Restrictions in Masculinity;

Gender Performance in Children’s Literature

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**Introduction**

Children develop their understanding of gender and gender roles from a young age. They pick up cues from their surroundings to form a basic understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl, allowing children as young as three years old to make a gender distinction when choosing a playmate (Martin and Ruble). This initial knowledge is cemented in a “rigid either-or” phase which is followed by a “phase of relative flexibility” extended towards the child’s own and others gender expression and performance, which they enter around the age of seven (idem.). The cues children act upon are made up of adult behaviour, TV and other media, and also books. The importance of children’s literature in the development of children’s perception of gender and gender roles has been illustrated by several researchers, including Trepanier-Street, Romatowski and Gooden and Gooden. Trepanier-Street and Romatowski’s examinations show that when children were regularly confronted with diverse gender roles in literature, their attitude towards traditional gender roles changed, the children exhibiting less stereotypic thinking when tested (155-156). Gooden and Gooden moreover emphasise the importance of diverse gender representation in children’s literature as they state that gender role stereotypes in children’s literature can negatively affect the child reader’s self-esteem, identity and interaction with others. The fact that stereotypes in literature can make a child feel like they should conform to roles they do not identify with illustrates the importance of representation in children’s literature those children can identify with even further. This shows that incorporating a diverse and positive image of gender roles and gender in children’s literature is truly important for a child’s development and an issue that deserves attention.

Thus far, the attention that gender in children’s literature has received focuses largely on femininity and female characters (Flood) (Tsao). Despite having titles that indicate a discussion of genders, gender stereotypes and gender roles, a large percentage of articles discussing gender focus on the problems surrounding the manner in which femininity and female characters are portrayed. The research conducted by Kortenhaus and Demarest is one amongst many: it is titled *Gender Role Stereotyping in Children’s Literature: An Update,* but despite the seemingly neutral title mainly focuses on female characters and their representation in children’s literature. It shows that, while there has been an increase of female characters in children’s literature since 1940 (when they were still largely outnumbered), the roles they are depicted in are still marked by negative gender stereotyping. The female characters are overwhelmingly dependant and passive, in contrast to the male characters who are mainly depicted as active and independent (8-11). More significantly, the traits female characters are given are seen as less desirable, which results in males being portrayed as competent and successful while females are not (3). Kortenhaus and Demarest argue that this leaves female readers without a positive role model for their own gender, which could have negative effects on the reader (3, 12). It is furthermore possible that male readers could be affected as well, as a lack of positively portrayed feminine traits and female characters could shape their perception and the importance attached to conforming masculinity may make them insecure about their own gender performance. They could feel pressured to conform to hegemonic masculinity, the dominant and most valued form of masculinity (Connell 221). Discussing these issues is certainly necessary and important, as Basow states that these roles are learned through input. Basow argues that this not only opens the possibility to learn them differently through varied representations, but furthermore makes it possible for these roles to be “unlearned” and for gender identity itself to be influenced through similar means (8). As Pugh and Wallace state: “Children are harmed by the male and female stereotypes developed in traditional literature” (5) and it is important to note that this applies to both female and male stereotypes. Most academic writers and researches seem to agree that a change in children’s literature is indeed needed, as without such change these stereotypes could “contribute to the construction and validation of retrograde, politically unequal meanings for males and females” and could cause readers to view gender deviance as “sick, disgusting, and immoral” leaving no space for children to have any sort of flexibility in their gender performance and expression (Pugh and Wallace 5). These facts are as true for male readers, male characters and the manners in which they and masculinity are represented in children’s literature as they are for female readers, female characters and femininity. To truly achieve a varied representation and to make positive and diverse role models a possibility for child readers the depiction of gender performance in relation to masculinity needs to be considered in equal amounts as that of femininity.

