Elisa Opriessnig

Are you sure - boys will be boys?

A Critical Analysis of Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Children’s and Young Adults’ Literature

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Klagenfurt, 10. September 2017
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Klagenfurt, September 9th, 2017
(Place, date)
To my Grandfather

(October 1940 - June 2015)

To Aaron
my dog and best friend

(May 2008 - February 2015)
Abstract

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lightening of a fire.” W.B. Yeats

This thesis provides a critical analysis of the representations of masculinity in the following contemporary narratives for children and young adults: *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins, *The Boy in the Dress* (2008) by David Walliams, *Here Lies Arthur* (2007) by Philip Reeve, *Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest* (2002) by Nancy Springer, and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (2001) by J.K. Rowling. Reading plays a crucial role in the process of creating and shaping our lives and imagination, and thus, expands our knowledge, serves education, personal growth and development especially for children. Gender roles in children’s and young adults’ literature influence the young audiences in their understanding and development of ‘male’ and ‘female’ and in that regard also their view on heroism. The narratives have been analysed according to their representation of masculinity and their rejection of or adherence to the traditional concepts of masculinity. Further, the portrayal of female-to-male/male-to-female cross-dressers and their experience of masculinity have been critically studied. This is vital in order to understand how gender orders are either challenged or maintained in such texts. Childhood, which according to Stephens is “the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education abouth the nature of the world” (1992, 8-9), can be tremendously shaped and influenced by the ideas conveyed in these stories and its retellings such as Robin Hood and King Arthur. These retellings introduce the young to ethical, social and aesthetic values of a culture, as Stephens (1992, 91) points out. Literature for the young influences children’s development and personal growth and thus, is crucial to the understanding of masculinity and the changing concept of gender ideology in general. This analysis offers the opportunity to obtain insights into the way in which gender ideology, legends and hero figures are constructed in children’s books and to see how they shape the way children view themselves and the world around them. This has a considerable impact on their development and is of great importance because it will shed light onto to what purpose and effects certain aspects in children’s literature are constructed. Gaining such insight is important and useful because books shape the development of children. While this thesis compares the representations of masculinity in the selected narratives, it also shows how these mythical heroes live on in children’s and people’s imaginations as long as their stories and tales are rewritten and (re-)told. As such ideological ‘vehicles’ they are important for changing stereotypical thinking in regard to masculinity and the concept of genders.
Key words: Gender, Masculinity, Children’s and Young Adults Fiction, Boy Code, Harry Potter, Children’s Literature, King Arthur, Robin Hood, Hunger Games, The Boy in the Dress, Psychology, Sociology, Gender Study
Preface

“I know nothing in the world that has as much power as a word. Sometimes I write one, and I look at it, until it begins to shine.” Emily Dickinson

Working on this thesis has been a particularly challenging task for me, yet it has also been the most exciting piece of academic work I have produced so far. Children’s and Young Adults’ Literature is a genre often overlooked by literary scholarship. Throughout the world, literature for the young keeps being produced, and famous stories, legends or folklore about “historical and fictional individuals memorialised for their heroism or holiness, adventurousness or mischief” (Stephens 2009, 91) are adapted and retold. Several experts have dealt with the chosen narratives in the past, and considerable amount of research has been conducted in this field, however, the majority of it mainly focuses on the past, often neglecting the fact that these mythical heroes and characters are major figures today, dealing with current issues of the time. The idea was to combine children classics such as Robin Hood and King Arthur with more contemporary works such as Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, The Hunger Games and the not so well known The Boy in the Dress. A friend of mine suggested to look into ideology and gender, as it is a reoccurring theme in contemporary literature and culture. This topic was fascinating for me as it is such a topical issue in society. Women as well as men face tremendous obstacles and hardships as the result of existing stereotypes, gender norms and ideologies. Men are taught to believe that being weak, showing emotions, asking for help is considered ‘unmanly’. This propels men in a sort of vicious cycle, where they are constantly forced to prove their manhood to society. This gender equality gap needs to be closed and I believe this already needs to start at a very young age. For this reason, I have chosen to work on children’s and young adults’ fiction in order to find out how authors portray masculinity in their writings. This thesis attempt is to contribute to the field of masculinity studies and children’s and young adult’s fiction. I really enjoyed working on this topic and I hope that reading this thesis will prove that to the reader.
Acknowledgements

“A writer only begins a book. A reader finishes it.” Samuel Johnson

At this point I would like to write some words of appreciation, because of the endless support that I have received during the process of writing this paper. I would like to mention some by name as they are probably not aware of how much I have appreciated their contributions and support. Many people deserve appreciation: First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for their continuing support and love. Thank you very much for supporting me in everything I do. I have learned from you to always follow my heart. A special thank you to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Schalleger, who has provided useful advice and insightful comments not only on thesis-related topics, but who has also helped guide me with his valuable feedback and patience, especially when I first could not come up with a thesis topic. Further, I would like to mention my grandfather. I lost my grandfather two years ago. During this time, I learnt about the depth of sadness and the grief that comes with it, but it also taught me about hope and strength. I now believe that in face of any challenge or obstacle, a person can find meaning and purpose. I will never fully work through the grief, but I strongly believe that he contributed to putting me on the path I am today. In addition, I would like to thank my dad, who is my personal hero in life. My parents have always helped and supported me throughout my journey. I strongly believe that my own experience through health and illness, and more so my training as a doctor is invaluable and will provide me the opportunity to help other people and to give something back. My family always tells me that I can achieve anything when I just believe in myself and go for it. They remind me that setbacks are part of life. Sometimes there are so many walls and you think that everywhere you turn you hit one. But it is never a failure, but rather a lesson. Thank you for being such amazing people. Also, I want to thank all of my friends who I contacted and talked to about my thesis, especially Jasmin and Patricia. I highly appreciate all of your useful advice, comments and interesting discussions. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Raluca Radulescu and Dr. Maureen McCue from the University of Bangor, who helped me during my research visit to Bangor University. At this point, I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Schalleger again for supporting me in my scholarship application. Visiting Bangor University would not have been possible without your help and the financial aid from the Studienrektorat.

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List of Abbreviations

CYAL  Children’s and Young Adult Literature
HLA    *Here Lies Arthur* (2007) by Philip Reeve
HPPS   *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (2001) by Joanne K. Rowling
OED    Oxford English Dictionary
TBITD  *The Boy in the Dress* (2008) by David Walliams
THG    *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins
Introduction

The representation of gender has been of much interest for a long time and plays a major role in children’s literature. Stories and images help influence a child’s understanding of “what it means to be human, whether male or female” (Jule 2008, 36). In other words, Fox states that everything we read helps us understand who we are and what constructs us, by presenting us with an image of ourselves as girls and women or as boys and men (1993, 86). Consequently, the texts children read influence their comprehension of gender (Salem 2006, 85). This is important to realize who we are, where we come from and how our identity is defined. Representations of gender in literature are vital for children and young adults as they work through defining stages in life, in which they attempt to construct their own identity. Meanwhile, stereotypes exist for both males and females, and are equally dangerous. Girls are frequently portrayed as beautiful, vulnerable, weak, caring and passive, while boys are presented predominantly as strong, heroic, and emotionally distant. This may limit the manner in which young people express themselves, and could influence them to act and behave in a way contrary or not suited to their personality or their general human potential.

For this reason, reading plays a crucial role in the process of creating and shaping our lives, imagination and expanding our knowledge. Especially for children and young adults, reading continues to be one of the most significant factors in regards to education, personal growth and development. Therefore, what they read and watch is very important. New media or books as traditional media play a crucial role in transmitting culture and especially stereotypes to our children and young readers. Indeed, gender is a predominant and a frequently addressed theme in children’s and young adult literature, and its representation has shifted significantly in the past decades.

Since the 1970s feminism has dominated children’s and young adult literature, which has been demonstrated by the number of studies and the large amount of texts produced for young readers over that period of time. Authors started portraying female protagonists in the retellings of traditional tales, for example, as it is the case with Robin Hood in which the legend was continued with an introduction of the female character Rowan Hood (Flanagan 2010, 27-28). Authors increasingly employed principles found in theories of feminism to interrogate contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality, while simultaneously seeking to increase elements of “feminine agency” (Flanagan 2010, 26 and 37). In short,
authors used feminism as a tool to question the perceived gender roles reinforced by the status quo as being ‘right’ for society. They question these accepted norms and seek to push the status quo in a direction that promotes girl power. This, it appears, can be seen in contemporary literature and particularly in fiction for children and young adults since protagonists tend to be girls who are smart, strong and heroic. In fact, authors assign women a new gender role: “[b]rave, smart, resourceful girl protagonists” are common in contemporary children’s and young adult literature, abbreviated CYAL, whereas the depiction of traditional female characters may be viewed as needing justification or apology from the author (Simons 2009, 156). One can say that in recent years, gender studies in CYAL have been reshaped and authors try to encourage girl power, while boys do not have an equivalent boy power or do not strictly follow a certain ‘boy code’. As Brooks points out “[b]oys need, and yet are still left wanting, the moral and functional force that our society now eagerly and properly grants to female human beings” (2000, 88-89). It seems that boys or men are denied this power, while girls have gained power and are encouraged to cross and overcome gender boundaries to explore new fields, which in the past were only allowed to males. In contrast, boys are not permitted to do this because they fear judgment and criticism. Those qualities and abilities, which are now attributed to females, prevent boys from having the right to discover their own talents or personality, and thus, boys are disoriented in regards to their performance of masculinity. This hinders their own reading engagement tremendously, as Genette’s narrative model is challenged: “[T]he implied reader, who can cognitively align with the young protagonists and young narrators”, can in this case not identify with the representation of masculinity (Nikolajeva 2014, 142-143).

Gender studies, especially in children’s literature, have recently come to focus on masculinity and rework gender stereotypes and gender roles, as Flanagan points out (2010, 28). For the last ten years, there has been interest in both masculinities and femininities along with the gender continuum that connects them (Jule 2008, 4). Now that masculinity has emerged as an overt theme in literature, a critical analysis and consideration is timely. Author Mem Fox notes that there is a lack of emotion displayed by male characters especially in children’s and young adult books, and that this may have negative effects on young boys, as this presents the idea of manhood as distant, emotionally detached and brave, where males bear responsibilities and provide for a family and/or make decisions (1993, 86-88). Fox questions this view and asks if children’s literature could be part of the reason that males are confined to a terrible emotional prison and must endure impossible social expectations (ibid.,
Just as girls find themselves under a lot of pressure to conform to societal expectations, boys find themselves trapped in emotional prisons (ibid.). Representations of masculinity often entail aggressive, heroic, or macho behaviors, which are presented as natural traits for males. A hero figure often entails such qualities and traits. However, this does not benefit boys, or girls who are disguised as boys (cross-dressers), but rather strengthens stereotypes instead and leaves no room for other behavior. Literature, and especially literature for the young, must include other characteristics as well. As Brooks suggests “we can try acting as if boys were nice rather than surely dangerous […], moral rather than selfishly opportunistic, sensitive rather than emotionally crude” (2000, 89).

Pollack summarizes the situation by referring to a so called ‘boy code’, which encompasses a set of expectations that are constructed by a culture and “inculcated into boys by our society” from an early age (1999, xxv). Although this model is perhaps outdated, it does give important insights into how society still works today. However, Nodelman in his work “Making Boys Appear. The Masculinity of Children’s Fiction” views the portrayal of male and female characters and the investigation of masculinity and femininity as equally important (2002, 1). For this reason, another key concept this thesis draws on is cross-dressing, which makes an analysis of gender and its constructs possible, including masculinity and femininity and their division, as “this discourse of female-to-male cross-dressing in children’s literature thus offers unlimited potential in its ability to question and challenge traditional gender constructions, providing a spectrum of gendered alternatives (Flanagan 2002, 79). This helps discover whether masculinity embodied by the characters should be challenged or rather maintained (ibid.). Maria Nikolajeva, a narrative theorist and author at Cambridge University, raises important questions on literature for the young, such as

[i]f literature is […] a powerful implement for enlightening the reader, for conveying knowledge, for building citizenship, how exactly does this work, what is the mechanism of the epistemic value of literature specifically targeting an audience that purportedly has a different cognitive capacity than the sender? (Nikolajeva 2014, 3)

Cognitive criticism might offer an answer to these questions as it is

a cross-disciplinary approach to reading, literacy, and literature that suggests rethinking the literary activity as such […], including interaction between readers and works of literature, but also the ways literary texts are constructed to maximise, or perhaps rather optimise reader engagement. (Nikolajeva 2014, 4)

In that regard, cognitive literary theory does not only involve the interaction between an author and the readers, it also focuses on “the relationship between representation and its referent in the perceptible world” (ibid.). Therefore, cognitive theory is also part of the methodological foundation of this thesis, as it gives insights into how children’s fiction
“challenges its audiences cognitively and affectively, stimulating attention, imagination, memory, inference making, empathy, and elements of mental processes, as well as ethical decision-making” (Nikolajeva 2014, 227). As Nikolajeva further points out, children’s fiction is special, because it considers the audience and adjusts the form and content to its implied reader emotionally and cognitively (ibid., 227).

This master thesis offers an analysis of five 21st century narratives that provide insight into contemporary CYAL with a heavy focus on the depiction of masculinity. Amongst the selected works, variations of the classical King Arthur and Robin Hood tales will be examined. It is the aim of the paper to find out how dominant masculinity is portrayed in the selected novels and how these representations influence and shape young readers. Providing such an analysis is necessary in order to comprehend how male characters and their masculinity, as well as the enactment of it by female protagonists, influence and shape young readers and how gender ideologies and/or stereotypes are challenged or perpetuated in these novels. The imperatives of the so called ‘boy code’ (Pollack 1999) are the foundation of this analysis. However, a traditional understanding of gender and masculinity are applied as well. Maria Nikolajeva’s (2014) study of cognitive criticism as a cross-disciplinary approach will further enhance the foundation of this analysis. Therefore, this thesis links a cognitive approach to the representations of masculinity, a topic which has tremendous impact on the image our young generation develops of their own gender roles, and as such, those in the social order. The novels chosen for the analysis are Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (2001) by Joanne K. Rowling, Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest (2002) by Nancy Springer, Here Lies Arthur (2007) by Philip Reeve, The Hunger Games (2008) by Suzanne Collins, and The Boy in the Dress (2008) by David Walliams. Besides offering insights into the representations of masculinity, these narratives have been selected based on the following premises. First, the relevant characters play a major part in the story line, but are not always considered the hero of the story. Second, the texts were published in the 21st century, and thus, offer current representations of masculinity. Third, the characters of all novels are either ‘cross-dressers’, girls disguised as boys, boys disguised as girls, or occupy an important role within the novels and in their representation of masculinity, which are essential to study in order to grasp current representations of these concepts.

The argument of this thesis is divided into four parts. Chapter One provides definitions and accounts of the terms ‘gender’ and ‘ideology’, thereby laying the ground for their examination. The structure of a narrative is an ideologically powerful tool of a text, and thus
enables the reader to engage or develop a range of reader subject positions. Chapter Two offers a general introduction to the field of children’s literature. Chapter Three is concerned with the analysis of the selected novels and examines how masculinity is represented in the books. The goal of this analysis is to find evidence of how the ideology of gender, especially masculinity, is presented based on the assumption that “meaning is produced by the interconnections of discourse and society” (Stephens 1992, 6). Considering the vast amount of research on Robin Hood and Arthurian literature, gaps in their summaries are inevitable. But it is the aim of the paper to demonstrate that amongst more recent publications such as Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (2001), legends/classics such as King Arthur and Robin Hood continue to be retold and variations are published.
1 Gender and Ideology: An Introduction

Gender is an important issue in contemporary society since we are enveloped by gender beliefs and customs from a very young age (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 9). Gender, gender relations and ideas about them are “commonplace” and we trust and consider them to be true and accept them as scientific fact (ibid., 9). However, as scholars and critical thinkers, it is our task to look beyond this stereotypical thinking and “question some of our most fundamental beliefs” about gender and ideology (ibid.). In their work, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet refer to convention and ideology as important aspects in maintaining gender and social order (2003, 34). They refer to convention as something “we perform” (ibid., 10). In other words, convention can be defined as the way we behave, thus keeping in mind that gender is not innate but something we do, and that convention is not questioning why we do it (ibid., 10). The power of convention, therefore, exists because we learn ways of doing things and ways of being without thinking and without asking why (ibid., 34). For example, a little boy proudly follows his father, “he swaggers and sticks out his chest”, imitating him and doing everything possible to be like his father and “to be a man” (ibid., 10). What is important to understand here is that the father might not be swaggering, but the boy creates “a persona that embodies what he is admiring in his adult male role model” he considers his hero (ibid., 10). When children grow up, they engage in so-called “gendered performances”, which are publicly available to every person. However, one has to consider the constraints that come with these performances. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet “society tries to match up ways of behaving with biological sex assignments”(2003, 10), therefore, a man who tries a little mincing will not be considered a man or will not be considered cute at all, in contrast to a girl engaging in such behavior. Another example of convention would be a greeting on a card. People automatically assume that it has to say “Mr. and Mrs. Smith” instead of mentioning the woman first. Also, a priest would say, “I now pronounce you husband and wife” and not “wife and husband”. This kind of construction stems from a very old belief that men have “male superiority” and thus “should be mentioned before women” (ibid., 34). This reaches back as far as the sixteenth century, where grammarians already discussed this issue of convention and concluded that the male should be mentioned before the female: “let us keep a natural order, and set the man before the woman for manners Sake” (Wilson 1560, 189; cited in Bodine 1975, 134).
Gender as the first subchapter below aims to demonstrate how gender can have different meanings, and as such, is a social, historical and cultural construct. Ideology, in the second subchapter, has various meanings too, but in this thesis it refers to a “set of beliefs characteristic of a social group or individual” (OED 2016). In other words, it is a term used by people, who try to give a satisfactory record of, explain, and justify their behavior, and assess and decode that of others (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 35). Gender ideology, then, refers to the shared beliefs, which direct people’s participation in the gender order and additionally justify that participation (ibid., 35), i.e. the views and common beliefs of gender in society, the “terms in which the male-female dichotomy is publicly understood and frequently justified”, especially, what it means to be ‘male’ or ‘female’, or the question of what it should mean (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 35).

Gender ideology can be considered necessary when referring to power distribution of individuals in a social group or in society, according to Parsons (2011, 113). The dominant gender ideology does not prescribe a current set of beliefs of what it means to be male and female and that they should be different, rather it “insists that they simply are different” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 35). This so-called essentialism, meaning the unchanging essential features and qualities of males and females, is an extremely powerful tool, as it holds a strong “place in gender ideology” and its representations “permeate society” (ibid., 36). Current features of gender ideology in any western industrial society include views such as men are strong, women are weak, and men are rather direct, whereas women are indirect. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet continue by stating: “men are practical, women are nurturing and gentle, while men are considered rough” (2003, 35).

The following subchapters aim to give definitions and historical information on the terms ‘gender’ and ‘ideology’. They are part of the theoretical foundation for this thesis, and thus require explanation.

1.1 Gender: The Cultural, Historical and Social Construct

Men, like women, face obstacles and hardships as a result of preexisting gender norms in contemporary society. A lot of men are already taught from a very young age that being weak, asking for help, expressing emotions or being vulnerable is a clear sign of being unmanly. This force of gender practices and social norms does not allow us to live in a non-gendered manner, and also forces us to act in a way that brings out gendered behavior in others (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 50).
According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2016) gender can be defined as “[t]he state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones).” It is “ever-present in conversation, humor, and conflict” and it is reflected in our behavior to explain all aspects of life, from the way someone drives to what food they prefer (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 9). The term gender has only recently become commonly used in our language and society, thus it is hard to define. However, it is vital to differentiate between gender and sex. The first distinction between these terms dates back to the British feminist Anne Oakley in the 1970s. She defined sex as “biologically base, a matter of physiology, something related to genes, gonads, hormones and anatomy” (in Jule 2008, 5). According to Oakley gender is “socially constructed”, thus “something we learn” (ibid., 5).

