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FROM GIRLS ON FIRE TO MOTHERS ON FIRE

Family and Female Heroism in Young Adult Dystopian Literature

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences
Master's Thesis
April 2024

ABSTRACT

Elina Salovuori: From Girls on Fire to Mothers on Fire: Family and Female Heroism in Young Adult Dystopian Literature
Master's Thesis
Tampere University
Master's Programme in Languages, Specialisation in English Language and Literature
April 2024

The thesis analyses the gender roles of female heroes who appeared in young adult dystopian literature during the time period of the late 2000's and the early 2010's when the genre's popularity grew substantially, and female protagonists became common in the genre. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), Stephenie Meyer's *The Host* (2008), and Rick Yancey's *The 5th Wave* (2013) serve as primary material of this thesis. The novels' female heroes represent the typical Girl on Fire protagonists who emerged in young adult dystopian literature during the time period that this thesis studies. The thesis examines how the female heroes of these novels both challenge and conform with traditional gender roles. The thesis identifies patriarchal patterns related to the themes of family, motherhood, nurture, and self-sacrifice that are common to all three novels, and studies how these themes affect the female protagonists' agency and heroism. The theoretical framework of the analysis consists of feminist literary criticism and genre studies on young adult dystopian literature.

The analysis identifies multiple patriarchal patterns which were common in Girl on Fire narratives. Among these is the recreation of a traditional nuclear family which consists of the female hero, her male love interest, and her younger sibling. The female heroes' storylines are defined by a journey to recreate a stable family unit, and their stories often end in happily ever after. Additionally, the analysis concludes that most, if not all, of the protagonists' heroic actions are motivated by their family and, most importantly, by their maternal roles and the promises made to their younger siblings. The female protagonists' heroism is defined by maternal self-sacrifice and ethics of care. The thesis argues that these patriarchal patterns limit the female heroes' agency.

The thesis contributes to the study of the Girl on Fire phenomenon and the history of the young adult dystopian genre. It observes how the genre began to move towards diversity, but how its new female heroes were still affected by the patriarchal patterns identified in the analysis. The study concludes that Girls on Fire paved the way for the diversity of contemporary young adult dystopian literature.

Keywords: Female Heroism, Young Adult Dystopian Literature, Feminist Literary Criticism, Gender Roles, Female Agency, Family, Motherhood, Self-Sacrifice

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Elina Salovuori: From Girls on Fire to Mothers on Fire: Family and Female Heroism in Young Adult Dystopian Literature
Maisterin tutkielma
Tampereen yliopisto
Kielten maisteriohjelma, englannin kieli ja kirjallisuus
Huhtikuu 2024

Tutkielma analysoi 2000-luvun lopulla ja 2010-luvun alussa nuorten dystopiakirjallisuudessa esiintyneitä naissankareita ja heidän sukupuoliroolejaan. Nuorten dystopiakirjallisuuden suosio kasvoi huomattavasti kyseisten vuosikymmenten vaihteessa ja samaan aikaan naispäähenkilöt yleistyivät tässä lajityypissä. Tutkielman aineistona ovat Suzanne Collinsin *The Hunger Games* (2008), Stephenie Meyerin *The Host* (2008) ja Rick Yanceyn *The 5th Wave* (2013). Näiden kirjojen päähenkilöt edustavat tyypillisiä Girl on Fire -naispäähenkilöitä, jotka ilmaantuivat lajityyppiin aikakautena, jota tämä tutkielma tarkastelee. Tutkielma analysoi sitä miten kyseisten romaanien naissankarit sekä haastavat että toisintavat perinteisiä sukupuolirooleja. Tutkielman tavoitteena on yhtäältä tunnistaa patriarkaalisia rakenteita, jotka liittyvät perheeseen, äitiyteen, hoivaamiseen ja uhrautumiseen ja jotka toistuvat jokaisen analyysin kohteena olevan naissankarin tarinassa. Tutkielma analysoi toisaalta myös sitä, miten nämä teemat vaikuttavat naissankarien toimijuuteen. Tutkielman teoreettisena viitekehyksenä toimii feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus sekä nuorten dystopiakirjallisuuden genretutkimus.

Analyysi tunnistaa useita patriarkaalisia juonirakenteita, jotka toistuvat Girl on Fire -tarinoissa. Näihin kuuluu muun muassa perinteisen ydinperheen uudelleen luominen. Tähän ydinperheeseen kuuluvat naissankarin lisäksi miespuolinen romanttisen kiinnostuksen kohde ja naissankarin nuori sisarus. Naissankarien toimintaa määrittelee tämän vakaan ydinperheen jatkuva tavoittelu ja heidän tarinansa päättyvät usein perinteiseen onnelliseen loppuun. Lisäksi analyysi osoittaa, että naissankareiden perhe, heidän äidilliset roolinsa ja sisaruksille tekemänsä lupaukset motivoivat melkein kaikkia heidän sankaritekojaan. Näin ollen äidillinen uhrautuminen sekä hoivan etiikka määrittelevät naispäähenkilöiden sankaruutta. Tutkielma esittää, että nämä patriarkaaliset juonirakenteet rajoittavat naissankareiden toimijuutta.

Tutkielma edistää Girl on Fire -ilmiön ja nuorten dystopiakirjallisuuden historian parempaa ymmärrystä. Tutkielma havainnoi kuinka lajityyppi alkoi edetä kohti moninaisempia hahmoja, mutta samanaikaisesti tarkastelee, miten analyysissä tunnistetut patriarkaaliset rakenteet vaikuttivat genren ensimmäisiin naissankareihin. Tutkielma päätteleekin, että Girl on Fire -ilmiö viitoitti tietä nykypäivän nuorten dystopiakirjallisuuden moninaisuudelle.

Asiasanat: naissankarit, nuorten dystopia kirjallisuus, feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus, sukupuoliroolit, naisten toimijuus, perhe, äitiys, uhrautuminen

PREFACE

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tampere University for the seven most amazing years of my life so far. Thank you to everyone who helped and supported me during the writing process of this thesis. Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Maarit Piipponen, for supporting and guiding me during this process. A special thank you to Lexica, my home for all these years, which has brought so many incredible friends into my life. Thank you for all the Kyrpong and KIELARIT -adventures, and for introducing me to the world of events. Thank you to TREY as well for the most unforgettable, and the biggest, Wappu I have ever experienced. Thank you to the one-of-a-kind student culture of Tampere where I got to feel like I belonged, and found my place to flourish.

Thank you to my band Spicy Red, for all the music and the friendships that helped me relax in the midst of this process. Thank you to my wonderful group of friends who have studied with me this spring; our writing retreat, and the Lapland energy was one of the highlights of my year. A special thank you to Elisa, Sara, and Noora, we did it! Thank you to Ida for being an amazing friend that I can always count on. Thank you to my family, Sohvi, and Manta for your endless love and support throughout the years. Finally, I want to thank all my dear friends with whom I have made the memories of a lifetime that I will cherish forever. All of you have been the best part of my years at university.

Tampere, 16 April 2024

Elina Salovuori

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1. Introduction

This thesis analyses female heroes of young adult dystopian literature, during the time period when the genre's popularity grew substantially, and female heroes began to appear as its main characters. More specifically the analysis focuses on the ways in which these heroes both challenge and conform with traditional gender roles. The gender roles affect the heroes' agency and their heroism. The three protagonists all have traits that have been traditionally considered masculine as well as traits that have been traditionally considered feminine. This thesis analyses and compares these traits while mostly focusing on how the female heroes reinforce traditional gender roles, family, and themes related to family, such as nurture and self-sacrifice being the focal point of analysis. Additionally, the aspect of romance is analysed in terms of how it connects to these themes. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), Stephenie Meyer's *The Host* (2008) and Rick Yancey's *The 5th Wave* (2013) serve as primary material for this thesis. *The Hunger Games* and *The 5th Wave* are both first novels in a trilogy, and thus their sequels, Collins' *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010) as well as Yancey's *The Infinite Sea* (2014) and *The Last Star* (2016) will also be analysed but to a much smaller extent. The sequels will only be analysed in order to showcase how the themes analysed in this thesis appear throughout the series and the protagonist's character arc, and to further prove arguments relating to these themes. The research questions of the thesis are:

1) What kinds of gender roles did female heroes of young adult dystopian literature have during the time period when female protagonists began appearing and gained popularity in the genre? How did they challenge and how did they reinforce gender roles traditionally placed on women in literature? What traditionally feminine traits did they have?
2) What kinds of common patterns related to the traditionally patriarchal themes of family, romance, nurture, and self-sacrifice can be identified in the female heroes' storylines? How do these affect the female heroes' agency?

Feminist literary criticism and genre studies on young adult dystopian literature will serve as the theoretical framework of this thesis. The gender roles of the protagonists as well as the patriarchal themes relating to family, romance, nurture, and self-sacrifice will be analysed in terms of feminist literary criticism. Genre studies on young adult dystopian literature will be used in the wider analysis of the novels' genric dimensions: for example, the thesis will consider how the genre of young adult dystopian fiction affects the representation of the protagonists, as well as how the representation of the protagonists affected the genre. Genre studies will also serve the goal of this thesis, which is to detect common patterns relating to traditional gender roles that appear in the genre and its female heroes.

The three primary material novels suit the aims of this thesis well, because it is possible to identify recurring patterns related to the themes of family, romance, nurture, and self-sacrifice, which are common to all three novels. The topic of this thesis arose from these common patterns that can be identified in the genre's female protagonists; therefore, choosing these three novels as primary material serves the aims and research objective of this thesis. The thesis will focus on analysing and comparing the protagonists of each novel, Collins' Katniss, Meyer's Melanie, and Wanda, and Yancey's Cassie. The reason for analysing two characters of Meyer's novel is that Wanda is a female alien who inhabits and controls Melanie's body throughout the entire novel and consequently the two characters are nearly inseparable.

The time period of the late 2000s and early 2010s was characterised by female protagonists who started to be more common staples of the YA dystopian genre than male protagonists. This development contributed to the dystopian genre's explosion in popularity. Indeed, the three novels chosen as primary material are fitting examples of the genre during its rise to popularity, because they were all published during this particular time period and some of them had a strong influence on the genre's development. All the novels used as primary material are international bestsellers and have been adapted into popular movies as well. Moreover, *The Hunger*

Games is often considered a classic of the genre that influenced and changed the trends of YA dystopia for decades to come. According to Sarah Hentges, "The Hunger Games [set] the standard for young adult literature generally, and for the Girl on Fire as a cultural force to be reckoned with" (5). Thus, *The Hunger Games* and its popularity was a catalyst for female protagonists emerging as a trend in YA dystopian literature. Consequently, the numerous female protagonists who emerged in YA dystopian narratives during the aforementioned time period are often referred to as Girls on Fire, after Katniss, due to their resemblance to one another. Hentges defines the Girl on Fire as a "complex, intelligent, brave, and triumphant survivor of impossible situations", and as a genre, Girls on Fire "speak to an important cultural moment and an optimism that shapes the future" (5). Consequently, this thesis studies the gender roles of typical Girls on Fire.

The time period of Girls on Fire saw female protagonists becoming more common in YA dystopia, and these female protagonists differed from how adolescent women had traditionally been depicted in literature. The protagonists were girl heroes, strong and able to fight; consequently challenging stereotypes of girls and women. Literature has attributed many characteristics to women that have formed a stereotypical view of femininity, and this view is connected to traditional gender roles. According to Cheri Register, literature and society have "reserve[d] active mastery skills for boys – that is, creativity, ingenuity, adventurousness, curiosity, perseverance [sic], bravery, autonomy – and describe[d] girls as passive, docile, dependent, incompetent, and selfeffacing [sic]" (20). The traditional and patriarchal view of women has shaped their typical roles in literature as objects, compared to men constructed as subjects: man as self and woman as other. This describes the masculinist model for women – "she is other, she is body; consciousness resides outside of her" (Schumacher 33). Such patriarchal views that ascribe to the masculinist model of truth have also greatly affected the formation of literary canon as well as literary criticism throughout history; a key aim of feminist literary criticism has been to make patriarchal constructions visible, and to analyse and challenge them.

The primary materials' female protagonists were some of the first modern dystopian girl heroes who challenged patriarchal gender roles by being strong and active subjects, and in many ways the opposite of how girls and women had traditionally been depicted in literature and also in popular media. However, many previous studies have only concentrated on this revolutionary aspect of these novels and protagonists, and in doing so, the traditionally patriarchal aspects of the novels have not gained equal attention. This is evident from Hentges' definition of Girls on Fire, for example, which, along with her study, focuses on the transformative aspects and masculine traits of these protagonists, with their traditional aspects being a sidenote. This is the reason why I chose to focus on the traditional aspects and feminine traits of Girls on Fire, while giving less emphasis to their masculine traits because they have already been studied extensively. The most important goal of this thesis is to provide a multifaceted analysis of the protagonists that shows both sides of the argument – how these girl heroes were a substantial leap forward in the development of diversity within the dystopian genre but how they simultaneously reproduced and reinforced patriarchal values.

The patriarchal themes that this thesis focuses on all connect to the theme of family. This theme not only encompasses the biological families of the protagonists, but also their love interests or romantic partners. All three protagonists have lost their parents, or their parents are unable to take care of their children, due to different reasons relating to the apocalypse; consequently, the female protagonists are all left with the responsibility of taking care of their younger siblings in the dangerous dystopian society. Due to this, all three protagonists have taken over the role of a mother to their younger siblings. This connects to the theme of motherhood that will be analysed in the thesis. It is the need to protect their younger siblings that initially motivates their heroic actions and positions them on a trajectory towards becoming girl heroes.

Furthermore, the found family and the family-of-choice tropes, as well as the recreation of a traditional heteronormative family, are a trend in young adult dystopian literature. In all three novels, the protagonist has formed this type of family that consists of the protagonist in the role of a

mother, the protagonist's love interest in the role of a father, and the protagonist's younger sibling in the role of their child. Consequently, there is a strong connection between the themes of family and romance. In addition to their younger siblings, the female protagonists have a strong need to protect their love interests. As this thesis argues, the themes of nurture, motherhood, and protecting one's loved ones all connect to the patriarchal theme of self-sacrifice. All protagonists sacrifice themselves in one way or another for their younger siblings and love interests multiple times in the novel. The roles of a nurturer and a mother are very traditional patriarchal roles placed on women in literature and in society, thus this thesis analyses the traditional themes of nurture and self-sacrifice that connect to the aspect of family. This thesis identifies a strong connection between heroism and family in the novels because most, if not all, of the protagonists' heroic actions are motivated by their need to protect their family and loved ones.

The topic of this thesis is relevant because it identifies traditional patriarchal trends that appeared in some of the most popular novels of the young adult dystopian genre and that have previously been studied very little compared to the feminist aspects of the novels. The aim of feminist literary criticism is to expose and analyse societal structures that are reflected in literature and that have affected women's position in society. It is impossible to dismantle such patriarchal structures without continued analysis and better knowledge of them. In light of this, the YA genre has considerable influence on its readers because they are young and literature is a way for them to learn about the world. Because young adults do not usually have enough knowledge about patriarchal structures and views of gender for example, they are very susceptible to them. This claim of YA literature's influence is supported by Joanne Brown et al., who argue that:

> adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the stories they hear and read. The preoccupation with self that is characteristic of adolescents makes them particularly receptive to fiction. They tend to identify strongly with a story's characters, share their dilemmas, and participate in the choices that the characters make, keenly aware of the

> values that their actions imply. And the passive girls who have dominated in young adult fiction send a distinct message. (9)

The wider objective of this thesis is to analyse a specific time period in the history of the YA dystopian genre. This thesis formulates a look into how the YA dystopian genre began developing with regard to diversity through its portrayal of female heroes, while at the same time sheds light on the patriarchal aspects that still appeared in the genre during that time. Thus, the thesis aims to form an understanding of female heroism in the genre during this time period and to provide further insight into how the genre's diversity developed. The temporal distance from the publication time of the novels and the time period of the genre's explosion of popularity can bring new perspectives to the analysis, because trends and popular patterns can be more easily recognised after some time has passed. Due to the same reasons, it is also possible to identify the ways in which these protagonists challenged traditional gender roles affected and contributed to YA dystopian literature of today.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is introduced in Chapter 2, and it provides background for all the concepts that will be applied in the analysis of the primary material. Subchapter 2.1. will examine the young adult dystopian genre, while Subchapter 2.2. will focus on female agency and traditional gender roles, from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. In Chapters 3 and 4, the aspects that have been introduced and discussed from the theoretical perspective will be analysed in terms of how they are present in the primary material and represented by the protagonists, who are the subject of this study. The analysis identifies patterns that are common to the primary material's female heroes, and connects these patterns to the concept of the Girl on Fire. Chapter 3 will identify themes and patterns that relate to family and romance. Subchapter 3.1. will analyse the connection between family and romance, as well as the theme of motherhood, and recreation of the nuclear, heteronormative family. Subchapter 3.2. will centre on how the romantic plotlines reinforce traditional gender roles through common patterns such as love triangles, the female hero as an object

of desire, and the concept of happily ever after, for example. Chapter 4 will analyse the themes of nurture and self-sacrifice. Subchapter 4.1. will analyse the motivations of the protagonists' heroic actions and their connection to family. Subchapter 4.2. will analyse how the feminine and maternal trait of self-sacrifice affects the female heroes' actions and their heroism. Additionally, in both subchapters the analysis will focus on how the traditional gender roles, established in Chapter 3, related to family and motherhood, affect the female heroes' agency.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will introduce the theoretical background of this thesis, genre studies on YA dystopian literature and feminist literary criticism. These have been chosen as theoretical background because they support the analysis of female protagonists in this specific genre. The first subchapter will focus on YA dystopian literature and specifically the time period of late 2000s and early 2010s in the history of the genre, when female protagonists began to appear as a trend. The chapter first provides a historical context of the genre by discussing the history and initial development of dystopian literature and YA literature separately, and then it delves into YA dystopian literature in closer detail. The historical context will present a point of comparison for the time period of the primary materials' publication, and aid in understanding how female heroes began gaining popularity in the genre. The second subchapter will contribute theoretical perspectives to analysing heroism from the point of view of feminist literary criticism. The theoretical framework will present background on the emergence of female heroes, and define the concepts relating to female heroism, traditional gender roles, masculine and feminine traits, and female agency as they are understood in YA dystopian literature. The more specific themes relating to these concepts that will be discussed are those related to family, motherhood, nurture, romance, and self-sacrifice, as well as their connection to female heroism. Before delving into these patriarchal themes that will be the main focus of the analysis, the chapter will also discuss how the idea of female heroism in itself challenges traditional gender roles.

2.1. Young Adult Dystopian Literature and Its Rise in Popularity

According to Keith M. Booker, dystopian literature was originally born as a counterreaction to utopian literature. These two literary genres are inseparably linked because they are characterised by social criticism: they both depict fictional societies that critique and comment on the current society by how they have been constructed. Utopian literature depicts an ideal society, but the genre typically

has connections to dystopia because the utopian society often turns into a dystopia as these narratives delve into the question of whether perfect societies exist. Dystopian narratives often serve as a warning or a reminder of what utopian thinking can lead to. (3) Booker discusses this connection between dystopian and utopian literature and offers the following definition of dystopian literature:

> literary works that critically examine both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives can be seen as the epitome of literature in its role as social criticism . . . it is precisely such literature that is encompassed by the term "dystopia" . . . literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. (3)

Therefore, it can be difficult to classify some literary works as one or the other, because the integral connection between the two genres can result in some novels having aspects of both.