 To provide that attention, this thesis focuses on masculinity and how it is represented and performed by both male and female characters in children’s literature. The presiding question is: “How are gender roles depicted in children’s literature aimed at children from the ages of 7 to 12 through the use of gender performativity and performed masculinity?” This question is answered at the hand of four books as to include a variety of gender performances and their depiction in children’s literature. The books chosen for this paper are *Five on a Treasure Island* by Enid Blyton, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* by Michelle Magorian and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling. These books were chosen due to the fact that they are all aimed at the same age bracket and reading level, which indicates the content of the books are on a similar level allowing them to be discussed in the same manner. Another aspect that was considered during the selection of books is the time the books were published in. As the aim was to incorporate a wide variety of depictions of gender performance, the books are all from different eras, as attitudes towards gender performance are likely to be different throughout history. *Five on a Treasure Island* was published in 1942, a book describing the adventures of the three siblings Anne, Julian, Dick and their cousin George, accompanied by her dog Timothy. A similar concept of four siblings’ adventures is described in the 1950’s *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, in which Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter venture into the world of Narnia. Published in 1981, *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* does not detail the adventures of siblings but those of Will, who is evacuated from London to Little Weirworld due to the second world war. He is taken in by Mr. Tom and is soon surrounded by a group of friends with whom he too undertakes adventures. The last book in the selection is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, published in 1997. This book details yet another variety of adventure, those experienced by Harry and his friends when they arrive at the wizarding school Hogwarts. The books were furthermore selected as all of the groups of children in the books have at least one male and female member, which makes it possible for this thesis to discuss male as well as female performance of masculinity.

The discussion of the books takes place in two chapters, both chapters discussing two books. The books are paired due to their publishing date, discussing the books closest to each other alongside each other. The pairing is moreover due to the fact that they portray similar gender roles as both Blyton and Lewis discuss rather traditional gender roles while both Magorian and Rowling approached gender roles with a more modern mind-set, which could be interpreted as an indication of the gender performances represented in the books. The text are analysed on the basis of the gender performances that they portray, focusing on the child characters and their masculine performance, while considering the context they are performed in.

**Theoretical Framework**

This thesis discusses both normative and transgressive gender stereotypes. This is done at the hand of the definition presented in Basow’s book *Gender: Stereotypes and Roles*. A stereotype is a “relatively rigid and oversimplified conception of a group of people in which all individuals in the group are labelled with the so called group characteristics” (Wrightsman Qtd. in Basow 1). The key part of this definition is “so called group characteristics” clarifying that these characteristics that are seen as representative of the group are not accurate for the whole group and may not apply to every individual. In relation to gender these stereotypes pertain to group and individual attributes, characteristics and behaviour. A traditional gender stereotype for men could be strength while the trait of nurturing would be ascribed to women (Basow 3). This assumes that character traits match biological sex in traditionally familiar ways. These stereotypes presume that a person who belongs to the gender that is physically capable of bearing a child would also naturally be a nurturing person, as this is necessary when raising children. The circularity of these stereotypes is clear in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary which defines masculinity as “having qualities appropriate to or usually associated with a man”.

This thesis, however, operates under the idea that gender is not a natural fact that is rigid, but rather a performance constructed by the individual and the discourse, allowing a person of female biological sex to perform masculinity and for a person of male biological sex to perform femininity and not be bound by their sex. This idea is encapsulated by the idea of gender performativity, largely defined by the writings of Judith Butler. She wrote *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (1992)as a way of challenging the heterosexism in feminism and the policing of identities in queer spaces (Butler, *The Body* 84). Butler argues that the categories of man and woman, and male and female, are essentially called into being and shaped by the discourse surrounding these categories, rather than being defined as a fact by biological differences. Butler explains that a person is given their gender by the repetition and reinforcement of gender roles throughout a person’s life (*Gender Trouble* 125) rather than it being a natural fact. She states that gender is “a stylized repetition of acts … which are internally discontinuous […] so that the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (*Gender Trouble* 179). With this definition in mind it can be argued that masculinity can be performed by male and female characters alike, through which they could enforce or subvert the expectations placed upon them by the traditional gender stereotypes which attribute characteristics to people based on their biological sex. The characters’ gender performance is analysed at the hand of the hegemonic masculinity, which is the dominant form of masculinity, the one that is most valued in the culture and time period of concern (Connell 211). This dominant masculinity is reinforced by systems and institutions, such as schools, raising and educating children in a manner supportive of the hegemonic ideal (Connell 205).