Talbot defines gender as “learned behavior”, whereas sex is “biologically founded” (1998, 7). Jule agrees with this definition and states in her work that gender “concerns the social category of behavior”, thereby being “strongly associated with the social divisions made on the basis of sex, and language plays a major role in establishing and sustaining these divisions” (2008, 5). From a medical point of view, the differences between a man and a woman lay in the “differences between reproductive anatomy” and “a reproductive arena, defined by bodily structures and processes of human reproduction” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279-280; Connell 2005, 71).

Masculinity and femininity basically describe a trait, which is shown and ascribed to each sex, as Jule states that they are considered categories of behavior, which are attributed to and aligned with the corresponding sex (2008, 5). Nodelman agrees and states “[L]ike femininity and being female, masculinity is a social construct that connects with but does not necessarily coincide with maleness” (2002, 2). These gender practices are essential for both male and female, as they could not continue to be socially significant if they were not performed (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 50). Acting like ‘women’ and like ‘men’ is important in regard to the social categories – male and female – in virtue of social practice, meaning the “human activity when emphasizing the conventional aspect of activity and its relation to social structure” (ibid.). In recent years, common social structures have changed, as for instance, more women decide to go back to work while their partner stays at home caring for the children, or as same-sex couples may adopt children. These nontraditional individual life choices, even if not yet common, have tremendously shaped and contributed to changing or altering the traditional meaning of male and female, and thus the concept of gender has
Gender can also be understood as a *performance*. This concept is particularly relevant in this analysis as gender is something that ‘we do’, something ‘we perform’ and “the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated”, therefore “repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” and public, as Judith Butler suggested (1990, 191). This means gender can be performed, and thus is “a series of stylized acts and behaviours that are repeated” until a certain notion of authenticity in public is achieved (Flanagan 2010, 32-33). John Stephens (1992) further explains:

> [P]erformativity in fiction [...] as distinct from performance, operates in a more metaphorical sense: readers recognize that a character is being depicted as “performing an act”, in a metaphorical sense, because we recognize a behavioural ritual which inheres in culture prior to the construction of this character. In other words, the character is constructed in accordance with, and so plays out, recognizable performatives. (Stephens 1992, 6)

These performed acts are engaged behaviors and as Simone de Beauvoir in 1952 explained “we gradually become masculine and feminine and we behave in gendered ways in a whole variety of circumstances for a host of reasons” (in Jule 2008, 5). Therefore, *sex* can be binary, while *gender* is not. We are not masculine or feminine; rather we engage in various behaviors and are a combination of many components that can be either or both masculine and feminine depending on situation and our relationships with others (ibid., 5)

People perform gender based on a “continuum of masculine and feminine characteristics” (ibid., 5). Children in their formative years are permanently encouraged and urged to behave according to their gender and the way the community understands it (ibid., 6). Talbot does not believe in simply mapping gender onto a sex, meaning that all behaviors a boy presents are considered masculine and all presented by a girl are considered feminine. She states that “socially determined differences between women and men are natural and inevitable” (1998, 9), but cannot only be performed by either one of them.

Historically speaking, the use of *gender* dates back to the 15th century. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2016), the term *gender* referring to male/female first occurred in 1474. However, during the twentieth century it was used to define “[t]he state of being male or female”, referring to “social and cultural distinctions” rather than a biological one (OED 2016). In the eighteenth century a concept of masculinity was already in place where women and men were regarded as different from each other, but in “the sense of being incomplete or inferior” (Connell 2005, 68). Back then one cannot speak of masculinity, in a
culture which does not regard men and women as equal or as “bearers of polarized character types”, as “masculinity does not exist except in contrast with femininity” (ibid., 68). Masculinity, therefore, is a rather recent historical product, while during the 18th century “we are doing gender” in a culturally specific way (ibid.). Until that time period, the human body was merely considered to be “of one flesh”. In other words, it consisted of a “single” and “capacious sex” (Glover and Kaplan 2009, 5).

The concept of gender and social order developed during the so called “long sixteenth century” (1450-1650) as the French historian Fernand Braudel called it (Connell 2005, 186), with the unparalleled development of European and North American power, the formation of a global capitalist economy and global empires and the unbalanced encounter of gender order in the colonized world (ibid., 185-186). These developments are crucial for the establishments of such concepts. It is important to note that masculinity, gender and gender orders cannot be understood on a “personal level” when neglecting its “global connection” (ibid., 186), as European and American masculinity were deeply influenced by “the world-wide violence through which European and American culture became dominant” (ibid.). Different developments and actions contributed to the production of masculinity and the formation of a modern gender order: the “cultural authority of compulsory heterosexuality”, the “creation of overseas empires”, the “growth of cities” for commercial use and capitalism (ibid., 186-187). All these factors contributed to the emergence of the modern gender order and the development of masculinity. Connell states that from the very beginning the Empire was indeed gendered and refers to women as those who mainly came to the colonies as either wives or servants (2005, 187). Imperialism and the imperial states were entirely “staffed by men” and those who “applied force in the colonial frontier [...] were perhaps the first group to become defined as masculine [...] in the modern sense” (ibid.). According to Connell during the following two centuries, and finally during the eighteenth century, masculinity and femininity were defined as opposing concepts and further stabilized (2005, 189).

In recent years gender has gained plural characteristics as masculinity and femininity are now considered as “relational”, rather than “oppositional” (Flanagan 2010, 30). In regard to CYAL, it is vital that children are encouraged to view masculinity and femininity as relational and fluid, rather than oppositional and binaristic (ibid., 36-37). The term gender and the meaning of the concepts of masculinity and femininity have altered over time, and thus are historically constructed. As Mallan explains: “[C]hildren’s literature has similar functions to literature written for adults in that it is the vehicle for carrying, as well as exposing
ideologies about the hierarchical arrangements of society” (2009, 3). Therefore, it is vital that writers, critics and especially readers are cautious when reading such texts as it is significant to understand how they maintain or challenge dominant gender ideologies (Flanagan 2010, 36-37), and thus, cast light onto dilemmas, which might arise when “individuals do not fit neatly into normative categories of existence”, i.e. gender roles (Mallan 2009, 3).

1.2 Ideology: ‘Setting the Stage’

According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet ideology can be defined as “the system of beliefs by which people explain, account for, and justify their behavior, and interpret and assess that of others” (2003, 35). In other words, this means “to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination” (Thompson 1984, 4). The term itself derives from the Greek but also has French roots, as it is a concept which evolved around the Enlightenment period, as Parsons points out (2011, 113).

The very nature of present-day culture has cast a negative shadow over the use of the term ideology. Popular sentiment seeks to solely associate ideologies with the judgment of a particular issue through some set framework of “preconceived ideas” which alters their understanding, as Eagleton emphasizes (1991, 3). He further states that there usually is “a suggestion that this involves an oversimplifying view of the world – that to speak or judge ‘ideologically’ is to do so schematically, stereotypically, and perhaps with the faintest hint of fanaticism” (ibid.).

Regarding literature and especially literature for the young, it is important to strive for freer roles for the reader, as major characters may show behavior in a way “oppositional to normal socializing expectations, or [where] the ideological basis of conformist behavior is examined in order to confirm or reject that behavior” (Stephens 1992, 156).

The educational and domestic structures of Western societies on the whole aspire to encourage their children to grow up as reasonable, creative, autonomous and achieving human beings, and these ideals are furthered by the ideological positions implicit in the literature produced for children. (Stephens 1992, 120)

Social practices and behavior are often in conflict with gender bases, when boys are expected to develop masculine roles, while girls engage in feminine behavior. These ideological beliefs are deeply rooted in our culture, and as such, may evoke self-contradiction and suppression of one’s identity. Children’s fiction plays an important role in cultural and social practices, as one of its purposes is to educate and socialize the target audience. Stephens notes:
Childhood is seen as the formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education, about the nature of a world, how to live in it, [...] what to believe, what and how to think – in general, the intention is to render the world intelligible. (Stephens 1992, 8)

Society provides children with a framework of ideological positions where language functions as a “principal code” (Stephens 1992, 8). Within this network, children are expected to adapt these ideologies in the sense of “a system of beliefs” that helps them make sense of the world (ibid., 8). Narratives make use of language in order to illustrate and instill current values and attitudes (ibid.). A narrative without ideology does not exist. Ideology is strictly connected to language, because meanings and values within a language are determined socially (ibid.). Stephens argues that the use of a story is a channel for socialization and a willful and calculated process, as it functions as a sort of “bibliotherapy” for the young readership, which helps young readers deal with obstacles and experiences they face in their lives (1992, 9). Every book has an ideology, often implicit, which contains assumed social orders and behaviors and does not question the portrayal of such. “[T]hings are simply ‘so’” (ibid., 9).

Further, Stephens discusses different aspects of ideology in children’s literature defined by Hollindale in his essay, originally published in 1988. Hollindale refers to various categories of ideology that should be differentiated. In the first category, surface ideology appears to be “an overt or explicit element in the text, disclosing the writer’s social, political or moral beliefs” (1992, 27). Passive ideology, the second category named by Hollindale, is the “implicit presence in the text of the writer’s unexamined assumptions” (ibid., 27). It contains more power, as it is invisible and assumes that things are simply the way they are. The next level refers to language, in which ideology is “inherent within language” (ibid., 32). Language is considered as “the words, the rule-systems, the codes which constitute the text” (1992, 33). According to Hollindale, ideology has a strong connection to language (ibid., 33). However, it takes good “analytical ability” to show such ideologies, as they are very powerful forces that consist of beliefs taken for granted in our society (Stephens 1992, 10). Consequently, ideology in language aims to suppress the beliefs of a dominant social group. Fairclough agrees with this view and describes ideology and its struggles to be part of language. He identifies the term as an “object of struggle”, as language holds meaning and is the basis of communicative norms (1989, 88). If children and young readers are aware of how ideology operates in a fictional setting, only then will they be able to identify similar patterns of ideology in the actual world. However, research has shown that more in-depth methodology is needed to completely uncover linguistic evaluations, and thus offer a linguistic encoding of ideology (ibid., 88).
Eagleton states that ideology is “a matter of discourse” and not so much one of “language”, because it is important to evaluate the ideological character of a statement within its discursive context, rather than looking at it in isolation (1991, 9), thereby arguing that discourse or context is as important as language. Therefore, ideology “concerns the actual uses of language between particular human subjects for the production of specific effects” and thus, does not directly refer to the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement (ibid.). Yet, there are so called ideological idioms which have to be considered. Generally speaking, the language of a text may have ideological potential in one context but serves a different purpose in another. In other words, “ideology is a function of the relation of an utterance to its social context” as the same language may be “ideological in one context” but has different meaning in another one (ibid.).

Literary scholarship took note of the significance of discourse and language analysis as the world and subjects are depicted in literary works, and through language, it is used to define the interactions between child and culture (Stephens 1992, 5). Consequently, narratives produced for the young are an important area for “discourse analysis in order to disclose the processes and effects of those representations and definitions” (ibid., 5). In recent years, gender and ideology have become important issues within our society. Gender in particular has gained plurality, with the concepts of femininity and masculinity being separate categories. As it becomes clear from the information presented in this chapter, the understanding of gender and ideology has altered over time, and thus they are historical constructs. Similar to the emergence of gender order, the concept and understanding of heroism has changed over the course of time, and thus, variations of children classics such as Robin Hood and King Arthur have changed by adopting different values throughout time. Yet it seems of the latter that masculinity has fundamentally remained at the heart of the story.
2 An Introduction to Children’s Literature

2.1 Child and Childhood: A Sense of Innocence and Purity

The definition of childhood has changed throughout time and place depending on how adults’ conceptions of the terms *child* and *childhood* have altered. Rudd points out that it was important to recognize children in order to be able to create children’s literature (2010, 7). This is also true for *childhood*, as it relies on the construction of children and childhood in the time period in which the literary work is written (Hintz 2013, 32). In other words, the reader can learn about the history of these terms by reading books of a certain era. What is notable about those questions is that the authors had to learn about the child and had to adapt to it over the course of time (Rudd 2010, 10). Childhood is perceived as an abstract condition founded on adult assumptions of that condition (ibid., 11). Further, childhood is gendered, as it can be seen by Hollindale’s model of father-son playing (Hollindale 1992, 12). He claims that children’s books offer the possibility to learn about the nature of childhood and the meaning behind this term (1992, 12). The concept of *childness* arises in order to describe the quality of being a child (ibid., 47), since according to him a child can be defined as “someone who believes on good grounds that his or her condition of childhood is not yet over” (ibid., 30) and these good grounds are biological rather than based on experience (ibid., 10).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2017) *childhood* can be defined as the state or period of being a child, however, this is not a very satisfactory definition, as it is important to consider the different conceptions childhood holds. Our awareness of childhood is shaped by the time and culture we live in. In thirteenth century France the perception of childhood was different to the one in Victorian England. Child mortality was high back in those days, while during the Victorian Era children were more likely to grow into adulthood, yet had to bear dynastic, imperial and national weights (Immel 2009, 19). Childhood is the formative period and an important stage of developmental growth in a human’s upbringing as it is the time to obtain basic education especially about how to live in the world and what to believe and think. Stephens points out that it is the time to give meaning to the world, referring to the exploratory nature of children (1992, 8). In contrast, adolescence refers to the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood, during which people attempt to fully understand and accept themselves and society around them (Sainsbury 2005, 125-126). It is a time in a person’s life where people create a new self-consciousness and are constantly reassessing the world around them, thereby discovering one’s true self (ibid., 126).
Immel observes a connection between the different ideas about children’s books and childhood as culturally constructed (2009, 19). But what is a construct in this context? A construct is often understood as “an idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically one considered to be subjective and not based on empirical evidence” (OED 2017), which means that something is constructed by the mind and one can argue that it is therefore, more authoritative in contrast to a simple belief. Hintz agrees that the understanding of childhood depends on the era of a literary book’s composition (2013, 20). Immel states that constructs are essentially norms that are often subconsciously developed as a result of environmental factors (2009, 20). Such constructs proceed to shape the manner in which one approaches the world around them. These embedded ideas or notions have a substantive impact on every area and apply to our understandings of childhood. Therefore, it is of little surprise that Immel feels that we pass on these norms in the production of children’s literature, fundamentally placing our environmental stamp on the direction of the dialogue and the evolution of the genre (ibid., 20). Our understanding of childhood is – similar to gender - shaped and constructed depending on the time and culture. Simultaneously, class, race, ethnic origins are also important (Lesnik-Oberstein 1996, 19).

Earlier scholars did not think that the concept of childhood existed in the Middle Ages, but today’s literary scholarship believes that this assumption is indeed exaggerated. But, they still agree that it was conceived differently. Childhood was less separated from the other stages at this time. In the 17th century, with the emergence of the so-called nuclear family and the development of schools, the idea of childhood arose (Rudd 2010, 8). Rudd claims that new technology such as print was responsible for this development (ibid., 12). During the nineteenth century, which marked the Victorian era, the terms again became redefined as Christian beliefs in the United States and Britain reshaped the understanding of children (Hintz 2013, 19). They moved away from thinking of children as being born ‘sinful’ and ‘damned’ and made it their priority to permit play and restrict child labor (ibid.). However, education and discipline remained central issues during that time, especially with the development of Sunday Schools in Britain between the 1750s and 1780s. This establishment intended to help children with Christian thought processes and further provided them with valuable alternatives to mischief and prevented them from criminal acts. This was especially important for poor and working class children (ibid.). Roberts writes that society aimed to improve society by telling stories to younger generations, especially to children, who were regarded as pure, innocent, and virtuous (2002, 355). Adults had supposedly lost these character traits.
A model of the sinful or evil child emerged which can be seen throughout children’s books (Hintz 2013, 20). For instance, Draco Malfoy in the Harry Potter series is part of this tradition as opposed to the innocent character often attributed to children. His childhood experiences, upbringing, and close relation to Voldemort are the main causes of his evil. Another key development in the history of childhood is the discovery that a child is a valuable asset (ibid., 20). Children were viewed as objects which in fact cost parents money (ibid.). The idea of the working child disappeared, and society moved away from this notion that children were useful labor, which persisted late into the nineteenth century (ibid., 21). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the idea of the sacred child was born. Children had compulsory education and were understood as objects to appreciate and praise rather than tools to use (ibid., 22). In the 1930s, compulsory attendance of secondary schools increased. This was mainly due to a shift in values in society, as men were expected to care for their family and earn enough money to sustain the household. In addition, in the twentieth century a strong growing demand for educated labor was felt in the economy (ibid.) Society insisted that children should attend school rather than work. The declining child mortality rates also had a considerable impact on this development. Families had fewer children but could invest more time in them. Gradually, these latest developments came to be understood as the ‘ideal’ toward which society should aspire. Today, childhood and children are still regarded as helpless and pure (Rudd 2010, 3). Lesnik-Oberstein among many other scholars writes that the attempts to define childhood and what a child is continue, but it is “these children who remain the passion of – and therefore the source of conflict for – children’s authors and critics” (1996, 28-29). Further, Rudd notes that these attempts to find a definition of what a child is will continue, as will the numerous attempts to define the characteristics of a children’s book (2010, 9), yet he further emphasizes that “childhood needs to be recognized as having been constructed differently at different times and for different groups within any particular period” (ibid., 12). Rudd further elaborates:

[I]n short, the crisis over childhood – whether it is concerns over the child’s disappearance and adultification, or the adult’s infantilization and kiddulthood – is part of a wider shift in society in which the child has been scapegoated, with increasingly desperate attempts to turn back the clock via stricter controls, ‘brat camps’ and returns to old-fashioned schooling and values. (Rudd 2010, 12)

This tension is reflected in contemporary literature, and most obviously in the “cross-generational phenomenon” of Harry Potter. J.K. Rowling tries to link back the more carefree, traditional conceptions of childhood, while also incorporating the problem-novel genre and darker fantasies. In fact, childhood is not a disappearing issue, however it is clearly shifting its realm from the Romantic innocent view to an expanded version (Rudd 2010, 12). The modern
child, a new status accredited in the modern period, caused that childhood is now recognized as a separate stage in life which holds its particular needs (Grenby 2009, 7).

2.2 Children’s Literature and Childhood: Finding a Definition

Stories, especially those for the young, are important in all cultures. Children’s books and children’s literature have gained wide academic acceptance and interest over recent years. One major focus in this academic field is to define children’s literature and its origins by drawing from memories of childhood, discussions with one’s own children and their reading, or simply by enthusiastically listening to what children have to say (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, 1). When debating a satisfactory definition of children’s literature, scholars are confronted with questions such as “What is Children’s Literature?” “How is it used?” “How can we approach it?” and “When did it develop?” Upon examination of this topic, there is not a single valid definition of the genre; rather scholars have used various definitions. However, there is a need for one, since according to Hunt it would have educational and commercial benefits (ibid., 12). Rudd refers to the category of child as having no intrinsic referent and that its understanding mainly relies on the definitions different cultures have used. However, societies have used various definitions and their perceptions have differed significantly throughout time (Rudd 2010, 7). Therefore, this chapter provides different definitions of children’s literature and attempts to define its characteristics. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein explains children’s literature as a

category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children. [...] [I]t wants to be something in particular, because this is supposed to connect it with that reading audience – ‘children’ – with which it declares itself to be overtly and purposefully concerned. (Lesnik-Oberstein 1996, 2)

Peter Hunt states its importance:

[C]hildren’s literature is a remarkable area of writing: it is one of the roots of western culture, it is enjoyed passionately by adults as well as by children, and it has exercised huge talents over hundreds of years. It involves and integrates words and pictures, it overlaps into other modes – video, oral storytelling – and other art forms. (Hunt 1994, 1)

Grenby further states that children’s literature is defined by its proposed audience but recognizes the difficulty to define the terms childhood and child (2009, xiii).