Dystopian literature often describes societies that have been constructed after some abrupt end of the previous society, typically a result of some type of disaster that has caused a reset. As a result of this reset, the new societal order is often constructed with utopian intentions. However, dystopian narratives often simultaneously shed light on how the supposedly utopian thinking has gone terribly wrong and the society is in fact dystopian, at least for most of its citizens. According to Booker, dystopian literature typically criticises the existing social conditions or political systems by exploring how they play out in a fictional dystopian society. Dystopian settings provide an opportunity to explore and shed light on the issues of current societal structures, for example, by exaggeration of these structures, consequently they can more clearly reveal the flaws of a society where such structures exist. Thus, dystopian literature can often be interpreted as a cautionary tale of what could happen if the current society takes a turn toward a specific path described in the fictional society. (3-4) Booker continues that with the literary strategy of defamiliarization, dystopian literature bestows the reader with a possibility to examine the society that they live in from a distance, by taking

its familiar structures into a new fictional context: “by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable” (3-4). Therefore, the reader can gain understanding and new perspectives into the society that they live in by exploring it through different dystopian societies. As Booker argues, “By this definition, dystopian literature is not so much a specific genre as a particular kind of oppositional and critical energy or spirit” (3).

Due to the oppositional and critical spirit of dystopian literature, and because a counterreaction always develops as a response to something, certain conditions needed to exist in order for this type of genre to develop. The Enlightenment is a historical time period that caused a significant development in dystopia as a genre: “The rise of science as a discourse of authority in the Enlightenment directly inspired both an explosion in utopian thought and a corresponding wave of dystopian reactions. It is thus in the course of the nineteenth century – in which technological utopianism reached its peak – that dystopian literature [became] an important and identifiable cultural force” (Booker 5). Technology and science are very common themes appearing in dystopian literature. To this day there are many works of the dystopian genre that envision technological or scientific developments gravely affecting dystopian societies.

After the dystopian genre developed, it gradually gained more and more popularity and eventually, “[i]n the course of the twentieth century, dystopian energies . . . [became] far more prominent in both literature and cultural criticism than . . . utopian ones” (Booker 7). Moreover, dystopia and its popularity affected literature as a whole, so much so that dystopia’s reach expanded to other genres as well. As a result, many genres started to have dystopian tendencies and undertones. (Booker 7) Furthermore, the influence of dystopian literature did not only affect literature but, more extensively, “popular culture as a whole”, which exhibited a significant increase in dystopian mood starting from the end of the twentieth century (Booker 7). This was influenced by the fact that many

films were based on dystopian literature; as Booker notes, "dystopian visions have in general constituted a popular and important modern film genre" (7). Consequently, the trend of dystopian films began developing during this time period and gained more popularity moving towards the twenty-first century, which is the time period when the primary material novels were adapted into films as well.

One of the most popular, if not the most popular, iteration of dystopian literature today is its subgenre, young adult dystopian literature. The three novels used as primary material are all representations of this genre. YA dystopian literature was born due to the combination of two literary genres, the previously discussed dystopian literature and the genre of young adult literature. Before the specific time period when YA dystopian fiction had its peak in popularity can be discussed and analysed, it is important to discuss the background of how young adult literature initially emerged, paying special attention to the history of its female character portrayals.

Young adult literature in general is a relatively new genre; the concept of adolescence became known in literature only in the "1930's [when] publishing houses developed juvenile divisions to handle books that fell between the children's and adult books" (Brown et al. 8). In connection to the research questions of this thesis, I argue that the very concept of young female protagonists in YA was a departure from traditional gender roles because, as Brown et al. state, in early twentieth-century literature female characters had no tangible interim period between childhood and adulthood. Society considered girls to be adults in terms of marriage and "[m]ost girls' fiction omitted this transitional and troublesome period until well into the twentieth century, in part because the concept of adolescence itself did not take root until the late nineteenth century" (Brown et al. 7). Brown et al. continue that literature had traditionally depicted young female characters during their childhood, on a journey that ended when they found a husband. This pattern can be seen in many popular novels of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century; young female protagonists in *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Pollyanna* (1913), and *Little Women* (1868) all

exemplified this tradition that is rooted in traditional gender roles. (8) According to Brown et al., in the 1930s, at the beginning of YA as a genre, the portrayal of female adolescence was still very limited. The portrayals developed in the 1940s and 1950s when female protagonists began to appear in the genre, and they were granted more character development. Through this development, literature began paying attention to the female experience of adolescence, not just the male one, and fiction began to depict female characters facing adolescent experiences. This made authors explore what kinds of adolescent experiences girls could have and how they grew up to be women. (8-9)

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that YA literature that depicts female protagonists has developed a popular pattern that is distinct from YA literature depicting male protagonists. YA authors have imagined the female experience of adolescence as having an integral overarching plot, where the female protagonist learns to challenge traditional gender roles. As this connects strongly to the topic of this thesis, it is important to provide background on this phenomenon. Brown et al. discuss the development that took place in the YA genre in order for these kinds of stories to emerge.

According to Brown et al., the very first YA plotlines involving female adolescence, which emerged from the 1930s onwards, were educational. YA literature of the time depicted how the female protagonist discovered what kinds of expectations society had of them, and consequently, how the protagonist learned to enact this gender coded behaviour. (178) The focus was not on the protagonist developing an autonomous self as in today's YA literature; instead, girls received a lesson of "mother knows best" from these novels (Brown et al. 129). This pattern had been present already before the genre of YA emerged and it is exemplified by the previously mentioned female protagonists, such as Anne, Pollyanna, and the March girls, for example. However, from the 1940s and 1950s onwards the aforementioned historical pattern involving gender roles and expectations started to evolve, as novels began "enthusiastically [promoting] as a major theme the necessity for girls to gain control over their lives by embracing their gifts, to engage in self-definition, and to use

their own empowerment to challenge oppressive social structures" (Brown et al. 129). Thus, the previous pattern of limited female adolescence changed and developed into the "protagonist [determining] if her own sense of what it means to be female can be reconciled with the models her culture offers. When it cannot, she is then faced with resolving the conflict, with constructing an identity that allows her an active place in the world" (Brown et al. 178).

This theme is very prevalent in contemporary YA fiction, and it is an integral part of all the chosen primary material novels as well. The theme concerns stories about female protagonists and does not often appear in YA stories about male protagonists. The pattern connects to the aims of this thesis to analyse the novels' female protagonists' traditional gender roles. Additionally, it is relevant and important to analyse such an integral pattern that appears in YA literature, almost exclusively, with female characters. Moreover, as for young readers of the genre, "girls today are not passive consumers of mass culture around them but actively interact with popular culture in such a way as to reimagine and reshape cultural norms of what constitutes acceptable girlhood." (Brown et al. 179) Therefore, it is important to examine the patterns related to traditional gender roles that are present in YA literature, because they can have strong effects on how young readers view gender.

The theme of challenging oppressive social structures connects more widely to the goals of feminist literary criticism. We can tell many things about the society that we live in through literature, and it is very telling that young female protagonists did not simply go through a rite of passage of growing up, but that an integral part of their growing up was to learn about gender roles present in their society. Furthermore, this popular pattern involved them learning to challenge these roles during their journey to adulthood and not just to blindly accept them. The theme resulted in more diverse female protagonists in YA literature and more varied role models for young readers. From 1940s and 1950s onwards, young girls could read about how it is possible to challenge and change societal norms. Consequently, literature affected society when these fictional narratives were mirrored by real girls who followed in their literary role models' footsteps. Thus, when authors wrote

about different possibilities for girls and women, they, in a way, imagined them into being, because readers could then imagine more varied paths for their own lives.

In addition to the genres of dystopia and YA, the subgenre of YA dystopian literature has connections to many other literary genres. Balaka Basu et al. identify the YA dystopian genre as part of the wider literary genres of children's literature, utopian and dystopian literature, and science fiction in their study *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. The links between utopian and dystopian literature were discussed previously in this subchapter. The connection between dystopian literature and science fiction, on the other hand, is explained by dystopia's common themes of science and technology, which began during the previously discussed time period of Enlightenment. Furthermore, aside from connections to other genres, the YA dystopian genre "draws on a number of familiar, enduring, and popular plots and narrative forms" (Basu et al. 6). Among these is the *Bildungsroman*, or the coming-of-age-story, which is a popular convention of YA literature in general.

According to Basu et al., the *Bildungsroman* conveys a storyline of an adolescent protagonist reaching adulthood by facing, and eventually overcoming, some challenges that affect them reaching maturity. In the YA dystopian genre, it is the dystopian society, or the disintegration of the normal society, that traditionally creates the challenges that force children to grow up faster and take on more mature roles. (6-7) Therefore, the convention of the *Bildungsroman* has been adopted by the dystopian genre. This convention can be seen in all the primary material novels, as their protagonists have had to take on adult roles due to the state of their society, and especially due to its effects on the protagonists' families. The dystopian society or the disintegration of the normal society has been the reason for all protagonists either losing their parents or their parents being unable to take care of them. Consequently, the protagonists have been forced to take on more mature roles within the family dynamic, and this eventually leads to them taking on more mature roles in the new society as well. Another conventional narrative form that the YA dystopian genre has taken influences

from is the adventure story. John G. Cawelti provides a definition of this narrative form as" a story of the hero – individual or group – overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission" (39). In YA dystopian fiction, the dystopian setting creates the challenges for the "hero" to overcome. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss has to overcome and survive the Hunger Games, in *The Host*, Melanie has to overcome and survive an alien taking over her body, and in *The 5th Wave*, Cassie faces the challenge of trying to find her brother in the dangerous postapocalyptic setting. Each novel depicts the female hero struggling to overcome their challenges, and by the end of the story, they have overcome them. However, Katniss and Cassie both encounter new challenges that have originated from them completing their mission; this is explained by their stories continuing in two more novels. Basu et al. argue that "YA dystopias could in fact be seen as a reinvention of the adventure tradition" (7). This is because YA dystopias have adventure as a very integral aspect of their plots, as can be seen in all the primary material novels, and they have adapted the conventions of the adventure story into the conventions of the genre. Moreover, as Cawelti stated, the adventure story has traditionally been the story of a "hero", thus implying that the protagonists of these narratives have typically been boys or men. YA dystopia has reinvented this tradition by its depiction of girl heroes.

A third important narrative form that the YA dystopian genre has implemented into its own conventions is the romance plotline. Romance is a very central part of YA dystopias, and according to Basu et al., it can often be linked to the dystopian society, such as when the society restricts its citizens' rights in choosing a romantic partner, or in choices of procreation, as in Ally Condie's *Matched* trilogy (2010, 2011, 2012) for example (8). Many YA dystopias also depict the challenges relating to the popular star-crossed-lovers storyline that originates in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). The storyline is evident in both *The Host* and *The 5th Wave*, where the protagonists' love interests represent the opposing side of the dystopian conflict. When discussing romance as a narrative form, it is also important to note that "romance is historically a

conservative genre and just as often serves to affirm traditional norms, advancing the primacy of heterosexual couples while associating such relationships with growing up and finding a place in the world. Very few YA dystopias included queer relationships as a central focus" during the early era of the genre (Basu et al. 8). Consquently, out of the narrative forms mentioned by Basu et al. (8), romance is the most important for this thesis, because it contributes to the traditional gender roles and patriarchal aspects of the genre that are the focus of this thesis.

In addition to these genres, dystopia and YA dystopia have a strong connection with postapocalypse narratives. Basu et al. list postapocalypse narratives as a subgenre of dystopia, called postapocalyptic dystopia (3). The postapocalypse narratives do not tend to describe an established dystopian society; instead, they depict the immediate aftermath of the apocalypse where a new dystopian society has not yet been formed. Basu et al. elaborate on this as follows: "One result of the apocalyptic event is that it can turn existing communities into dystopias marked by secrecy, fear, and control, as those in power use violence and repression to maintain what little social structure remains" (3). *The Hunger Games* is an example of an established dystopian society, whereas *The Host* and *The 5th Wave* are examples of postapocalyptic dystopia.

This background on different genres and narrative forms that YA dystopian literature has been affected by provides important context to the time period in the genre's history that this thesis focuses on. The three primary material novels represent the turn of the decade when female protagonists and, more importantly for the analysis, female heroes began appearing in young adult dystopian fiction. The end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s was the time period when all the primary material novels were published, and that is also the time period when the young adult dystopian genre experienced an explosion in popularity. According to Hentges, this popularity was affected by one of the primary material novels in particular: *The Hunger Games* is one of the most popular young adult novels of all time and made young adult literature immensely more popular. *The Hunger Games*, and its protagonist Katniss, also initiated the Girl on Fire trend, which was named

after the nickname used of Katniss in the novel. (5)

The rise of girl heroes is connected to the contemporary popularity of the genre and can, at least for the most part, explain the YA dystopia's popularity during the time when the primary material novels were published. Sara K. Day et al. state that one of the reasons for the emergence and popularity of female protagonists in YA dystopian literature is the idea of female adolescence. As Brown et al. stated, adolescence in general, and especially female adolescence, were new concepts that started to emerge in literature in the 1930s. However, female adolescence was initially viewed from patriarchal perspectives as can be seen from the previously discussed history of the YA genre. According to Day et al., "in both culture at large and literature in particular, the struggles and potential of young women have recently far outweighed concerns about young men; this unbalanced emphasis on adolescent women reflects an ongoing effort on the part of authors, scholars, parents and young women themselves to reconsider and redefine adolescent womanhood" (5). Consequently, the female heroes of YA dystopia have been a significant force in redefining adolescent womanhood.

Female heroes, especially girl heroes, were a relatively new concept in literature and popular media, and they provided an interesting and new perspective to heroism. The girl heroes of YA dystopia were some of the first young female heroes, but they had adult predecessors in other literary genres as well as films and television series. Jeffrey A. Brown recounts the history of adult action heroines as follows:

> The modern action heroine has an interesting lineage. She is built upon the foundation of such diverse precedents as the female sleuths in the writings of Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, the femme fatales of 1930s and 1940s film noir, the spunky tomboys of 1950s teen films, and the leather-clad mod heroines of 1960s television programs like The Avengers and Honey West. In the 1970s it was the vengeful heroine of blaxploitation films like Coffy (1973) and Cleopatra Jones (1973) and the sexy television detectives of Charlie's Angels and Police Woman (10).

Some examples of female heroes who predated YA dystopia's girl heroes analysed in this thesis are Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Veronica Mars, Wonder Woman, as well as action heroines targeted for children, such as Kim Possible, the Powerpuff Girls (Brown 9-10), and Nancy Drew, for example. Brown describes the agency of the first action heroines as follows: "the modern action heroine is a far cry from the traditionally passive roles offered to women. She commands the narrative and controls her destiny, makes her own decisions, and fights her own battles. She is inquisitive and intelligent, physically and emotionally strong, and is clearly portrayed as a heroic ideal with which audience members identify" (11). The agency related to female heroism is discussed further in Subchapter 2.2. and in the analysis of Chapter 4.

However, the initial problem that first female action heroes encountered according to Brown was that even though they were able to gain agency, they were still very much defined in terms of traditional gender roles concerning their looks: they became popular because they were beautiful and sexualised by the narratives as well as their audiences. Even though women became heroic subjects, they also continued to be sexualised objects. The emergence of female heroes was affected by patriarchal conventions in this way, and the first female heroes had to please male audiences by still being sexualised objects. In this familiar role dictated by society they were less threatening for audiences. (11-12) Sexualization of girl heroes is less common because of their age; their objectification is done in more subtle ways compared to their adult predecessors, but they are still objects of desire, as I argue when I discuss romance in Subchapter 4.2.

Even though female heroes had also appeared in other genres, the genre of dystopia lends itself very well for the questioning of traditional gender roles: "Given the ultimately aspirational nature of both dystopia and postapocalypse narratives, these subgenres have the potential to envision new worlds where traditional gender roles no longer apply and can, therefore, be used to challenge stereotypes in the representation of women and their bodies" (Santaularia 1). Due to this aspirational nature, the dystopian setting can provide women opportunities that they do not have in our society,

because normal societal structures have often been dissolved or modified in the genre. In *The Hunger Games* more time has passed since the end of the world compared to the other novels, and thus, there has been enough time to establish a new dystopian society with its own rules and conventions. The established dystopian society can, nevertheless, echo the inequalities of the reader's society. These can include issues of race, gender, and sexuality, for example. In *The Host* and *The 5th Wave*, on the other hand, the characters live in the immediate aftermath of the apocalypse and there is no social order to follow. This type of chaotic environment, where all rules and laws have stopped applying, lends itself to women breaking out of the mould of what society thinks women should be like. Consequently, the challenging of traditional gender roles and societal conventions is more easily achieved in the chaotic postapocalyptic environment, where a new dystopian society has not yet been fully established. Since the novels represent the young adult genre, it is important to note that in addition to women, the immediate aftermath of apocalypse similarly gives young people new opportunities for action and power that they might not normally have in society.

Where the apocalypse often results in young people having unusual opportunities for action and power, established dystopian societies typically control their citizens by reverting adults into the role of a child. This is an effective strategy in controlling citizens because it often makes them passive and denies them the possibility of achieving subjectivity:

> In dystopian settings, the expectations placed on young adults are much more rigid. They are required to perform the roles society dictates to them without question. They are not meant to develop into independent subjects. In fact . . . the dystopian governments of these novels need their citizens to remain in an extended state of childhood if the governments are to maintain absolute control. While adolescence does mark the end of childhood, it does not indicate the beginning of adulthood. Rather, it signifies the period when citizens become fully integrated as objects into their

> repressive societies, in which they accept – either willingly or unwillingly – their positions as powerless subordinates. (Day et al. 36)

This is an aspect that is customary to the genre of dystopia and it can be connected to the themes of passivity and depiction of women as objects related to traditional gender roles, which are examined in Subchapter 2.2. and the analysis in Subchapter 5.1. Dystopian societies compel all their citizens into passive objects as patriarchy has traditionally done to women. The unusually strong control dystopian societies exert over their citizens makes the young female protagonists' rebellious actions in defying traditional gender roles even more powerful; they are willing to challenge a strong societal system and accept the consequences of them breaking out of the mould of what a woman or a girl should be like.

Before the time period when the primary material novels were published, the YA dystopian genre had not often featured diverse characters. Therefore, the female heroes of the 2000s and 2010s constituted the genre's first step towards diversity. It is important to note that even though female heroes defied traditional gender roles and challenged the tradition of prominent male heroes, all of the female protagonists analysed in this thesis are white and their stories contributed to the tradition of heteronormativity. Additionally, as I will show in Chapter 3, the protagonists did not only challenge traditional gender roles, but they also reinforced them in various ways. Therefore, by analysing this topic, it is possible to understand how the authors of the primary material novels contributed to the current diversity of the YA dystopian genre through their female protagonists. One can find much more diverse characters in contemporary YA dystopia with regard to race or sexuality. It is important to understand the first steps in this development because they contribute to a better understanding of the genre and its underlying ideologies.