**Chapter 1**

***The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* and *Five on a Treasure Island;***

**Extreme performances in gender**

Out of all of the chosen books *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* contains the most straightforward and conforming gender performances, as there is only slight deviance present the majority of the gender performances conform to and emphasise the hegemonic gender roles. Masculine performance is very limited for the female characters as they are often pushed back into feminine performance while male characters are pushed to perform masculinity. This chapter illustrates the findings concerning these books through an analysis of the four main characters of both books, considering their performances separately and in context with one another.
 The male characters carry the stereotypical characteristics associated with men (Pinset 3, 12), Peter in particular. He is the patriarch of the family and takes a lot of responsibility on himself, as he leads his siblings and attempts to provide for them, always takes charge and makes the final decision (Lewis 25, 47). This role is only amplified once the children come into Narnia and are faced with issues such as battle. Without a question he is assumed to be the leader and is appointed to take charge by Aslan when he hints that he might not be there for the battle (53). There is no room for him to express his doubt or desire for a different role, he is appointed to be the leader and the pressure of the fate of Narnia depending on him is too heavy for him to refuse. This is underlined by the fact that when Susan and Lucy are attacked by a wolf, Aslan sends Peter forward to fight it, actively holding more experienced and qualified warriors back from the scene. Aslan tells them “Back! Let the Prince win his spurs” (47). This is the first time Aslan refers to Peter as a prince, connecting the title with the action that is required of Peter, underlining the fact that with the completion of this task this he would be earning the title, as well as Aslan’s respect. This however also suggests that Peter’s worth is dependent on his physical capabilities, which aligns with the ideas of hegemonic masculinity. The pressure this approach to masculinity places on Peter is illustrated by the fact that Peter is in fact not brave, as he does not rush forward to rescue his sister, but rather he is pressured into doing so, leaving him feeling “not very brave” (48) but sick. The next sentence highlights the pressure he is put under, stating that how he felt “made no difference to what he had to do” (idem.) illustrating that there is in fact no space for his own feelings and that he simply is to perform as he is told. This idea of the male characters having to prove themselves in battle is echoed in Edmund’s story line as he too regains trust and appreciation from Aslan and his siblings by fighting in the battle and defeating the White Witch (63). None of the girls experience this kind of pressure to prove their worth. They do not have to fight, nor excel at anything to show their value, as there are no expectations of active or brave behaviour attached to their gender. The importance of the hegemonic masculine gender performance is furthermore highlighted by the scene directly after Peter’s moment of trial. As Peter and Susan both begin to cry over the event the narrator informs the reader that “in Narnia people didn’t think less of you for that” (48), suggesting that anywhere else they would because Peter should not be crying.

During the first chapters of the book it seems as if Lewis lets the reins on gender performance hang slightly looser when it comes to the girls, as they are allowed some masculine performance. Lucy is portrayed as an explorer and a leader as she ventures into Narnia by herself and through this is capable of leading her siblings with the knowledge she attained on her previous trip (25). Susan is granted with a similar freedom, being given the traits of practicality and sensibility, which are often characterised as masculine, as she suggests to take the coats with them and appears to be the voice of reason in the discussion concerning their next steps after arriving in Narnia (Burrus 27). But this apparent freedom seems to only have been granted to bring the story forward as the rest of the book seems to only restrict the girls in their gender performance and only grant them freedom to follow with restrictions. This can be seen when the children are gifted with weapons by Father Christmas. He provides all three of the children with a weapon which seems to encourage the girls to battle and defend themselves, however, while Peter is given a sword and shield, Susan is gifted with a bow and arrow (40), a weapon that is considered to be the most feminine weapon (Gallegos 4), pushing her back into the confines of the feminine gender performance. This is further emphasised by the second gift Susan receives, a horn that allows her to call for help (Burrus 41), placing her in the role of a damsel in distress, rather than an independent warrior. Lucy is given a bottle of cordial that is capable of healing any wound, alongside her dagger (41), placing her in a nursing role rather than a fighting one, confining her too within the feminine gender performance. After having given them all the gifts, Father Christmas makes the intentions of the gifts clear, stating: “[Y]ou also are not to be in the battle” (Lewis 41). This restriction not only confines the girls in their actions but also limits them in their gender performance as they are not allowed to partake in what is the most emphasised masculine performance in the book. This restriction of both the girls and the boys to the hegemonic gender performance assigned to them returns throughout the book through the division of roles, similarly as through their gifts. When the children are invited into the beavers’ house the girls are assigned to help inside the house while the boys accompany the male beaver to hunt for fish (30), establishing the traditional gender roles. Similarly, later in the story, the boys are encouraged to partake in the military portion of the battle (53) while the girls accompany Aslan while he leaves the camp to sacrifice himself, comforting him and taking care of his body after the sacrifice is completed (55, 57). These restrictions, actively keeping the girls from exploring masculine performance while pushing the boys towards that performance, leave all of the child characters and through that the child reader confined within the conforming performance of their own gender.

In contrast with the extreme conforming performances of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* the most obvious and extreme instance of non-hegemonic gender performance is Georgina from the *Famous Five* series. She performs her gender in a completely masculine manner, even refusing to respond to anything but George, the male name she has chosen for herself. She is described as looking like a boy (7), being a good swimmer (17) and rower (15), being better than any of the boys and being a leader as she is the one who dictates many of their interactions (8) and leads their adventures by suggesting activities (15, 43). Her character is given most of the action and speaks most out of all the children (Rudd 4) letting her take the lead in most things. She avoids any instances of feminine performance, refusing to take on roles or tasks assigned to girls. When asked who she is she simply replies: “I’m George.” I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won’t be. I don’t like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher- boy on this coast. You’re to call me George. Then I’ll speak to you. But I shan’t if you don’t.” (7).

