters, they were also all compared to the set of stereotypes compiled by Clute and Nicholls. In this section

Katniss is not going to be compared to that same list, however, there will be a discussion on why some feminist critics think that Katniss is portrayed in a traditional manner, and why others follow the thought behind this thesis that Katniss is portrayed in a fashion newer to this genre. Katherine Broad, with the help of Elaine O'Quinn, argues that Katniss "is hardly a feminist figurehead" ("The Dandelion in the Spring", 125). According to O'Quinn, suffering and passivity are encouraged in girls in the traditional fiction that is seen as appropriate for them (book review, 169). Broad then goes on explaining that Katniss "certainly suffers, and despite all her heroics with a bow and arrow, she is a passive heroine, manipulated into outfits, relationships, arenas, and TV shoots, trying to figure out what everyone wants from her while asserting little of her own needs and goals" (125). According to Broad Katniss shows no agency over her own life and does little more than what she is told. Broad's opinion is based on the ending of the novel, which she believes "reframes the way we read the rest of the novels as it redirects the energies of the narrative from social upheaval to the maintenance of a reproductive status quo and ensures that Katniss's rebellion serves to keep her an appropriately gendered, reproductive, and ultimately docile subject" (125). Broad is not completely illogical in thinking that after having seen Katniss fight and rebel against the system for three novels it might seem almost a little anti-climatic to then in the epilogue see Katniss married to Peeta with two children who share a resemblance to both their parents. She argues "The series' conclusion in an epic heroine defaulting to a safe, stable, and highly insular heterosexual reproductive union – a union so much like the social and sexual status quo of our own – raises questions about just what has been transformed by Katniss's harrowing fight" (125). Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane in "Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in *The Hunger Games: "Scarred," "Bloody," and "Stunning"*" agree with Broad stating that "the book ends with her becoming a somewhat passive mother in an isolated community defined by her domestic role in a heteronormative family, tying her back to her

nurturing relationships with Prim and Rue” (157). Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane, however, think that the ending is at least not a complete surprise because throughout the series Katniss already displayed her caring for other people and showed that this had already been in her make-up since the start. Whatever argument these articles are making precisely, both look at *The Hunger Games* from the perspective that Collins’ portrayal started out on the right foot by having Katniss hunt, survive the Games and assassinate President Coin, but veered off in the wrong direction by making her insecure about certain decisions and not stand up for what they think Katniss should have stood up against.

There is one argument that can be made to explain why critics such Wright, “weak because she cannot articulate the cause for which she fights” (part 6), Woloshyn, Taber and Lane, “indecisive as well as selfish” (158), and Broad, “a passive heroine” (125), think that Katniss cannot be a feminist figurehead because she cannot make up her own mind and is led around by everyone in the series. Susan Bordo explains that boys often find themselves in a double bind, meaning “any situation in which a person is subject to mutually incompatible instructions, in which they are directed to fulfil two contradictory requirements at the same time” (“Gentleman or Beast?: The Double Bind of Masculinity.”, 242). With boys it means that they are required to be both aggressive and non-aggressive, not at the same time, but it can be very difficult for boys to understand when to be aggressive and when not to be aggressive when nobody explains it to them. Boys are expected to infer how to behave themselves from the set of unspoken rules of social standing (236). This double bind certainly also applies to Katniss. The Hunger Games and the death of her father expect aggression from her in order to survive. Opposite that the Capitol expects her to appear in a manner suitable for a woman. The discussion that Katniss has with Haymitch on how to portray her in the pre-Games interview is proof of that.

“I’m trying to figure out what to do with you,” he says. “How we’re going to present you. Are you going to be charming? Aloof? Fierce? So far, you’re shining like a star. You volunteered to save your sister. Cinna made you look unforgettable. You’ve got the top training score. People are intrigued, but no one knows who you are. The impression you make tomorrow will decide exactly what I can get you in terms of sponsors,” says Haymitch.

Having watched the tribute interviews all my life, I know there’s truth to what he’s saying. If you appeal to the crowd, either by being humorous or brutal or eccentric, you gain favour (140-141).

In the Games and in the Capitol, the people who stand out are the ones who gain favour, and the people who stand out are those who embrace what is suitable for them. Haymitch, as her mentor, is rightfully concerned on how to present her as her presentation will determine if he can get her any sponsors during the Games to ensure her survival. The final sentences of what Katniss says indicate that she is aware of this. Throughout the trilogy it is this awareness of what people expect from her and how they are going to react if she does not follow that expectation that is in disagreement with her own knowledge of what she might need to do to survive or do what she feels is right. As Katniss is only sixteen and seventeen throughout the trilogy she is still in the throes of puberty, of finding herself and discovering who she actually wants to be. Whenever Katniss cannot decide on what to do, whenever the Capitol or other people ask of her to follow a different guideline than her own, that is because she has trouble choosing between her own moral compass and how other people perceive her or should perceive her. Had Katniss been unaware of this discrepancy she might have either been a good girl who does what she is told, and consequently is killed in the Games because she cannot think for herself, or she might have been a girl who could not care less about what other people think of her. It is her awareness of the discrepancy in what people expect of her,

where there simply may not be a choice that will make everyone happy, that makes it so hard for her to choose. This double bind places another layer on Katniss' character, portraying her more realistically.