2.2. Traditional Gender Roles and Female Agency

As can be seen from Cawelti's definition of the adventure story, the usual term that has been used for the protagonist of an adventure story is "hero". This is also the tradition in young adult dystopian

literature because the typical protagonists of the genre often perform heroic and brave actions, and some even defy and change oppressive societal structures. However, "hero" is a masculine word, and this corresponds to how YA dystopia, and literature in general, have had mostly male protagonists in the past. Female protagonists started to emerge only in the late 2000s and early 2010s, which raises the question of what this new type of protagonist is called.

"Heroine" has traditionally been the female version of the word hero; in this thesis, however, "female hero" was chosen as the word referring to female protagonists who act in heroic ways. This choice has been made because the word heroine, similar to many other derivation forms that have the linguistic meaning of feminine, often have different connotations compared to the male version of the word. By adding the feminine derivation, the word is often viewed as inferior to the original word, similar to professional nouns for example. This claim is supported by Marlis Hellinger and Heiko Motschenbacher in *Gender Across Languages*, when they state that feminine derivations in the English language are often marked by semantic derogation, which makes nouns carrying the meaning "female" the lesser category compared to their male counterpart. Additionally, the use of feminine derivations of terms is often "stylistically marked" and "carries negative connotations, which makes them unacceptable in neutral contexts" (12). This phenomenon is common to many languages, not only English, and it can be seen in professional contexts, for example regarding how many female actors wish to be addressed as actors rather than actresses for the previously stated reason. The word "heroine" can also have strong connections with the word "love interest", because is it often used with this meaning in romance literature. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, it is more fitting to use the word "hero" rather than "heroine", because the female protagonists of the primary material novels are main characters, not side characters serving as the male hero's love interest, and they all perform heroic actions and have heroic traits similar to male heroes of the genre. The additional definition "female" or "girl" will be used with the word "hero" in order to define and differentiate the heroes from the male or boy heroes discussed.

When it comes to traditional gender roles, it is important to note that the very notion of a girl hero challenges traditional gender norms. Lois Tyson argues that "Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (85). Girls and women have traditionally been depicted as objects in literature and popular media: women have been defined by passivity, whereas men have been defined by action. Consequently, in hero stories, women have typically been in the role of a side character or the love interest of the male hero. The three primary material novels defy this tradition, because they all have female protagonists who are the heroes of the story; consequently, they have gained subjectivity and agency. Therefore, their existence defies the traditional gender role of women as passive objects.

Due to female heroes breaking out of the tradition of passivity and gaining subjectivity, there is a strong connection between female heroism and female agency. According to Lois McNay, "[a]gency is commonly understood as the capacity of a person (or other living and material entities) to intervene in the world in a manner that is deemed, according to some criterion or another, to be independent or relatively autonomous" (41). McNay goes on to add that "agency is a universal capacity, it is socially realised in a variable and unequal fashion: it means different things according to the cultural context and some individuals and groups clearly have more agency than others. In other words, agency is inseparable from the analysis of power" (39). This connects to how patriarchy has limited female agency. McNay defines agency as it has been traditionally understood in feminist criticism, while this thesis analyses female agency in terms of how it is understood in the context of YA dystopian literature. Thus, it is important to examine the concept of the girl action hero and how it portrays female agency. Susan Hopkins analyses the concept of the girl action hero as follows: "The helpless heroine has been replaced by the new stereotype of an ambitious dynamic tough girl seeking self-advancement and self-actualisation. The new girl action hero knows what she wants – and is willing and able to fight for it" (108). Especially giving these possibilities for action to young girls

contradicted traditional gender roles and attributed girls with many traditionally masculine characteristics. Girl action heroes became a trend in YA dystopian literature as is proved by the concept of the Girl on Fire.

However, the idea that women and girls were breaking out of their traditional passivity and portraying masculine traits was not only embraced by society. Some find female agency and masculine women disconcerting or even threatening, because they deviate from the traditional view society has of women. Lisa Purse has analysed this societal response and according to her, female agency and physically powerful women can be "potentially culturally disturbing"; consequently, female heroes' representation in fictional settings that differ from reality is common. This connects to the concept of defamiliarization which was defined in Subchapter 2.1. Female agency and female heroes are thus more easily accepted by readers and audiences when they are presented in settings that do not resemble present society (80-81). In other words, genres like dystopia, science fiction, and fantasy offer settings and narratives that enabled the portrayal of female agency in literature, with dystopia offering the possibility to connect this portrayal to social criticism. Consequently, the defamiliarization aspect of dystopia contributed to girl heroes initially rising into popularity through this genre in particular. Even though the girl action hero concept questioned the tradition of feminine passivity and defied traditional gender roles, as this thesis will prove, it does not mean that female heroes did not also have traditionally feminine character traits and conform to some aspects of traditional gender roles. For example, the role of the nurturer that Tyson lists as a traditional gender role for women (85) is very much represented by Katniss, Melanie, Wanda, and Cassie.

Feminist literary criticism differentiates between two concepts that are integral to understanding gender: sex and gender. Sex is commonly understood as referring to a person's biological sex, female or male, and gender to gender identity that has been culturally affected (Tyson 86). This distinction is important in order to understand how certain characteristics have been culturally attributed to women and others to men. The concepts of sex and gender are understood and

used with this meaning in this thesis. Western society has constructed character traits into two categories, masculine and feminine, and they are intrinsic to traditional gender roles, as Tyson stated (85-86). The female heroes of the primary material novels have both traits that have traditionally been considered masculine and traits that have traditionally been considered feminine. Thus, the female heroes I analyse in this thesis showcase how female heroes can express fluidity of gender by having both traditionally masculine and feminine character traits. This is one example of how gender is different from sex and how gender is an individually expressed multifaceted concept. As Tyson states, "women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine" (86); instead, these are traits that are constructed by society to express a certain gender, when in actuality, women have both masculine and feminine traits and so do men. It is important to note that masculine and feminine traits are societal constructs, and these terms are used here to shed light on patriarchal gender roles. I recognise that gender is linear, and these binary concepts are patriarchal constructions. Therefore, when I call some traits masculine or feminine, I refer to how the traits have traditionally been linked to a certain gender, because these terms are fitting for the purposes of this thesis.

Regarding traditional gender roles, Tyson also adds that "The 'good girl' . . . [is] attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she's modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing and nurturing" (85). Consequently, the good girl is a construct created by the patriarchy and traditional gender roles and it reflects the patriarchal view of women. All the female protagonists of the primary material novels can be seen as reconstructing some aspects of the patriarchal good girl pattern, especially regarding nurture and self-sacrifice. As mentioned in the introduction, all the female protagonists have lost their parents and have taken over the role of a caretaker of their younger siblings. However, the role of a caretaker is developed even further in the novels; all three female heroes are portrayed in connection to motherhood, and they are thus no longer simply "big sisters" who care for their younger siblings out of necessity. Instead, they have all taken over the role of the mother of the family and think about the role in various ways. The role of a mother

is a very traditional role assigned to women by both society and literary narratives, and it specifically connects to "nurturing", which Tyson (85) lists as a traditionally feminine character trait. Motherhood is linked to domesticity and how traditional gender roles have assigned women with domestic roles. As Alison Blunt et al. state in *Writing Women and Space*, patriarchal societies have traditionally assigned different spaces for men and women: the public sphere for men and the private, domestic sphere for women. The separation of space serves patriarchal power relations because the public space governs the private space, as it is also the sphere of action. (2-3) This has served to define women as the other compared to men and to limit their agency.

The previously mentioned masculine and feminine traits affect the female heroes' agency. As noted above, all the primary material novels have a common pattern of the female heroes' actions being motivated by nurture. Additionally, they all sacrifice themselves for their loved ones, especially for their younger siblings, in the course of the novels. "Self-sacrificing" is another feminine trait connected to traditional gender roles that Tyson lists (85). Consequently, the protagonists' heroic actions can also be viewed as reconstructing the patriarchal good girl ideal that Tyson defined (85), because while the first female heroes of the YA dystopian genre had new, more active roles, those roles were nevertheless affected by traditional gender roles. This can be seen as a negotiation: women can be active if their actions are motivated by and stem from their traditional roles as nurturers.

Because of the emphasis of family and motherhood present in the genre, it is also important to provide some background on family dynamics in connection to traditional gender roles. As mentioned in the introduction, in addition to taking over the role of a mother, each female hero has recreated the traditional nuclear family with their male love interest and their younger sibling. Katniss, Melanie, and Wanda have done this very literally, whereas for Cassie it happens more on a conceptual level. The fact that the female heroes have motherhood and family as very essential aspects of their stories creates a contradiction between them rebelling against traditional gender roles and their rebellious actions being motivated by traditional notions such as motherhood. Rebellion and

political activism catapult the female heroes into the public sphere where they can affect societal change, yet they are very much part of the domestic sphere at the same time, due to the family plot. There are also limits to the female heroes' agency, as will be analysed in Subchapter 5.1. This is supported by Katherine R. Broad who argues that "even as readers are raving about the ways Katniss can inspire young female readers by modeling [sic] a strong and competent heroine, a closer reading suggests that her character also imparts a very different message, one that tells girls the importance of growing up to find satisfaction in heterosexual love and the nuclear family" (117-18). The family dynamics of female heroes can thereby enforce traditional gender roles. Thus, even though YA dystopia often features protagonists whose family dynamic has somehow dissolved due to the dystopian plot, which is necessary in order for the protagonist to have independence and possibilities for agency that adolescents otherwise rarely have, I argue that their story is still motivated by the wish to recreate the nuclear family.

The recreation of the nuclear family is part of the tradition of heteronormativity and motherhood. It is also connected to the theme of romance, which will be explored later in this chapter, because the female heroes' love interests are part of their family-of-choice. "The 'Found Family' or 'Family of Choice' trope refers to a device in literature and media where a group of characters find themselves united in a family-bond based on shared experiences, mutual understanding, and interpersonal connection" (Vélez 2020). This trope has connections to queer romance because queer characters cannot form the traditional nuclear family, but, instead, queer narratives understand family and love as concepts that take many different forms. The found family and family-of-choice tropes are very common in dystopia because the dissolution of society often leads to the disintegration of families, consequently resulting in survivors creating new family units that consist of people not related by blood or creating new family structures with their blood relatives, as can be seen in the primary material novels. However, during the time when female heroes initially emerged into the genre of YA dystopia, the family-of-choice trope was often combined with the recreation of a nuclear

family, and thus its use reinforced traditional gender roles and the tradition of heteronormativity. The family dynamics of each protagonist will be analysed with regard to these perspectives in Subchapter 4.1.

Romance is a very central part of the storylines of female heroes in YA dystopian literature. This is in many ways different from the romantic storylines of male heroes, even though they typically have romances as well. Day et al. support this claim by stating that dystopian novels about girl heroes often feature, and even favour, romantic storylines, such as love triangles, and they often comply with marriage and motherhood as the traditional conclusion and end-state for stories about women (10). Therefore, having romance as a central part of the female heroes' story can imply them being on a trajectory towards such "desirable future outcomes" of a woman's life (10). The strong connection between romance and eventual marriage and motherhood is one of the reasons why romance is a conservative genre and often reinforces traditional gender roles. Therefore, having romance as an integral part of female heroes' stories is very significant in terms of the connection between female heroism and patriarchal gender roles. In the context of the YA dystopian genre, as Hentges argues, romance is part of the "politics of YA dystopia" that include romance to be "compulsory and heterosexual" (8), at least during the initial appearance of female heroes in the genre. Thus, having romance as an integral part of female heroism also serves to affirm heteronormativity.

Romance often plays a significant role in stories about women, which is why it has different realisations for male heroes. When, for example, comparing the love interests' roles in romantic storylines concerning male heroes and those concerning female heroes, Janice A. Radway describes the traditional role appointed to female love interests by romantic narratives throughout history as "a heroine whose principal accomplishment, if it can even be called that, is her success at drawing the hero's attention to herself, at establishing herself as the object of his concern and the recipient of his care" (85). Therefore, from this background it is evident that female love interests

have traditionally had very liminal roles in male heroes' stories; more so than having their own agency, they have been depicted as the object of the male hero's desire or as the "prize" that they gain in the end as a result of their heroic actions. The liminal role of female love interests is one of the reasons why romance has a much smaller role in male heroes' stories, often it is simply a subplot that ends in the hero getting the girl.

In contrast, male love interests often have much more prominent roles in stories about female heroes and the romantic storyline is consequently more prominent. This is exemplified by the primary material novels, which all feature love triangles, meaning that each female hero has two male love interests. The two male love interests are central characters in the story and have agency on their own; the plot affords them to have their own story and identity, rather than simply being objects of desire, who the reader does not really know much about. For example, in *The 5th Wave*, the story is told from multiple perspectives, not just Cassie's, even though she is the main protagonist. Both her love interests, Ben and Evan, have their own storylines which are told from their perspectives. This gives them, and their stories, a very prominent role in the overall storyline. For example, Ben's storyline is completely separate from Cassie's for most of the novel and it is given much space and time in a book that is primarily supposed to tell the story of Cassie.

The love triangle is an aspect that all three primary material novels have in common. Love triangle is "a situation in which two people both love a third person" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Love triangle has been a very popular trope in YA because the readers are able to root for their favourite love interest and discuss who the protagonist should end up with. This phenomenon grew even more when the books were adapted into movies. Especially regarding *The Hunger Games* franchise, one of the most pressing discussions within the consumers of the franchise was whether one identified as "Team Peeta" or "Team Gale". Broad claims that the emphasis on romance through love triangles and the different sides readers take can diminish the attention given to the rebellious traits of the protagonists and their actions because the readers often give extensive focus to the

romance: “Readers are as much on the edge of their seats asking ‘Peeta or Gale?’ as they are wondering how the trio will outrun, outsmart, and outlast the enemy at their heels” (118).

Additionally, the love triangle serves to make the female hero seem desirable because two men declare love for her and are fighting over her attention and affection. Desirability connects to traditional gender roles because patriarchal values have often connected women’s value to how desirable they are in men’s eyes. This is supported by Radway, who states that “the implicit content of the cultural message linking female identity with sexual attractiveness stipulates that a woman's value is produced only when she is recognized by a man” (106). The feminine trait of desirability is also linked to women’s objectification in popular culture, where, as stated previously, women are often simply regarded as the object of the male hero’s desire. I will analyse the implications of love triangles as an integral part of the girl hero’s story in Subchapter 4.2.

Having romance in such a central role in stories about girl heroes implies that having a romantic partner is common and expected of female heroes. Furthermore, storylines concerning girl heroes often end in a happily ever after, which is a traditional concept in the genre of romance. Catherine M. Roach argues that:

> the romance story is defined by what insiders commonly refer to as the HEA. These initials stand for the Happily-Ever-After ending, which Romance Writers of America describes more fully on its website as the ‘emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending [where] the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love . . . Stereotypically, this ending involves a hero and heroine declaring without reservation or irony their mutual love, getting married, and conceiving or bearing a child’. (165-66)

Even though happily ever after is a traditional concept of the romance genre, it is also present in many YA dystopian narratives, like *The Hunger Games* and *The Host*. The concept of happily ever after is connected to Day et al.’s previous argument about female heroes being on a trajectory towards

marriage and motherhood, because in the end girl heroes typically choose one of their two male love interests and the story ends with them finally being together. Sometimes, as in *The Hunger Games*, they get married and have children, and other times it is implied as a very probable future, as in *The Host*.

The happily ever after ending makes the storylines of girl heroes contradictory in nature. As I argued earlier, the very concept of female heroes defies traditional gender roles. A very important characteristic of each female hero analysed in this thesis is rebellion; they rebel against the oppressive society and traditional gender roles. However, having an ending of this type in a rebellious storyline suggests a return to traditional values and "desirable outcomes" of women's lives: it implies obedience and complying with the norms that the characters wanted to oppose at the very beginning of their story. This claim is supported by Basu et al.: "Moreover, YA dystopias that end in romantic fulfilment tend to include a retreat from society into an insular relationship, turning away from the social and political involvement that motivated the narrative in the first place" (8). This is a good example of the contradictory nature of female heroism during the initial appearance of girl heroes, which is the focus of this thesis. The concept of happily ever after and its different implications will be analysed further in Subchapter 4.1.

Moreover, I connect the tropes related to themes of family and romance presented in this chapter to the previously introduced educational nature of YA and ask whether the aim of these types of storylines is to teach young readers that an essential part of rebellious teenage girl heroes' stories was that at the end they learn to comply with society's expectations of women, and that it is an integral part of growing up. This claim can also be connected to Brown et al.'s previously mentioned argument about YA's traditional pattern regarding female adolescence experiences. They claim that from the 1940s and 1950s onwards female protagonists have had more varied stories that have not simply concentrated on them finding a husband (8). However, it is still possible to find this traditional ending in many YA dystopian novels about girl heroes in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

In the next chapter, I analyse the themes presented in this chapter even further, exploring whether YA dystopian narratives suggest that rebelling against societal norms is simply part of teenage rebellion and not adulthood.

3. Family and Female Heroism

This chapter will analyse the traditionally feminine traits of the female heroes. The focus will be on the family dynamics and romantic plotlines of the primary material's girl heroes. The analyses will delve into the themes of motherhood and recreation of the nuclear, heteronormative family, as well as themes that are related to romance. Romance and family are linked in the primary material's female heroes' stories because they have all formed, or wish to form, a nuclear family unit with their younger sibling and their love interest. This is a prominent theme that also motivates their heroism. The male love interests' roles will be analysed in terms of the female heroes' agency and their connection to the nuclear family and fatherhood. Additionally, the common patterns related to romance, such as love triangles, the female hero as an object of desire, and the concept of happily ever after, will be analysed. The analysis will concentrate on how all these themes embody traditional gender roles.

3.1. On a Journey to Recreate a Traditional Nuclear Family

I argue that family and motherhood are one of the biggest themes in all the primary material novels' girl heroes' stories. In this subchapter, I will support this claim by first establishing how all the female heroes take over the role of a mother for their siblings after losing their parents. After this, I will analyse how the female heroes' stories describe a trajectory towards reconstructing a nuclear family unit. This pattern is connected to the romantic plotlines of each protagonist.

All three female heroes of the primary material have lost their parents due to different reasons that were caused by the dystopian society or the apocalypse. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' father is killed in a mining accident, and even though her mother is alive in all three novels, she is so devastated by her husband's death that she is unable to take care of her children. Katniss describes the aftermath of her father's death and her mother's depression as follows: "She didn't do anything but sit propped up in a chair or, more often, huddled under the blankets on her bed, eyes fixed on some point in the distance . . . No amount of pleading from Prim seemed to affect her. I was terrified.