This is the description that truly describes her performance throughout the book. She is not called Georgina again and she accurately describes herself as capable, demonstrating her skills throughout the book. George is given almost absolute freedom in her masculine gender performances, her choices, while commented on, are largely respected. Even Anne, one of the most conforming characters in her own performance, accepts her choice and grants her this freedom, commenting that she does not really care what she calls her and how she likes the name George more than Georgina (7). George’s parents, despite commenting on the subversive nature of her gender performance (5), never attempt to change anything about it or call her by her birth name, leaving George in control and power over her own performance. What makes this absolute freedom George seems to experience so important are the implications this has for Blyton’s opinion on gender and gender performativity. The character of George can be interpreted as proof for Blyton believing that behaviour, skills and capabilities are not bound to biological sex. George, while behaving like a boy is physically still a girl, yet is able to best the boys at many physical activities such as swimming and rowing (15, 17). Through this, it seems that Blyton is arguing for the fact that gender is constructed, as George is able to perform and construct her gender in a manner she is comfortable with and she feels represents her, instead of being bound by biological facts.

While it can be argued that creating George was a manner for Blyton to rebel against and criticise the hegemonic gender performance and roles she believes to be unfair and restricting (Coetzee 89), the other characters’ portrayal and George’s character development point towards Blyton feeling some pressure in this area. Throughout the series George is continually restricted in her masculine performance — she is silenced (Rudd 7), removed from the action (4) and is eventually placed in a more domesticated and feminine performance (6). This pressure, however, is already apparent in the first book through the presence and portrayal of the other characters. The brothers, Anne and the adults all conform to their gender’s hegemonic performance, Julian taking on the role of the stereotypical leader-patriarch and Anne the one of the aspiring housewife (Coetzee 88).

In contrast to George, Anne values and enjoys all that comes with the dominant feminine performance and actively avoids masculine performance. She enjoys being a girl and the “pretty frocks” and dolls that come with it (7), frequently avoiding the more action packed moments in favour of more feminine tasks such as nursing (49, 53, 61). Rudd however argues that Anne has an added role in the book, as she believes Anne is not simply there to contrast George and provide a portray of hegemonic femininity, but is furthermore present to prevent the books from becoming an homage to hegemonic masculinity (10). Yet it seems as if Blyton achieved the exact opposite. Anne portrays the exact reason George turned to masculine performance, as she represents all of the aspects of femininity that George finds stifling, such as housework and the need to dress up (Coetzee 91). The contrast between Anne and George seems to be present to show that masculinity is preferable over femininity (Coetzee 95), as not only the boys strive to perform masculinity, so does a girl. While the scene in which George states she “simply hates being a girl” (Blyton 7) is a clear illustration of this sentiment to begin with, it only functions as a set up as it is reiterated throughout the series, as George emphasises several times that being a girl is in fact not worth it while it is portrayed as being trivial through Anne’s behaviour (Cash 5). The preference towards masculinity is moreover emphasised by the link created between masculine performance and power. Coetzee argues that George is only able to achieve power and success through masculinity (95), as the more she conforms to a feminine performance, the less power and action she experiences (Rudd 4) communicating to child readers that masculine performance is what is needed for them to do the same.

The portrayal of gender and gender performance in this book not only argues that being a boy is preferable to being a girl, but furthermore evokes the idea that being masculine is what children should strive to be (Coetzee 95). This, additionally to restricting and condemning girls, pressures boys in a similar manner, leading them to believe that they are required to be masculine. The idea that boys are not to perform outside of the presiding masculine gender performance is affirmed by Anne’s explanation concerning her happiness at being a girl. She states "You see – I do like pretty frocks – and I love my dolls – and you can't do that if you're a boy." (Blyton 7), effectively not only telling the reader that this is what being a girl means but furthermore arguing that boys are not allowed to participate in this behaviour. While it can be argued that Blyton’s goal was to create a subversive gender performance and to rebel against the hegemonic gender roles, the effects are somewhat different. Although girls certainly are encouraged to step outside the dominant gender performance, this is only possible if it is in favour of a completely masculine performance as this is constructed as being worth more than femininity. Boys are met with even more restrictions within the book. The entire text seemingly tells them to be masculine and not venture outside of the constraints laid out for them, unless they are willing to take a step down of sorts towards femininity and agree to be valued less than masculine boys.