Scholars have been working on and contributing different texts in order to define characteristics of children’s books, yet, some claim that the large scale of books makes it impossible to discern form and content (Hunt 1994, 12). However, some aspects can be identified as belonging to the genre of ‘children’s literature’, amongst them are pictures,
length, larger print, more action than reflection, certain language, central young characters, less violence (ibid.). Despite various attempts to define this genre, a universal definition of the term cannot be found. Nikolajeva suggests in her work on *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature* (1995) that it should be viewed as a broader genre incorporating a variety of different aspects (1995, 50). In the Preface of the *Cambridge Companion to Children’s Literature*, Grenby writes that children’s literature has become a large and diverse field, thereby, incorporating prose, verse, drama, fact as well as fiction and texts which mainly are composed of pictures or digital content (2009, xiii). Grenby further emphasizes the complexity of the genre, which makes a universal definition of the term even more difficult. However, as Peter Hunt states, children’s literature is available to criticism in addition to amateur writers, and people do not shy away from commenting and censoring unlike any other form of the arts (1991, 7-8).

### 2.3 Origins and Developments of Children’s Literature

Most historians and scholars agree that the origins of children’s literature lie in the mid eighteenth century, when it first took hold in Britain. John Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* published in 1744, is frequently regarded as the point of origin of children’s literature, where he combined both entertainment value and educational merit (Grenby 2009, 4). However, Grenby suggests that Newbery’s role has been ‘exaggerated’, because the author strongly believes that he provides children educational and entertaining texts. Despite all the references to Newbery, the majority of scholars argue that children books have been in existence even before this, as “instructional books, both secular and religious, had been marketed directly at children for centuries” (ibid. 4). William Caxton’s *Book of Courtesy*, published in 1477, provided boys and girls with rules on how to behave in a noble household. Isaac Watt’s *Divine Songs* (1715), among many other works, was also available already before that time. However, Grenby claims that real children’s literature has its origins in the twentieth century in Britain, when Beatrix Potter wrote her famous story about a rebellious rabbit, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902). Grenby elaborates that other scholars strongly suggest that the origins of children’s literature can be traced back even earlier than 1477, as far back as the Roman Times.

Irrespective of the accurate origins of this genre, it can be said that in 1850 writing for children changed drastically. With the emergence of the so-called ‘golden age’ in children’s literature, which lasted until 1950, a shift towards a moral and didactic purpose could be
recognized. In that period, canonical books were published, amongst them Lewis Carrol’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) or Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Critics argue though that one cannot talk about a canon for that period, since despite a long history of interest in evaluation of children’s books the academy of scholars came rather late to the genre in order to assess children’s books, therefore, talking about children’s literature as being canonical is a recent invention (Stevenson 2009, 110). During this period, advertisers and the entertainment industry more often targeted children directly and commercialization peaked. This often led to conflicts with parental and educational authorities (Rudd 2010, 2). Children’s books that were produced at that time were significantly different in cost, appearance and content from those published for adults. Another important development at the end of the nineteenth century was that writers could finally regard themselves as children’s literature writers only. Society moved past the idea of increasing the number of books written for the use of children because there had already been a huge number of books targeted at children, and therefore, it might seem unnecessary to add to the number of books (Grenby 2009, 7). In 1802, the first children’s book review journal *The Guardian of Education* was founded by Sarah Trimmer and children’s literature was finally established as “a distinct cultural and commercial entity” (ibid.).

Between World War I and World War II the mode of writing for children continued and other characters such as *Winnie the Pooh, Mary Poppins, Doctor Doolittle or the Cat in the Hat* were introduced. Scholars investigated this sudden emergence of so many ‘modern mythical heroes’ and found that books merely showcased and reflected a world on how people would like it to be, namely, after WWI books aimed at incorporating the theme of freedom, whereas after WWII children’s books turned to fantasy even more (Hunt 1994, 106). Hunt coins the period between 1920 and 1935 as “The Long Weekend”, referring to the interrupted quality of writing during the war (ibid.). The decade before the Second World War was dominated by major influences from abroad, and teachers, librarians and parents experienced a growth in awareness with regard to the standards in children’s books (ibid.).

The commercialization of children’s literature has grown exponentially in the past 70 years, and as a result, it has become a relevant force in publishing houses (Hunt 1994, 127). Within children’s literature, fantasy has led the pack as the most popular genre of the nineteenth and twentieth century. E.T.A. Hoffmann’s book *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816) has been acknowledged to be the first fantasy book written for children, introducing a little girl protagonist, many toy characters and an interesting point of departure,
the nursery (Nikolajeva 2012, 50). *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1881) by Carlo Collodi, with a puppet protagonist, has received similar recognition. In Britain, however, the first fantasy children books were Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), George MacDonald’s *Princess books* (1872, 1883) or Charles Kingsley’s *Water Babies* (1863). Edith Nesbit is named as ‘the creator of modern fantasy’ for children, as she used a more modern narrative voice and was further able to embrace a child’s perspective in her writing (Nikolajeva 2012, 50-51). By doing so, she brought elements of magic into the genre, thereby incorporating enjoyment and comedy. Many twentieth century writers adopted this style. For instance, Pamela Travers used it in her famous work *Mary Poppins* (1934) or J.R.R.Tolkien in his famous work *The Hobbit* (1937).

Once economic stability was restored in the 1950s, a clear move into fantasy was displayed. Throughout the 1960s, however, children’s literature and especially fiction was influenced by drastic socio-political changes and a shift towards new realism, i.e. “streetwise, multiracial literature, often written from the inside” (Hunt 1994, 127). Issues such as violence and/or sex dominated and gradually led to the establishment of a new market directed at teenagers, *Young Adult Fiction*, where a balance between adult and child had to some extent been found (ibid., 127). The Post-War Period was dominated by the introduction of several new works such as *Thomas the Tank Engine* (1945) or *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) as part of the *Narnia* sequence (ibid., 135). The remarkable range of fantasy children books, which were published in the 1960s and 1970s, speaks for a period of new and elaborated mindsets (ibid., 141).

However, Young Adult Fiction needs to be differentiated from Children’s literature, as different age groups are addressed. Scholars discuss, that while children’s books have parental figures widely removed to give children the possibility to explore an unknown world, young adult books have reinforced parental figures in order to demonstrate a revolt against parents (Nikolajeva 2014, 56-57). Further, Nikolajeva argues that children’s fantasy books have a child protagonist, thereby providing not only moral but spiritual guidance for the young. In contrast to Young Adult books, fantasy for children, she writes, is “addressing an audience that has yet not any firm distinction between reality and imagination; that does not dismiss magical worlds and events as implausible; that has stronger potential for secondary belief” (Nikolajeva 2012, 60).

In order to deal with ethical, existential and psychological questions, authors apply a fantastic mode as their choice of narrative device. This method proves to be more effective than a
realistic approach. In addition, it allows for the empowerment of a child protagonist, thereby presenting the spiritual growth of the protagonist. In contemporary times, fantasy is considered to be a vehicle for socialization and very suitable for children, and one that has culminated the contemporary cross-over phenomenon as presented by J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (Nikolajeva 2012, 60-61).

### 2.4 A ‘Reading for Learning’ Approach: Purpose of Children’s Literature

The multiplicity of definitions of children’s literature and childhood in common use contribute to the complexity and confusion over the definition of the genre. In the absence of a satisfying definition, the majority of scholars have determined three dominant purposes of children’s literature: to educate, entertain and instruct. While entertainment is undoubtedly an issue, scholars have claimed that

> [a]ll teachers know the power of stories as educational tools. They are vivid, enjoyable, easily understood, memorable and compelling. They appeal to people of all ages, but for children who have not yet achieved the ability to reason abstractly they provide images to think with. (Hourihan 1997, 1)

In addition, children’s literature serves to absorb, possess, and to be possessed. Its demands are very immediate, involving and powerful (Hunt 1994, 1). Nikolajeva argues that children’s literature is indeed a very powerful tool for educating children since from the very beginning it is related to pedagogy (1995, ix) With the realization of childhood being a very special and formative stage in people’s lives, society started to emphasize the fact that it can be equally dangerous if a text does not suit children (ibid.). Therefore, children’s literature requires attention from all parties: its producers, its audience, and interested others […]. We are all products of culture (socially constructed), but we occupy different positions in terms of power – which, unsurprisingly, features centrally in what we call children’s literature. (Rudd 2010, 9)

Education plays a major role in children’s literature. According to Nikolajeva and her work on cognitive criticism, part of education starts with *literacy* and literary competence:

> Literary competence involves a complex and stratified set of skills, ranging from the ability to follow a plot […] to the mastery of more advanced textual codes, including language as expressive means; the narrative perspective and thus the over and hidden ideology, […] and the historical, social and literary context. (Nikolajeva 2014, 227)

Nikolajeva claims that literary competence strongly depends on an understanding of fictionality, as even this reality-based narrative is a source of art (2010, 153). It is an important concept and essential in understanding a child’s growing intellectual development (ibid., 147). Nikolajeva further elaborates that besides knowledge and common literacy regarding language, fiction entails more complex figures or features, which require particular
knowledge to be understood (ibid.). A children’s book, therefore, is not solely artwork but also serves educational purpose, or as Nikolajeva argues, has been increasingly employed as a vehicle for education by teachers and educators (2014, 2). Reading books, particularly fiction, is vital to our cognitive and emotional growth and development (ibid., 228) and thus, serves educational, entertainment and instructional purposes. Therefore, it is essential to interrogate how narratives affect children and how they shape their lives by looking into cognitive theory. This thesis does not intend to offer an extensive explanation of cognitive theory. Yet, it will provide a basic introduction to how the field of cognitive criticism relates to children’s literature, thereby pointing out key principles of cognitive theory and basic understanding, which is necessary for analyzing the selected narratives for this thesis.

Recent studies have shown that there is a correlation between reading fiction and the way our brain views and interacts with our surroundings and the real world (Nikolajeva 2012, 7) and thus benefits our understanding of the world and society (ibid., 8). As a result, one main aim of cognitive criticism is to investigate how readers’ respond to a text. A book entails meaning and validity in interpretation, and as an artifact “has a number of unrealized possibilities, which is up to the reader to ‘realize’ them, to extract a meaning already encoded and merely waiting to be uncovered” (Nikolajeva 2010, 150). As studies have shown literary texts are subject to interpretative codes, which have to be accessed by readers in order to decode a message (ibid., 9). For the reader and especially for children it is vital to understand the way texts interact with each other and their cultural context and that there is not a single meaning attached to a text. Hogan explains this in a similar manner, but stresses the need for a focus on a child’s emotional engagement with these stories, and further suggests that characters and plots affect them in formative periods of their lives (2011, 287), i.e. their childhood. Readers become actively involved in meaning creation by acting as sort of co-creators, thereby contributing to a formation of meaning with their own understanding and experiences (Nikolajeva 2010, 150-151). In addition, it is essential to take into consideration that the audience is in fact children and that texts written for children who are undergoing cognitive growth have different effects than a text aimed at readers whose cognitive potential is fully developed i.e. an adult (Nikolajeva 2014, 11). Children’s literature, therefore, serves as a tool for readers to give them the opportunity to apply their own experiences in order to understand and create meaning of fictional characters. This leads them to employ life-to-text strategies, where novice readers relate fiction to personal experiences in order to make sense of fiction, (ibid., 84). As a result, it appears that the reader can relate to a character and may connect emotionally loaded memories to a character’s emotions. For a child with limited real-
life emotions, this can be particularly valuable (ibid.). The intentionality of a text serves as a vital asset too, as it is important to consider the messages of a text, the intention of an author and most importantly what the reader is supposed to learn from it (Nikolajeva 2010, 151). After all children’s literature is believed to be didactic, instructive and teaches morals and life lessons (ibid.), thereby expressing values implicitly or more pronounced, as it is often the case in recent texts.

Cognitive theory has been argued to engage readers to learn about real people from fictional characters (Nikolajeva 2010, 85). A child can benefit from this reading experience in regard to empathy development, a feeling for others, and a strong theory of mind. Nikolajeva speaks of the concept of the ‘implied reader’, which is “the reader extracted and constructed from the text” (2010, 146). Further, it is necessary to understand that the emotional involvement that might result is particularly typical for novice readers. However, it might bear many problems. These direct emotional responses i.e. crying over a character’s death, are caused by the fact that children are in the process of cognitive development and they still have to learn about fiction and reality. The concept of the learning brain refers to low affective paths through external stimuli rather than high reasonable paths (ibid.). This means children, then, believe that they can affect a fictional character with their physical or verbal attacks or response. Cognitive criticism differentiates between a direct identification and an empathic one (ibid.). Direct identification means that readers fully indulge in the fictional world thereby becoming unable to free themselves from certain subject positions imposed by the text (ibid.), which results in them becoming the characters. This can be viewed as problematic as their life is projected on the character’s experiences. It limits their scope of recognition and thus, the character’s experiences are projected back into the actual world. Scholars claim that certain literary texts can evoke negative or scary emotions in children, as they cannot differentiate between the real world and what is fiction (ibid.). This involvement causes the reader to believe that, for instance, bears or wolves are dangerous (Nikolajeva 2014, 250). It is vital for children to understand that the situation is fictional in order for them to shift their ‘emotional engagement’ onto the characters. This is an important issue because it helps children understand that there is no need to feel distressed when the character is sad. Further, it is essential for children to realize that there is no monster under the bed (ibid., 250). In contrast to this, advanced readers should be able to engage with characters without projecting their own life onto them (ibid., 86). Another important concept is empathy as it describes a social skill which refers to an understanding of people’s minds without necessarily sharing their emotional experiences or opinions (ibid.). Regardless of an author’s intention, children’s
literature has always caused certain concerns in regard to the degree of emotional involvement and intellectual distance (Hunt 1994, 17).

The field of cognitive criticism has shown considerable interest in children’s literature in the past few years. Yet, the majority of scholars disregard the ‘danger of immersive identification’ since it is intended to be applied to literature for ‘expert audiences’ (Nikolajeva 2014, 87). However, with the growing interest in children’s literature, it is vital to further investigate the purpose and effect of cognitive theory on children. Nikolajeva argues that the concept has not yet been fully applied to children’s literature, because most authors do not believe that novice readers are able to abandon this concept and would rather identify with a character (2014, 87). Nevertheless, children’s literature has always been important as it is a vehicle for conveying knowledge and serves the purpose of enlightening the reader and thus, shaping their lives (ibid., 2).

Generally, cognitive theory has emphasized the importance of reading as it serves an intellectual, emotional, social and ethical purpose (Nikolajeva 2014, 227). In addition,

[it] adds a desirable facet to the definition of children’s literature as a specific kind of literature geared toward an audience with a particular cognitive capacity, determined by the development of the young brain. It appeals to cognitive skills available to young readers: attention, memory, imagination, linguistic proficiency, and spatio-temporal cognition. It also takes into consideration the presumed life experience of the audience. (Nikolajeva 2014, 227-228)

Charlotte Huck further explains certain knowledge of such children’s stories and how they affect them, contribute to the understanding of a certain culture and provide children with certain models of greatness (Huck et al. 1987, 314). These models of greatness receive wide acceptance in society and have been altered by generations of experience. As Hourihan claims, stories are powerful tools for cultural transmission (1997, 4) and thus, children stories significantly influence a child’s perception of the world, and in doing so provide them with the necessary knowledge to operate in society. To recognize that all texts are ideological and all texts have a point of view, it is vital to examine what messages texts entail and how these could affect young readers.

Since a culture’s future is, to put it crudely, invested in its children, children’s writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mold audience attitudes into desirable forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose. (Stephens 1992, 3)

Children engage in reading activities for different reasons, however, personal development and identity construction are often viewed as major purposes of reading books (Protherough 1983, 7). This can be observed in the genre of fiction, as there is a recognizable trend for
children’s fiction to focus on one’s individual psyche. The transition from childhood to adulthood, thereby maturing in social awareness, is a predominant and prevalent theme (Stephens 1992, 3). Personal development is amongst one of the most pervasive themes in children’s literature. While protagonists in the selected narratives might appear ‘strange’ or immature, there is still growth in their consciousness. Therein lies the message for the reader. Also Bernice Cullinan in her work Literature and the Child (1989) states:

[C]hildren absorb quest tales ‘into the bloodstream’, thereby assimilating various values of society past and present.[…][M]ost children unconsciously learn from experience that goodness is generally rewarded and wickedness punished, quest tales affirm their knowledge. (Cullinan 1989, 306)

In regard to this paper, it is vital to explore how representations of masculinity in children’s narratives can affect and shape the reader. For this reason, the depictions of masculinity are investigated in the selected books, looking at how this portrayal might affect the readers as

our postmodern world has generally thrown notions of a stable identity into doubt, there has been more pressure to hold on to something solid and enduring – and childhood is regularly seen to provide such an anchor, if not an Eden. (Hourihan 1997, 12)

2.5 Gender in Children’s Literature: “Boys must be Boys”

Decades of scholarly work have shown how narratives express ideas about women and men, and thus, how their femininity and masculinity is shaped. Especially in children’s literature, it is crucial to investigate how these concepts are portrayed, as

writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture’s past […], and aspirations about the present and future. (Stephens, 1992, 3)

Within these writings the concept of masculinity is understood as resisting the act of putting on a certain costume or dress or simply refers to being repressed by conventional roles (Nodelman 2002, 1). In other words, masculinity is sometimes considered to be ‘natural’ and less bound to rules and a state where men could just be their true self. Consequently, traditional male assumptions are adopted and from very early on, children have to learn how to fit into these categories. In doing so, it is crucial for this development to observe how gender, societal norms and heroism are portrayed in literature or the media. Literature for the young has always been closely linked to the ‘material culture’, as Clark points out (1999, 1). However, girlhood and boyhood have often been treated as separate entities, which are ‘different’ and for that reason are also rewarded ‘unequal’ status (Simons 2009, 143). Simons notices that especially children’s books from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-century
depict strong and active boy characters, while girls are rather obedient, thoughtful and domestic (2009, 143). Further, she states that

equally prevalent, even if sometimes less immediately obvious, has been a recurrent expression of the flimsiness and artificiality of the division between boys and girls, and of the desire of many protagonists to contravene the gender identities enjoined on them. (Simons 2009, 143)

Consequently, one can say that children books were also divided by their readerships, as there were certain books aimed at boys and some others solely for girls. But some of them were addressed to both girls and boys, for example Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744) (Simons 2009, 144). Only during the nineteenth century, were fictional worlds of boys and girls clearly separate with their own boundaries and rules, thereby outlawing the other sex (ibid., 144-145). This could be seen by the development of a “lucrative market in children periodicals.” *The Boy’s Own Paper* (1855-1967) promoted ‘manly attributes’ or qualities, thereby addressing issues boys might be interested in (ibid., 144-145). Simons refers to Jack Harkaway, who was the archetypal boy hero at that time, who was depicted as fearless, heroic, muscular, tough, yet, also ethical despite his tendency to confront authority (ibid., 145). These characters represented the typical ‘schoolboy’ image. At the same time, *The Girl’s Own Paper* (from 1880) promoted the ‘girl’s story’ by embracing home and family as dominant themes. Simons notes that especially stories surrounding girls show a deeper understanding and respect for authority, albeit reluctant to adult control (ibid.). Girls and young women have to obey and follow rules, and naughtiness is simply a phase girls must outgrow (ibid.). Edward Salmon, however, criticized this notion, by stating that literature for girls would be more successful if it did not focus so much on being too “goody-goody” (1951, 86). There was disparity between heroines presented in books during that time compared to all the male heroes whom boys might be inspired to emulate or impersonate (Simons 2009, 146). Writers were aware of their obligations to instruct young readers of the rigorous codes of conduct imposed by society and influence their perspective in a manner which would be useful in the future (ibid.). Further, scholarly research has shown that the division between gender was indeed on purpose, as authors try to engage readers through demonstrating these tensions between prescribed and preferred gender roles (ibid.). Interestingly, authors also made characters coexist in children’s books with different characters that would also attempt to overturn decorum such as traditional gender roles (ibid.,146-147). With the rise of the tomboy, traditional gender norms were challenged which is seen in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868). Simons further states that “the lasting image in the collective audience memory is the figure of the defiant tomboy chopping off her ‘abundant hair’” (ibid.,147). In contrast, boys performing a feminine role were not as accepted because most children’s books
had not depicted one simple model of masculinity since the late nineteenth century (ibid., 154). For example, J.M. Barrie’s story of *Peter Pan* did not focus on manly attributes but rather represented a lack of physical ability and courage and self-doubt as the major components of heroism and masculinity (ibid.). Consequently, a female tomboy cannot be regarded as equivalent to a male character that behaves like a girl.