I suppose now that my mother was locked in some dark world of sadness, but at the time, all I knew was that I had lost not only a father, but a mother as well" (32). As a result of her mother's illness, and Katniss having to take over her responsibilities, "nothing was ever the same between [them] again" (*The Hunger Games* 64). Katniss' mother's mental illness can be connected to the traditionally feminine trait "emotional" (Tyson 85), and Katniss additionally views it as a weakness, which can be connected to the feminine trait "weak" (Tyson 85). Even though Katniss' mother's character traits are not the focus of this analysis, it is important to note how Katniss reacts to them. Katniss herself has many masculine traits, and she is unable to forgive what she considers her mother's weakness (*The Hunger Games* 10). She idolised her father when he was alive and also after his death but has a very difficult and distant relationship with her mother, especially in the first novel of the trilogy. It is possible to make a connection between all the primary material novels regarding the girl heroes' fathers' different level of presence and significance in the storyline compared to their mothers.

In *The Host*, aliens have colonised Earth and taken over human bodies, which they use as hosts. Melanie's father was killed by the aliens when they took over his body. It is implied that Melanie's mother encountered the same fate; however, the mother is only mentioned once in the entire novel, thus she has a very diminished role in the story. Melanie's father is mentioned more often, and even though he has been dead throughout the novel's timeline, his family is in an important role because Melanie eventually finds refuge from the apocalypse in her Uncle Jeb's hideout, and he serves as a father figure for Melanie and Wanda as well.

In comparison to the two novels above, in *The 5th Wave*, Cassie's father is alive for much of the novel and he is an important part of the beginning of Cassie's storyline. In *The 5th Wave*, aliens take over Earth, similar to *The Host*, but they do this by causing waves of disasters, such as tsunamis and an EMP strike that eliminate most of the human population. Cassie's family survives the first two waves, but her mother dies of the plague the aliens use as the third wave. Her father dies during the fourth wave after taking his children to a survivor camp where the aliens come to kill all

adults and teenagers, however Cassie manages to escape after witnessing her father's death. In Cassie's story, her father has a much more prevalent role than her mother, correspondingly to the other novels. Similarly to Katniss, Cassie idolises her father, describing him as follows: "He was the smartest man I knew. If he didn't have an answer, there was no one who did" (Yancey, *The 5th Wave* 53). This strong connection with and idolization of the female heroes' fathers can be connected to traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles are patriarchal constructions and patriarchy initially "signified the rule of the father or the rule of the head of the household" (Kantola 918). Therefore, society and often also literature have historically idolised fathers and attributed very different roles to them compared to mothers. As analysed, the girl heroes' fathers have significant roles in the stories despite being dead, whereas the mothers of the female heroes have very small and passive roles, and especially Katniss' mother is described to have many feminine traits. The societal idolization of fathers can be seen as one explanation of why the female heroes' relationship to their fathers is different to their mothers. This can contribute to the female heroes' strong connection with their fathers over their mothers because the girl heroes identify with many masculine traits. All three protagonists value masculine traits and this is one of the reasons why they idolise their strong and wise fathers, especially Katniss and Cassie view their fathers as role models and want to be as strong as them.

All three female heroes have a younger sibling who is in an essential role in their story; Katniss has a younger sister, Prim; Melanie has a younger brother, Jamie; and Cassie has a younger brother, Sam. As a result of their parents' death, or in Katniss' case her mother's illness, the female heroes have all taken over the role of a mother to their younger siblings. Melanie describes herself in terms of motherhood that was thrust upon her due to the apocalypse: "I am so hungry. There is another need that is stronger – another hungry stomach hidden safely far away in the darkness, waiting alone in the rough cave that is our temporary home . . . What will he do if I don't come back? All the pressure of motherhood with none of the knowledge or experience. I feel so hideously helpless. Jamie

is hungry" (Meyer 31). She feels responsible for Jamie and puts his needs before her own; simultaneously, she feels overwhelmed and unequipped for motherhood. Moreover, Wanda, who has access to Melanie's thoughts, describes Melanie as a mother to Jamie (Meyer 141). In the beginning of the novel, when Melanie and Jamie are still on the run by themselves, Melanie is mostly preoccupied with providing food for Jamie, which is very similar to Katniss in *The Hunger Games*. The female heroes' putting their siblings' needs above their own connects to "self-sacrifice", which Tyson lists as a feminine trait (85) and which has been historically connected to motherhood. Victorian motherhood was defined by "immense physical suffering and self-sacrifice" (Plant 2). This connection between motherhood and self-sacrifice is an important aspect of the analysis of the girl heroes, and the sacrificial acts of each girl hero as well as the effect their siblings have on their actions are analysed in closer detail in Subchapter 4.2.

After Melanie is inhabited by an alien, a soul called Wanda, her feelings for her family, Jamie and Jared, are so strong that eventually Wanda starts to love them in the same way that Melanie does. Wanda thinks about how she feels about Jamie: "I tried not to think about the implications of my feelings for him. Because what did it mean if the greatest love I'd ever felt in my nine lives, the first true sense of family, of maternal instinct, was for an alien life-form?" (Meyer 247), and she even tells Melanie that she "can't live without them either now" (Meyer 86). Melanie's maternal instincts are replicated by Wanda, and even though she is an alien, Wanda adopts the human view of motherhood, while also comparing it to the previous view she had of motherhood. The novel portrays motherhood as something universal to all planets. Wanda describes motherhood in terms of emotionality: "Mothers are irrational here. Too many emotions involved. Motherhood is always emotional – even for . . . souls" (Meyer 141). This connects motherhood to the feminine traits "emotional" and "irrational" that Tyson lists (85-86), which are often considered as negative traits. Showing one's emotions has often been deemed as a sign of weakness, and it has historically been claimed that women make decisions based on their emotions. This is described as irrational or

hysterical behaviour, which has then been used to justify the patriarchal claim that women cannot be political leaders for example. In the novels, the emotions connected to motherhood are viewed from two different perspectives. Emotions, and feminine traits, are viewed as negative if they do not result in nurture, for example Katniss views her mother in a negative light because she has been a bad mother due to her emotions, thus she thinks they are a weakness. On the other hand, emotions, which result in nurture and self-sacrifice are valued by the protagonists because they often result in actions that serve others and the greater good. This aspect is connected to the ethics of care in Subchapter 4.2.

Wanda's story is essentially about her finding a family and a home on Earth that she has been searching for her whole life. This again shows how the theme of family and motherhood is an integral part of the female heroes' stories and identities. At the end of the novel, Wanda even feels maternal feelings towards the Seeker who has been her and Melanie's enemy throughout the novel: "I couldn't hate the Seeker in this form. An almost maternal love swept through me … I cradled [the cryotank] to my body, protective as any mother" (Meyer 536). She cannot feel hate towards anyone and in the end feels protective and maternal even towards her worst enemy. This connects to the good girl concept and feminine traits that Tyson discusses (85-86). Hate and anger were traditionally not part of how women should act, and Wanda, and all the souls, in many ways embody traditionally feminine traits. Wanda is described as immensely compassionate and unselfish: for example, she puts others' needs before her own and cannot bear violence. These feminine traits are characteristic to all members of her species, regardless of their gender. Therefore, the society led by the souls can be seen as social commentary; it is a depiction of what society would be like if these feminine traits guided all citizens.

In *The 5th Wave*, Cassie's mother openly asks her to take on the role of a mother for Sam when she is dying: "'[Sam] needs you now, Cassie. Take care of him. Take care of your father.' . . . 'You're all they have,' Mom said. Her last words to me" (52). She is even asked to take care of

her father and in this way take over the role her mother had in their family. Cassie's mother makes this request because she worries about Cassie's father, but Cassie notes how strong he is throughout her mother's death. Cassie does not directly refer to herself as a mother, but this is implied through Sam's thoughts, as he sometimes confuses Cassie and their mother and calls Cassie "Mommy" (50). In addition, when the story is told from Sam's perspective in the novel and he thinks of something nice and comforting he "sees Cassie's face in his mind's eye, and he's surprised. He expected to see his mother's face" (203).

Unlike the other two girl heroes, Katniss has taken over both the role of a mother and a father in her family. She is very much described as the provider of her family, which is traditionally a father's role. She hunts illegally, as her father taught her to do before his death, so that her family can survive starvation. Katniss describes how she took over this role as follows:

> At eleven years old, with Prim just seven, I took over as head of the family. There was no choice . . . Because if it had become known that my mother could no longer care for us, the district would have taken us away from her and placed us in the community home . . . I could never let that happen to Prim . . . The community home would crush her like a bug. So I kept our predicament a secret. (*The Hunger Games* 32-33)

Katniss eventually learns to hunt in order to feed her family. Katniss describes herself as the head of the family, which is traditionally a masculine role. Jessica Miller discusses how a head of the family is a masculine role: "Many . . . associate qualities like breadwinning, physical and mental toughness, and fighting (literally) for survival with masculinity and manhood" (147). In this manner Katniss' role in her family challenges traditional gender roles. Katniss never describes herself with the word "mother" unlike Melanie, Wanda, and Cassie, and her parental role is undoubtedly more masculine than the other female heroes'. However, she also has many traits that can be connected to motherhood, not only fatherhood: for example, she sacrifices her own comfort for Prim's needs and describes how she cannot bear to see Prim in pain, similar to how Melanie did previously: "The anguish I always

feel when she's in pain wells up in my chest" (*The Hunger Games* 18). In addition to hunting, she performs more maternal tasks as well: "I bought our food at the market and cooked it as best I could and tried to keep Prim and myself looking presentable" (*The Hunger Games* 32-33).

Katniss' whole identity revolves around her role as the provider and caretaker of her family. Before the Games she has no other purpose in her life and her only pleasure comes from her friendship with Gale, which is still inseparably connected to the family dynamic and hunting for food for her family. Katniss herself describes how much of her identity is inseparable from this role when she thinks about the possibility of winning the Games and acquiring substantial wealth as a result: "No more fear of hunger. A new kind of freedom. But then . . . what? What would my life be like on a daily basis? Most of it has been consumed with the acquisition of food. Take that away and I'm not really sure who I am, what my identity is. The idea scares me some" (*The Hunger Games* 378). Having this be her only identity in the beginning of the novel reinforces the one-dimensional patriarchal view of women and how they are defined by caring for children as part of the private and domestic sphere. June Pulliam discusses this traditionally feminine identity as follows: "the institutions of marriage and motherhood are still heavily influenced by patriarchy, female characters whose adult identities revolve around being wives and mothers are shorn of agency" (171). This connects to how Blunt et al. described the power relations between the public and private sphere. Therefore, traditional gender roles and the depiction of women with identities that revolve around motherhood and marriage serve to affirm women's placement in the private sphere, separate from the public sphere, and this limits their agency. In the course of the novel, Katniss begins to show signs of political activism which makes her identity more multifaceted; yet, at the end of the trilogy, she is described as having separated from the outside world, and she goes back to a very similar identity that she had at the beginning of the trilogy; she is, in effect, redomesticated. This depiction that shows Katniss also physically and spatially removed from the outside society can be seen to reflect the separation between the private and public spheres, and emphasise how her agency is limited by the

private sphere.

In addition to Prim, Katniss can also be seen as a mother figure to Rue, who Katniss describes as "a twelve-year-old girl from District 11. She has dark brown skin and eyes, but other than that, she's very like Prim in size and demeanour" (*The Hunger Games* 55). She connects Rue to Prim throughout the Games and eventually chooses Rue as an ally, even though she knows this will not help her survive and her mentor will think the choice is unwise: "I can almost hear Haymitch groaning as I team up with this wispy child. But I want her. Because she's a survivor, and I trust her, and why not admit it? She reminds me of Prim" (*The Hunger Games* 244). Katniss wants to protect and take care of Rue, even though she is not part of her family, and because she cannot bear to see anyone who reminds her of Prim suffer and go unprotected.

The female heroes consider their younger siblings in almost everything they do and this makes the siblings' roles prevalent, even though they have little character development in most of the novels. Prim and Jamie serve very much as catalysts for Katniss and Melanie's stories, but other than that, they have very liminal roles in the novels. Prim's role becomes more active in the later novels of the trilogy, but in *The Hunger Games* she is described as very passive, emotionally fragile, and helpless, which are all feminine traits. Sam has a more prominent storyline that is separate from Cassie's because parts of the story are written from his perspective.

Next, I will analyse the recreation of a traditional nuclear family that appears as a pattern in all three novels. As was previously mentioned, each novel features a love triangle, which is a common trope in the YA genre, thus each female hero has two male love interests who have an important role in their stories. Katniss has two love interests, Peeta and Gale, Cassie has Evan and Ben, and Melanie and Wanda have Jared and Ian. While the love triangle trope will be analysed in the next subchapter, in this subchapter the focus is on how these love interests connect to the theme of family in the novels.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, each female hero has formed a new

family of choice after the loss of their biological family unit. The found family consists of the female hero in the role of a mother, the female hero's love interest in the role of a father, and the female hero's younger sibling in the role of their child. In *The 5th Wave*, Cassie is separated from Sam for most of the novel, and thus she has not concretely formed a new family unit with him, but this is clearly her goal as her thoughts showcase, whereas Katniss and Melanie have already formed this new family unit by the beginning of the novels. Katherine R. Broad connects the ideal of a nuclear family with these novels' view of utopia: "This utopia is less a political arrangement than a conception of home as a stable, loving home and nuclear family, insular and protected from the outside world" (125). As Booker et al. stated, dystopian literature has a strong connection to utopia and utopian thinking. Even though in all three novels the female heroes want to work towards a new and better society, and social criticism is embedded in this utopian thinking, they consider the nuclear family unit as a utopia that they work towards even more than the better society. This is exemplified by how the female heroes' motivation in creating a new society is due to them wanting a better society for their siblings or their children, as will be analysed in more detail in Subchapter 4.1. when examining the female heroes' motivations for their heroic actions. These novels have a strong connection between utopia and the nuclear family, and this is exemplified by the ending of *The Hunger Games*. Broad recounts how the novel does not describe what the new society will be like after the war or how it is being formed (125); instead, the novel's ending describes Katniss' new family. The nuclear family is connected to traditional gender roles, women as mothers and wives, and in this way the novels showcase the nuclear family and happily ever after as utopian. Next, I will analyse how the girl heroes' love interests are presented as part of the recreated nuclear family in each novel.

In *The Hunger Games*, after losing her father and starting to hunt for food to provide for her family, Katniss meets Gale in the woods, and they start to hunt together. Gale's father has died, and he provides for his mother and younger siblings similar to Katniss. Katniss and Gale both think of the younger siblings as their children: "'If we didn't have so many kids,' [Gale] adds quickly.

They're not our kids, of course. But they might as well be. Gale's two little brothers and a sister. Prim. And you may as well throw in our mothers, too, because how would they live without us? Who would fill those mouths that are always asking for more?" (*The Hunger Games* 11). Katniss and Gale have had to grow up faster and take on more mature roles than children in normal circumstances. Simultaneously, their mothers can be seen as regressing to the role of children. Gale's connection to the father role is evident from how Katniss describes him as her partner: "Having a partner lightened the load, could even make the arduous task of filling my family's table enjoyable" (*The Hunger Games* 133). She also makes a connection between him and her late father: "Gale gave me a sense of security I'd lacked since my father's death" (*The Hunger Games* 135). This connects to gender roles, because fathers and husbands have traditionally been portrayed as protectors, and marriage has historically offered women a sense of social security that they lacked as unmarried women. Historically, women's social position was always viewed in connection to men, first through their fathers and then they gained a social position through their husbands; thus, unmarried women had very liminal rights and sense of social security compared to married women because they had to worry about what would happen to them in the case of their father's death. This connects to how Katniss has lost a sense of security after her father's death and gained it back through Gale. However, simultaneously Katniss challenges traditional gender roles by hunting with Gale and being his equal partner instead of having a more traditionally maternal role.

In *The Host*, Melanie has formed a family unit with her love interest, Jared, and her younger brother, Jamie, since they encountered Jared after having been on the run for two years. Even though Jared and Jamie are not related, Melanie describes them as follows: "They were family, the bonds between them stronger than any blood tie" (Meyer 168). After Melanie and Jamie unite with Jared, Jared very much adopts the role of a father, a provider, and a protector in the family unit, and in this family Melanie and Jared have very traditional roles of mother and father. After Wanda reunites with Jamie and Jared, she becomes part of the family unit, by adopting Melanie's feelings

for them. Similarly, Jamie begins to consider Wanda as a maternal figure because of her connection with Melanie, even though she is a separate being from her: "Jamie was watching us with a satisfied smile . . . What does he see when he looks at us? His family, put back together? Isn't it? Sort of?" (Meyer 373). The theme of recreating the family unit is a very important part of the novel's storyline; in addition to Melanie recreating a traditional family with Jared and Jamie, the novel begins when this family unit has been broken by Melanie being captured by the aliens. Her main objective is to reunite with her family, even if it is through Wanda. In order for the family unit to reunite, Wanda has to echo Melanie's maternal and romantic feelings, as was previously analysed.

As opposed to Katniss, Melanie, and Wanda, who all have already formed traditional family units by the point where the novels' story begins, Cassie is separated from her brother for most of the novel and is trying to get back to him during the entire first novel. However, when she falls in love with Evan, she dreams of forming a family unit with him and Sam: "I'd like to believe we're coming back, Evan. You, me, and Sammy, one big happy family" (*The 5th Wave* 337). Further, her other love interest, Ben, takes care of Sam when they meet in the aliens' army training centre and Sam is assigned to his squad and under his protection: "'Private [Sam], Private [Ben] is your squad leader, and you will bunk with him . . . He will be the big brother you never had'" (*The 5th Wave* 222). Some of Ben's squad members "laugh at [him] for mothering [Sam] . . . calling [him] [Sam's] Nanna" (*The 5th Wave* 223). This exemplifies how society deems feminine traits inferior or negative compared to masculine traits (Stone 881), and consequently, how men who express feminine traits are often ridiculed. It is significant that the characters make fun of Ben for "mothering" a child, instead of calling him a father figure for example, which is a role traditionally more valued by patriarchy.Even though Cassie dreams of forming a family unit with Evan and Sam, at the end of the novel, it is implied that she does this with Ben instead because Evan is thought to be dead. The novel ends as follows: "[Ben] puts his arm around me and we sit like that for a while, my arms around Sammy, Ben's arm around me, and together the three of us watch the sun break over the horizon, obliterating

the dark in a burst of golden light" (*The 5th Wave* 457). Thus, in Cassie's story the recreation of a nuclear family is also a very important part of the novel because it is essentially what directs all her actions throughout the novel; the novel is about her trying to reunite with Sam, and along the way, she wishes for her love interest to complete their family. In addition to the female heroes' having recreated the traditional family unit in the beginning of their stories, they also work towards achieving this or maintaining it throughout their storyline in the novels. In some cases, as in Katniss', the novel ends with them having formed the nuclear family with their love interest and their own children. This effectively constitutes a happily ever after, which is a traditional concept of romance literature, as was examined in Subchapter 2.2. The romantic plotlines of each female hero include a love triangle, and thus, in the end of the storyline, the love triangle is resolved by the female hero choosing one love interest over the other. The love triangle trope will be examined in more detail in Subchapter 3.2., but here I will analyse how the resolution of the love triangle constitutes the happily ever after.