**Chapter 2**

**Different degrees of divergence in *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone***

The third book to be published from the selected books, *Goodnight, Mr. Tom*, has not received a lot of academic attention. However, the research that has been dedicated to it, such as the article by Pham Dinh, argues that Magorian uses the war-time setting in *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* “as a catalyst for self-discovery in all kinds of ways,” including gender performance. The book does indeed present a wide variety of gender performance to the child reader, making it possible for many children to identify. The gender performances of the child characters are laid out for the reader through the first outing of the main child characters together as they go blackberrying. Will, Zach, George and the twins Carrie and Ginnie discuss their likes and hobbies, giving the reader not only an insight at their character but into their gender performance as well. Zach is the character who portrays the most divergent gender performance, as he tells the children that he enjoys reading poetry and plays (Magorian 58). This could be considered as feminine interests, as theatre and poetry were and still are often associated with romantic, flamboyant and feminine people. While this in itself is not necessarily the most subversive trait it receives a reaction from the children establishing him as different. This subversiveness is then continually built up throughout the book, as it is revealed that he enjoys extravagant clothes (78), tap dancing and the theatre (76), writes his own stories and poems (71) and believes good listening and sensitivity to be admirable (80). He is even described as looking like a girl in the dark (48) which, combined with the above and the fact that he is considered dramatic (76), establishes him as the most divergent of the hegemonic masculinity in his gender performance. It is the manner in which this character is treated however that illustrates Magorian’s attitude towards deviating gender performances, as he is accepted and valued for these traits and when he dies is greatly missed. Zach’s character is almost solely portrayed in a positive light as he becomes an adored presence in most characters’ lives and is given to the reader as a positive example of subversive male gender performance.

Will is introduced as the second variant of male gender performance, as he is portrayed as deviating from the hegemonic masculinity but grows towards it bit by bit. When the reader is introduced to the other characters Will has already been established as subversive of the dominant masculinity that includes being strong as he is weak both in body and in mind. His attempts to run fail due to him being physically incapable (51) and he is called a “sissie” for not playing with his classmates in fear of dirtying himself which would result in punishment from his mother, the person who is in control over his life (41). Due to his fear of his mother and his adherence to her will, he has not found any likes or dislikes independently, being left to tell the other children the only thing he can think of: drawing (59). His mental and physical strength improve throughout the book, allowing him to establish hobbies such as acting (96) and singing (102), which he has a natural talent for and to discover that he is sensitive and a good listener (80). While he frequently struggles with accepting his skills and traits as positive and fears that his classmates were correct in calling him a sissie, he comes to terms with the possibility of a divergent gender performance being possible and positive through other characters. Zach argues that his sensitivity and empathy is admirable (80) while George, who portrays the most conforming masculinity of the boys, shows him that having traits such as an affinity for plants and flowers does not make one a sissie (107). He grows into a “well-fleshed” boy (117) which allows him to partake in physical activities without problems. This symbolises him growing into hegemonic masculinity which emphasised by his growing taller at the end of the book, becoming more conforming masculine in his appearance as well. However, he continues to be a sensitive and caring boy, not leaving his non-conforming traits, as he grows into a character representing both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity.

George is the one amongst the boys to represent the gender performance that is the closest to the hegemonic masculinity, as he describes himself at the hand of typical masculine characteristics. He enjoys fishing, having occasionally provided food for his family through his hobby (59), a trait reminiscent of the typical male role of the provider. He furthermore enjoys several sports including cricket which demonstrates his strength as he is known to accidentally break windows during the game (59). The final fact that he provides concerns his building skills as he has built a raft that the twins and he took onto the river. Even though George is constructed as the character most conforming to dominant masculinity through these traits he is later on utilised to directly explain to the child reader that performing outside of one’s hegemonic gender performance is completely fine. He does not ridicule Will for his weakness when he fails to carry his bucket by himself (54) and later on proves to Will, and through him the reader, that knowing and appreciating plants and flowers is in fact not something to be ashamed of as a boy (107).