During the twentieth-century, authors of “epic fantasy have played with readers’ expectations of masculinity in their choice of protagonists” (Simons 2009, 155). For example, *The Hobbit* (1937) by Tolkien introduces an uncommon character as the hero of the adventure (ibid.). Bilbo has traits such as stocky, scared, insecure and devoted to the comforts of home but who still sets off on a great adventure with Thorin and Company (ibid.). Readers might expect Bilbo to show his courage and determination to succeed despite the difficulties he faces, however, his ‘inherent domesticity’ wins in the end (ibid.). This is a common notion as many other boy heroes of the twentieth century applied the same concept of cross-gender identity, combining assumed male and female qualities. However, this blurring of gender roles became apparent and the center of attention of new novels at the end of the century (ibid.), as seen in Anne Fine’s *Flour Babies* (1992). Despite the complexities of masculinity, feminine qualities in a boy were not widely affirmed in male characters because it was regarded as sassiness (ibid., 156). Recently, there is more freedom given to how girlhood and manhood are depicted in children’s literature. ‘Tomboy’ characters do not cause controversy anymore, as their portrayal is simply two-dimensional. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, brave, smart, resourceful girl protagonists are by no means unusual in recent children’s novels (ibid.). However, girl characters that are superior, in important respects, to a novel’s male protagonist, such as Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* novels, should refrain from upstaging the male hero or the man they fell in love (ibid., 156-157).

Generally speaking, the representation of gender and gender roles still play an important part in children’s literature. The depiction of traditional gender roles has shifted towards a more calculated disarrangement of gender identities (Simons 2009, 157). Traditional representations of gender are still popular in contemporary society as social conservatism is very much part of daily life (ibid.). Simons further elaborates “these books should be best understood as a kind of fairy tale of adolescence, enabling children to satisfy an urge to experiment with gender without the need to destabilize their real-life identities” (2009, 157). The insinuation here is that young females may take pleasure in ‘tomboy’ stories. However, this is not meant to imply they necessarily identify with that role. Because of, or in
spite of gender stereotyping, it becomes increasingly clear that society must decide whether it pursues a path of assumptions or acceptance. These norms may, by their definition, remain the force that guides society, or we could choose to challenge them, developing new constructs that are more flexible and consistent with the values that we espouse. Unchecked, literature can become a vehicle that represses the natural development of a child by reinforcing a script that has already been written about the nature of a man or a woman (Nodelman 2002, 2-3). Similarly, theories teach us that the variables that most impact our interactions with one another are those that we fail to question. As we begin to believe that the world, and our world, simply is the way it is, with no room for socially acceptable adaptation, we slowly adopt the normative belief that this is not only what is, but that it is also what should be (ibid., 2).
3 Analysis

This chapter deals with a detailed analysis of the ‘boy code’ and the concept of cross-dressing (female-to-male, male-to-female) as used in three of the examined novels. It must be noted that all stories represent masculinity in different ways and either maintain or challenge it. A definition of the concept of cross-dressing as applied in this thesis will be given in the second part of the analysis.

3.1 The Boy Code: “Boys should be boys. That’s one of the rules of the world”

In his work Real Boys – Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood (1999) William Pollack, an associate clinical professor in the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, talks about the four basic rules of the ‘boy code’, which is a set of assumptions about how boys are expected to behave in society. Yet, Pollack criticizes this model and the resulting stereotypes, which describe what boys are and how boys should behave, for his research confirms that these ideas are simply not true (Pollack 1999, 52).

In his work he tries to uncover basic myths by demonstrating possible truths about manhood. The first myth that seems to be false is that nature controls a boy’s behavior, meaning that high levels of testosterone cause aggression, violence or at least the potential to be aggressive or violent (ibid., 52). Boys are considered “prisoners of biology”, meaning that their behavior is mainly predetermined and innate (ibid.). However, in reality it can be claimed that a boy’s behavior is shaped more by loved ones than by nature, thereby understanding that testosterone is not the primary factor in determining a boy’s behavior, yet still plays a crucial role in various natural patterns of behavior (ibid.). For example, boys do enjoy running around, kicking soccer balls, but a distinction between being active and being aggressive is necessary. Pollack believes that a boy’s behavior can be shaped i.e. by discouraging violence and aggression and channeling creative, positive directions (ibid., 53). If a boy feels the need to punch, he should be given a punching bag or if he wants to argue, he should be given the opportunity to engage in a conversation which allows a development of debating skills (ibid., 57-58).

The second myth Pollack is addressing refers to the phrase “boys should be boys”, meaning that they have to fulfill the stereotype of the dominant and ‘macho’ male. However,
this hinders some parents and their sons from living in a way that comes most naturally to them, as Pollack claims (ibid., 58). The ‘boy code’ demands boys to never act like girls, for according to Kimmel and Davis men fear femininity, which is an issue at the very heart of men’s gender role conflict (2011, 7). As soon as boys act outside this code, there will be resistance in society, which might even result in humiliation or feeling ashamed (Pollack 1999, 58). For parents it is particularly difficult to witness their sons go through this process of learning how to act ‘masculine’ and how to be like other boys. However, this myth is not true either, as there are many ways to be a boy. Pollack talks about the diversity of masculinity and considers the ‘boy code’ to be based on a stereotype unique to our culture and time (ibid., 60). He states that countries have different perceptions of boyhood, yet, sometimes parents and their sons find themselves struggling to meet the expectations of their own culture and thus, the ‘boy code’. In this case, the code does not clearly reflect a boy’s true nature and he will constantly try to break free of it. It is necessary for boys to experience childhood in a natural way, thereby being allowed to express their feelings, to talk, to grieve openly, especially when the may feel they failed to live up to social expectations (ibid., 62). When no one makes fun of this behavior, boys understand that they are accepted as who they really are and do not have to fit into a box.

The final myth Pollack refers to is that boys are toxic. These myths state that society sees boys as prisoners of their biological makeup (“boys will be boys”) and as confined by a gender straightjacket (“boys should be boys”). In addition, there is the belief that boys have something “inherently dangerous and toxic” about themselves (ibid., 62). This means they are emotionally distant, unsocialized or even unaware. According to Pollack, the truth is that boys are empathic, even though this trait is strongly related to girls. He refers to a study, which proved that boys are able to show caring, supportive and empathetic behavior for their loved ones (ibid., 64).

In short, the ‘boy code’ is a set of rules, which boys should follow to be considered a ‘real man’ and thus needs to be explained in more detail. The first basic rule emphasizes traits such as independence, endurance of hardships and pain, stability and the necessary strength to overcome fears and hide weaknesses (Pollack 1999, 23). The second imperative encourages and allows violent behavior of boys/men, declaring these acts as biological (ibid. 24). The third rule refers to the achievement of power, status and dominance, thereby suppressing failure and unhappiness (ibid. 24). The last rule of this code prohibits boys/men from expressing feelings or any emotions, as they are linked to feminine traits (ibid.). Consequently, the ‘boy code’ dictates how they have to behave. However, it becomes clear
that this code is outdated and demonstrates dysfunctional gender stereotypes. As a result, boys feel ashamed when they show their vulnerable side and their emotions. Today’s society sends boys mixed messages, namely, to be strong yet vulnerable, masculine but empathetic, and cool and detached when they wish to be open. It causes confusion since boys do not understand what behavior is right, and causes misunderstanding if they act tough but also act nice. In his work Pollack shows the consequences of the ‘boy code’ on culture and individuals. Most research has focused on rethinking feminism, however, there is a lack of focus on boys. In fact, boys need permission to express their feelings openly, and they need their parents (Pollack 1999, xviii). It becomes clear that “their specific developmental needs, the cultural and peer pressures they face, and the cultural issues” must be resolved for them to grow into strong and good men (ibid., xi).

The first part of this section provides an overview of the ‘boy code’ and an explanation of its categories, while the second part of this chapter offers a critical analysis of the behavior of the selected characters in the novels in order to discover if they reject or adhere to the ‘boy code’ and to what effects. It deals with the different experiences of the selected characters in the narratives, thereby focusing on issues such as cross-dressing (female-to-male, male-to-female), but also analyzing the concepts of masculinity enacted by the selected character. This study should demonstrate how masculinity can be performed and how it is merely a learned behavior rather than an innate quality, and thus is subject to change. The findings are summarized in the third subchapter and the concluding chapter of this thesis, which primarily focuses on the question of how the novels convey masculinity to their readers, whether the authors are able to challenge the traditional ‘boy code’ and how this might affect young readers and their view of the world.

**The “Sturdy Oak”**

The first injunction of the ‘boy code’ is the ‘Sturdy Oak’ rule and requires boys to be stable, stoic and independent individuals, who do not openly show pain, fear or grief (Pollack 1999, 23). The term stoic in this context refers to people who are capable of enduring pain or hardships without complaining or showing fear openly. Stoicism in this context can be noted particularly for boys when they feel distress or sadness, but in contrast to what they are experiencing, must act bravely and strongly when confronted with difficult obstacles (ibid., 23). Compliance with this rule can be found for example in *Here Lies Arthur*, where it is done on purpose to raise awareness of gender being a social construct. This can be seen when Bedwyr, Arthur’s nephew, has been badly injured on the battlefield. Gwyna – in the role of
the maid of Arthur’s wife – wants to help him but decides against it because she knows that Bedwyr, as a fully grown man now, doesn’t want her help anyway, and after all, as a woman she is not his friend anymore: “Watching him go, it was all I could do not to run and give him my arm to lean on” (Reeve 2007, 207). It becomes clear after reading passages like this that the first rule of the ‘boy code’ is endorsed. Reeve does this on purpose because it offers the reader the possibility to critically examine the concept of masculinity.

In Collins’ novel The Hunger Games, this rule is clearly challenged, for example, when Katniss, the protagonist, starts to cry when she wants the Games to stop and Peeta comforts her:

I can feel tears starting to pool in my eyes. Peeta looks at me in concern. “What is it? Are you in a lot of pain?” I give him another answer, because it is equally true but can be taken as a brief moment of weakness instead of a terminal one. “I want to go home, Peeta,” I say plaintively like a small child. “You will, I promise,” he says, and bends over to give me a kiss (Collins 2008, 293-294).

Peeta tries to ease her by giving her a kiss and promises her that she will be home soon. He even suggests her to dream about home. Peeta does not question his behavior in this scene, when he shows his emotions and empathy for Katniss. Collins criticizes the first imperative of the ‘boy code’ and therefore the concept of masculinity. Such episodes are used consciously in order to question the normative values of masculinity.

The “Give ‘em hell”

Pollack notes that this imperative is rooted in the myth that ‘boys will be boys’, which claims boys to be ‘biologically wired’ to act manly or even violent, and to encourage other boys to engage in risky behaviors and violent acts (Pollack 1999, 24). The way this ideology contributes to boys’ increasing levels of violence and their openness towards it is not surprising at all. Violence and masculinity are institutionalized in many cultures, in which a dominant place for male violence is the military and war scenes (ibid., 24). Schrock and Schwalbe agree that violent behavior is often used to signify manhood and it can be seen in different sports (2009, 282). Pollack states that the second rule of the boy code may stem from the myth “boys will be boys”, meaning that this kind of aggressive behavior is simply in their nature (1999, 52). In fact, violence plays an important role in Reeve’s novel Here Lies Arthur and in Collins’ The Hunger Games.

In Reeve’s novel, battles and their consequences play a fundamental role. King Arthur is portrayed as the villain in the story, who abuses his wife and who engages in a number of fights, much to Gwyna’s surprise. Already at the beginning of the story she learns that Arthur
has recently attacked her master’s properties: [Myrrdin talking] “You know who those riders are, Gwyna? They are the war-band of Arthur. You have heard of Arthur, haven’t you?” (Reeve 2007, 16). Gwyna has heard of Arthur, however, she never expected to meet him in her own woods. Later, when Gwyna disguised as Gwyn rides with his war-band, she soon learns about Arthur’s violent actions and behavior and the unjust war and his demand for respect, because he believes “he was a man they should respect” (ibid., 201): “Stories are all well and good, he told Myrddin, but if you want men to respect you, you have to show them strength. They burn one of your holdings, you burn two of theirs” (ibid., 201). Gwyna is a witness to Arthur’s abuse towards his wife Gwenhwyfar: “[…] he used to hit her. He would make the blood of the Aureliani bloom under her skin in purple bruises. She is his wife, after all, so he’s a right to bend her to his will” (ibid., 208-209).

Reeve demonstrates that the most significant way for a boy to become a man is by becoming warriors and fighters. Also, the appearance of Bedwyr’s growing a beard is also a symbol of manhood: “He was almost a man, with a scruffy stubble of beard that he was vastly proud of, and a host of a boastful tales about his skill at hunting” (ibid., 152). Gwyna describes taking Bedwyr with them to make him one of them, a man, something she can never be because it is getting hard to hide her ‘real’ biological identity. When Bedwyr returns, she barely recognizes him, as she states: “He was a warrior now, with a warrior’s windy vanity, and five notches cut in the edge of his shield to show the men he’d killed. He’d put his life as a boy far behind him, stuffed it away as if it shamed him […] (ibid., 170).

In *Here Lies Arthur* the sole purpose of boys is to grow up, turn into a man and to be sent off to fight for Arthur. However, Myrddin, the bard, clearly is against wars and wants to stop them. This is also the reason why he keeps spinning glorifying stories about Arthur. Stories which should make him strong enough to bring all wars to an end: “[…] if I can make Arthur strong enough there might be peace again, like our grandfather’s fathers knew back in the days […]” (Reeve 2007, 17). He knows that Arthur’s strength can be used for good (ibid.). Gwyna tries to understand why Arthur wants power for himself and is in constant pursuit of it. She does not want to speak up because she fears it would sound womanish, and instead she asks herself: “why not let Arthur hold his territory and all the other kings hold theirs and leave the Saxons quiet in the lands they’d settled?” (ibid., 148). But, they all fail to recognize Arthur’s plan to gain full power.

Violence and aggression are dominant issues in *The Hunger Games* too, in which Gale is depicted as particularly brave and strong, embodying all male traits, whereas Peeta does not
know how to handle weapons, shows his emotions openly, and only gets involved in minor
tasks like looking out for possible intruders:

rocks as much as possible, no sense in leaving him tracks to follow. And listen for both of us.” It’s
clear, at this point, that the explosion destroyed the hearing in my left ear for good. (Collins 2008, 313)

Gale, on the other hand, enjoys hunting in the woods with Katniss, even though they
both are aware that it is illegal and carries severe penalties: “Most of the Peacekeepers turn a
blind eye to the few of us who hunt because they’re as hungry for fresh meat as anybody is”
(Collins 2008, 5). Gale always waits for Katniss in the woods and she feels as though Gale is
the only person with whom she can be herself (ibid., 6). Gale is described as having
“[s]traight black hair, olive skin” (ibid., 8) and even though, when he met Katniss a few years
ago, he was only fourteen, “he already looked like a man” (ibid., 10). He is active, outspoken
and willing to fight for a pride future, where he would like to have children. Gale hunts to
provide for his family and Katniss appears to have fewer reservations when she is with him.
She even notes that “Gale won’t have any trouble finding a wife. He’s good-looking, he’s
strong enough to handle the work in the mines, and he can hunt” (ibid., 10). Katniss also
recognizes his body, when they say goodbye before the start of the Games: “[h]is body is
familiar to me – the way it moves, the smell of wood smoke, even the sound of his heart
beating I know from quiet moments on a hunt – but this is the first time I really feel it, lean
and hard-muscled against my own” (ibid., 38-39). Gale encourages Katniss as she is the best
hunter he knows (ibid., 40), and to him killing animals is not much different to killing people
(ibid.). This demonstrates his willingness to enact physical bravery despite potential
consequences. Gale seems to be “biologically wired” as he engages in risky behaviors such as
illegal hunting in the woods where he could get injured or face severe consequences, and even
gives Katniss advice for her time in the Games, and thus endorses this rule of the ‘boy code’
(Pollack 1999, 24).

In contrast to Gale, Peeta Mellark is described as “steady, solid as a rock” (Collins
2008, 70) and as someone where you can see “his struggle to remain emotionless” (ibid., 25).
Peeta Mellark is a baker’s son and therefore, not necessarily poor, and thus, doesn’t have to
provide for himself and his family. One time, he deliberately burns bread in order to give it to
Katniss. To her, this was an act of “enormous kindness that would have surely resulted in a
beating if discovered”, because his mother tends to hit him for misbehavior like that (ibid.,
31-32). Before the actual Games start, Haymitch, Peeta’s and Katniss’ mentor, punches Peeta
in his jaw to give him a bruise in order to trick people. Haymitch knows of Peeta’s lack of ‘manly’ skills and therefore has to go through with this plan: “Let the bruise show. The audience will think you’ve mixed it up with another tribute before you’ve even made it to the arena” (ibid., 57). Peeta is aware of his lack of skills, for he admits, “I can’t do anything,” says Peeta. “However, he and Katniss receive group training in order to learn survival skills and other fighting techniques (ibid., 92-93). Peeta also has a passion for making cakes: “Fancy cakes with flowers and pretty things painted in frosting” (ibid., 96). Throughout the Hunger Games, Peeta constantly protects Katniss and looks out for her because he cares deeply for her. Peeta is definitely presented as being soft and weak, and thus challenges this imperative of the ‘boy code’, even though his weakness actually serves him well, as can be seen later in the analysis.

The “Big Wheel”

The third rule of the ‘boy code’ is referred to as the ‘Big Wheel’ imperative. Boys should achieve status, power, and dominance. It requires boys to act as if everything is under their control. As part of this ideology they have to learn how to act cool, thereby being tough at all costs and always striving for the best possible outcome (Pollack 1999, 24).

The issue of power and dominance does play an important role in Reeve’s novel Here Lies Arthur. It is foregrounded and portrayed as a negative trait and personified by King Arthur, who takes every chance to obtain more power over the country. Only Myrddin is blinded and still views Arthur as the only hope for Britain (Reeve, 2007, 17). His advisor is not completely unaware of the situation as “he could see that Arthur only wanted what the others wanted: power and land” (ibid., 309). However, he sees a chance that if Arthur feels strong enough he will not want to achieve more power. Gwyna finds herself in the middle of this struggle and does not want to listen to Myrddin’s hopes and talks about Arthur anymore when she says to Myrddin:

“Arthur? You’ve wasted your life building him high and wrapping him up in stories, but Arthur hasn’t cleaned the Saxons away. […] Arthur doesn’t care about anything but making his own self fat and rich, and he hasn’t even managed to do that very well. And all you can do is make up stories, make up lies, try and turn him into something that he isn’t.” (Reeve 2007, 305-306)

When Arthur dies in the battlefield she takes all his possessions, amongst them his rings, belt, boots and his gold cross, because she believes that she has earned them. This shows how little respect she has left for Arthur. It can be seen as the ultimate gesture of dismissal, since Arthur
states that respect is very important to him, and thus, Arthur adheres to this rule while Gwyn clearly challenges it.