Jones, however, feels that Katniss actually is a good feminist figurehead, as Broad puts it. Together with Wright she articulates the reasons why choosing to live with Peeta is actually a good feminist choice. Wright makes the point that “woman can be both strong and feminine, and that one does not need to make them overtly masculine to make them admirable and edifying characters. Indeed, I proposed the idea that confusing strength with masculinity is in truth not a feminist ideal, but a misogynistic idea” (part 6). He argues against Broad, Woloshyn, Taber and Lane, saying that Katniss' masculinity has nothing to do with making her a good feminist female character. He, together with Jones in her own article, argues that “Masculine and feminine are a complementary relationship, not a master-slave relationship” (part 6). The feminists of the argument above seem to think that making the choice for her feminine side makes Katniss inferior. Jones, however, argues that

Her journey to selfhood is not in determining which boy she loves, but which set of values and behaviors, masculine or feminine, she accepts as her own. Katniss experiences a unique bond with each boy that amplifies the aspect of character that she shares with each. Like Gale, Katniss is angry and violent; like Peeta, she is a sympathetic artist (64).

When looking at the time before Katniss' father died it can be seen that Katniss was not always angry and violent.

It strikes me that my own reluctance to sing, my own dismissal of music might not really be that I think it's a waste of time. It might be because it reminds me too much of my father.

“So that day, in music assembly, the teacher asked who knew the valley song. Your hand shot right up in the air. She stood you up on a stool and had you sing it for us. And I swear, every bird outside the window fell silent,” Peeta says (*The Hunger Games*, 366).

This part shows that before the death of her father Katniss loved music and singing with him. She was proud of it. It was only later, when music and singing do nothing to secure her survival, and that of her mother and sister, and it reminds her of her father that Katniss started viewing it negatively. Jones also analyses that “Katniss’s resentment of her role as an artist or creator indicates the unbalanced state of her own identity. She is both artist and warrior, feminine and masculine, but cannot reconcile these two opposing parts of her character; instead, she reads herself as torn and fragmented, a broken reflection of the broken world she lives in” (66). When placing this analysis next to the one about her childhood it can be argued that the rift in her identity started after her father’s death as she had to assume a role that she would not necessarily have chosen for herself. It is very likely that even if her father had not died that she would have taken up hunting, but it would only have been to support and add to the provisions of the family. Jones stated that at the end of the trilogy Katniss did not choose a specific boy so much as she chose who she really wanted to be (64). In the end she made the decision to combine her masculinity and femininity, but with the overtones of the caring mother and wife, instead of those of the providing father which she had done after her father’s death. Jones and Wright argue together with this thesis that it is because Katniss chose who she wanted to be without discarding everything that had happened that makes her a good feminist female character. Collins created that opportunity by following Katniss’ character and what she ultimately wanted and needed instead of making her into a character that would have completely defied everything that she had done up until that point. By giving Katniss that choice of choosing who she wanted to be, instead of just choosing which boy she wanted,

Collins improved how female characters can be portrayed in the genre from the love-struck heroine of Rabkin to characters like Katniss Everdeen, who makes a choice of who she is.

In this final section Suzanne Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games* was discussed. It was argued that the setting of the dystopian subgenre allowed Collins to portray her characters in more detail than is necessary in a story centred on an adventure. Collins also treated her characters equally giving everyone the opportunity to show every side of them, and made Katniss equal to the other men in the story making certain that she was seen as inferior to them. Katniss' masculinity made her stand out from the start of the trilogy and continued to be a part of her story and growth. Her femininity, however, is what ultimately makes her who she is and why she chose to volunteer in Primrose's place in the Games. This femininity is hotly debated by various feminist critics. Some believe that it makes her weak and complacent, pointing to the ending of the trilogy where she eventually chooses to be with Peeta and have children and saying that she conforms to what is currently seen as the social status quo. While others see that it rounds out her character and, although it makes her softer, does not make her weaker, pointing to her love for Primrose and how she cares for her sister, mother and Rue and also point to the ending but with the argument that she does not settle down for less, but chooses which set of gender values she wants to keep as her own. It is also argued that Katniss' masculinity and femininity are personified in Gale and Peeta, respectively, allowing for increased layers in the story and Katniss' character. A reason why the feminists who do not see Katniss as strong, see her as weak and indecisive is the double bind of feminine caring and love versus masculine strength and aggression that at times makes her confused of what she should do. Collins changed the way that the damsel in distress scenario is used by, whenever someone needs to be rescued, having that person be active and helpful, rather than the genre standard of waiting passively.

## In Conclusion

Rabkin, Clute and Nicholls have shown that women are traditionally seen through the lenses of a set of stereotypes. These stereotypes are based on their relationship statuses. Johnson and Wright argue that these stereotypes come from a naturalistic point of view which determines characteristics based on gender which is based on their role in life. Gernsback partly agrees with Wright as his case revolves around the education and general tendencies of women. Badami found an anonymous critic who does not agree with either of them and is of the opinion that women are unimportant in every level of the genre. Robins proves that women are only accepted in the sciences if she renounces her femininity.

*Ender's Game* and *Bearing an Hourglass* are traditional science fiction novels. In *Ender's Game* the female characters Petra Arkanian, Valentine Wiggin and mother Wiggin are only given supporting roles. Petra can be classified as the Amazon Queen. Valentine has the role of the Kid Sister. Mother Wiggin as the Good Wife. *Bearing an Hourglass* has a female alien who embodies the entirety of the Amazon Queen stereotype. She also shows that the more sexual aware a female character is, the more she can be categorised as evil. Neither of these novels further explores the characters or their stereotypes.

Collins has moved up the evolutionary ladder of science fiction with her novel *The Hunger Games* by featuring a female focal point and by making her female characters equal to, and in balance with, her male characters. She has shown that the portrayal of female characters does not have to stop at a stereotype and that both genders can be equally important and active in a story, and even be active in the female lead.

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