The diversity of performed gender and masculinity continues with the twins, who are represented as each other’s opposites, as Carrie loves to climb trees, explore and learn (58), while Ginnie is drawn towards the more feminine hobbies such as knitting and sewing and enjoys helping out in the household. Carrie is the one amongst the sisters that represents a more masculine performance as she works hard to be allowed into a high school, which up to that point was a privilege that had belonged to boys only in their village. When her sister reminds her of the fact that this behaviour is seen as odd, she responds that she would rather be odd if that meant she was happy (108), directly showing the child reader that being different from the norm is completely fine as long as one is happy with it. She furthermore continues to break the norms surrounding gender performance as she fulfils her wish of wearing pants. Despite having been told by her mother that this decision would lead to her turning into a boy and never being able to marry, she exclaims that she does not care for marriage anyway and follows through, wearing Zach’s old clothes. Not only does she challenge the standard gender performance expected of girls, she furthermore claims traits associated with masculine performance as her own. This challenging of roles and performances is continued with her parents’ and sister’s reaction, as her mother is the one who disapproves of her performance outside of the norm and her father is the one supporting her choices (200). Her sister, the one character who values and conforms to the standard more than George (201) is also supportive, which illustrates the diverse environment Magorian is creating (Pham Dinh). Pham Dinh furthermore argues that the fact that Carrie achieves her goals could show authorial approval of her performance.

While in other books adults can be seen correcting the children’s atypical gender performance, this is almost absent in *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* as the adult characters, just as the child characters, portray an array of gender performances. The conforming performance is represented through characters such as Mrs. Hartridge, while Nancy Little represents subversive performance as she performs masculine traits (21). Tom, just as his adoptive son, is a combination of hegemonic and divergent performance. He is introduced as a “a healthy, robust, stockily built man with a head of thick white hair. Although he was of average height, in Willie's eyes he was a towering giant with skin like coarse, wrinkled brown paper and a voice like thunder” (2). His personality is gruff and unsociable to the extent of being slightly scary (10, 32, 34), depicting him as the stereotypical male who is reserved about his feelings and does not talk a lot. This image in contrasted by the manner in which he behaves towards Will as soon as he takes him into his home. Without any real hesitation Tom takes care of the boy, buying him all that he needs despite being told that he does not have to (29). He anticipates the needs of the boy (4, 10) and knows how to take care of him when things take a turn for the worse, Will is being sick (7). Within a week Tom describes Will as “being with him” (25), buys him treats (28) and decides to build an air raid shelter, which he previously did not consider necessary, as it is no longer just him (23). This nurturing side of him appears to be natural as he does not question it and seems to act by instinct, simply knowing what to do. He takes on the traditional role of mother and father in one, not only teaching Will practical things and physically helping him grow stronger, but also taking on the mental and emotional nurturing of the child. While he is initially surprised by how instinctively he takes these roles upon himself he does not once question it or consider that this might be something that is traditionally feminine or not suited for him. Through the manner in which Magorian constructed all of these characters’ gender performance she shows that not only it is okay to perform outside one’s gender, it can have a positive effect to accept one’s traits that do not fit into the hegemonic view of gender performance. Tom, Will and Carrie all improve their lives by accepting their subversive traits, as Carrie achieves her goals, Will becomes a more well balanced and healthy boy and Tom lives a happier life (84).

Lastly,due to its popularity, gender in the last book, the first part of the *Harry Potter* series, has been widely discussed and often praised for its encouragement of being deviant from the norm (Pugh and Wallace 3). According to both Bronski (Qtd. in Pugh and Wallace 3) and Wannamaker, the contrast between the muggle world and the wizarding world and how they are respectively portrayed encourage this deviance. They argue that the series are an attack on normalcy as the muggles that the reader encounters, the Dursleys, are vilified and the wizards celebrated (Bronski Qtd. in Pugh and Wallace 3). The Dursleys are portrayed as thoroughly unpleasant and abusive, while they describe themselves as “perfectly normal, thank you very much.” (1) linking their unpleasant presence with the idea or normalcy. In addition to this, the Dursleys hate anything that diverges from the norm, making this option that much more attractive to the reader (Wannamaker). This hate is introduced at a time in the book when neither Harry nor the reader are yet aware of magic or the fact that this is what the Dursleys’ hate is directed at. This could lead to the reader interpreting their hate as hate towards any divergence, including gender. Wannamaker argues that this leads to a positive image of gender deviance for the reader, as it is opposed to what the Dursleys believe. This stance is furthermore supported by the male characters in the Dursley family. Both father Vernon and son Dudley present hegemonic masculinity (Wannamaker) in a negative light, due to their fondness for it. Both Vernon and Dudley strive to perform the dominant masculinity but due to the readers established dislike for the Dursleys and what they stand for this stance towards hegemonic masculinity is condemned as well. Duriez argues that Rowling employs the same strategy of linking unpleasant characters to ideas she does not support in the wizarding world too, making the Slytherin house a representative of gender stereotypes, as the characters conform to prevailing gender performance and it is the only house which does not have any female athletes on their quidditch team (Rowling 42). Wannamaker furthermore argues that the book supports gender performance outside of hegemonic restrictions through the characters’ behaviour and appearance. The first impression the reader gets of the most powerful wizard in the whole series is one of divergence, as Dumbledore enters the story dressed in “[…] long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots.” (5). While Dumbledore represents non-hegemonic gender performance through his appearance Hagrid does the same through a combination of appearance and traits (Wannamaker). Hagrid is a masculine man when the reader is first introduced to him through the description that states “He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild — long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets.” (9). Hagrid arrives on a motorbike and seems to fully fit into the dominant masculinity of strength, however when the reader witnesses his interaction with the baby he is carrying a different image is presented. He is portrayed as caring and emotional as he bursts out into tears after saying goodbye to the baby, leading to Dumbledore comfort him (9). This contrast between his masculine physical appearance and his nurturing and caring personality is present throughout the book, illustrated by the second time the reader encounters Hagrid. This scene shows him as he breaks down a door to enter the cottage the Dursleys have temporarily moved to retrieve Harry (29). He proceeds to intimidate the Dursleys, bending Vernon’s gun into a knot after which he gifts Harry with a home backed cake and decides to cook tea for him (30). These actions clearly demonstrate his strength and masculinity as well as his more feminine and nurturing traits, illustrating his non-hegemonic gender performance.