In *The Hunger Games* Katniss and Peeta are the only two tributes left and according to the rules there can only be one winner in the end. Peeta decides to kill himself in order to save Katniss. However, Katniss refuses to leave him behind:

“You’re not leaving me here alone,” I say. Because if he dies, I’ll never go home, not really, I’ll spend the rest of my life in this arena trying to think my way out. “Listen,” he says, pulling me to my feet. “We both know they have to have a victor. It can only be one of us. Please, take it. For me.” And he goes on about how he loves me, what life would be without me but I’ve stopped listening because his previous words are trapped in my head, thrashing desperately around. We both know they have to have a victor. (Collins 2008, 343–344)

Katniss feels powerless because she is a girl. In this scene, she typically shows her ‘female’ nurturing side and the feelings she has for Peeta. Peeta on the other hand shows courage and bravery when he decides to end his life in order to save Katniss. This does challenge this rule of the ‘boy code’, because he does not act selfishly, but rather strives for the best possible outcome which is to save Katniss who he loves deeply. Since neither of them can live without each other, they decide to change the rules on their terms and kill themselves. His weakness is used to his advantage at this point, because he has to leave his comfort zone to fight the Capitol:

If Peeta and I were both to die, or they thought we were....My fingers fumble with the pouch on my belt, freeing it. Peeta sees it and his hand clamps on my wrist. “No, I won’t let you.” “Trust me,” I whisper. He holds my gaze for a long moment and then lets me go. I loosen the top of the pouch and pour a few spoonfuls of berries into his palm. Then I fill my own. “On the count of three?” Peeta leans down and kisses me once, very gently. “The count of three,” he says. We stand, out backs pressed together, our empty hands locked tight. “Hold them out. I want everyone to see,” he says. I spread out my fingers, and the dark berries glisten in the sun. I give Peeta’s hand one last squeeze as a signal, as a goodbye, and we begin counting. (Collins 2008, 344)

As a couple they want to overturn the Capitol and thus achieve status, power, and dominance. They have control over their own lives and act bravely in order to obtain the best possible outcome. Going against the rules and taking the risk ultimately saves both their lives, when both are declared victors at the end of the Games: “Stop! Stop! Ladies and gentlemen, I [Claudius Templesmith, the announcer of the Hunger Games] am pleased to present the victors of the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark! I give you – the tributes of District Twelve!” (Collins 2008, 345).

The restrictions of traditional masculinity are clear because in *Here Lies Arthur* boys are required to wear a mask of toughness at all times, they need to “act as though everything
is all right, as though everything is under control, even if it isn’t” (Pollack 1999, 24). The achievement of power, however, appears to be a negative trait in *Here Lies Arthur*, which is embodied by King Arthur. In *The Hunger Games* Peeta’s masculinity is clearly viewed as ‘unmanly’ and ‘inferior’ because he does not act as one would expect a ‘real man’ to act, he shows emotions, and although his body is stereotypically depicted as strong and as a ‘masculine’ asset, he does face a serious injury which takes his bodily strength away. Therefore, this rule is clearly challenged here.

**The “No sissy stuff”**

The fourth imperative of the ‘boy code’ is called the ‘No sissy stuff’ rule and discourages boys and men from expressing their feelings or urges, since they are perceived as feminine. The expression of their natural love and empathy violate this restrictive code and soft behavior may be considered ‘gay’ or ‘unmanly’. Pollack regards this rule as the most “traumatizing and dangerous injunction thrust on boys and men” (1999, 24). In order for men to come across as ‘manly’, it is necessary not to engage in any behavior considered feminine and also not be homosexual (Nodelman 2002, 8). As Pollack notes, when boys break under the strain and when they display feminine feelings or behaviors they are “usually greeted not with empathy but with ridicule, with taunts and threats that shame them for their failure to act and feel stereotypically ‘masculine’ ways” (Pollack 1999, 24). Boys bury these feelings and are determined to never engage in such behavior again. Pollack explains how such taunting may already occur at a very early age i.e. “when they sleep alone in a crib for the first time, are sent away for two weeks of summer camp, or separate from their parents for the first day of kindergarten” (1999, 24). They are already expected to be independent or are simply pushed towards “pseudo-independence” before they are really ready (ibid.). Through repression of certain feelings, boys may show symptoms such as conduct disorders or even become depressed and are more likely to turn to drugs and alcohol when they are older. However, boys can challenge this rule and can experience the vast amount of feelings and behaviors (ibid., 24-25).

In Reeve’s narrative this issue of repressing ‘feminine’ or ‘unmanly’ feelings is also addressed in the character of Bedwyr, who is Arthur’s nephew and one of his best soldiers. He is described as being sensitive and shows feelings towards Gwyna. When Gwyna invents a story about her parents dying his eyes fill up with tears and he comforts her in a “brotherly, bearish way” (Reeve 2007, 46). Another important character who challenges this rule is
Peredur, the son of a famous warrior. Peredur, who is raised as a girl by his widowed mother, wants to join Arthur’s band once he discovers he is in fact a boy (ibid., 187). Gwyna feels sad about this and states: “Filled my eyes with him, and felt sorry, knowing that he’d be swallowed into the warrior-life, and learn to hide his sweetness under bluster and ironmongery” (ibid., 197). It becomes clear again that Here Lies Arthur challenges this rule of the ‘boy code’ by referring to this behavior as learned behavior. Boys or men learn to hide their feelings “under their bluster and ironmongery” (ibid.).

The Hunger Games challenge this imperative when the gender roles are reversed, for example, Peeta starts crying at the station as reporters “with their insectlike cameras” show up (Collins 2008, 40). However, Katniss notes that she has a lot of practice when it comes to hiding her feelings. She feels gratification that the television screens show her “bored” when she arrives at the scene (ibid.). However, Peeta Mellark cannot hide his emotions: “Peeta Mellark, on the other hand, has obviously been crying and interestingly enough does not seem to be trying to cover it up” (ibid., 40). Katniss believes that this is his strategy to succeed in the Games. By appearing weak and frightened he will reassure the other tributes that he is not at all competition for them. She compares this to a girl, who previously used this behavior in the Games and succeeded until only a few contestants were left and she started to “kill viciously” (ibid., 41). Katniss does not believe that Peeta can convince anyone with this, as his outer appearance is “broad-shouldered and strong” (ibid.). In her opinion, it will take “an awful lot of weeping to convince anyone to overlook him” (ibid.). Only later does she learn that she can trust him, because towards the end when she is asked about the berries, which should kill her and Peeta, she admits: “I don’t know, I just …couldn’t bear the thought of … being without him” (ibid., 369). Katniss ability to hide her emotions makes her appear more masculine than Peeta’s weakness and emotional state. Collins challenges the fourth rule of the ‘boy code’ on purpose for the reader to understand that there are different kinds of masculinities. However, Katniss only believes that Peeta puts on a show to trick everyone because to her a man would clearly not act in this way naturally. She only later learns that Peeta is different than Gale.

In The Boy in the Dress, it is Dennis who hides his vulnerable emotional side from his father and brother John, and thus, this rule is challenged. His brother is described as performing masculinity, avoiding any demonstration of emotion or warmth towards his brother Dennis. This can be seen in the scene where Dennis cries because he misses his mother:
“Dennis? Dennis? What are you crying for now?” demanded John from his bed. “I don’t know. It’s just...well...I just wish that Mum was here, and everything,” came the reply from Dennis. “Well, don’t cry. She’s gone and she’s not coming back.” “You don’t know that.” “She’s never coming back, Dennis. Now stop crying. Only girls cry.” (Walliams 2008, 17-18)

The suppression of ‘feminine’ feelings is addressed here, when crying is regarded as something only girls do. According to Pollack, boys are not “allowed to explore these emotional states and activities, boys are prematurely forced to shut them out, to become self-reliant” (1999, 24).

Similarly, Dennis is shrugged off by his own father, when he finds his Vogue magazine under the mattress:

“What the hell is this?” said Dad. His eyes were popping out, he was so angry. “It’s a magazine,” replied Dennis. “I can see that it’s a magazine.” Dennis wondered why his dad was asking, if he already knew what it was, but he kept that thought to himself. “It’s Vogue magazine, Dad.” “I can see it’s Vogue magazine.” (Walliams 2008, 39)

For his father it is “just not right”, because he regards his son’s interest in dresses as “weird” (ibid., 53): “I can see it’s Vogue. What I want to know is why a son of mine wants to look at a fashion magazine?” (ibid., 50-51). However, for Dennis it offers the opportunity to escape from his world as a boy to a new “glorious world” which is described as “his Narnia, only without the talking lion that’s supposed to be Jesus” But Dennis’s escape to that magical world of glamour ends the day his dad discovers the magazine” (ibid., 50). Dennis’ interest in fashion and magazines can be interpreted as a display of ‘feminine’ feelings and behaviors, which is greeted with ridicule, as the “No sissy stuff” imperative is challenged here.
3.2 The Many Masculinities and the Concept of Cross-Dressing: “I don’t fit in, either.”

The ‘boy code’ as defined in the first part of the analysis encompasses strict guidelines to follow. A violation of this set of rules can have severe consequences in regard to gender roles (Pollack 1999, 23). Its purpose is to maintain the traditional masculine ideology by also reinforcing patriarchy. For this reason it can be considered closely connected to the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, which requires explanation in order to understand the main patterns of masculinity in the gender order (Connell 2005, 76-77). The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* contains vital ideas with regard to the studies of masculinity and was developed by R.W. Connell in 1995 discussed further below (Horlacher 2011, 7-8).

*Hegemony* refers to a group which claims and sustains leadership or dominance over others in social life (Connell 2005, 77). With regard to masculinity this means that at any given time one form of masculinity is culturally promoted. Therefore, *hegemonic masculinity* can be defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees […] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (ibid., 77). It is masculinity which holds the superior position in society and in a given pattern of gender relations (ibid. 76). Hegemonic masculinity is not set in stone, yet subject to change at any given time and cultural context. Connell emphasizes that a form of hegemonic masculinity is merely a current state, thereby at risk of being questioned by new formations, which challenge old beliefs, as “it is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same” but rather “a position always contestable” (2005, 76). Connell states that homosexual men are subordinated and oppressed through violence, abuse and discrimination (2005, 78). This marginalization of men in society also refers to the exclusion of some heterosexual men, because they appear to be different and therefore are expelled from a certain circle of “legitimate masculinity”(ibid.). They receive punishment for being different and get referred to as a mother’s boy, nerd, jellyfish, candy ass, geek or wimp (ibid., 79). Regarding a child’s personal development, it becomes apparent to note that children are born into this world in which differentiations between boys/men and girls/women exist. It is their task to learn how to fit into these categories and to communicate to others their understanding of their place within this system. Young boys need to decode gender orders and find their own identity to obtain their masculinity (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 281). This can be a challenging task because there is not only one form of masculinity, but rather multiple can be found due to the distinction
between hegemonic masculinity and “lower status ways that manhood is enacted by males with fewer resources” (ibid., 280). This process is a type of act, namely, “one that signifies a masculine self” (ibid., 280). Men have to adapt to the hegemonic masculinity to feel accepted, otherwise they will feel rejected or emotionally detached (ibid., 288).

The following sections of the second part of this analysis give evidence as to how the selected characters perform their masculinity. Before analyzing the selected narratives, brief plot summaries are provided in this subchapter. Further, it focuses on the concept of cross-dressing, which is an issue in *Here Lies Arthur, Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest* and *The Boy in the Dress*. 

Female-to-Male Cross-dressing:
“She liked to pretend to be a boy sometimes - to go where a girl would not venture, she would travel as a boy.”

*Female-to-male cross-dressing* refers to the performance of masculinity by female characters and it appears to be a common theme in children’s literature. Female-to-male cross-dressing narratives aim to destabilize the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity in order to establish a broader understanding outside conventional expectations and gender stereotypes. It refers to the act of girls dressing themselves as boys in order “to escape societies which seek to repress and limit femininity” (Flanagan 2002, 78-79). This allows the character to enter a new ‘male’ world and enjoy all liberties which are usually denied to females. The concept of female-to-male cross-dressing offers unrestricted opportunities to confront traditional gender norms, thereby providing a variety of alternatives: “The cross-dressing protagonists reworks and reconstitutes the very idea of gender, appropriating it for her own purposes” (ibid., 83-84).

Generally, there is a difference between female-to-male cross-dressing and male-to-female cross-dressing. For females it portrays an act of liberation, as seen in *Here Lies Arthur* and *Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest*, while males dressing up as females is merely a gesture of male rowdiness to a comic effect as it is the case in *The Boy in the Dress* (ibid., 79). Flanagan notes that cross-dressers have the ability to deconstruct gender through his/her perception of what is required in a performance of the gender which is other to their biological origin, and in the respond which their behavior engenders in others, is only now being realized in contemporary literature and cinema. (Flanagan 2002, 80)

According to Schrock and Schwalbe “the existence of the category ‘men’ depends on the collective performance and affirmation of manhood acts” (2009, 287). Cross-dressing therefore allows females to encounter a male world and experience liberties which they are usually denied of as women (Flanagan 2002, 78-79). This is the case in both Springer’s and Reeve’s novels, which are analyzed in the subsequent section of this subchapter.

*Rowan Hood – Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest*, published by Nancy Springer in 2001, is a retelling of the original *Robin Hood* tale. The main character is Rosemary, a 13-year-old girl, who has nowhere to go when her mother is murdered for being a healer. Rosemary wants to turn to her father, the famous outlaw Robin Hood, who she has never met before. She disguises herself as a boy called Rowan and travels to Sherwood Forest. During her adventure she meets Tykel, a part-wolf and part-dog creature which helps her survive this
journey, Ettarde, a 13-year-old princess who they helped escape a forced marriage, and Lionel, a giant minstrel. When Robin Hood soon is caught and imprisoned, Rosemary, disguised as a boy, and her companions try to save him. In the end Rosemary opens up about her real identity and Robin acknowledges her and asks her to join his group. But she refuses and tells him that she has already found her own outlaw group.

In Springer’s novel Rosemary, who has nowhere to go when her mother is murdered for being a healer, wants to turn to her father, the famous outlaw Robin Hood, who she has never met before. She disguises herself as a boy called Rowan by changing her appearance in order to travel through Sherwood Forest in search of her father:

There was one more thing she had to do. With her knife in one hand, she pulled her hair taut with the other and hacked it off. Long, brown tresses fell away, and she threw them into the tree hollow. […] When she finished her head felt light and cool. Her hair formed a rough stubble around her ears, as if she were a peasant boy. (Springer 2001, 15)

Having long hair is considered feminine, and thus, she needs to cut it off to make her disguise more credible. It is a necessary change in order for her to feel more like a boy and to enjoy liberties that she would not have been able to experience as a girl. Rosemary’s departure and her shorter hair cut and places her in a new social role which now presents her as a boy and marks a new identity. The decision to cut off her long hair establishes this new identity for her as a boy.

During her journey she meets Tykel, which helps her survive this journey. Thus, there is a limitation to her disguise. Her physique is quite ‘manly’ for her to pass as a boy; however, her mind is not yet remembering her change:

“I’m not a lad,” she said, too late realizing that, once more, she should have let it go. What was she, standing there in her dirty jerkin and ragged leggings, if not a lad? […] “You’re not a lad?” He [Tykel] smiled, his flaxen eyebrows raised, bright on his tanned face. “What are you, then?” “An outlaw,” she said boldly, making the best of her blunder, “and I am on my way to join Robin Hood’s band.” (Springer 2001, 57)

Luckily she manages to save the situation. The experience is quite liberating for Rosemary yet there are clearly restrictions, as she cannot express herself emotionally, when a man gets hurt:

“Every instinct in Ro urged her to run to the hurt man and help him, bandage him, comfort and heal him, but her mind told her she had to stay where she was” (Springer 2001, 64). This is a tricky situation for Rosemary, as she clearly has the skills to heal the man because she has learned this from her mother. However, this is not without difficulty because she has to hide her desire to help because she does not want to appear feminine. Springer portrays the power of healing as part of a feminine role. But being male for her is a liberating experience
nonetheless because it gives her the opportunity to be with her father, however, he does not
know about his daughter yet or her disguise.

Robin acknowledges Rosemary’s presence and her attempt to be part of his band, however, he
wants to show her what it means to be an outlaw and what life of an outlaw entails:

“You’re a fine arrow of a lad.” Robin gave her a level, quiet look. “Let me try to do you a favor.
Rowan, lad, it’s no lark to be an outlaw. It’s what you have seen, but it’s suffering, too, and being out
always in the wet and cold, and it’s bloodshed, and not knowing when someone might take a notion to
hang you or cut your head off, and it’s never being able to go home. If there’s somewhere.” (Springer
2001, 69)

In Springer’s novel, Rosemary’s act of cross-dressing ensues from her own decision, because
she wants to escape life as a girl. The role as a girl seems to be clearly understood by her:

“I don’t fit in, either. First of all, I’m a girl and I don’t want to be. I don’t want to be owned by some
man. I don’t want to spend my life making babies and churning butter. But that’s not the worst of it.”
(Springer 2001, 22)

Rosemary is fully aware of what it entails to be a woman, and thus does not want to be one.
Robin, however, tells her about the risks the life of an outlaw holds, and now it is up to
Rosemary to decide what life she wants to lead. Later Ro is joined by Etтарде, whom they
help escape from a forced marriage, and Lionel, a giant minstrel. Rowan guides her
companions to a safe place when they flee from the soldiers who search for the princess. It is
Etтарде who Ro opens up to about her disguise; yet, Etty already suspected it by Ro’s
behavior and her good sense: “I knew it,” said Etty, unsurprised by what Ro had just told her.
“I knew you were a girl.” Lionel bleated, “I have been taking orders from a girl?” (Springer
2001, 145). While Lionel, however, never guesses Rosemary’s secret, the reason being that
males are not as sensitive as females and are easily tricked because as it will be later seen with
Gwyna in Here Lies Arthur people and in this case men believe what you tell them to believe.
Etтарде, however, uncovers her secret, much to Rosemary’s surprise: “How did you know?”
“Because you wanted me to come to Nottingham with you. A boy would have wanted to
leave me behind. And,” Etty added wickedly, “because you have such good sense” (Springer
2001, 145). Rosemary disguise makes her appear as a boy, however, her ‘female’ nurturing
traits cannot be easily cut off as she does with her hair.

Robin Hood is soon caught and imprisoned when he sneaks into the town of
Nottingham. Rosemary, still disguised as a boy, and her companions try to save him. Lionel
sings and distracts the crowd while Rosemary and Etтарде go into the dungeon to free Robin.
This is when Guy of Gisborn comes and tries to prevent them from escaping with Robin
Hood. However, Ettarde is able to knock him out. After they escape through the gates, they find a secret place and Rosemary, still disguised as a boy, nurses Robin back to health with her healing skills, which is a feminine trait and something she has learned from her mother, who was a healer. Robin again questions her about who she was:

She was supposed to say that she was an outlaw, but she didn’t. Did she want to be in his band? No. She wanted to be his daughter, not his healer. She didn’t say anything, for she knew what she wanted to say, what she had been waiting to say, and – could she? (Springer 2001, 136)

Rosemary feels powerless because she is caught in this trap. She did not just cross-dress as a boy because she does not want to live the life of a girl – in fact, it is the fear of being an orphan who desperately wants to meet her father which forces her to disguise herself as a boy. When Rosemary becomes Rowan it indeed opens up doors for her, and through cross-dressing she obtains access to travel and can search for her father. However, she is disappointed when Robin Hood tells her that girls cannot be outlaws. Rosemary’s thoughts: “He would not want her if he knew she was a girl. No one wanted girls except as servants” (Springer 2001, 74).

A few days later Rosemary decides to tell Robin that she is a girl and his daughter, because she wants to be accepted for who she really is:

“I’m not a lad,” Ro told him. Her voice came out quiet and shaky.
“Your are right, you are not. Your are an outlaw, brave and true.” Ro took a deep breath and laid a hand on Ty for steadiness. She said, “Yes. And I’m a girl.” (Springer 2001, 156)

Robin Hood’s reaction when he learns about her disguise:

Watching him, she saw his mouth drop open, his eyes fly open wide as he gawked, every bit as astonished as he had been that first day […]. “A girl!” he exclaimed. “Of course. I should have known it before. You make a fine, straight arrow of a girl.” (Springer 2001, 156)

Rosemary fears to be rejected by him when she confesses. This is why she is tremendously afraid when she awaits his response:

Ro managed to say, “You don’t mind?” “Mind? Hardly. Rowan, you are no less a wonder for being a girl.” “You said – you said a girl had no place in the greenwood” –“It would seem I was wrong.” […] “You – you think I can be an outlaw…” “Rowan, you are an outlaw.” (Springer 2001, 156)

Robin Hood, in the end, admits that he is wrong about his opinion on girls being outlaws. Through Rosemary’s brave actions she proves to him that she can be whatever she decides to be, and thus, Robin Hood ultimately gives her the status of an outlaw. Rosemary moves on by telling him that he is her father. But Robin tells her that he does not remember having any kids. In the end Robin acknowledges her, and asks her to join his
group, but she refuses too and tells him that she has already found her own outlaw group, just like her father.