In *The Host*, the love triangle is resolved by Wanda giving Melanie her body back and taking on another host body. At the end of the novel, Melanie and Jared are together, as are Wanda and Ian. Wanda finds the home and family that she has been looking for in all her different lives and in different planets with the group of human survivors, as well as with Melanie, Jamie, Jared, and Ian, who she describes as follows: "my nest of humans, my little family" (Meyer 504). Simultaneously, Melanie is reunited with her family unit, Jared and Jamie. This connects to *The Hunger Games* because the stories of Katniss, Wanda, and Melanie are essentially about the search for a family that they have lost due to the dystopian society or the apocalypse, and how they eventually manage to find it.

As for Cassie, her other love interest, Ben, is a trained soldier, but he and Cassie are separated for most of the novel. Cassie had a crush on Ben before the apocalypse, but Ben did not reciprocate the feeling and barely knew that Cassie existed. Even though they did not have any type of a relationship, Cassie describes her feelings for Ben as follows: "I wanted to see Ben Parish [again],

just to tell him I loved him and wanted to have his baby more than I wanted to live" (*The 5th Wave* 62). This is a very intense claim considering Cassie and Ben have no relationship, and it connects to the traditional gender role of women as mothers and how motherhood is associated with self-sacrifice, as was previously analysed. Moreover, Cassie refers to Ben as her "future husband" (*The 5th Wave* 16) in addition to her "future boyfriend" (*The 5th Wave* 16). This distinction again implies her underlying view of marriage as the eventual goal of a woman's life. The ending of Cassie's storyline is not connected to the happily ever after concept and due to this it will be analysed separately in Subchapter 4.2.

Out of all the primary material's female heroes, Katniss has the most traditional ending to her storyline. In the end, she chooses Peeta over Gale, and they return to District 12 after the war, get married, and have two children. This is very much in contrast with how Katniss is sure that she will never get married or have children throughout the trilogy. She tells Gale: "I never want kids" (*The Hunger Games* 11). This aspect of Katniss' character challenges traditional gender roles. However, she names the dystopian society as the reason why she does not want children, as she cannot bear to subject them to the same suffering that she and other citizens of District 12 have had to deal with: "I know I'll never marry, never risk bringing a child into the world . . . My kids' names would go straight into the reaping balls with everyone else's. And I swear I'll never let that happen" (*The Hunger Games* 378-79). She does not want to get married because she thinks her husband would want children and she would not want him to give that up simply for her. At the end of the novel, when she does have children, Katniss admits to Peeta persuading her to do it at the end of the trilogy and feeling terrified during her pregnancies: "It took five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree. But Peeta wanted them so badly. When I first felt her stirring inside of me, I was consumed with a terror that felt as old as life itself. Only the joy of holding her in my arm could tame it. Carrying him was a little easier, but not much" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 437). Considering Katniss' initial reasons for not wanting children, her getting married and having children after the war has ended is understandable, because

her fears regarding the Games and other dangers related to the dystopian society have been resolved, as a new society is being built.

However, many scholars have criticised the ending of the trilogy because Katniss has been mostly portrayed as a hero with many masculine traits who differs from and challenges traditional gender roles by not being interested in romance, not wanting to get married or have children. Despite how Katniss is in many ways depicted as a non-traditional female protagonist – as she is not interested in romance and does not see this in her future – this depiction is contradicted multiple times in the novel. When she thinks about her future without Peeta or Gale, she describes this future as follows: "there's only a tremendous void. A pale grey nothingness that is all my future holds" (*Mockingjay* 186). Thus, Katniss feels that her future is integrally linked with that of her love interests', and she does not see any future for herself without them. Deborah O'Keefe calls Katniss' story ending in marriage a "cop-out pattern" because Katniss "ultimately [gives] up [her] independent vision and [subsides] … into traditional behaviour" (22). Annis Pratt argues that these kinds of female adolescence narratives depict a phenomenon that she calls "growing down", because "[t]he protagonists begin as selfassured [sic] young women who question their subordinate place in society, but the endings find them less active, less assertive, and reintegrated into society through marriage" (30). The pattern Pratt describes is still evident in Girl on Fire narratives, as I argue in this thesis, and it connects to my previous argument of how these novels depict girl heroes who challenge traditional gender roles only during their adolescence, and who eventually learn to comply with them when they grow up. This contrasts with how Sarah Hentges previously described Girls on Fire as transformative and rebellious protagonists. I argue that they portray these characteristics only during the middle of their storyline; at the beginning and the end of their storylines, the protagonists occupy very traditional roles, which reinforce traditional gender roles instead of challenging them.

Moreover, it is important to note that Katniss has always wanted to recreate the nuclear family that she lost due to her father's death. She managed to achieve this temporarily through her

family with Gale, but the family unit is destroyed after Prim dies at the end of the trilogy in *Mockingjay*. This can explain Katniss' decision to be with Peeta at the end of her story, because with him she has the possibility to create a real nuclear family, not just a family-of-choice that is born out of a necessity to survive. Additionally, Gale was part of her family unit with Prim and in a way failed to protect Prim because the bomb that killed her was possibly designed by him. Katniss cannot get past this, and it is one of the reasons why she chooses Peeta over Gale: "'Was it your bomb?' [Gale answers:] 'I don't know . . . Does it matter? You'll always be thinking about it.' He waits for me to deny it; I want to deny it, but it's true . . . I will never be able to separate that moment from Gale . . . 'That was the one thing I had going for me. Taking care of your family,' he says" (*Mockingjay* 413). Gale himself thinks that Katniss only loved him and considered him as a romantic partner because he helped provide for and take care of her family. This is another example of how much Katniss' actions are affected by her family.

The end of the trilogy depicts Katniss living in the deserted graveyard of District 12, where only her family and Haymitch returned after the war, removed from the outside world and the rebuilding of a new society that she fought so hard for during the war and in the Games. Thus, she voluntarily chooses a passive life over a life in the public sphere. Consequently, Katniss' agency is limited by her redomestication. This, again, connects to traditional gender roles; Katniss returns to the domestic, private sphere, where her story began. After stepping into the public sphere as a famous tribute and victor, as well as the Mockingjay, the face of the rebellion and a political activist, she chooses to remove herself from that sphere and fulfil her search for a stable and safe nuclear family by starting a family with Peeta. Feminism advocates that women should have a choice in how they enact femininity (Heberle 606), and all choices should be regarded as equally valuable. Therefore, choosing to be a mother should be as valid a choice as masculine professional paths. Therefore, criticizing the domestic ending of Katniss' story is contradictory. However, I argue that even though motherhood is as valid a choice as any other, it is important to note that literature and popular culture

have traditionally depicted this ending in most stories about women and girls, as was shown in Chapter 2. Having this be a pattern in YA dystopian literature's depictions of girl heroes implies that motherhood is not simply a choice if other choices and endings are not equally represented in the genre. A choice implies that women have other options as well, but those choices were not equally represented by YA dystopia's initial girl heroes.

This subchapter identified multiple patterns related to family and proved my claim that family and motherhood are one of the biggest themes in YA dystopian narratives that portray female heroes. These patterns can be connected to the Girl on Fire trend, and due to the findings of the analysis, it is possible to conclude that Girls on Fire often view a stable nuclear family as a utopia, which they aim to achieve, and this motivates their heroic actions. Typically, narratives about Girls on Fire end in happily ever after, which repositions them into the private/domestic sphere from which they broke out of due to their heroism. Hentges supports this by her definition of Girls on Fire: "Most often her story ends happily – which often means with the boy/the love she cannot live without" (7). However, she does not remark on the ways in which a traditional happily ever after ending reinforces traditional gender roles and how this has been a common trait in depictions of female adolescence throughout the history of YA, as was established in Subchapter 2.1. All in all, the Girl on Fire narratives' emphasis on family reinforces marriage, motherhood, and heteronormativity as desirable outcomes of women's lives, which is in contrast with the masculine and transformative traits of female heroism. Thus, I argue that Girls on Fire are in fact Mothers on Fire due to the strong emphasis the stories place on motherhood.

3.2. Love Triangles and Agency

This subchapter will more closely analyse themes that are related to romance and the romantic plotlines of each female hero. I will analyse how the female heroes' agency is affected by their romances and compare their agency and gender roles to those of their love interests'. This subchapter will also examine the novels' love triangles and how the romantic plotlines position the female heroes

as objects of desire, which is a traditional role for women in literature and popular media. I will analyse the differences of each girl hero's two male love interests and what they represent to the protagonist.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' two love interests, Gale and Peeta, are very different; Gale in many ways represents traditionally masculine traits, while Peeta represents feminine traits. Gale's role as Katniss' hunting partner and father figure in their family unit was analysed in the previous subchapter. Katniss and Peeta, on the other hand, pretend to have a romance as a strategy in the Games, and this aspect of their romance is analysed more extensively later on in this subchapter. Peeta is very much the opposite of Gale and has many feminine traits, which is quite unusual of male love interests and male characters in general. In some ways, Katniss and Peeta's romance depicts a reversal of traditional gender roles, with the contrast of Katniss exhibiting many masculine traits and Peeta in turn feminine. In the Games, Katniss hunts food for them and they discuss this as follows: "'I won't be much help with that,' Peeta says. 'I've never hunted before.' 'I'll kill and you cook,' [Katniss says]. 'And you can always gather'" (*The Hunger Games* 359). Hunting is a traditionally masculine task, while gathering and preparation of food have traditionally been feminine tasks. Peeta's inability to perform masculine tasks like hunting reverses traditional gender roles and consequently affects the power dynamic in the relationship.

As McNay previously stated, agency is connected to power (41), and the reversal of traditional gender roles and Katniss' masculine traits contributes to her having more agency in the Games, and consequently, leaves Peeta with less agency and less power over their situation. Peeta openly admits to this, and in addition to relying on Katniss' hunting, he reverses traditional gender roles by having Katniss protect him from one of the most dangerous tributes, instead of him, as the man, being the protector: "'Cato could be right outside our cave.' [Katniss says] . . . 'What do I care? I've got you to protect me now,' says Peeta" (*The Hunger Games* 380). Even though Katniss is in many ways portrayed as having more masculine traits than Peeta, Peeta still has some masculine traits

as well. Katniss is more skilled in hunting, but Peeta is also presented as unusually strong, and he saves Katniss' life in the Games as well (*The Hunger Games* 235). This makes their relationship more equal regarding power and agency.

However, Katniss finds it difficult to be patient with Peeta's lack of survival skills in their first Games and compares him to Gale who is more willing to act and take risks. Moreover, she makes fun of Peeta mentioning that he has artistic skills, which he learned working at his family's bakery: "'I do the cakes,' Peeta admits to me . . . Fancy cakes with flowers and pretty things painted in frosting . . . 'It's lovely. If only you could frost someone to death,' I say. 'Don't be so superior' Peeta says" (*The Hunger Games* 117). Peeta referring to Katniss as superior is a clear reversal of traditional gender roles because women have traditionally been considered inferior to men. However, this still implies that traditionally masculine traits are superior to traditionally feminine traits because Katniss feels superior to Peeta due to her masculine hunting skills. Nevertheless, this reversal of gender roles was a departure from previous YA romance narratives because the patriarchal aspects of a heteronormative romance have been reversed by Collins, who depicts how Peeta is reliant on Katniss instead of the female character relying on the male one. Consequently, Katniss and Peeta's romance differs from the romance narratives in *The Host* and *The 5th Wave*, which depict more traditional romances.

The contrast between Gale representing male traits and Peeta representing feminine traits affects how Katniss feels about her two love interests and how she makes a choice between them. In the second novel of the trilogy, the Capitol and its President force Katniss to continue pretending to have a romance with Peeta and eventually this means she has to marry him: "He means there's only one future, if I want to keep those I love alive and stay alive myself. I'll have to marry Peeta" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 54). Consequently, in the second novel Peeta comes to symbolise the Capitol's control over Katniss, and she rebels against this by choosing Gale who represents very different things to her: "I have chosen Gale and the rebellion, and a future with Peeta is the Capitol's

design, not mine" (*Catching Fire* 147). Gale represents rebellion with his masculine traits and willingness to speak out against the oppressive government, while Peeta represents feminine traits and the tradition of marriage. Thus, by choosing Gale in the beginning of the second novel, she simultaneously chooses to rebel against the oppressive dystopian society and her rebellion is conscious compared to how she rebelled unintentionally in the first novel.

When Katniss eventually makes the decision to choose Peeta over Gale at the end of the trilogy, this is again influenced by the previously analysed differences between the two love interests. She reflects on her decision to choose Peeta over Gale as follows: "I know this would have happened anyway. That what I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 436). The fire she refers to can be seen as a metaphor for masculinity because she mentions both she and Gale have fire, thus she does not need a partner with similar masculine traits but instead a partner like Peeta, who is different from her. As Gale mentions in a discussion he has with Peeta: "Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can't survive without" (*Mockingjay* 371). The resolution of the love triangle challenges traditional gender roles because "Katniss and Peeta— the hunter and the baker— offer something that Gale and Katniss never could have: a partnership that helps us imagine an alternative to dominant romance narratives and a way of valuing both masculine and feminine roles, regardless of who fills them" (Miller 159). However, Katniss' redomestication is linked to the resolution of the love triangle, and in the previous chapter I analysed how that aspect of the romance narrative complies with traditional gender roles.

In *The Host*, the two love interests represent different things similar to *The Hunger Games*. Jared is described to have masculine traits and idolised by Melanie as well as the entire survivor community due to these traits: "'You're the best," Jeb agreed. 'You changed our lives when you showed up here.' Melanie and I nodded to ourselves; this didn't surprise either of us. Jared is

magic. Jamie and I were perfectly safe while Jared's instincts guided us; we never came close to getting caught. If it had been Jared in Chicago, I'm sure he would have made it out fine" (Meyer 187-188). Melanie relies on Jared's intellect and skills after they form a family unit and feels that his skills are superior to hers. This is similar to Cassie's romance narrative in *The 5th Wave*, which will be analysed later on in this subchapter.

The two love interests also have very different attitudes towards Wanda and Melanie' agency. When they wish to leave the cave where they are hiding and risk going into the outside world Jared supports this, while Ian is very opposed to it and says he "has to protect her from herself" (Meyer 474). Thus, implying that Wanda does not know what is good for her. This can be associated with how women have traditionally been thought to need a man's protection, as well as how women have been excluded from the public sphere, which traditionally belonged to men, as was established by Blunt et al. in Subchapter 2.2.

Next, I will analyse how the romantic plotlines position the female heroes as objects of desire. Romance is in a very important role throughout Katniss' storyline because of the emphasis the Games have on sponsors and the audience's expectations, and next I will analyse her and Peeta's romance as a strategy in the Games, the reasons why this strategy was necessary, and how it affects Katniss' agency. Katniss and Peeta become celebrities due to their role as tributes in the Games, but especially due to their portrayal as "[t]he star-crossed lovers from District Twelve" (*The Hunger Games* 164). This conception of the two characters emerges due to Peeta proclaiming his love for Katniss unbeknownst to her on live television. Katniss is furious with Peeta because she feels that his confession has "made [her] look weak" (*The Hunger Games* 164). However, Katniss' mentor Haymitch tells her:

> [Peeta] just gave you something you could never achieve on your own . . . He made you look desirable! And let's face it, you can use all the help you can get in that department. You were about as romantic as dirt until he said he wanted you. Now they all do . . . It's

> all a big show. It's all how you're perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you're a heartbreaker. Oh, oh, oh, how the boys back home fall longingly at your feet. Which do you think will get you more sponsors? (*The Hunger Games* 164)

This is connected to traditional gender roles and how patriarchy defines women's value in terms of men. Haymitch's claim that Katniss' worth has increased tremendously due to Peeta wanting her showcases how the dystopian society views women in a similar way to patriarchal societies. Alone Katniss is forgettable and does not appear special or stand out in the audience's or the sponsors minds, but a romance with Peeta allows them to see her as desirable, and moreover as an object of desire, which is a traditionally feminine role, as was established in Subchapter 2.2. The sponsors and the audience can be connected to the male gaze, which refers to women's visual objectification "in which normative male subject positions function as the ideal viewer" (Wanzo 658). In addition to the pretend romance with Peeta, Katniss is mentored to perform for the audience and to comply with traditional gender roles because that is what the audience will respond to. Katniss is ordered to portray feminine traits for the audience, to wear "pretty little-girl dresses" (*Catching Fire* 252), to smile, and to act in agreeable ways expected of women. Consequently, the Games' audience can be analysed as a metaphor for the male gaze and patriarchy.

Peeta's declaration positions Katniss in a more passive position, with Peeta being the subject and her the object, and this is magnified by the fact that she does not have any power over the decision to initiate this narrative about herself. Peeta acts and she reacts, and as can be seen throughout the trilogy, Peeta's decision affects their lives profoundly. Furthermore, Haymitch states that Katniss could never have achieved this response from the audience on her own; thus her success in the Games is profoundly linked to her romance with Peeta, regardless of what she accomplishes on her own. Later on in the Games, Haymitch only sends Katniss food if she acts on her fake romance with Peeta: "One kiss equals one pot of broth" (*The Hunger Games* 316). Through the gifted food, the sponsors,

and Katniss' mentor, imply that a romance with Peeta is an obligatory narrative she needs to play out in order to survive. The sponsors are part of the Capitol society which is depicted as the dystopian society that is deeply flawed and needs to be overthrown. Consequently, the sponsors and audience of the Games can also be viewed as social criticism of how patriarchy views women.

Katniss' reaction to Peeta, the sponsors, and her mentor forcing her to comply with traditional gender roles is important to analyse. She describes her success in the eyes of the sponsors and recounts how she was simply complying to her team's orders and reacting to Peeta's actions: "And there I am, blushing and confused, made beautiful by Cinna's hands, desirable by Peeta's confession, tragic by circumstance, and by all accounts, unforgettable" (167). This description shows how passive Katniss is in the first novel of the trilogy and how she does not challenge her team when they order her to comply to traditional gender roles. Moreover, she reflects on Peeta's declaration as follows: "Haymitch is right. I survived my interview, but what was I really? A silly girl spinning in a sparkling dress. Giggling . . . I'm forgettable. Silly and sparkly and forgettable . . . But now Peeta has made me an object of love. Not just his. To hear him tell it, I have many admirers" (*The Hunger Games* 165). She herself uses the word "object", and this relates to how women are objectified by society and men. It is important to note that Katniss views this as a positive development after her initial rage towards Peeta. Thus, even though the novel presents the sponsors and the dystopian society as social criticism, in the first novel Katniss' character reads as an adolescent girl who passively follows her team's instructions and learns to go along with the society's expectations of women. This internalization of patriarchal values and seeing them as something positive and modelling oneself according to them implies many things to the adolescent readers of the genre who are similarly still learning about gender and society's views about it.

The importance of romance and Peeta's role in Katniss winning the Games can be seen as diminishing her agency; even though she is a very strong, in many ways non-traditional, masculine female hero, this is often overshadowed by the traditional aspects of the narrative. This is repeated in

the later novels of the trilogy, when Peeta lies to the audience of their second Games and claims that he and Katniss got married secretly and that Katniss is pregnant with their child. Therefore, in the eyes of the Games' audience and the rebels, she occupies the traditional role of a wife and a mother in the last two novels of the trilogy. These roles are still present when she becomes the voice of the rebellion.