Despite these aspects of the book which seem to encourage non-hegemonic gender performance, hegemonic gender performance is reinforced too, through the portrayal of several male characters. One of these characters is Harry, who grows from a weak, oppressed and feminised boy into a famous, rich and popular athlete, transforming him from a non-hegemonic performing character to a character that represents the values of the dominant masculinity (Heilman 142). This transformation takes place parallel to his transformation from a nobody who was unhappy with his life to a hero who saved the school which could cause the reader to attribute the positive changes to his changes in his gender performance, provoking a positive association of conforming to hegemonic masculinity.

The characters are furthermore portrayed in a manner that discourages male characters to perform outside of the restrictions of their presiding gender performance. Neville, one of these characters, is ridiculed for his lack of physical and athletic abilities which causes him to fall of a broom, his lack of bravery (96) and physical “unattractiveness to girls” (Heilman 143) (Rowling 147). Heilman argues that the lack of these traits can be interpreted as the lack of hegemonic masculinity and his treatment is a consequence of failed masculine performance (156). This negative portrayal of Neville is a “textual warning” (157) towards the reader, demonstrating the consequence of a male character failing to conform to the dominant masculinity (Heilman 157). While these characters’ portrayal encourages boys to perform hegemonic masculinity and reinforces its dominance, masculine performance of female characters seems less straightforward. While Hermione seems to be a strong, independent girl who is as integral to the adventure as the boys, contributing in her own way, she is pushed back into the feminine roll frequently (Dresang 223). This is strongly illustrated by the manner in which she becomes the damsel in distress after a troll is set loose in the castle. Despite her obvious intellectual superiority to both Ron and Harry, she is helpless and unable to think of a solution until they come to save her (115, 116). She is depicted as close to fainting and as “squealing” (187) and “squeaking” (149) in threatening situation, words that are never used to describe Harry or Ron (Dresang 223). While it is not strange or problematic to portray a girl differently from the boys, it becomes significant when it does not fit with the rest of that character’s personality. Despite performing masculinity through being brave and independent, Hermione is not allowed complete freedom in her gender performance, being placed back into the confines of femininity regularly.

Although the book seems to support divergence from the norm, this support is largely symbolic and not connected to a real issue. While both Hagrid and Dumbledore seem to encourage non-hegemonic gender performance this is countered by the manner in which other characters’ presence seems to argue against it. The text employs characters’ gender performance to illustrate the importance of hegemonic masculinity for boys and the consequences of performance outside of it. While Hermione is given more freedom than the male characters, she is still restricted in her masculine performance and frequently confined to feminine performance.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

When looking at these books side by side some tendencies can be detected, showing a possible development in children’s literature. It seems as if when looking at the freedom girls, boys and adults receive in their gender performance in these books different developments take place. The freedom boys receive in stepping outside of hegemonic masculine performance seems to be increasing. While both *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* and *Five on a Treasure Island* give the male characters no freedom, in Lewis’ case even pressuring the male characters into conforming masculine performance, this seems to become less in the later books. While Will still feels slight pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity in fear of being called a sissie, throughout the book he is assured that it is not necessary for him to worry. Rowling’s book however seems to break the chain. While it certainly shows more freedom for male characters, especially adult characters, it also mirrors Lewis’ book by pressuring the male child characters by suggesting non-hegemonic masculinity is negative. It seems as if Rowling took up both the attitude represented by Blyton’s and Lewis’s works and the attitude that emerges in Magorian’s work and combined both of them in the text.