It can thus be argued, that the function of cross-dressing for Rosemary is for the sole purpose of enabling her to travel through the woods in order to find her father Robin Hood. Rosemary appropriates her new identity and gender for her own purposes. In order to pass as a boy, she has to physically change. Therefore, she decides to cut off her long hair and to change her name into Rowan. Her depiction as a boy is part of the overall message, that gender and sex are in fact binary and opposite categories and that appearing masculine or feminine is bound to specific bodies. Her performance of masculinity defeats the purpose of overlapping gender traits. Rosemary’s cross-dressing action has no consequences for her, as she successfully manages to find Robin Hood. Her body does not limit her disguise, however, her character traits do, when she desperately wants to use her knowledge as a healer or feels responsible for her newly found companion Ettarde. But Rosemary does not expose her real identity as being female until she feels the urge to tell the truth. Her friends, who have already known about her disguise, do not betray her and keep her identity a secret. Masculinity, thus, is successfully performed by the protagonist in this novel.

*Here Lies Arthur*, written by Philip Reeve and published in 2007, focuses on a de-glorification of the famous Arthurian story, and the figure of King Arthur. Reeve has set the story in sixth-century Britain, introducing Arthur as “just a little tyrant in an age of tyrants” (Reeve 2007, 331). The protagonist and the narrator of the story is Gwyna, an orphan girl, who is taken in by Myrddin, who is bard and advisor to King Arthur. He spends most of the time spinning tales about Arthur in order to spin Arthur’s battles into something heroic when retold. Myrddin is a firm believer that the power of stories can motivate men (ibid., 16). However, King Arthur is not the hero of the story, but merely a warlord. The traditional hero image of Arthur solely exists in Myrddin’s stories and in the imagination of the people. In the novel, Reeve successfully teaches the young readership to think carefully about the way stories can become narratives when enough people are willing to believe them.

In this novel her act of cross-dressing does not occur of her own accord. It is Myrddin who encounters Gwyna but impatiently tells her: “I’m just a traveller who has picked up a few handy conjuring tricks along the road” (Reeve 2007, 27). He recognizes that Gwyna might in fact be useful to him and makes her ‘act’ in one of his tricks, when she performs the ‘Lady of the Lake’ figure, who gives Arthur Caliburn, his sword:
“You see, Gwyna, men do love a story. That’s what we’re going to give them this morning, you and I. A story they’ll remember all their lives and tell to their children and their children’s children until the whole world knows how Arthur came by the sword of the otherworld. And here we are!” (Reeve 2007, 23)

Myrddin knows that Gwyna serves him well in his task to spin tales about the glorious King Arthur. It is not her choice to act out the ‘Lady of the Lake’ figure. Myrddin makes use of the weak position Gwyna finds herself in and objectifies her as his newly found tool, which dehumanizes her. She is afraid that this act will be disclosed and everybody will find out about their little show, but Gwyna soon realizes: “I wondered sleepily how anyone could have been fooled by my dirty, trembling hand, holding up a sword too heavy for it. I did not know then that men see whatever you tell them to see” (Reeve 2007, 35). Gwyna does not know at this point that men are less sensitive and more physically attributed. Myrddin is completely aware of this and is only using her, because she can easily trick men. The reader, though, is confronted with two contrasting ideas here, because Gwyna has “dirty, trembling hands” and has to hold up a sword, which is too heavy for her. Besides the fact that she visibly appears too weak to carry out the task she is successful. Through successfully completing this task she regains some self-confidence, when she easily dupes King Arthur and the group of men around him. It appears that men only see what they want to see and that men on one hand are strong and powerful but fail to realize that there is a woman duping them.

After this, Myrddin names Gwyna his servant and lets her travel with him, disguised as a boy called Gwyn, because she is not really useful to him as a girl:

“Then what if she was not a girl?” asked Myrddin, and turned to look at me. I don’t think he’d been fooled for an instant by my play of being asleep. “What do you say, child?” “How would you like the great Myrddin to transform you into a boy?” (Reeve 2007, 38)

This scene expresses the limiting nature of being a girl. Gwyna knows that her femininity restricts her from traveling with Myrddin. Her act of cross-dressing is not her own decision. It is Myrddin’s idea to travel with him disguised as a boy in order for her not to be recognized as the ‘Lady of the Lake’ figure. If someone discovers Myrddin’s show and lies, he will not be able to spin new stories around King Arthur. Gwyna believes she has no other choice and therefore does as she is told:

If I’d been a man, or even a boy, I might have said, “What do you mean, ‘we’? I want no part in enchantments.” But I was only Gwyna the Mouse. It was my lot to do as my elders told me, even if I didn’t understand. (Reeve 2007, 23)
Gwyna knows that she has no other choice but to do as Myrddin tells her; this clearly shows her submissive, powerless position. This can already be seen at the beginning when the bard uses her to fool the men about the ‘Lady of the Lake’.

Yet, Gwyna somehow feels unsure about the idea of her disguise as a boy because she does not know what it entails to be a boy (Reeve, 2007, 40). Gwyna finds herself constrained by the demands of patriarchy; however, they force her to disguise herself as a boy:

I was busy asking me what it would be like to be a boy. Would I have to fight? Would I have to ride? Would I have to piss standing up? I was sure I couldn’t do any of those things. No one would ever take me for a boy, would they? (Reeve 2007, 40)

In her disguise, Gwyna tags along with Arthur’s troops as a beardless youth who rides a horse and who can swim very fast. Sometimes – when she needs to be safe – she appears as a plain maid, who due to her appearance will never attract a man’s eye. The act of cross-dressing gives her opportunities and liberties and access to all that had been previously denied to her as a female (Flanagan 2002, 82). For her it is particularly sad when she has to appear as a maid in order to be safe. To Myrddin it is very important that nobody recognizes Gwyna and exposes the role she performs for him. Gwyna experiences King Arthur and his band of warriors as violent, arrogant and greedy. She quickly learns the qualities of a ‘real man’:

On the whole, I preferred being a boy. The things boys do – even the chores – are better fun than women’s work. Even the clothes are easier, once you grow used to them. There’s more to being a boy than wearing trews and cutting off your hair, of course, and don’t let anyone tell you different. There’s ways of moving and ways of standing still you have to learn. There’s a way of looking at things as if you don’t care about them, even when you care about them a lot. There are grunts that mean more than words. Boys have all sorts of rules among themselves, just like dogs. Rules about who leads and who follows. They don’t talk about them, they just seem to be born knowing these things. I had to pick them up as best I could, by watching Bedwyr and the others. There were about two score boys in Arthur’s band, acting as servants and grooms, learning the ways of war from the older men. (Reeve 2007, 48)

Gwyna realizes that she needs to learn the rules of being a boy, which are similar to rules that dogs have and follow. As said earlier about being easily duped, here again it can be noted that men are portrayed as not thinking but rather just following. Men are compared to dogs who simply follow preexisting rules. It seems to be clearly defined who leads and who follows within a group. As commented previously, men are easily duped and they only follow what is said and only see what they want to see. According to Gwyna, boys ‘seem’ to be born knowing these rules and she has to learn them as best as she can by imitating their behavior. It appears that she grows into a boy along the story, when she admits that she herself starts to view herself as a boy: “But though I knew it was true, it grew harder and harder to believe it. My new life was so different that the old felt like it had never been at all. Even I was coming to think of myself as a boy” (Reeve 2007, 52).
As Flanagan points out, a necessary strategy in the narrative is the continuous comparison that occurs “between her own male behavior and the behaviors of the other biological males who surround her” (2002, 84). Myrddin sets her up with the opportunity to escape her old life. Being a boy is an act of liberation for her. However, Gwyna is really disappointed when Myrddin does not allow her to join the next battle because she could be injured on the battlefield, and more so, he fears that someone would discover who she really is:

“If the boy come, Myrddin,” but, of course, my master would not relent. I knew what he was frightened of. Injuries are common on the hunting field. What if I fell, and someone tried to tend me, and discovered what I really was? (Reeve 2007, 79)

He also fears that she will be killed or badly injured, because after all she is ‘just’ a girl:

“What if you were killed Gwyn? What if you were wounded? What if you found you on the battlefield afterward and peeled your clothes off and found what’s underneath, and what’s not? No, boy; you stay with me, safe from harm.” (Reeve 2007, 111)

Myrddin believes that “boys will be boys, even the ones who are only girls dressed up: That’s one of the rules of the world” (Reeve 2007, 111). Regardless, Gwyna joins the battle, which gives her new possibilities to learn the ways of how to be a boy. Her deliberate performance of masculinity is demonstrated in this scene. Gwyn, disguised as a boy, is according to her only regarded a ‘real boy’, when she joins the battle. This prevents her from being excluded or condemned by the others. However, Myrddin makes sure that Gwyna never forgets who she really is: “My master shook his head. “No, Gwyn.” (He still called me Gwyn sometimes, when we were alone, as if to remind me of what I really was” (Reeve 2007, 94).

Later, Gwyna is mad at Myrddin because she can no longer cross-dress for her body does not allow her to and old Maelwas can already see the truth:

I felt ashamed of myself for letting old Maelwas see the truth. Had it been my fault? Had I not been boyish enough? I’d let my hair get longer, following the same fashion as Bedwyr and the other boys. It hung below my ears and maybe it showed up something girlish in my face. (Reeve 2007, 146)

The example shows that her masculinity is a constructed one, just as femininity is. This can be seen when Gwyn takes the mask of masculinity off and becomes Gwyn again: “You have been a good boy, Gwyn. But you’ll be a better girl. It’ll be Gwyn who rides back with me at fall-of-leaf” (Reeve 2007, 149-150). Gwyn’s reaction: “I don’t want to be a girl!” I cried. “I’ll never be able to go home. People will recognize me!” (Reeve 2007, 149-150). There is now a limitation to her disguise. Her physique is not masculine enough for her to pass as a boy anymore. Instead of continuing performing her ‘masculine’ role, Gwyn is used again by
Myrddin as a tool to fool people. She finds herself in a powerless situation, where she has to obey the bard. The decision to put the mask of masculinity off does not occur out of her own will because Myrddin has already made plans to trick people:

“You will go back in a woman’s dress, with your long hair loose. You will walk like a girl and talk like a girl, and they will think, that maiden looks a little like Gwyn, if they think anything at all. And I shall tell them you are Gwyn’s kin, and they will think of you no more.” (Reeve 2007, 150)

There is only one problem that Gwyna sees, which is that she does not know how to be a girl anymore:

“But I don’t know how to be a girl!” I told him. “I’ll have to do the things that women do.” I gaped like a fish, groping about for examples. I barely knew the things that women did. “Sewing and stitching and spinning and brewing barley beer…What will they think when I don’t know how to do those things?” (Reeve 2007, 150)

Myrddin answers: “Then you must learn” (Reeve 2007, 150). This implies that masculine and feminine behaviors are constructed and can in fact be learned. Gwyna knows nothing about women. She only knows how to hunt and how to ride a horse. Her becoming a girl makes her sad because this means the end of her friendship with Bedwyr: “But riding on, I started to see that my friendship with Bedwyr was almost ended anyway” (Reeve 2007, 153). Gwyna despises the ideas boys have about women:

It uneased me to hear the way they spoke. How hard they thought of girls’ bodies and how little of their feelings. Like women were just creatures to be used and traded. They respected horses better. (Reeve 2007, 151)

As discussed earlier, it is emphasized again that women are to be used and that animals are respected better. This dehumanizes women. Gwyna does not like what she learns about being a woman and even more so she does not like the household where she is supposed to learn all about them: “The girls and women of the household did not like me. They thought I was strange and clumsy and spoke too loud. But slowly I learned from them the things women do” (Reeve 2007, 157).

She mainly learns about male privilege and the rules of the world, i.e., that women don’t speak to the menfolk unless they’re spoken to first, that’s one. They don’t tuck up their skirts and run. They sit for hours stitching and mending, which is slow torture, and embroidering, which is worse. They spin wool and linen. They weave cloth, singing in time to the clack of the clay weights that swing against the loom’s frame. They steep meat in brine barrels, and grind flour. They knead soft dough into loaves, getting flour on their arms and their cheeks and the tips of their noses. They make cheese, and butter, and cream, and buttermilk. They brew beer. They giggle. They whisper. They gossip. (Reeve 2007, 157-158)
Gwyna knows one thing for sure: “[I]t wasn’t for me, that life” (Reeve 2007, 158). For her it is too late to change, as she has been a boy for too long: “My voice isn’t right. […] My stitches don’t hold. My yarn gets tangled. My loaves are soft as wet wool, or hard like river stones”, she tells her master (ibid.). During her new life as a woman, she realizes that life as a girl is boring compared to the adventurous journeys of men. According to her, women do not have adventures as they only suffer “when their men’s adventures go wrong” (ibid., 137). However, just as she manages to adapt to the life of a boy, she soon learns the ways of women. At the end, Gwyna has learned that these two worlds are “as different as night and day, air and water” (ibid., 168). She comes to the realization that after living in both worlds she “didn’t fit in, either” (ibid.). This refers to the duality of gender categories. By not feeling to belong to one gender, there is an overlap in gender qualities. One particular gender does not truly exist in this case, and thus it is fluid. This means that the gender binary is contradicted here. In fact, Gwyna does not feel to solely belong to one gender and its confinements, and thus, feels equally drawn to ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits. Gwyna becomes aware that being a boy is different to being a girl. She also knows about the rules of the two genders and has lived in both worlds. The statement that she “didn’t fit in either” can be understood in terms of gender duality. Flanagan states that a cross-dresser ultimately does not belong to “neither category”, meaning masculine or feminine – yet seems to belong to both in his/her “amalgamation and reconstruction” of masculine and/or feminine gendered behaviors (2002, 89).

The story is taken so far that she witnesses the beheading of Bedwyr, who has fallen in love with Arthur’s wife, Gwenhwyfar. In the end Gwyn decides to spread Myrddin’s stories after he has died of sickness and Arthur has long fallen in a battle against his nephew Medraut. She decides to do so as Gwyn, Myrddin’s son. Myrddin tells her in the end: “Gwyna,” he said. “You have been a good daughter to me. And a good son, too” (Reeve 2007, 313).

While Rosemary in RH leaves her life as a boy behind when finally telling her father the truth about who she is, Gwyna creates her own gender identity in the end. One can say that both stories are great examples of female-to-male cross-dressing. As Flanagan points out, the true biological status of a cross-dressing girl is not discovered in the story for a period of time. In fact, the girl is considered to be truly male by the other characters (2002, 83). This is the case in both stories. In RH, Rosemary is only recognized to be a girl by Ettarde and her friends who she can fully trust, and therefore the information is not revealed. In HLA, Gwyna’s secret is only known by Myrddin and later King Maelwas, and Arthur’s wife
Gwenhwyfar recognize her as a girl. Gwenhwyfar only later tells Gwyna that she has known all along (Reeve 2007, 216). The other boys and Arthur’s gang never find out about her secret. “People see what they expect to see, and believe what you tell them to believe” (Reeve 2007, 49), Myrddin later explains. People never find out about her secret, even when later in the story Gwyna decides to switch between these two worlds, and people welcome her again as a boy without taking any notice of her maturing into a woman. She deliberately decides not to tell anyone about her disguise, as she fears to be judged as ‘wicked’.

Considering the two novels discussed above, it can be said that masculinity is performed by females and is bound to specific characteristics and traits. In HLA and RH, the body of Gwyna and Rosemary is not a limitation to their disguise. However, Gwyna later has to return to being a girl, because her secret can hardly be hidden due to her developing and growing body. Rosemary appears as a young boy and is not exposed as being female until she decides herself that it is time to open up to her father about her true self. Her circle of friends already knows, yet, will not expose her. Masculinity is successfully ‘performed’ by both characters in the novels. As Flanagan points out, gender traits and stereotypes can easily be appropriated and positively subverted by means of cross-dressing (Flanagan 2002, 253). Generally, the portrayal of masculinity is limited because as seen in the previous paragraphs, the outer appearance can be changed to appear more masculine, while the mind cannot just be easily switched off. Gwyna and Rosemary need to get rid of some things like long hair or their clothes in order to pass as a boy, but even as a boy they cannot completely convince all of the characters they interact with. For instance, Arthur’s wife has known for a long time about Gwyna’s ‘real’ biological gender, and also Etтарde uncovers Rosemary’s secret due to her ‘feminine’ traits. Therefore, gender can be considered as fluid. Although society or people like to think there is a division between everything, it appears that there is not in reality. These divisions (male – female) confine people to follow rules that may not be natural for them at all. It shows that by having these divisions, people can be easily duped by just simply ‘dressing’ or ‘acting’ like a boy or girl, which is the case in both novels.
Male-to-Female Cross-Dressing: “But boys will be boys, even the ones who are only girls dressed up”

According to Flanagan, *male-to-female cross-dressing* is a rather new concept addressed in children’s literature, as most of the research has previously focused on adult protagonists (2002, 79). However, cross-dressing does not only concern adulthood. Each act of *cross-dressing* is a rebellion against socially imposed or constructed notions of either masculinity or femininity (ibid.,79-80). A protagonist lacks the ability to fulfill the traditional gender norms attached to their biological sex. Male cross-dressers usually do not have a fragile masculinity, because their behavior assumes the male superiority over females, however, their “self-assured masculinity permeates every aspect of their cross-dressing experience, rendering comic their inability to comprehend femininity as separate to their own biologically male experience of gender” (ibid., 80). In the novel *The Boy in the Dress*, the reader learns early on that Dennis Simms enjoys fashion and dressing up as a girl, yet in doing so, tries not only to trick his classmates but more so to keep the memory of his lost mother alive.

*The Boy in the Dress* (abbreviated *TBITD*), written by David Walliams and published in 2008, focuses on the 12-year-old boy Dennis who lives with his older brother John and their father, a lorry-driver. His mother has left, and unfortunately Dennis misses her tremendously and only finds some comfort remembering his mother’s yellow dress in an old picture. Dennis feels different – even though he is an ordinary boy who lives in an ordinary house and who enjoys playing football with his friends: “Dennis was different. When he looked in the mirror he saw an ordinary twelve-year-old boy. But he felt different – his thoughts were full of colour and poetry, though his life could be very boring” (Walliams 2008, 11).

However, he feels lonely and frustrated by his surroundings and the grey world and dull city whose “[t]iny differences that only really pointed out the sameness of everything” (ibid.,12). For him, life has changed since his mother left their home. His brother and father agree upon the following rules: No talking about Mum. No crying. And worst of all – no hugging (ibid., 17). Dennis is so sad about this whole situation that he cries himself to sleep each night: “Sometimes he missed his mum so much that he cried in bed at night. He tried to cry as quietly as possible, because he and his brother shared a room and he didn’t want John to hear” (ibid.).
Crying is considered weak, and according to the fourth rule of the ‘boy code’, men are not allowed to show their emotions (Pollack 1999, 24). One night his brother hears him cry and demands he stop: “She’s never coming back, Dennis. Now stop crying. Only girls cry” (Walliams 2008, 18).