Even after the Games when Katniss is rescued by the rebels and she becomes the face of the revolution as the Mockingjay, the fictional romantic narrative is still not discarded. The rebels want Katniss to play out a narrative for the audience as the Mockingjay, similar to how she was forced to do in the Games. She cannot be herself and has to still comply with traditionally feminine traits and traditional gender roles like dressing up and pretending she is married to Peeta and miscarried his child, even though she previously chose Gale: "'Do you want [Gale] presented as your new lover?' . . . 'I think we should continue the current romance. A quick defection from Peeta could cause the audience to lose sympathy for her,' says Plutarch. 'Especially since they think she's pregnant with his child.' . . . The very notion that I'm devoting any thought to who I want presented as my lover, given our current circumstances, is demeaning" (*Mockingjay* 44-45). Katniss herself calls the emphasis placed on her love interests "demeaning". This connects to how patriarchy views women in terms of men and how their accomplishments are often overshadowed by their romantic relationships. The same phenomenon is present in the first novel when Katniss wins the Games but has to emphasise how all her actions were due to her love for Peeta, thus they are overshadowed by their romance.

The objectification of women present in Katniss' storyline can be connected to how Melanie is viewed in *The Host*. In the novel, the love triangle is different from the other two novels because Melanie and Wanda share the same body, yet they have separate love interests. Melanie loves Jared while Wanda falls in love with Ian. However, Wanda also adopts Melanie's feelings for Jared due to inhabiting the body that, according to her, loves Jared (Meyer 90). The novel's storyline of

Melanie's body being possessed by an alien emphasises Melanie's body compared to her mind. Melanie is often referred to with the word "body", and her body is viewed as belonging to her love interest Jared. The first time this is mentioned in the novel is when Melanie's Uncle Jeb, who is the leader of the human resistance, lays down the rule of who has the power to decide what happens to Melanie/Wanda when it is discovered that Melanie has been taken over by an alien. Uncle Jeb declares that "whoever the body belongs to makes the call" (Meyer 149). He declares that Melanie's body belongs to Jared and Jamie and that they have the power to decide whether she will be killed or not. Later on, Jared stakes his claim on Melanie's body when Ian becomes romantically interested in Wanda: "The body and the person locked inside it belong to me" (Meyer 384). This pattern of male possessiveness can also be seen in *The 5th Wave* when Cassie cuts her hair and Evan's reaction to this prompts her to think: "I guess I was supposed to ask his permission first. Like he owns me. Like I'm a puppy he found lost in the snow" (*The 5th Wave* 336). This view of male possession and power over the female body is echoed by Wanda and Melanie: "This body barely belonged to me or to Melanie – it belonged to him" (Meyer 579). The view of Melanie as "the body" and the female heroes as something that their love interests own is connected to traditional gender roles and how women are objectified by society. Additionally, it echoes how patriarchy has viewed women as men's possessions. This claim is supported by Radway, who has studied the patriarchy's influences on romance narratives. Radway claims that "romance . . . is never simply a love story, [but] also an exploration of the meaning of patriarchy for women. As a result, it is concerned with the fact that men possess and regularly exercise power over them in all sorts of circumstance" (75). Viewing Melanie in terms of her body also relates to the objectification of women and how they are sexualised as objects of desire.

The view of the female heroes as objects of desire is also supported by the love triangle narrative. The love triangle narrative of two boys fighting for the love of one girl is a very common plot device in YA literature, and it is also used in its other subgenres for example in YA fantasy, not

only in YA dystopia (Montz 107). It is important to note that love triangles appear in narratives about male protagonists as well, but I argue that this does not happen as often as with female protagonists, and the narrative is usually not as prominent as with female protagonists. This is partly because romance is often mostly a subplot and not as central in narratives about male protagonists, and partly because the roles of female love interests are more liminal than those of male love interests.

Out of all three female heroes, Cassie's agency is the most affected by romance. Cassie's reduced agency is a departure from the other two primary material novels where the female heroes have very active roles. Katniss is a skilled fighter and does not hesitate to kill. Compared to Katniss, Melanie relies on Jared for survival, but does this to a lesser degree than Cassie. Out of Cassie's two love interests, Evan is described as her saviour, a combat-skilled, masculine alien who does most of Cassie's fighting for her, and consequently, Cassie adopts a more passive role once she begins a romantic relationship with him. Cassie recounts how integral Evan is to her survival: "He kept me from dying. Fed me, bathed me, protected me. He helped me get strong. He even taught me how to kill" (*The 5th Wave* 359). Thus, even Cassie's fighting skills are due to Evan's as well as her father's teaching, and Cassie admits she would have died without Evan "sav[ing] [her] ass more times than [she] can remember" (*The 5th Wave* 358), albeit Evan was the alien sniper who shot Cassie and manipulated her into thinking he was her saviour. In the end when Cassie finds out it was in fact Evan who shot her, she is already in love with him and needs his help in rescuing her brother. Even though in the beginning of the novel Cassie is a tough survivor who has managed to survive on her own and even killed someone, by the end of the novel, the novel depicts how she grows down, which is a phenomenon previously defined in Subchapter 4.1., by assuming a more passive position and depicting how she relies on Evan and does not think she or her brother can survive without his help.

The romance between Evan and Cassie is often described in terms of Evan being the hunter and Cassie being the prey: "Well, this is a tragic love story, isn't it? Alien invader falls for human girl. The hunter for his prey" (*The 5th Wave* 363). This again connects to the star-crossed-

lovers narrative which is similar to Katniss and Peeta being called the star-crossed-lovers of District Twelve. Cassie and Evan are on opposite sides of the war, which has begun between the humans and aliens due to the apocalypse. Each side's goal is to exterminate the other side, and yet Cassie is referred to as the prey instead of as the hunter, like Evan. This can be connected to traditional gender roles regarding women's passivity. Moreover, this description is important to the romance narrative because that narrative similarly depicts Cassie as the naïve girl who falls prey to Evan, who has executed an elaborate scheme in order to manipulate Cassie into trusting and loving him. After Cassie discovers who Evan really is, she realises how naïve she has been and reasons that her naivety was due to Evan's good looks: "[I was] [f]urious at myself for breaking the first rule [don't trust anyone] for the first cute guy that came along" (*The 5th Wave* 356). Cassie is very passive in the romantic narrative as well. Things happen to her, for example Evan saving her and moving her in with him, and she simply accepts them. Cassie does not question Evan's story regardless of his suspicious behaviour, and this contributes to how her character is portrayed to be immature and childish, much more so than Katniss and Melanie's characters, even though they are adolescents as well.

Most of the action is reserved for Evan's character at the end of the novel. When they leave to rescue Sam and encounter soldiers, Cassie runs while Evan fights them off: "he's out there alone against pros, and where am I? Hiding behind a tree like a girl" (*The 5th Wave* 343). This can be linked to traditional gender roles and how action has been reserved for men and passivity for women. Furthermore, both Evan and Cassie think Cassie cannot manage on her own and that she needs to rely on Evan. This is evident from the phrase "like a girl" (343) that Cassie herself uses: "[t]he assertion that someone has done something 'like a girl' has long been an accusation of failure, ineptitude, or at a minimum, inadequacy" (Chase 1). Evan tells Cassie that: "You won't last two minutes out there without me" (*The 5th Wave* 174), while Cassie similarly thinks that: "I had my chance and I didn't do so well on my own. In fact, I sucked. I would have died if Evan hadn't found me" (*The 5th Wave* 267). Women's reliance on men is part of traditional gender roles because they denote that women are not

as strong as men and need men to protect them, and this limits women's agency. In the later novels of the trilogy, Cassie performs even less heroic actions. Evan's character is described as "single handedly blowing up the facility and taking out a whole squad of soldiers" (Yancey, *The Infinite Sea* 12), whereas a side character describes Cassie to be content to simply "[hang] out . . . waiting for [her] alien prince to come" (*The Infinite Sea* 48).

Cassie's passivity is also exemplified by the sexual interaction between her and Evan. Evan initiates their first kiss, and even though Cassie verbally refuses the kiss, Evan does not stop: "And then Evan Walker kisses me . . . 'Don't kiss me.' . . . He lays me on the bed. I say, right before he kisses me again, 'If you kiss me again, I'm going to knee you in the balls.' . . . 'I won't let you just . . .' He searches for the right word. '. . . fly away from me, Cassie Sullivan'" (*The 5th Wave* 178-179). Evan continues kissing Cassie despite her refusals, and eventually Cassie cries and accepts the kiss. This connects to the patriarchal view of the female body as something a man owns, and Cassie does not have self-determination over her own body in the romantic narrative. These traditional gender roles have affected women's limited sexual agency which in turn has contributed to an imbalance of power in situations such as Cassie and Evan's. Cassie does not have control over the sexual activity; she verbally expresses how she does not want Evan to kiss her, but he does it regardless of her wishes. Evan acts and Cassie is the passive body that the actions are carried out on, regardless of her own wishes. Radway discusses female sexuality in relation to men's forcefulness and non-consensual actions:

> I suspect [women's] willingness to see male force interpreted as passion is also the product of a wish to be seen as so desirable to the 'right' man that he will not take 'no' for an answer. Because he finds her irresistible, the heroine need not take any responsibility for her own sexual feelings. She avoids the difficulty of choosing whether to act on them or not. Although female sexuality is thus approvingly incorporated into

> the romantic fantasy, the individual ultimately held responsible for it is not the woman herself but, once again, a man. (77)

Therefore, female sexuality connects to traditional gender roles in how women must be desirable but simultaneously innocent and pure. Thus, if the man controls all sexual action, the girl hero seems more innocent, even if the man's advances are wanted. Patriarchy has used traditional gender roles as a reasoning for men's power over women regarding sexual activity; if the woman says no, it is often considered as simply being modest or innocent, not as a negation, and this has been used as a justification for non-consensual sexual activity that men have initiated.

This subchapter identified patterns related to romance which are in an important role in the female heroes' stories. These patterns can be connected to the Girl on Fire trend, and due to the findings of the analysis it is possible to conclude that romance and male love interests are in an integral role in female heroes' stories. The romantic plotlines often position the Girls on Fire in passive positions. The narratives feature love triangles, which position Girls on Fire as objects of desire.

4. Mothers on Fire

This chapter will analyse how the previously established traditional gender roles related to nurture and motherhood affect the female heroes' agency. It will offer a more in-depth analysis of two of the feminine traits that Tyson lists; "nurturing" and "self-sacrificing" (85-86). I argue that most, if not all, of the girl heroes' heroic actions are motivated by nurture and the need to protect their family, most often their younger siblings, but sometimes their love interests as well. Additionally, I will analyse the connection between the female heroes' heroic actions and self-sacrifice. Each protagonist either sacrifices, or tries to sacrifice themselves for their loved ones, and, moreover, for the greater good, multiple times in the novels. Their actions will be analysed in terms of the feminine traits nurture and self-sacrifice, and how these traits affect their agency and their heroism.

4.1. Motives for Agency – A Promise to Act

The goal of this subchapter is to prove my argument that the female heroes' maternal roles motivate their heroic actions, thus affecting their agency. The analysis begins by examining the events that functioned as the initial catalysts for each female hero's heroic journey, and then moves on to analyse their heroic actions throughout different points of their storyline.

The primary material novels and these specific female heroes were chosen for this thesis because they all have similar plots, but most importantly because all the female heroes initially take on heroic roles due to a promise made to their younger sibling. The importance the three novels place on this storyline related to promises has not been studied from this perspective before, and that was the reason why I initially chose to analyse this topic. Most of the previous studies on these novels have focused on how the female heroes challenge traditional gender roles, some of these, such as Day et al.'s, noting that the female heroes' actions are often motivated by their wish to protect their families. However, they have not focused on studying how central the promises made for maternal reasons are to the female heroes' storylines and how they work as catalysts for their heroic actions.

This subchapter will aim to establish a pattern regarding nurture and motherhood as motives for agency. This is important because it will be connected to the Girl on Fire trend, which these girl heroes are part of.

At the beginning of each novel, the female hero makes a promise to their younger sibling, which then motivates their actions for their entire storyline and positions them on a path to female heroism. As was previously analysed in Subchapter 3.1., the female heroes often consider themselves as a mother to their younger siblings, thus the promises made to them are connected to motherhood as well. Each female hero performs many heroic actions due to trying to uphold their promise. Therefore, the promise, and motherhood, are what initially motivates them to become female heroes.

At the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss volunteers to take her sister Prim's place in the Games. Katniss knows that as a tribute from District 12, the poorest district, her chances of surviving the Games are practically non-existent. However, Prim asks her to promise that she would try to win the Games and come back home to her family: "'I just want you to come home. You will try, won't you? Really, really try?' asks Prim. 'Really, really try. I swear it,' I say. And I know, because of Prim, I'll have to" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 44). From that point on Katniss tries to stay alive and win the Games, which she eventually manages to do by killing some of the tributes and by outsmarting and besting the most skilled Careers in combat. All these actions are consequently motivated by her promise to Prim.

In addition to the promise Katniss makes to Prim, she is motivated by a promise she makes to Rue, a tribute that she felt similar maternal feelings for as Prim. When Rue is killed, she asks Katniss to win, similar to how Prim did, and Katniss again promises to do it for her: "'You have to win,' she says. 'I'm going to. Going to win for both of us now,' I promise" (*The Hunger Games* 283). Later on, Katniss reflects on the two promises she has made as follows: "I told Rue I'd [win]. For both of us. And somehow that seems even more important than the vow I gave Prim . . . Now I

am determined to avenge her, to make her loss unforgettable, and I can only do that by winning and thereby making myself unforgettable" (*The Hunger Games* 293). Katniss is motivated not simply to win, but also to avenge Rue, and this is one of the initial signs of her thinking about taking rebellious action against the oppressive dystopian society. She cannot forgive what they have forced Rue and Prim to be subjected to. Katniss had rebellious thoughts already at the beginning of her story, but this is one of the first times she thinks about acting on them. Thus, Katniss' rebellion is connected to, and motivated by, motherhood, and how she does not want children to suffer. Katniss' actions to win the Games are what position her on a trajectory towards becoming the Mockingjay, the face of the rebellion and a political activist, in the later novels of the trilogy. Therefore, the role she later takes on is a consequence of her promise and the heroic actions she does in order to save her sister.

Similar to Katniss, Melanie makes a promise to her younger brother, Jamie, at the beginning of her story. She is going to find other human survivors and be separated from him, and Jamie asks her to promise that she will come back when he is worried about the aliens capturing and killing Melanie: "'I'm scared you won't come back. Like Dad.' . . . 'I'll come back. I always come back.' . . . 'I promise everything will be fine. I'm coming back. I promise. You know I won't break a promise, Jamie. Not to you'" (Meyer 85). When Melanie is captured by the aliens and inhabited by Wanda, she does not die like most humans, but her mind stays present and Wanda can hear her thoughts: "*Mine*, spoke the alien thought that should not have existed. Again, I was frozen, stunned. There should have been no one here but me. And yet this thought was so strong and so aware! Impossible. How was she still here?" (Meyer 13). Her force of will keeps her alive, and she is even strong enough to block Wanda's access to some of her memories for long periods of time in order to protect Jamie from being found by the aliens. When Wanda finally finds out about Jamie, she thinks: "For a panicked moment I wondered at her control. All this time, and I'd never even guessed at the boy's existence – not because he didn't matter to her, but because she protected him more fiercely than other secrets I'd unraveled . . . Was she that strong?" (Meyer 38-39). Eventually, Melanie

influences Wanda to such an extent that she worries about losing control of the body and Melanie taking over: “Sometimes I feel like she’s as present as I am . . . It’s getting worse. Instead of fading, she seems to be growing stronger . . . I finally admitted to her power” (Meyer 45). Melanie is described as very powerful and strong, and her unforeseen capability to stay alive in Wanda’s head is due to her wanting to keep her promise to Jamie. A friend of Wanda’s describes Wanda’s struggle against Melanie as follows:

> You are strong. Surprisingly strong. Our kind are always so much the same, but you exceed the norm. You’re so brave it astonishes me. Your past lives are a testament to that . . . I truly believe that if anyone else had been put into this host, Melanie would have crushed them in days. Maybe it’s an accident, maybe it’s fate, but it appears to me that the strongest of our kind is being hosted by the strongest of theirs. (Meyer 46)

Thus, both Melanie and Wanda are portrayed as unusually strong, which challenges traditional gender roles. However, as was established in Subchapter 3.1., the souls have many feminine traits as well, and Melanie’s masculine traits, such as her willingness to resort to violence, are often contrasted with Wanda’s feminine traits.

When Melanie’s feelings begin to influence Wanda and she eventually adapts them, she falls in love with Jared and feels maternal feelings towards Jamie. Due to this, Melanie is able to influence Wanda to escape the alien society and go find her family. When they almost die in the desert looking for them and Wanda has no strength left, Melanie manages to take over the body from Wanda in order to keep her promise to Jamie: “Melanie was, as always, tougher than I. I could feel her now, not just in my head but in my limbs. My stride lengthened; the path I made was straighter. By sheer force of will, she dragged my half-dead carcass toward the impossible goal” (Meyer 113). Due to Melanie’s resilience, they eventually find Jamie and Jared and Melanie keeps her promise: “*I wish I could tell him that I kept my promise*. *You certainly did*. I shook my head, amazed. *No one can say that you didn’t come back, just like always*” (Meyer 143). Consequently, the reason why Melanie

resists Wanda's invasion of her body and stays alive is her promise to Jamie and her maternal bond with him, and she even influences Wanda to help her in keeping her promise.

Cassie, similar to Melanie, is separated from her younger brother Sam during her storyline. Cassie makes her first promise to Sam when the aliens initially invade Earth, and Sam says: "'Don't let them get me, Cassie. Don't let me die. 'You're not going to die, Sams.' 'Promise?' I promised" (Yancey, *The 5th Wave* 69). She promises to keep her brother safe and does this at any cost. Cassie makes Sam another promise when she and Sam are separated: "'You're going to come later, Cassie?' 'You bet I am.' 'Promise?' I promised. Whatever happened. No. Matter. What" (*The 5th Wave* 82). This promise is what motivates her actions during the entire first novel of the trilogy, and she reflects on the promise as follows: "I know where I have to go. I've known for a long time. I made a promise. The kind of promise you don't break because, if you break it, you've broken part of yourself, maybe the most important part" (*The 5th Wave* 14). She refers to her promise, and consequently Sam and her maternal role, as the most important part of herself, thus emphasizing motherhood as an integral part of her personality and storyline. This can be seen as a reasoning and motive for all her actions in the first novel, and it connects to the other female heroes as well because they view their promises in a very similar way to Cassie.