When observing the female characters there seems to be more of a trend rather than a development. Due to the strong contrast between the two books that were published earlier, it would be difficult to find a development between them and the books published later on. Both *Goodnight, Mr Tom* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* seem to provide more freedom for girls to perform masculinity when placed in comparison with *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe,* however when compared to George from *Five on a Treasure Island* both of them seem to be incredibly restrictive, as George has no restrictions. Nevertheless, while there is no clear development, a trend can be detected amongst these books concerning the freedom granted to the female child characters. All four of the books, despite having varying degrees of masculinity performed by girls, all seem to have at least one female child character that reinforces the dominant feminine gender performance. In Lewis’ text Lucy and Susan both fit this description as both of them largely reinforce the hegemonic performance and barely stray from it, balancing any masculine performance with an abundance of feminine performance. In *Five on a Treasure Island* Anne is placed in that role, balancing George’s extremely deviant gender performance with and extremely conforming one. A similar division of roles can be observed in *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* in which Ginnie, who strongly conforms to the hegemonic gender performance, seems to balance an equally as strongly subversive Carrie. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* this division is made within one character as Hermione is the only female child main character. Hermione has several masculine traits such as bravery and independence, however these seem to require feminine performance too such as fainting and squealing to balance it out. It seems that while girls do receive slightly more freedom in their gender performance there is a need to balance the masculinity with feminine performance, no matter how small.

 Although both the gender performance by boys and girls in these four books seem to connect on some level, it seems that the gender performances of the adult characters are not completely linked. Lewis’, Blyton’s and Magorian’s text all seem to utilise the adult characters to mirror the attitude towards gender performance that is exhibited throughout the text, while Rowling does not. Although there are almost no adults in Narnia, the one that does relate to gender performance seems to completely encapsulate the text’s attitude towards gender performance. As he presents the children with the gifts he represents how Lewis treats gender performance throughout the book, giving the girls weapons that symbolise the masculine performance they are allowed. Mirroring Lewis’ attitude he however immediately restricts them to femininity again by forbidding them to battle. In addition to this he echoes the attitude displayed throughout the text by presenting Peter with a sword and a shield, placing him in the role of the warrior and leader. In Blyton’s text the adults are similarly absent, only contributing to gender performance through their comments on George. While they acknowledge her wishes and respect them, they still question it occasionally by asking her to perform femininity, symbolising the balance that is otherwise achieved through Anne’s presence. The adult presence that represents the manner in which gender performance is treated in *Goodnight, Mr. Tom* is Tom, as he receives the same amount of freedom as the children do and mirrors them by performing both masculinity and femininity. Rowling’s text however is the exception, as the adults receive more freedom than the children in their deviating gender performance.

Though one can never speak for the author, it seems as if both Rowling and Blyton attempted to create a text with diverse and positive gender performance for both male and female characters, but simply were influenced by external influences such as the dominant opinions on gender in their society. It has been argued that this is the reason behind Lewis’ portrayal of gender performance as well (Burrus 5) as he lived in a time arguably more misogynistic than ours. However, it is worth noting that in a group of four the only male author also happened to be the one with the most restrictive and hegemonic view on gender performance.

Even though these books almost all have aspects to them that could be considered restrictive to a child reader’s gender performance and perception this does not mean that they should be cleared from the bookshelf. While more varied gender roles and performances should be represented in children’s literature (Kortenhaus and Demarest 231) this can be achieved through several approaches. Instead of restricting the amount of books a child reads that represent traditional and stereotyped gender performance, it could be seen as beneficiary to present them with a variety. The development of the child’s perception of gender and gender performance could be shaped in a diverse manner if they read all four of the books discussed in this paper, since together they present the reader with a wide array of gender performance and possible reactions and effects connected to them.

While this thesis is limited by the scale and the fact that this only allowed for a small part of children’s literature to be examined, the conclusions and findings drawn from it may be applicable to other forms of media. The scale of the thesis moreover limited the amount of books that could be discussed and the amount of characters that could be analysed. Future research may find noteworthy findings when considering a larger scale analysis of the discussed series as a whole or by considering the historical change that may be found when analysing a larger number of books.

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