Dennis realizes that he has a great interest in fashion and discovers that he enjoys wearing dresses. However, he is not particularly keen on sharing this interest with his manly lorry-driving dad, older brother, or his school football team where he is considered a star:

In Dennis’s house talking about football was easier than talking about feelings. He, John and Dad all loved football, and together shared the highs and (more often) lows of supporting their local third-division team. But as soon as the match finished and the referee blew his whistle, it was as if that sound also signaled a return to their strict no-hugging policy. Dennis did miss being hugged. His mum had hugged him all the time. […] Most children can’t wait to grow up and get bigger, but Dennis missed being small and being picked up by his mother. It was in her arms that he felt most safe. (Walliams 2008, 20-21)

One day Dennis sees a dress on the cover of a Vogue magazine which looks very similar to the one his mother wears in the picture. He decides to buy a copy from Raj, the local shop owner. “He knew it was usually women who bought it, so he also picked up a copy of Shoot on the way to the counter, hoping to hide the Vogue underneath it” (Walliams 2008, 41). Dennis lies about the magazine and tells the shop owner that it is for a female friend, who has a birthday. He is really excited about the magazine. However, when his father discovers the magazine he is angry and his brother also starts to tease him and calls him Denise. When he befriends a girl called Lisa, they get along immediately because she is also into fashion. He admires her ‘girly’ room:

Dennis instantly adored it. In truth it was how he would like his room to be. She had pictures from fashion magazines all over the walls, stylish shots of beautiful women, in glamorous locations. (Walliams 2008, 79)

Lisa starts dressing him up in girl’s clothing. They decide to go out in public in disguise and Dennis goes by the name of Denise:

“It would look good on you!” said Lisa. She laughed and held the dress next to Dennis. He laughed too, and then looked down at it, allowing himself to imagine for a moment what he would look like wearing it, but then told himself to stop being silly. “It’s really beautiful,” he said. “It’s not fair though, is it? I mean boy’s clothes are so boring.” (Walliams 2008, 83)

Dennis feels bored because he is a boy and cannot wear those beautiful dresses, when Lisa tells him: “Well, I think all those rules are boring. About what people can and can’t wear. Surely everyone should be able to wear whatever they like?” (Walliams 2008, 84). For this reason, Lisa comes up with the idea to dress Dennis up:
“But dresses can be beautiful, and dressing up is fun. I love putting on pretty dresses. I bet some boys would like it too. It’s no big deal.” Dennis heart was beating really fast – he wanted to say “yes”, but he couldn’t. He just couldn’t. This was all a bit much… (Walliams 2008, 84)

Lisa gives Dennis a dress which he tries on. It is his first time trying on a dress:

Dennis looked at the dress. It would be fun to try it on. “Well…if you’re sure.” “I’m sure.” Dennis took a deep breath. […] It felt different to wearing his normal boy’s clothes. The fabric felt so unfamiliar next to his skin – all silky and smooth. (Walliams 2008, 97-98)

Dennis no longer has to hide his desires. Wearing a dress and being a girl is a liberating experience – at first: “Dennis gazed at himself. For a moment he was shocked by what he saw. Then the shock turned to wonder, and he laughed. He felt so happy he wanted to dance. Sometimes you feel things so deeply that words aren’t enough” (Walliams 2008, 102-103).

Dennis “did look a bit like a girl” (ibid.,104) and admits that “[i]t’s not fair,” because “[g]irls have got all the best stuff!” (ibid.,106). However, Lisa says: “[R]ules don’t apply here” as “you can be whoever you want to be!” (ibid.). They decide to pass Dennis off as a girl. Dennis, now pretending to be ‘Denise’ becomes a French exchange student who speaks very little English. He still worries that someone will expose him. But Lisa tells him that “[i]f you believe it, everyone else will too” (ibid.,116). First, they go to Raj’s shop but he does not recognize Dennis. Dennis receives criticism by his French teacher for his French accent. After kicking a football during break, their secret is exposed and Dennis is revealed to be a boy:

Dennis couldn’t help it – the urge to kick the ball was too strong. […] Dennis couldn’t help himself, and chased it aggressively. He stopped it neatly, then took a run up to kick it back to his friend. But as he kicked the ball his high-heeled shoe flew off, and he toppled backwards. At that moment his wig slipped back off his head and on to the ground. Denise became Dennis again. (Walliams 2008, 156)

This again shows that Dennis is a character that cross-dresses, yet never completely escapes his masculinity. Even though his physical appearance persuades others of his femininity, he cannot escape his mind and therefore some of his ‘manly’ behavior appears. This overlapping of genders again states that a gender binary contradicts reality. People often find themselves trapped in both worlds.

The headmaster, Mr. Hawthorne, expels him from school for his cross-dressing behavior and also his dad sends him to his room, not allowing him to contact his friends. However, his team encourages him to play football in a dress and they win against their opponent, Maudlin Street. Dennis’ dad forgives him and attends the game. In the end, Raj tells Dennis that Mr. Hawthorne’s sister, Doris, buys the Telegraph now instead of him, revealing that there is ‘something funny’ about her. Lisa and Dennis discover that it is actually Mr. Hawthorne himself cross-dressing this time by wearing a skirt. They use this
opportunity to threaten him to allow Dennis to be reinstated at school or they would tell about Mr. Hawthorne’s behavior. In the end, the family work through the pain of losing their mother. Cross-dressing allows Dennis to inhabit the female world and experience some of the liberties denied to him in his male form. Unlike to RH and HLA where cross-dressing is not encouraged, his teammates encourage it. Instead of being ridiculed or made fun off, they support him to live out his genders.

As Flanagan points out, male cross-dressers attempt to perform a more feminine role, yet their masculinity is less fragile, as can be seen with Dennis (2002, 78-79). He still enjoys football and all boy things; however, he finds the world of girls more colorful and exciting. The protagonist does not disguise himself as a girl from the very beginning, but he and his friend Lisa want to trick people and make them believe Dennis is a girl, thereby deconstructing traditional notions of gender and its social construction. By cross-dressing, Dennis gains access to all that has been denied to him by being masculine. This is the reason his world was only grey and sad.

The most obvious similarity between the selected novels regarding male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing is that in all of them the reader knows about the ‘real’ identity of the protagonists. As a result, all three novels focus on how these characters perform or do not perform masculinity, and examples of such narratives are hard to find. For example, Dennis in TBITD embodies male stereotypes with his passion for football, as well as female stereotypes with his passion for clothing, dresses, and magazines. He purposely decides when to perform either a more masculine or feminine role. Dennis cross-dresses partly as a joke but also to experience the female world and to further engage in his interest in dresses and magazines. Dennis cross-dresses as a girl, yet never fully escapes his real identity. Flanagan notes that in the male-to-female model, a male character often “adopts the clothing of a female for a brief interlude, often for comic effect” (2002, 81). Yet, the authenticity of the masculinity of the cross-dresser is never in doubt, because the masculinity, which he embodies is mainly characterized in terms of rather traditional gender values (ibid., 81). This sort of masculinity is never presented as precarious or vulnerable (ibid., 82). Even though this is not totally true in this case, as Dennis is very emotional about his mother, the gender of the male is never subject to ambiguity which may be created in relation to female cross-dresser in literature (ibid., 81). Female-to-male cross-dressing on the other hand is mostly regarded as “a form of feminist rebellion against rigid patriarchal social structures” (ibid., 82). Compared to
male-to-female cross-dressing, the protagonist within this model tries to escape patriarchy and adopts masculine attire, which provides the person access to the male world (ibid.). The performance is noticed immediately “without any trace of suspicion” as to her/his biology and indicates how children’s books aim to deconstruct gender. Readers of either sex can identify and empathize with the protagonists as they redefine the concept of gender according to their own purposes and needs. The disguise is not discovered immediately and they continue to be considered genuinely male by other characters. The protagonists continuously compare their own male behavior to the behaviors of other biological males. Therefore, the protagonists are constantly measuring their performance against other males (ibid., 83-84).
It’s a Men’s World. – “Yes. That boy has a strange road ahead of him, but he must find his way alone.”

Considering the number of sales, portrayal of characters in popular culture and the fanbase, it can be said that the *Harry Potter* book series is one of the most influential ones worldwide. With such a wide audience, which involves children especially, the books have a large impact on the development of an individual’s concepts and comprehension of gender roles, and thus, masculinity. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, henceforth abbreviated as HPPS, was written by J.K. Rowling and published in 1997.

The character Harry Potter is eleven years old and lives with his Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon and their son Dudley. He has to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs and experiences constant bullying at the hands of Dudley. When Harry starts receiving strange letters, a giant man called Hagrid rescues him. Harry, who up to this point believes he is an ordinary orphan boy, discovers that his parents did not die in a car accident as his uncle and aunt had always told him. They were wizards, and he is one as well and a very famous one as Professor McGonagall states to Dumbledore: “Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won’t even remember! Can’t you see how much better off he’ll be, growing up away from all that until he’s ready to take it?” (Rowling 2001, 14). Voldemort, a Dark Wizard, who is responsible for the death of Harry’s parents and those of others, lost his power when he tried to kill Harry. Now Harry learns about his scar on his forehead as well. When he enrolls at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, he soon builds new friendships, but also makes some enemies. In the beginning of the first school year, Professor Dumbledore, the headmaster, tells all students not to enter the third floor corridor unless they want to “die a very painful death” (ibid., 136). Harry finds the Philosopher’s Stone, which is a magical tool, capable of turning things into gold and prolonging ones lifespan. He also finds out that someone tries to steal this stone and in the end even gets into a fight with Voldemort.

*Harry Potter* offers various possibilities to analyze specific identities suggested for males and females, yet Harry Potter and the other boys are mostly stereotypically portrayed, as “strong, adventurous, independent” males that evoke a heroic form of masculinity, while the weaker male characters are mostly despised and unsuccessful (Heilman and Donaldson 2009, 155). At the Sorting Ceremony, a yearly ritual where all Hogwarts students get assigned to one of the four school Houses, the magic hat already predicts some of Harry’s masculine characteristics:
The last thing Harry saw before the hat dropped over his eyes was the Hall full of people craning to get a good look at him. Next second he was looking at the black inside of the hat. He waited. “Hmm”, said a small voice in his ear. “Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind, either. There’s talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that’s interesting…So where shall I put you?” Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought… “Not Slytherin, not Slytherin.” “Not Slytherin, eh?” said the small voice. “Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it’s all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that – no? Well, if you’re sure – better be Gryffindor.” (Rowling 2001, 129-130)

The Sorting Ceremony is very important, because the selected house is Harry’s family within Hogwarts because students sleep in their house dormitory and spend free time in their house common room (Rowling 2001, 122). Harry Potter acts independently and quickly grows in terms of self-esteem and identity; when he finally discovers who he is, he cannot believe it at first:

A wizard? Him? How could he possibly be? He’d spent his life being clouted by Dudley and bullied by Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon; if he was really a wizard, why hadn’t they been turned into warty toads every time they’d tried to lock him in his cupboard? (Rowling 2001, 62)

In the beginning of the novel, Harry seems to be an outsider and thus, is neither powerful nor strong. He is a skinny boy who frequently serves as “Dudley’s favourite punch-bag” (ibid., 21). Harry’s appearance is described as follows: “Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Sellotape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose” (Rowling 2001, 21). Harry’s life is miserable at this point, as he does not really have anyone to rely on, since his uncle, aunt and everybody else seem to hate him:

Don’t be silly, Vernon, she hates the boy.  
The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn’t there – or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn’t understand them, like a slug. (Rowling 2001, 24)

Once Harry becomes a student at Hogwarts, he has to change from being the orphan at his uncle’s place to the competitive, strong and smart character at school. This shows how when he is ‘weak’, he was bullied by his cousin and when he is strong he is a force to contend with, also displayed by his ‘strong’ prowess in Quidditch, a wizarding school sport performed on broom sticks. This suggests a traditional male characterization of Harry.

The more Harry learns at Hogwarts and settles into his new life, the more he grows as a person and character. He even enters the forbidden corridor in order to fight for the magical stone. At this point, Voldemort shares the body of Professor Quirrel, who is the Dark Arts teacher. The physical possession by Lord Voldemort emphasizes a lack of masculinity. As Heilman and Donaldson state Quirrel is often nervous and prone to fainting, pale and finds
himself trembling a lot (2009, 157). But for Voldemort it is the only way he can live. Harry fights Voldemort because he has no intention of giving him the stone, which would grant him immortality.

As the story progresses, his status changes and he turns into a powerful and famous wizard and thus becomes very appealing to readers. Part of this appeal stems from the fact that he is introduced as a poor, skinny and orphaned outsider and yet achieves great things in regard to masculinity (Heilman and Donaldson 2009, 156). Consequently, Harry sets an important role model for any readers who want to be successful themselves. Those boys who do not achieve the masculine ideal are consistently mocked, or excluded, or simply unpopular. Heilman and Donaldson argue that boys develop their masculinity by avoiding behavior associated with girls or which are simply less masculine, whereas hegemonic males such as Harry do not show any fear, do not cry or giggle and are not necessarily concerned with their appearance (ibid.,158). Ultimately, a victimization of characters reinforces the hegemonic masculinity (ibid.). This can be seen in the character of Ron, one of Harry’s two best friends and fellow Gryffindor, or Neville Longbottom, a pureblood wizard. Both of them do not share the same talents in sports as Harry does. During flying lesson, Neville, a boy of Gryffindor, gets hurt when he loses control over his broomstick and Draco Malfoy, who is a pureblood wizard and was sorted into Slytherin, makes fun of him:

Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him. No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst into laughter. “Did you see his face, the great lump?” The other Slytherins joined in. “Shut up, Malfoy”, snapped Parvati Patil. “Ooh, stick up for Longbottom?” said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. “Never thought you’d like fat little cry babies, Parvati.” (Rowling 2001, 158)

Harry stands up for his friend Neville and follows Malfoy up in the air on a broomstick:

“Give that here, Malfoy,” said Harry quietly. Everyone stopped talking to watch. Malfoy smiled nastily. “I think I’ll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to collect – how about – up a tree?” “Give it here!” Harry yelled, but Malfoy had leapt on to his broomstick and taken off. […] “Come and get it, Potter!” Harry grabbed his broom. […] He mounted the broom and kicked hard against the ground and up, up he soared, air rushed through his hair and his robes whipped out behind him – and in a rush of fierce hoy he realized he’d found something he could do without being taught – this was easy, this was wonderful. (Rowling 2001, 158-159)

This scene demonstrates how Harry does not show much fear of Malfoy; instead he displays only strength and coolness and follows him up in the air to fight for his friend Neville. For Harry this was a lesson to increase his self-esteem when he finally realizes that he can do things by himself and not because someone has to teach him: “Harry knew, somehow, what to do. He leant forward and grasped the broom tightly in both hands and it shot towards Malfoy
like a javelin” (ibid., 159). Despite Professor McGonagall rule to not use the broomsticks when she is not there, Harry stands up for his friend. He has shown courage and bravery, neglecting possible consequences, and thus is traditionally masculine. In contrast to Harry, Neville manages to reinvent himself later in the series after he experiences misery as a consequence of his failed masculinity. He starts to fight back and strengthens his friendship with Harry (Heilman 2009, 158).

When Professor McGonagall catches Harry flying on the broomstick, he fears punishment. Instead, she takes him with her and introduces him to Oliver Wood who is responsible for the Quidditch team, where Harry from then on serves as a seeker:

“Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood – I’ve found you a Seeker” Wood’s expression changed from puzzlement to delight. “Are you serious, Professor?” “Absolutely”, said Professor McGonagall crisply. “The boy’s a natural. I’ve never seen anything like it.” (Rowling 2001, 162)

When Draco Malfoy and the others finally find out, they are not happy about it. Malfoy once turns to Harry and says:

“You’ll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don’t want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there.” He held out his hand to shake Harry’s, but Harry didn’t take it. “I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks”, he said coolly. (Rowling 2001, 116)

Draco Malfoy’s is displeased and even insulted about this development and threatens Harry, because he wants to state his superiority and power:

“I’d be careful if I were you, Potter”, he said slowly. “Unless you are a bit politer you’ll go the same way as your parents did. They didn’t know what was good for them, either. You hang around with riff-raff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid and it’ll rub off on you.” (Rowling 2001,116)

Thanks to Harry, Gryffindor wins the Quidditch game:

Malfy had been even more unpleasant than usual since the Quidditch match. Disgusted that Slytherin had lost, he had tried to get everyone laughing at how a wide-mouthed tree frog would be replacing Harry as Seeker next. Then he’d realized that nobody found this funny, because they were all so impressed at the way Harry had managed to stay on his bucking broomstick. So Malfoy, jealous and angry, had gone back to taunting Harry about having no proper family. (Rowling 2001, 209)

Malfy is a fellow member of Slytherin house, and remains hostile toward Harry. The Quidditch game can be seen as an opportunity to challenge Harry and serves as an attempt to cause him severe trouble. Malfy, who believes in purebloods, views himself superior to Harry, who is an orphan, and thus, tries to achieve power, dominance and status according to the ‘The Big Wheel’ imperative (Pollack 1999, 24). Malfy wears his mask of coolness and tries to overshadow this with taunting Harry about having no real family (Rowling 2001,
He feels strong resentment because Harry receives attention for his ability to fly and because he joins the Quidditch team.

Only shortly thereafter, Harry, Hermione and Ron are caught in the corridors in the middle of the night. They lose 150 points for their house Gryffindor and get ranked last. This causes many of the students to hate Harry Potter, as he clearly does not think about the consequences of his actions:

Harry Potter, the famous Harry Potter, their hero of two Quidditch matches, had lost them all those points, him and a couple of other stupid first-years. From being one of the most popular and admired people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most hated. Everywhere Harry went, people pointed and didn’t trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him. Slytherins, on the other hand, clapped as he walked past them, whistling and cheering, “Thanks Potter, we owe you one!” (Rowling 2001, 263)

Heilman and Donaldson claim that this serves as an echo to the emerging masculinity of Harry (2009, 158). Harry Potter starts out as a weak, orphan boy who develops into a strong, famous, fearless wizard. Throughout the story, Harry grows and develops his identity, which is an identity that people have already expected from him and that he has to live up to. Readers gain an insight into how traditional masculinity works and they might achieve a clear understanding of masculinity. Further, it helps them comprehend power struggles and inequality issues. As readers, they obtain a clear idea of who is in the top position. Harry, due to his parents, has already gained an interesting status, since all people know his name. Throughout the story his masculine traits include “bravery, confidence, class status, and personal charisma”, all characteristics expected of members of Gryffindor House, where “the brave at heart” are (Heilman and Donaldson 2009, 156). Contrary to the cross-dressing characters, Harry Potter’s character shows no overlapping of gender. He starts out as a weak orphan boy, who is forced to change and becomes stronger during his time at Hogwarts. Therefore, it can be said that he is forced to embody stereotypical male gender traits. His character is very much a ‘coming of age’ one, who in order to survive becomes even more traditionally masculine.
The Surfacing of a ‘new’ Male – Peeta “Boy with the Bread” Mellark

_The Hunger Games_, abbreviated _THG_, is a dystopian novel written by the American writer Suzanne Collins and published in 2008. The narrator is 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen. The story is set in the future, post-apocalyptic nation of Panem, a rich city surrounded by twelve districts in North America. Political control is exercised over the rest of the nation by the metropolis, The Capitol. The Hunger Games are an annual event in which two tributes; one boy and one girl from each district between the ages of twelve and eighteen, leave their families to compete. This is even aired on television and its only purpose is a battle against each other to the death.

Katniss Everdeen, a sixteen-year-old girl from District 12, volunteers to take the place of her younger sister Primrose after Prim’s name is called forth. Peeta Mellark, Katniss’ former schoolmate is her male tribute in the Games, and he is the subject of this analysis. He once gave her family bread from his family’s bakery in order to save them from starvation. Katniss Everdeen is a hunter and she knows how to overcome life-threatening situations well. When the games start, many tributes are already killed on the very first day. Peeta finds his own way too and joins other tributes from the supposedly richer districts. However, he does not kill Katniss when the opportunity arises, but instead saves her from being killed by the other contenders. Rue, Katniss’ young partner is killed and Katniss seeks revenge. Midway through the event, the Capitol announces that two tributes from the same district can win the Games as a couple, which is a rule change. Katniss immediately looks for Peeta, whom she finds wounded. She takes care of him and helps him get back onto his feet. In the end, they remain the only surviving tributes. This is when the Capitol intervenes and wants them to fight each other until one is dead. In an act of rebellion Katniss and Peeta intend to commit suicide by eating poisonous berries, however, the Capitol then announces that both will be the winners of the Hunger Games.