Cassie acts heroically and exhibits immense courage when she is trying to survive in order to find and rescue Sam from the aliens who have captured him. When she is gunned down by an alien hunter, she herself states that the only reason why she fights and does not give up is Sam and her promise to him:

> I guess I have to talk about Sammy now. I don't know how else to get there. There being that first inch in the open, where the sunlight kissed my scraped-up cheek when I slid out from under the Buick . . . There being that place on the highway where I turned to face the enemy I couldn't see. There being the one thing that's kept me from going completely crazy, the thing the Others haven't been able to take from me after taking

> everything from me. Sammy is the reason I didn't give up. Why I didn't stay beneath that car and wait for the end. (*The 5th Wave* 55)

Consequently, Sam is the reason why Cassie has the courage to face and fight the alien who is trying to kill her: "I am the one still standing. I am the one turning to face the faceless hunter . . . I am the one not running, not staying, but facing . . . if this is humanity's last war, then I am the battlefield" (*The 5th Wave* 101). This is one of Cassie's most meaningful heroic actions, and she explicitly states it is motivated by her promise and consequently also by her maternal role. It is very significant how Cassie continuously thinks of Sam in situations such as this one, when she needs to find courage and act bravely and heroically. She can rarely find the strength to act in dangerous situations if she only thinks of saving herself, but when she thinks about Sam and how she needs to stay alive in order to keep her promise and save him, she instantly finds the courage to act. This theme recurs with Katniss, Melanie, and Wanda, and it denotes that the female heroes value their own lives less than those of their family members because saving themselves is not a sufficient reason for them to act heroically in order to survive.

When Cassie thinks that she is going to die from the wound the alien sniper inflicted upon her, her last thought before fainting is of Sam, of how she tried to keep her promise to him at all costs and is immensely sorry that she was unable to keep it. She describes herself as someone who is "dying by inches, but at least dying on her feet trying to keep a promise she had no prayer of keeping" (*The 5th Wave* 150). Therefore, Cassie thinks that if she has to die, at least her death would be made meaningful because she would die trying to keep her promise. This theme is repeated when Cassie survives and plans to infiltrate the aliens' army base where Sam is being held. She knows it is not likely that she will succeed, but she asserts that she will not give up until she finds her brother. In the end, Cassie infiltrates the base, managing to save Sam with the help of Evan and Ben. Thus, Cassie, as well as the other female heroes, are willing to risk anything in order to keep the promises they made to their younger siblings, and this connects to self-sacrifice. The female heroes' actions

are analysed further from this perspective in Subchapter 4.2.

Similar to Cassie, the other female heroes often think about their younger siblings when they are in situations where they need to be brave and perform heroic actions. Katniss often thinks of Prim when she feels weak, and this helps her to try and be brave: "My thoughts turn to Prim. It's likely she won't be watching me live, but they'll show updates at the school during lunch. For her sake, I try not to look too desperate" (*The Hunger Games* 205). Similarly, Melanie urges Wanda to think about Jamie when she is faced with dangerous situations where she needs to try to fight, which feels unnatural to Wanda who is very feminine: "You won't fight, but you can run. You have to try something – for Jamie" (Meyer 271). When Jamie is sick and Wanda has to infiltrate an alien hospital to get the medicine he needs, Melanie again reminds Wanda: "You have to be strong for Jamie" (Meyer 450), and Wanda assures her that she can do it. The infiltration is successful, and Jared describes Wanda's actions as "incredible" (Meyer 469). Thus, Wanda finds strength and motivation for her heroic actions from thinking about how Jamie needs her to be brave in order to survive his illness. In this manner, the siblings are present in the female heroes' thoughts almost every time they perform heroic actions. When they are exhibiting feminine traits in dangerous situations, the thought of their siblings helps them harness masculine traits. Therefore, the feminine maternal role in fact motivates and helps the female heroes to adopt masculine traits and perform heroic actions. This is exemplified by how Katniss' most important skills, which help her win the Games, are her skills in hunting and archery, and the reason that motivates Katniss to initially learn these masculine skills is again her family and their survival. The connection between the contrary traits is unusual, and it showcases how the female heroes portray fluidity of gender by simultaneously having both masculine and feminine traits. This relates to how Tyson understood feminine and masculine traits in Subchapter 2.2. and showcases how women can have both masculine and feminine traits.

When Katniss eventually decides to rebel against the oppressive society in the second novel, she again connects this decision to Prim and her maternal role when it comes to her and Rue:

> I need only to think of Prim [being in danger because of my actions] and all my resolve disintegrates. It's my job to protect her . . . I can't let the Capitol hurt Prim. And then it hits me. They already have. Prim . . . Rue . . . aren't they the very reason I have to try to fight? Because what has been done to them is so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice? . . . What I am about to do, whatever any of us are forced to endure, it is for them. It's too late to help Rue, but maybe not too late for [Prim]. (*Catching Fire* 148-9)

Thus, Katniss clearly states that her decision to rebel and fight for a better world, which eventually leads her to become the face of the rebellion, is because of Prim and Rue and because she wants a better world for children. After this realization, Katniss feels free, because previously, she was afraid to rebel in case her actions would be retaliated by hurting her family. However, when she realises that she needs to rebel to make a better world for Prim, she is freed from the worries that have previously restricted her actions. Therefore, the quotation effectively proves my claim that most, if not all, of the female heroes' heroic actions are motivated by nurture and their maternal role.

My argument is further supported by how Katniss reacts when her family is finally safe in District 13 in the final novel of the trilogy. She thinks about what her next course of action will be at a time when all Districts are fighting a war with the Capitol: "Is there any point in doing anything at all? My mother, my sister, and Gale's family are finally safe" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 14). She thinks about running away and exhibits no interest in joining the war or aiding the rebels with their fight for a better society. She states only one reason for why she does not simply run away: "I swear, now that my family and Gale's are out of harm's way, I could run away. Except for one unfinished business. Peeta. If I knew for sure that he was dead, I could just disappear into the woods and never look back. But until I do, I'm stuck" (*Mockingjay* 14). Katniss only joins the war in order to save Peeta, who she considers as part of her family by this point in the trilogy, and again all her heroic and political actions are motivated by family. She clearly states that she does not see any point in doing anything for any

other reason than for them and for saving peoples' lives. Thus, Katniss' rebellion and political activism stem from her maternal role, and even though the Capitol has not been overthrown by this point in the story, Katniss does not care about fighting for a better society if her family is no longer threatened by the Capitol. This, to some extent, explains the ending of the trilogy; Katniss has retreated from society and returned to the domestic sphere with little agency because her family no longer needs protection and the Capitol has been overturned, providing her and Peeta's children with a safe environment to grow up in.

My analysis of Katniss is supported by Miranda A. Green-Barteet, who states that "Katniss does possess a firm sense of self, but her identity is based primarily on her role as family protector, a role that she is very invested in but one that is born out of her position as a subjugated object of Panem. Indeed, throughout the first novel, Katniss occupies an object position . . . Katniss does little more than react to her environment and circumstances" (38). This connects to my earlier claim that Katniss, and the other female heroes, are portrayed to have very one-dimensional identities because most, if not all, of their actions and thoughts revolve around their maternal roles and their families. Additionally, it proves how despite being considered a trail-blazing Girl on Fire, Katniss' character is very passive in the first novel of the trilogy, and she simply reacts to the things happening to her, instead of taking on a more active role and a subject position. Gale even implies that Katniss is something "made in the Capitol" (*Catching Fire* 123), similar to a product. This captures how significantly the female heroes comply with traditional gender roles.

In addition to her family, Katniss' actions are also motivated by wanting to protect her love interests. When she outwits the Capitol and the Gamemakers, forcing them to crown two victors by threatening to eat poisonous berries and commit joint suicide with Peeta, leaving the Games with no victor, she thinks about her motivations as follows: "All I was doing was trying to keep Peeta and myself alive. Any act of rebellion was purely coincidental" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 22). Most of Panem's citizens interpret her actions as rebellious, and the districts begin to view her as a face of the

rebellion, but she denies any rebellious motivations and instead reasons that her rebellious actions were accidental, with her only motivation being to keep her love interest alive and to keep her promise. This is a ploy that the Capitol uses to diminish Katniss' actions and separate them from rebellion, but it is significant that Katniss' own interpretation of her actions is not very different from that of the Capitol's. She is not madly in love with Peeta, unlike in the Capitol's narrative of the events, but she was still motivated by wanting to save him and to save herself so that she could return home to her family. This exemplifies how Katniss' agency is still very limited in the first novel of the trilogy.

These examples prove that the female heroes' maternal role and the feminine trait of "nurturing" motivate their heroic actions. This aspect of the female heroism of Girls on Fire and the previous analysis can be connected to ethics of care, and this theoretical perspective will be further analysed in Subchapter 4.2. From the analysis of this subchapter, it is possible to conclude that the agency of Girls on Fire is connected to how they want to protect their family, and create a better world for children. The female heroes portray many masculine traits as part of their personality, but they also find courage by thinking about their siblings in situations where they feel weak or where they are exhibiting feminine traits. Some of the female heroes also learn masculine skills due to their family; for example, Katniss learns to hunt so that she can feed her family, and these skills consequently affect their agency. This is exemplified by how Katniss' hunting skills later translate into fighting skills in the Games. Therefore, I argue that the female heroes challenge traditional gender roles by portraying how women with maternal roles can gain agency and have masculine traits. However, having the nurturing and maternal role, along with their younger siblings, as one of the only motivations for the female heroes' actions, on the other hand, portrays a limited view of female agency because it indicates that girls or women cannot have varied motivations for their actions or for impacting societal change. Instead, the female heroes of YA dystopia denote that women and girls' actions can only be motivated by maternal roles and reasons that have to do with their families.

This restricts their agency and connects to Girls on Fire having to undergo a negotiation regarding their agency and heroism. They can be active heroes and have masculine traits if their actions are motivated by their traditionally feminine roles.

4.2. Sacrificial Heroes

In this subchapter, I will analyse the female heroes' sacrificial actions and how the feminine trait "self-sacrificing" (Tyson 86) affects their agency. As was established in Subchapter 3.1., self-sacrifice is a trait that has been seen as a fundamental aspect of motherhood, and this subchapter will analyse the connections between the female heroes' sacrificial actions and their maternal roles. I argue that along with motherhood, self-sacrifice is an integral trait of each female hero and their heroism. In addition to the female heroes sacrificing themselves for their siblings, their sacrificial actions are often simultaneously done for the greater good, thus they consider the wider society in their actions as well and are willing to sacrifice themselves for a better world. This connects to ethics of care and the female heroes' agency will be analysed from this theoretical perspective.

Katniss' storyline and trajectory towards heroism begins due to a sacrificial action. Katniss puts herself in danger in order to save her sister Prim, already before the point where the narrative begins, and before Prim is chosen as a tribute. Katniss continuously risks her life when acquiring food for her family by hunting illegally: "I could be shot on a daily basis for hunting" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 20). Moreover, she does not let Prim register for tesserae, extra food, which would add to the number of times her name would be entered in the lottery where the tributes are chosen from. Instead, Katniss takes on the extra food to prevent Prim being chosen for the lethal Games. When Prim is chosen as a tribute, despite all of Katniss' preventative measures, Katniss volunteers to take her place. This sacrificial action is the turning point of Katniss' life, and it positions her on a trajectory towards female heroism. Volunteering is an extremely rare action in the dystopian society, and Katniss' actions are described to be out of the norm: "in District 12, where the word tribute is pretty much synonymous with the word corpse, volunteers are all but extinct" (*The Hunger*

Games 27). This is exemplified by how when the male tribute, Peeta, is chosen, there are no volunteers to take his place: "no one steps forward. He has two brothers . . . This is standard. Family devotion only goes so far for most people on reaping day. What I did was the radical thing" (*The Hunger Games* 31). Katniss perceives her actions as radical compared to the passivity of others. Peeta's male family members do not sacrifice themselves for Peeta, which can be connected to traditional gender roles because self-sacrifice is part of feminine gender roles, and in this way the novel complies with these roles. Katniss stands out and earns the respect of many districts with her actions. Consequently, the sacrificial action propels her journey towards female heroism. Even though Katniss eventually wins the Games, it is important to note that when she volunteers for Prim, she does not think she has a chance of surviving and thinks she is going to die. Thus, she sacrifices her life for her sister.

When she is in the arena, Katniss often wonders how her actions might affect her family, while sparing no thought to herself: "Who cares what they do to me? What really scares me is what they might do to my mother and Prim; how my family might suffer now because of my impulsiveness" (*The Hunger Games* 126). This is related to how Katniss' rebellious actions are often influenced by fear of what their consequences could be to her family, as was previously analysed. She also openly states that she thinks that her family's suffering would be worse than her own death: "It's so much worse than being hunted in the arena. There, I could only die. End of story. But out here Prim, my mother, Gale, the people of District 12, everyone I care about back home could be punished" (*The Hunger Games* 434). It is evident that Katniss values her family members' lives more than her own, and this is why she continuously sacrifices herself for them throughout the trilogy. This is evident from an interaction Katniss has with another tribute, Johanna, later on in the trilogy: "'Swear it. On something you care about,' she hisses. 'I swear it. On my life.' But she doesn't let go of my arm. 'On your family's life,' she insists. 'On my family's life,' I repeat. I guess my concern for my own survival isn't compelling enough" (*Mockingjay* 285-286). This is a pattern that occurs

with all the female heroes, as was established in Subchapter 4.1. The valuing of one's family over one's own life and putting their lives above one's own can be connected to motherhood and self-sacrifice as part of ethics of care, as I will establish next.

Putting others' lives above one's own and sacrificing for others is related to ethics of care. The concept was developed by a feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan, who challenged Kant's theory on moral reasoning by claiming that moral reasoning, which was viewed as a masculine way of thinking, was not superior to feminine ways of thinking, which differed from moral reasoning and had been devalued by Kant's theory due to this reason. Gilligan established that the feminine perspective denotes how "an initial focus on caring for the self in order to ensure survival [that] is followed by a transitional phase in which this judgment is criticised as selfish. The criticism signals a new understanding of the connection between self and others which is articulated by the concept of responsibility" (74). Galligan links this to maternal morality, which similarly entails caring for others, especially children who depend on adults (74). However, Gilligan notes that this perspective entails an unbalance between those who receive care and the woman who cares for them because the woman herself is excluded from this care, and this consequently leads to self-sacrifice (74). According to ethics of care, self-sacrifice and care are "inherent in the conventions of feminine goodness" (Gilligan 74).

While some have considered Gilligan's theory as feminist because it challenges Kant's supposition that feminine ways of thinking are inferior to masculine ones, it has also been criticised, and similarly, I argue that Gilligan's theory still reinforced traditional gender roles. The ethics of care are connected to female agency and Gilligan's perspective of "women's moral agency as an ethics of care . . . [has] been criticised for deploying an idealised notion of interpersonal relations – paradigmatically expressed in the mother-child dyad – while disregarding how this intersects with gendered dynamics that associate women with a traditional domestic role" (McNay 42-43). Thus, the ethics of care comply with traditional gender roles because it regards women as having an inherent

way of thinking, which positions them in the domestic/private field and in domestic roles as mothers, while this perspective denotes that men have a different way of thinking that women do not possess, which is suited to the public sphere.

From the definition of ethics of care, it is evident that the female heroes analysed in this thesis represent ethics of care, and their actions are guided by this feminine way of thinking. This can be seen from the analysis of Subchapter 4.1. as well, which established how most, if not all, of the female heroes' actions are motivated by nurture. Consequently, the female heroes conform to traditional gender roles because their agency is fundamentally connected to the ethics of care, which denotes the idea that women inherently belong to the private/domestic sphere due to their way of thinking, which leads them to care for others, put others needs before their own, and have maternal roles.

In addition to Prim, Katniss thinks about sacrificing herself for any children she might have in the future. When the Capitol forces her and Peeta to continue their pretend romance after the first Games and they realise they will have to eventually get married she thinks about the possibility of having children as follows: "I wonder if President Snow will insist we have children . . . Given all the trouble I've caused, I've probably guaranteed any child of mine a spot in the Games . . . I can't let President Snow condemn me to this. Even if it means taking my own life" (*Catching Fire* 56-57). Furthermore, Katniss also sacrifices herself for Rue, the young tribute that she feels maternal feelings for, as analysed in Subchapter 3.1. When Rue is in danger, Katniss tries to make the other tributes come after her instead of Rue: "I shout . . . So, they know I'm near, and hopefully . . . [it] will be enough to pull their attention away from her" (*The Hunger Games* 280). Consequently, Katniss' sacrificial acts connect to motherhood not only through Prim but also through Rue and her own potential children.

Similar to Katniss', Melanie's storyline begins with her sacrificing herself for her family. When Melanie is in danger of being captured by the aliens, she tries to kill herself: "The

Seekers tried to get her to surrender. She ran from them. When they had her cornered, she jumped into an open elevator shaft" (Meyer 167). The reason for Melanie trying to kill herself is that she wants to protect her family: her brother Jamie and her love interest Jared. If the aliens capture Melanie alive, they will access her memories and use them to find and capture her family. Thus, by killing herself, Melanie can prevent this from happening. Melanie views this action as winning: "[There's] [n]o way to survive, but perhaps a way to win" (Meyer 11). Therefore, what she considers as winning is not her own survival but that of her family's. However, Melanie is unsuccessful in her attempt and the fall does not kill her.

Once Wanda inhabits Melanie's body and adopts her feelings for Melanie's family, she is also willing to sacrifice herself for them. Initially, she feels that she cannot do her duty and tell her fellow aliens about Melanie's family: "I don't want to . . . I don't know if I can hurt them. I'd rather . . . What? Die myself? Than give a few stray humans up to the Seekers?" (Meyer 101). Wanda immediately thinks about dying rather than giving Melanie's family up, even though she is only thinking about hypothetical solutions for the situation. This exemplifies how central self-sacrifice is to Wanda's personality.

When Melanie and Wanda leave to find Melanie's family and they end up close to death in a desert, Melanie and Wanda discuss what they are dying for. Melanie's reasons are clear from the thoughts she shares with Wanda: "At least I died trying. And I won. I never gave them away. I never hurt them. I did my best to find them. I tried to keep my promise . . . I die for them" (Meyer 112). She explicitly states that all her actions have been for her family, and she is willing to die for them and for the promise that she made to Jamie. Wanda in turn wonders: "'Then what am I dying for?' . . . Well, I think that maybe … you're dying to be human . . . After all the planets and all the hosts you've left behind, you've finally found the place and the body you'd die for. I think you've found your home, Wanderer" (Meyer 113). It is evident that Melanie, Wanda, and the other female heroes view family as something worth dying for, and this notion is repeated throughout their storylines.

Family and self-sacrifice are crucially linked in their minds, and this is the reason for their numerous sacrificial actions. The female heroes' view of family is connected to traditional gender roles, with self-sacrifice being an integral part of motherhood. They have internalised this view of motherhood and family; thus, this is one integral example of how they reinforce traditional gender roles.

Cassie sacrifices herself for her brother Sam, similar to Katniss, Melanie, and Wanda. Her plan to infiltrate the aliens' army base to save Sam is very dangerous, as Evan remarks: "'It's suicide,' he snaps. 'We're both thinking it. One of us might as well say it. Suicide if I go, suicide if you go. Dead or alive, he's lost'" (*The 5th Wave* 375). Cassie's response to this is that "[She is] going to get [her] little brother, and there's only one way [she] can do it." (*The 5th Wave* 375). She does not care if the plan is suicidal and is willing to sacrifice herself in order to save her brother. When Cassie and Sam are escaping the base, Cassie falls while carrying Sam and tells Ben to leave her behind and save Sam instead. Additionally, later on in the trilogy, Cassie tells an alien who is keeping Sam as a hostage: "let my little brother go . . . take me instead" (*The Last Star* 149). Similar to Katniss, Melanie, and Wanda, Cassie explicitly states that for her "[Sam] [is] the thing worth dying for" (Yancey, *The Infinite Sea* 39). She also mentions that Sam is her "raison d'être" (*The Last Star* 177), her reason to exist. This is related to traditional gender roles and showcases how Cassie sees her maternal role and Sam as her sole identity, similar to Katniss. Thus, Sam represents something more valuable to her than her own life, which is related to the view ethics of care have of the connection between feminine goodness, motherhood, and self-sacrifice.