Throughout _The Hunger Games_, it becomes clear that two of the characters are placed in relative comparison to each other by their enactment of masculinity, mostly relating to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, represented by Gale, and marginalized masculinity, as seen with Peeta. Katniss is depicted as having both masculine and feminine traits: her body marks her as a woman while her actions, bravery and hunting skills, are clearly ‘manly’ attributes.
Peeta is described by Katniss as of “[m]edium height, stocky build, ashy blond hair that falls in waves over his forehead” (Collins 2008, 25-26). However, he clearly is scared when he finally realizes what lies ahead of him, as “the shock of the moment is registering on his face, you can see his struggle to remain emotionless, but his blue eyes show the alarm” (ibid.). Katniss views Peeta as attractive, however, she is fully aware that he is weak and unskilled when he is unable to hide his tears or when he has to admit that he cannot do anything “[u]nless you count baking bread” as something (ibid., 89). To her, he is the privileged son of the baker because “[a]ll those years of having enough to eat and hauling bread trays around have made him broad-shouldered and strong. It will take an awful lot of weeping to convince anyone to overlook him” (ibid., 41). While Gale, the boy from District 2, is described as “a ruthless killing machine” (ibid., 125), Peeta is the “lover boy” (ibid., 161) who is madly in love with Katniss and who “has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self” (ibid., 142). He is repeatedly represented as having marginalized masculine traits, which Katniss often compares with Gale’s more hegemonic masculine characteristics. According to Connell, hegemony refers to the “cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (2005, 77). In The Hunger Games, strong, fearless men who take care of themselves and other people enact hegemonic masculinity, which is represented in Gale’s character. As Connell claims, hegemonic masculinity is “the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence” (2005, 77). Peeta is not expected to succeed in the Games since all he can do is lift heavy flour bags, something which won’t be of much use in the arena. He does not view himself as being a contender by admitting to Katniss:

“There’s always hand-to-hand combat. All you need is to come up with a knife, and you’ll at least stand a chance. If I get jumped, I’m dead!” […] “But you won’t! You’ll be living up in some tree eating raw squirrels and pick off people with arrows. You know what my mother said to me when she came to say good-bye, as if to cheer me up, she says maybe District Twelve will have a winner. Then I realized, she didn’t mean me, she meant you!” (Collins 2008, 90)

Peeta is constantly questioning himself, because he does not want to lose his empathetic, caring and gentle identity. He is presented as a victim who is seemingly weaker than others. This subordination in terms of masculinity with regard to the dominant group is a key aspect of marginalized masculinity (Connell 2005, 80-81). His primary aim is not to fight the others, but to use violence only if there is imminent danger or the need to protect Katniss and/or himself. Even Katniss considers him as a burden, which essentially makes her weaker. When she finally finds him wounded in the mud. At this point he has nothing to offer for her survival. She states: “I’ve made myself far more vulnerable than when I was alone. […] And
still I came after him. I’m just going to have to trust that whatever instinct sent me to find him was a good one” (ibid., 263).

However, she cannot leave him behind since the Gamemakers change the rules and will declare two people from the same district as winners of the games. She finally admits: “Peeta, who’s been wounded, is now my ally” (Collins 2008, 247). With having only him left to rely on after Rue’s death, she tries to get him back to health because she knows that he is of use and she has faith that they can win the Games:

It’s not that Peeta’s soft exactly, and he’s proved he’s not a coward. But there are things you don’t question too much, I guess, when your home always smells like baking bread, whereas Gale questions everything. (Collins 2008, 296)

Being creative, expressive, emotionally open, and caring, Peeta Mellark is unconventionally masculine. Despite the obstacles of not being the ‘masculine’ traditional type compared to Harry Potter, it works for Peeta, and his ‘soft’ side actually proves to be beneficial, when he and Katniss in the end are the victors of the Games. The representation of Peeta is very different to the traditional ‘masculine’ character of Harry Potter, who quickly develops into a strong young boy. Peeta grows up in a warm home, with food on the table and does not have to provide for his family or himself. Being a tribute in the Hunger Games, he has to quickly learn how to survive and be completely on his own. Even though Peeta is not portrayed as a stereotypical man, for he shows empathy, sensitivity, or nurturing, he also demonstrates signs of strength and bravery. Contrary to Peeta’s depiction, Harry is an orphan boy, who after the tragic death of his parents has to live with his uncle, aunt and cousin. Harry is forced to grow up fast and to be independent as part of the lack of approval he receives from his ‘new’ family. Only at Hogwarts does he develop the skills that are unique to him and on his own terms is capable to show strength and bravery toward Malfoy. At Hogwarts he learns how to fly, develops meaningful friendships with Ron Weasley or Hermione Granger and ultimately saves the school from Voldemort and his evil plan to steal the Philosopher’s Stone. Harry is portrayed typically masculine in terms of how he in the end is completely aware of his power as a wizard even though he returns to his uncle’s and aunt’s house over summer.
3.3 Masculinity as a Social Construct – Ways of being Male in a World of Men

If people are asked to describe what constitutes a man or how masculinity can be defined, the response would most likely be a list of features which includes muscularity, physical size, strength, bravery, stoicism, competitiveness and resourcefulness (Buchbinder 2013, 89). According to Buchbinder, the typical man is physically active, attractive, competent with mechanical objects, yet can also possess ‘ugly’ traits such as being violent, ruthless, aggressive (ibid.). These ideas are generally constructed in our cultural imagination. It is vital to understand that hegemonic masculinity operates here. For instance, J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (2001) adheres to this model. Neglecting the magical elements and abilities of Harry, he is presented as “devoted to Gryffindor” and “desperate to compete successfully against the other houses” (Buchbinder 2013, 89). Harry does not mind taking any risks and fearlessly rushes into different adventures, neglecting the consequences. Hermione Granger acts as the more “cautious member of the team”, while frequently warning the others about the danger their adventures bear (ibid.).

CYAL has been concerned with identity construction and the journey of finding one’s true self for a long time now. This development is typically characterized by mishap, detours and adventures (Mallan 2012, 12) In the twentieth century, the ‘typical’ man was considered emotionally impassive and rather stoic, however, in recent decades men have been depicted as emotional, sensitive and able to express their feelings, as can be clearly seen in the character of Peeta Mellark (Buchbinder 2013, 90). By reading these works, readers gain impressions of childhood, adolescence, and ideas of how to behave at a certain time in their life, which is predominantly clouded by uncertainty (Mallan 2012, 12). Gender and gender identity do play a decisive role in this development, however, “despite contemporary children’s texts’ attempts to reflect the changing social and political landscape of the world in which they are produced, a heterosexual matrix is constantly invoked in stories of childhood and adolescence” (Mallan 2012, 12). According to Butler, this heterosexual matrix generates sex, gender and an idea of heterosexuality by which a subject is defined. However, this means that certain other identities such as ‘queer’ people cannot exist (Butler 1990, 17). “By refusing to comply with the normative conceptions of gender one can undo one’s personhood” and thus make one’s life not livable (ibid.,14). This leads to one’s marginalization or rejection. As it can be seen through the analysis of the selected novels, “males can construct and present themselves as men in various ways” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 284). Based on the
examples, it becomes clear that the construction of masculinity as such has a bodily dimension based on physical appearance, but is not fully determined biologically (Connell 2005, 65). The concept of masculinity, therefore, is dependent on the behavior of a person, as an un-masculine person would be “peacable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, uninterested in sexual conquest” (ibid., 67). However, the physical sense of male and female is still central to the cultural understanding of gender, and thus to our understanding of who and what we are (ibid., 52-53).

Despite having a female protagonist, namely Katniss Everdeen, in The Hunger Games, it is obvious that the book was not solely written for girls but rather appeals to different ages and genders. As Connell points out, the various representations and types of masculinities are not separate and clearly next to each other, some are more dominant than others. The concept of masculinity, which is culturally most dominant, is called hegemonic masculinity, while others are subordinate (2005, 77). For example Harry Potter must be stronger and tougher than all his male counterparts. He acts independently, when others may not be able to do so. Harry and the other male characters are all in a continuous power struggle and leave it to the reader to figure out who is on top (Heilman and Donaldson 2009, 158). As Heilman and Donaldson suggest, it is important for readers to think about the portrayal of masculinity in texts, as children talking to each other or their parents should think critically about how to achieve common ground regarding their ideas about femininity and masculinity (2009, 158). For them, it is vital to understand who is harmed or served through these existing gender ideologies/orders. Davies states that children can learn certain discursive practices of our society and are able to put themselves within those in different ways (1989, xi). This allows them to develop ways in opposition or in line with how others position themselves (ibid.).

The second part of the analysis focused on the use of cross-dressing in three of the narratives. The unique experience of cross-dressers is especially centered in Here Lies Arthur, Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest and The Boy in the Dress, where the constructedness of gender and thus, masculinity and femininity is obvious. While Rowan and Dennis have a clear choice to cross-dress, Gwyna has to obey to what she is told to do. Therefore, the effect of cross-dressing in Reeve’s narrative differs from the other two books. The duality of gender is described in great detail in HLA, when Gwyna has to learn the rules of how to behave in either of the two worlds – female or male. Yet, she comes to the conclusion that she “does not fit in either” world, as she is aware of the negative aspects of being a boy (Reeve 2007, 168). This eventually leads to the construction of her own identity.
and accepting both female and male traits. While Rowan in RH returns to being female at the end of the novel, she too lives the life of an outlaw, who are usually male characters. However, she exposes herself to Robin Hood and does not look back. It can be said that cross-dressing is only secondary to the main events in this narrative and thus, does not teach a lot about the conventional gender codes and norms. Contrary to these two characters, Dennis enjoys more liberties and is able to live his life in a way he wants to, according to his own guidelines. His friends even encourage him to play soccer in a dress. He is able to live out his identity in both worlds and does not get ridiculed by his friends. Even his family accepts him for his true self at the end. Apart from Harry Potter, all books explore inhabiting both male and female genders and all experiences entail positive and negative reactions to it. The difference lies when they were forced to perform a certain gender role compared to when they could freely chose their identity. The ‘boy code’ as previously described puts boys and men into a “gender straitjacket” that restricts not only them, but everyone they interact with (Pollack 1999, 6). Analyzing the selected narratives, it can be said that both genders – feminine and masculine – have to work together and make use of their ‘strengths’ and qualities in order to survive, for their strength relies on using traits of both genders. Just being ‘the man’ or ‘the women’ is not working which can be seen especially in the characters of Peeta and Katniss, as they are very different but learn to work together, fight together and ultimately survive.

Reading texts such as *The Hunger Games*, *The Boy in the Dress*, *Here Lies Arthur*, *Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is essential in order to confront children with certain critical issues of our time. This triggers important discussions of literary portrayals, which potentially cause inequality, yet they also help to construct identity and a general understanding of gender orders (Heilman and Donaldson, 159-160).
Conclusion

This thesis is aimed at analyzing the representation of masculinity in Nancy Springer’s *Rowan Hood*, Philip Reeve’s *Here Lies Arthur*, David Walliams’ *The Boy in the Dress*, Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone*. The analysis is based on the ‘boy code’, a concept of imperatives of what it entails to be a boy, as well as to study the various performances of masculinity in order to find evidence of how the novels center on traditional masculinity, or challenge it. This concluding chapter reveals how children’s literature is responding to new gender relations with narratives that either sustain or challenge existing gender orders. As Culler notes, children’s literature is a vehicle which carries and exposes ideologies about hierarchical structures in society (1997, 39). It is often undervalued, however, as it contributes decisively to how children see the world and their place in it (ibid.). This thesis explored the representations of masculinity in children’s and young adults’ fiction and discussed the complex and various relations between individuals and their social context. It is important to cast light onto some of the arising issues when individuals do not fit into the respective norms, and thereby challenge existing gender or societal orders. Using this thesis as a tool, it is imperative building an understanding of how gender and the narrative practices of contemporary children’s and young adults’ literature can be comprehended by means of a critical framework and a broader set of social discourses. According to Buchbinder, these discourses inherently shape the values debate and similarly, they dictate the procedure by which it should be had. Such include the relative assignment of subject expertise, the social rules of engagement, and suggestions for navigating such sensitive topic matter (1998, 11). It is not solely the purpose of this thesis to apply theory to the selected narratives but to put theoretical perspectives to work arising within children’s fiction and cultural discourse. Judith Butler’s text *Gender Trouble* (1990) is central to this thesis because her notion and understanding of gender as ‘performativity’ shows that gender is something we do rather than are.

As Mallan notes, children’s texts carry certain views or ideologies of the world (2009, 8). Gender is certainly part of these discourses which are often implicit in texts, thereby challenging readers to form subject positions. To put it differently, “fiction not only represents a world of subjects who know, understand, and act in particular ways, but also offers the reader a subject position” (ibid., 8). However, Stephens points out that these positions are sometimes restricted and restrictive in regard to child readers (1992, 50). Questions need to be asked with regard to gender and its impact on identity. Mallan states
“fictional texts for children and young people assume a particular kind of reader: a person who is not an adult, but one who because of his/her child/youth status, will have certain knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about the world” (2009, 10). The term gender and its understanding have changed. It has become flexible and difficult to explain. Buchbinder states that the term gender has collapsed into sex and this blurs the distinction between the biological and social term (1998, 39). This thesis explored ways in which masculinity is represented in contemporary children’s and young adults’ texts. It is an attempt to search out recent publications and to write about texts that have so far received little critical attention. Special notice has been paid to which literary and social function those stories serve, because stories often induct their “audience into the social, ethical and aesthetic values of the producing culture” (Stephens 2009, 91).

This critical study offered the opportunity to obtain insights into the way(s) in which masculinity is represented in contemporary children’s books and to see how they shape the way children view themselves and the world around them. The considerable impact on their development is of great importance because it sheds light onto to what purpose and effects certain aspects in children’s literature are constructed. Gaining such insight is meaningful and useful because books shape the development of children. Therefore, this analysis is helpful and significant to academics, researchers, authors and readers. The selected stories are vital to British and American Literature, and while this thesis explored the ways in which masculinity is portrayed in the books, it also shows how these figures and heroes live on in children and people’s imaginations as long as their stories and tales are rewritten and re-told. The decision to select these narratives for the analysis of masculinity was based on the assumption that “meaning is produced from the interrelationships between audience, text, other texts, and the socio-cultural determinations of significance” (Stephens 1992, 116), as well as the fact that these stories are contemporary children’s books, and thus offer important insights into the producing culture (Stephens 2009, 91). The findings of the study are now summarized in this chapter.

The first part of the analysis discussed the ‘boy code’ as introduced by Pollack (1999). According to the first rule of the boy code (The Sturdy Oak) boys have to keep their emotions to themselves. They should be stoic, stable and independent, while also hiding their fear and not showing weakness. This rule corresponds with the character of Rowan Hood, Gwyna and Harry Potter. The second rule of the ‘boy code’ requires boys to engage in violent and aggressive acts. This is especially true in HLA, where the issue of war is linked directly to
masculinity. Battles are presented as bloody and full of violence, with no guarantee of a soldier coming back. Gwyna is disappointed of manhood, because of the brutality of the war. However, it is considered unmanly if one does not fight. After her own experience of war, she feels sorry for the other boys who will soon be accompanying Arthur and his band in the bloody battles. The third imperative of the code refers to power relations. The issue of power is particularly addressed in the character of Harry Potter, who does not show any fear and who proves to be sporty and strong. By doing so, the other male characters are victimized and hegemonic masculinity reinforced. The fourth rule of the boy code concerns the emotional state and the expression of feelings, which is mostly perceived as feminine and for this reason ‘unmanly’. Compliance with this imperative can be found in all novels except for The Hunger Games, where the character of Peeta depicts masculinity unconventionally. In HPPS, Harry is portrayed as traditionally masculine and thus, only shows the emotion of anger, especially in situations when he has to fight the darkness. In HLA, Gwyna learns how to behave as a man, and thus refrains from showing her emotions. In RH, Rosemary does everything to become part of Robin Hood’s outlaws and thus, also tries to adopt typical ‘male’ behavior.

The second part of the analysis focused on the different representations of masculinity and the effect of cross-dressing in the selected novels, dealing with the performances of masculinity by Rowan Hood, Gwyn/a, Dennis, Harry Potter and Peeta Mellark. Cross-dressing is especially dominant in Reeve’s novel HLA, in which masculinity as a construct becomes obvious. While in Springer’s work Rowan Hood’s cross-dressing appears to rather be a secondary element, and hence, is not as successful in assessing traditional gender codes, Reeve’s novel offers an alternative conception of cross-dressing. The different gender categories are emphasized in HLA, and it is described how Gwyn/a must learn what it means to be male or female, while always being criticized. Consequently, leading to the conclusion that Gwyn/a finds herself not fitting in either world and finally constructs her own identity using it to her convenience in different situations (Reeve 2007, 142). That is what cross-dressing narratives should lead to, as Flanagan suggests, “a subject who essentially belongs to neither category, yet also belongs to both in his/her amalgamation and reconstruction of masculine and feminine gendered behaviors” (2002, 89).

Society still expects boys to be brave, independent, and able to stoically cover their pain. These gender norms force many boys/men to suppress their yearnings for connection, emotion and for love by building a wall around them defined by toughness. One could say they wear a mask of masculinity, which hides their features and human pain. The ‘boy code’
supports messages such as “Don’t be a mamma’s boy”, “Big boys don’t cry”, which parents already tell their child at a very young age. Such messages are reinforced in adulthood and may cause all kind of problems in the process of constructing one’s identity. Boys start to believe that they fail to achieve their masculinity as their expression of feelings violates the ‘boy code’, and in fact, are considered feminine, womanish. *The Hunger Games* made it acceptable for men/boys to embrace a more female perspective. This becomes apparent, as the main character is a female. The character of *Harry Potter*, when one first encounters all three protagonists, is portrayed as a child, yet throughout the story, his circumstances force him to grow into adulthood quickly. Harry Potter in comparison to the main characters in other children’s books is a protagonist who is forced to mature faster than he would normally do and the notion of childhood is reduced. This could evoke distorting thoughts in young readers, as they might long for their own adulthood and to finally be grown ups who are allowed everything. This is true “[b]ecause meaning is produced from the interrelationships between audience, text, other texts, and the socio-cultural determinations of significance, all texts can be said to inhabit an intertextual space” (Stephens 1992, 116).

Of the five selected novels that have been analyzed in this paper, the cross-dressing narratives stand out in terms of the study of masculinity, as they clearly present “cross-dressing as a form of questioning or rebellion against socially ingrained and constructed notion of masculinity and femininity” (Flanagan 2002, 80-81). These discourses offer unlimited potential with regard to questioning and challenging traditional gender constructions and stereotypes, while also providing a range of gendered alternatives (ibid., 78-79). It is important to be aware of such stereotypes and to consciously work to eliminate them from our thought process and mind (Pollack 1999, xxvi). Analyzing the representation of masculinity in children’s and young adults’ literature is a step into the right direction and further raises awareness of such preexisting stereotypes. As Pollack suggests, “[p]arents do not have to resist their deepest feelings for their sons or let myths about boys overwhelm the wisdom of their own instincts” (1999, 25) because together this code can be unlearned, and we can make room to enjoy “close, emotionally rich relationships, based on connection instead of disconnections” (ibid.). While there are clearly biological differences between the genders, it is the way boys are nurtured and raised, which predicts their behavior. In addition to that, adults create a boy culture based on their understanding of masculinity. However, boys experience a variety of problems alone such as: academic failure, depression, struggles with friends or attention deficit disorder (ibid.). Their need for emotional connection and voice of struggle are often hard to realize and so they mask their feelings and pretend that
“everything is just fine” when in fact, they are just hiding behind the mask of masculinity (Pollack 1999, 3 and 7). Inflexibly enforced gender norms may provide reassurance and stability which may often be craved by young readers. However, at the same time they might enjoy the opportunity to go on a socio-cultural adventure (Simons 2009, 157). After all, masculinity is constructed and learned behavior, where a binary gender construct is contradicted by the duality/overlap and fluidity of genders.
Bibliography

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