When Jared and other members of the human resistance are determined to kill Wanda, not knowing that Melanie is still alive, Melanie and Wanda discuss how the different ways they could be killed might affect Jamie: "What's more important to us? Staying alive? Or Jamie? She knew the answer. Jamie, I affirmed" (Meyer 269). Thus, they decide that they should die sooner rather than later, so that Jamie would not have much time to form an attachment to Wanda, and their death would be easier on him. When Wanda goes to find medicine for Jamie and finds herself in a dangerous

situation, she thinks about how she needs to act in order to save Jamie, and how that is more important than acting to save herself: "[If] [t]hey catch us . . . they'll kill you . . . I tried to run faster. Not to save my own life, but because I was the only one who could save Jamie's" (Meyer 443). The female heroes' numerous specifications, such as this, prove how central self-sacrifice is to their thoughts and actions.

Wanda notes how she has always viewed motherhood in terms of self-sacrifice, but only understood what it meant when she adopted Melanie's maternal feelings for Jamie: "The mysterious bond of mother and child – so strong on this planet – was not a mystery to me any longer. There was no bond greater than one that required your life for another's. I'd understood this truth before; what I had not understood was why. Now I knew why a mother would give her life for her child, and this knowledge would forever shape the way I saw the universe" (Meyer 210). Wanda describes motherhood in such strong terms that the description can be paralleled to how people discuss religion or other core belief systems. Consequently, the female heroes think that once a woman becomes a mother, she has no choice but to unquestioningly and continuously be prepared to sacrifice herself if her child is ever in danger. The female heroes rarely discuss fatherhood, and even though family is also often described as a group of people who are willing to sacrifice themselves for each other, sacrifice is not as integral to fatherhood as it is to motherhood in these novels.

A further example of how family and sacrifice are connected is how at the end of the novel Wanda realises she can give Melanie her body back and decides to die instead of taking on another human's body. The female heroes' sacrificial personality traits are emphasised, when Melanie and Wanda fight with each other about how each of them wants to sacrifice herself for the other. Wanda recounts how she feels that her self-sacrifice was inevitable:

> I'd no idea that she cared so much for me. Almost as much as I cared for her. I hadn't realized that we loved each other. Even if Jared did not exist . . . Once this path occurred to me, I would have had to proceed down it. I loved her that much . . . Once we learned

> to love our human host, what hope did we souls have? We could not exist at the expense of one we loved. Not a soul. A soul could not live that way. (Meyer 510)

She notes that she loves Melanie and consequently cannot exist at her expense, and thus does not see any other option than sacrificing herself for Melanie. Melanie on the other hand plans to sacrifice herself by making herself disappear and fade away from consciousness before Wanda can carry out her plan. Her reasoning for this sacrificial action is the following: "I don't think I can let you do this. You're more important than that. In the bigger picture, you are of much more value to them than I am. You can help them; you can save them. I can't do any of that. You have to stay" (Meyer 509). Melanie justifies her decision with the greater good, as she feels that the human survivors benefit more from Wanda as an alien helping them than from anything she could offer them. This exemplifies how the female heroes are willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good as well. In the end, when Wanda carries out her sacrifice despite Melanie's protests and attempts to prevent this from happening, Wanda and Melanie call each other sisters: "Thank you, Wanda. My sister. I will never forget you. Be happy, Mel. Enjoy it all. Appreciate it for me. I will, she promised. Bye, we thought together" (Meyer 594). Melanie and Wanda consider each other as family, and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for each other is due to this familial love.

Another connection between motherhood and self-sacrifice is presented through the depictions of maternal loss in the novels. When Prim is killed at the end of the trilogy, Katniss loses her will to live and is ready to die after she murders the President whom she holds responsible for Prim's death. When Katniss is not executed, contrary to what she expected, she wishes everyone would "[l]et [her] die" (*Mockingjay* 393) and describes how she feels as follows: "Dead, but not allowed to die. Alive, but as good as dead" (*Mockingjay* 393). Katniss' reaction to Prim's death can be connected to maternal loss, which Plant theorises in terms of the intense emotional bond between a mother and her child: "Men could never understand the pain of maternal loss . . . because they never experienced such intense feelings of identification and attachment to another human being" (63).

Consequently, the concept of maternal loss denotes that fathers "cannot feel the way a mother feels . . . [thus, they] [cannot] realise what a mother's loss is. Such rhetoric not only privileged maternal suffering to the exclusion of [other family members']" (63). The theme of maternal loss that is present in Katniss' story when Prim dies is also present in Melanie and Wanda's storyline. When Jamie's life is in danger and he almost dies of an infection, Wanda and Melanie think about how "If they dug a hole for Jamie in the empty desert, they would have to put [them] in it, too" (Meyer 437) because "[they] would die, too. [they] would not live without Jamie" (Meyer 441). These examples imply that Katniss, Melanie, and Wanda cannot live with their maternal loss and they would rather die.

Katniss also sacrifices herself repeatedly for her love interest Peeta, who she considers as part of her family. When Peeta is dying from an infection during the first Games, Katniss drugs him so that she can leave to go find medicine for him, risking her life in the process. In the second Games, Katniss decides to do everything she can so that Peeta will win the Games: "I'm determined to keep him alive, knowing the cost will be my own life" (*Catching Fire* 255). This "dying wish" (*Catching Fire* 227), as she calls it, motivates all her actions in the second Games and affects her agency.

The other female heroes are willing to sacrifice themselves for their love interests, similar to Katniss. When Jared wants to kill Wanda, this does not affect how she feels about him, and she still wants to sacrifice herself for Jared. Ian notes on this: "She wouldn't hurt you to save her own life" (Meyer 274). Ian justifies his notion with how Wanda voluntarily came between Jared and his enemy, "giving Kyle the go-ahead to kill her" (Meyer 185) in order to protect Jared. From Ian's observation it is evident that Wanda values Jared's life more than her own, regardless of his violent behaviour towards her. Ian, views Wanda's sacrificial personality trait as negative and comments that: "[Wanda is] too self-sacrificing for [her] own good" (Meyer 305). This is an interesting contradiction to the view the novels have previously presented of self-sacrifice being an integral part of familial love. Ian thinks Wanda should value her own life and her own needs more than she does.

This could be connected to traditional gender roles and how self-sacrifice has not been a masculine trait; thus, Ian does not value it as much as Wanda does. However, Ian wanting Wanda to be in effect more masculine in this manner can also be seen as challenging traditional gender roles. This view is, however, challenged by how Ian thinks he knows Wanda's needs better than she does as analysed in Subchapter 3.2.

Even though this thesis focuses on analysing female heroes, next I will analyse one of the male love interests in terms of self-sacrifice because this serves to further prove my argument that self-sacrifice is a crucial trait of YA dystopia's female heroes, while it is not as common with male heroes. One of Cassie's love interests, Ben, and his storyline are used as a juxtaposition to Cassie's storyline when it comes to self-sacrifice. Ben had a little sister who died at the beginning of the alien invasion, even though Ben promised to take care of her. When Ben's family is attacked, Ben escapes and leaves the rest of his family to die: "On my feet now, running down the hall to the kitchen, and the thunder of footsteps as they come after me. Take care of your baby sister [my father said] . . . the circling Eye, coldly staring down at me, the one with the silver locket clutched in his bleeding hand, the one who lived, the one who did not go back, the one who ran" (*The 5th Wave* 118). Later on, Ben admits that he is the reason his sister died: "'Private [Ben], what happened to your baby sister?' . . . 'Sir, the private's sister is dead, sir!' 'Because you ran like a chickenshit!' 'Sir, the private ran like a chickenshit, sir!'" (*The 5th Wave* 221). This is a stark juxtaposition to Cassie, who risks everything for Sam, exemplifying how self-sacrifice is not part of traditional gender roles when it comes to men. The novel complies with traditional gender roles by depicting self-sacrifice as an integral part of Cassie's personality, while depicting Ben as a more selfish hero for whom familial love does not entail something that requires one's life for another. Ben exemplifies how family and self-sacrifice are not typical of male heroes in the YA dystopian genre, and how this is different with female heroes.

Cassie's other love interest Evan however, sacrifices himself for Cassie in the novel, but even though this challenges traditional gender roles, his sacrifice is not motivated by familial

love; instead, the motivation is romantic love and the protection of Cassie. This is more traditional of male heroes, who often put themselves in danger to protect the women they love. This pattern often depicts female love interests as helpless, and Cassie is depicted in this way as was analysed in Subchapter 4.1., thus it reinforces traditional gender roles.

Another example of how the male love interests react to self-sacrifice is how Katniss' love interest Gale practically exploits ethics of care in *Mockingjay* when planning a war strategy which eventually kills Katniss' sister, Prim. Prim is killed when she is among the first responders who arrive to tend to the wounded of a bombing. The bombers give the first responders enough time to arrive and then release a second wave of bombs, which kill most of the first responders, Prim among them. Gale plans this strategy counting on ethics of care, leading people into the trap he has set for them. When Katniss learns of this strategy she is outraged. It is evident that Katniss's way of thinking corresponds to ethics of care and Gale's does not because he is able to exploit this way of thinking in a strategy, which goes against everything that the ethics of care stand for. This exemplifies how the male love interests most often comply with traditional gender roles and do not exhibit self-sacrificial personality traits to the same extent as the female heroes do.

In addition to her family, Wanda is also willing to sacrifice herself for her enemies. As with Jared, Wanda does not care whether a person has tried to kill her or is a danger to her but sacrifices herself for them regardless of these factors. Initially, Wanda saves Kyle, a member of the human resistance movement who previously tried to murder her, with great risk to herself. Even Melanie does not understand Wanda's actions and "[she is] mad at [Wanda] for risking [their] lives to save [their] would-be-murderer" (Meyer 339). Later on, at the end of the novel, Wanda sacrifices herself for the Seeker, the alien who is trying to find and kill Melanie and her family during the entire novel: "I could save the Seeker. Of course I could. But it would cost me. A trade . . . A life for a life" (Meyer 505). Wanda trades her own life for the Seeker's by telling the humans the secret of how they can remove the aliens from their human hosts. Wanda's attitudes towards her enemies can be

connected to the Tyson's good girl concept which was examined in Subchapter 2.2. Wanda exemplifies this concept by how she forgives her enemies instead of being angry at them, and she is even willing to sacrifice herself for them. It is important to note that the chapter in which this happens has the title "Sacrificed" (Meyer 506), which supports my argument that self-sacrifice is a prominent and recurring theme in the novel as it is also explicitly worded in a chapter title.

Even though all the female heroes sacrifice themselves for their family multiple times and are willing to die for them as was established in this subchapter, Cassie is an example of a girl hero who makes the ultimate sacrifice and dies at the end of the trilogy. She destroys the aliens' mother ship with explosives that result in her death as well. She states her reasons and motives for making this sacrifice as follows: "'Why do you think I'm going? This isn't about Evan Walker. And it isn't about you or me. If Ringer is right, [this] is our last hope.' I look at my baby brother's face, angelic in sleep. '*His* last hope'" (*The Last Star* 180). Furthermore, she states that "[They] are at the point in the story where [they] have to choose . . . – a meaningful death, or a senseless one" (*The Last Star* 174). Thus, even though Cassie's main reason for making the ultimate sacrifice is Sam and creating a better world for him, she also thinks about the greater good, similar to Melanie, and chooses a meaningful death with her sacrifice having the potential to save Earth and end the alien invasion. This can be connected to how Girls on Fire are willing to sacrifice themselves and how, similar to Cassie's, some of their storylines end in the ultimate sacrifice. Tris from the *Divergent* trilogy (2011-2013) is an example of another Girl on Fire who sacrifices herself and dies at the end of her storyline.

From the analysis it is evident that Girls on Fire narratives can have two types of endings; they can end in happily ever after or in the protagonist's death due to their ultimate sacrifice. These endings connect to the notion that female agency can be seen as threatening, which was introduced in Subchapter 2.2. Santaularia argues that the endings of YA dystopia narratives, which portrayed female heroes during the Girl on Fire time period, prove how society feels threatened by female agency: "[Cassie's] suicide mission not only attests to the discomfort patriarchal culture feels

with powerful and strong female characters, that are often returned to the domestic space, as is the case of Katniss in the Hunger Games trilogy, or eliminated altogether, like sacrificial heroines such as Xena in Xena: Warrior Princess or Tris in the Divergent trilogy" (15). Having the stories of Girls on Fire end in redomestication, which positions them in the traditional roles of mothers and wives, or in the Girl on Fire's elimination reinforces traditional gender roles. During the time period this thesis studies, YA dystopia rarely portrayed female heroes who, in the end, stayed in their masculine role and continued to challenge traditional gender roles. This can be connected to the previously discussed educational aspect of the YA genre. Girl on Fire stories were made popular by their revolutionary and transformative aspects, but contrary to these aspects, the stories did not imagine female heroism as a lasting state. Instead, they implied that female heroism and challenging of gender roles is an integral phase of female adolescence, which ends in traditionally desirable outcomes of a woman's life. From this perspective Cassie and Tris' stories could even be viewed as cautionary examples of what the challenging of patriarchy and traditional gender roles can lead to.

All in all, this subchapter identified a pattern of how the female heroes' heroic actions often manifest in sacrificial acts. Therefore, Girls on Fire can be seen as sacrificial heroes, whose heroism is motivated by the ethics of care. Girls on Fire embody traditional feminine goodness, which regards the valuing of one's own life more than others' as selfish. Consequently, I argue that Girls on Fire embody maternal self-sacrifice. Their agency is strongly connected to self-sacrifice, and this implies that female heroism is defined by self-sacrifice in YA dystopia. Girls on Fire sacrifice themselves for their families but also for the greater good of a broader community, often in order to create a better world for them. The patterns identified in this subchapter reinforce traditional gender roles and are thus in contrast with the transformative aspects of Girls on Fire.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the gender roles of the first girl heroes who set a trend and were central to the young adult dystopian genre. More specifically, the aim was to study how the traditionally feminine roles regarding family and motherhood are connected to female heroism. The thesis aimed to analyse the connection between female heroism and the themes of family, nurture, and self-sacrifice to establish how these themes affect the female heroes' agency. The choice to focus on feminine roles and traits was made because the female heroes' masculine traits had been studied more than the patriarchal aspects of their heroism. The thesis aimed to detect common patterns relating to traditional gender roles that appear in the YA dystopian genre and its female heroes. These goals connected to the wider aim of the thesis to analyse a specific time period, the late 2000's and the early 2010's, in the young adult dystopian genre's history in order to provide insight into how the first female heroes diversified the genre, but how their stories simultaneously included many patriarchal patterns relating to the theme of family. This goal would in turn provide understanding of how the YA dystopian genre initially began to include more diverse heroes.

My first research question aimed to analyse and establish what kinds of gender roles the female heroes of young adult dystopian literature had during the time period when female protagonists began appearing and gained popularity in the genre. I answered this question by analysing four female heroes who appeared in some of the most popular novels of the genre during the aforementioned time period and how they both challenged and reinforced traditional gender roles. My analysis concluded that the female heroes had many masculine traits and that the very notion of female heroism challenged traditional gender roles because women have traditionally been positioned as passive objects rather than active subjects in literature. The female heroes positioned themselves in the public sphere, which has traditionally been a space reserved for men, by taking on roles as political activists or as part of the resistance fighting to overthrow the oppressive dystopian society, for example. Additionally, the female heroes challenged traditional gender roles by how they were

portrayed as strong, able to fight, kill, and perform heroic actions, which often resulted in rebellion that challenged the existing societal order and affected the development of a new society.

However, the analysis proved that while the initial female heroes famously challenged traditional gender roles, they simultaneously had many feminine traits that conformed with these roles. All of the female heroes analysed had taken on the role of a mother in their families, a role very traditional for women, which attributed them with many feminine traits integral to motherhood, such as nurture and self-sacrifice. The maternal roles assured that the female heroes were part of the private/domestic sphere, which is contrary to the public sphere that their heroic actions positioned them in. In addition to motherhood, romance had a crucial role in each female hero's storyline, which served to position the female heroes as objects of desire, while emphasizing heteronormativity. However, the analysis found that some aspects of the romantic plotlines and the male love interests also challenged traditional gender roles, for example by some male love interests portraying more feminine traits. The analysis established that each female hero recreated the nuclear family unit, of which their love interests were a crucial part, thus reinforcing marriage and motherhood as desirable outcomes of a woman's life. All in all, the analysis concluded that the female heroes occupied the masculine role of a strong hero, while simultaneously inhabiting the feminine role of a nurturing and self-sacrificing mother. These two roles were interchangeably linked because the protagonists became heroes due to their maternal roles. The analysis found this to be a negotiation; the female protagonists could take on untraditional masculine hero roles, but only if these roles were motivated by and stemmed from their traditional roles as nurturers.

Moreover, the analysis found that the female heroes' storylines and their heroic actions stemmed from their goal to create a stable nuclear family to replace the one they had lost. In the female heroes' minds, the stable nuclear family unit was viewed as a utopia, even more fundamentally than the better society that they were fighting for. The ending of most of the female heroes' stories repositioned them in the private/domestic sphere where they broke out of during their hero journey.

Most of the female heroes created or started their own family and lived happily ever after, which is a traditional concept of the romance genre, simultaneously removing themselves from further action and political activism. Consequently, one of the main findings of this thesis was that the YA dystopian genre of the aforementioned time period had, in some ways, reverted back to traditional depictions of female adolescence, which reigned during the initial emergence of YA and characterised female adolescence as a young woman's journey to find a husband. This traditional storyline was simply repackaged and combined with untraditional elements; the genre portrayed Girls on Fire as a popular trend of action girl heroes whose stories were still underlined by traditional patriarchal values.

The second research question aimed to analyse how the patriarchal themes of family, romance, nurture, and self-sacrifice affect the female heroes' agency. First, I answered this question by analysing each female hero's motives for their heroic actions in order to prove my claim that most, if not all, of the female heroes' heroic actions were motivated by their maternal roles. The analysis proved my claim, and one of the main findings of this thesis was that each female hero's storyline included a promise made for maternal reasons, which motivated most, if not all, of the female hero's actions, moreover, working as the initial catalyst for them taking on the hero role. The centrality of these promises and their connection to the female heroes' agency had not been focused on by previous studies; thus, this discovery provided crucial insight into the female heroes' agency.

Second, I answered the question by analysing the female heroes' sacrificial actions and their connections to their maternal roles. The analysis concluded that YA dystopia portrays self-sacrifice as an integral aspect of female heroism via female heroes who sacrifice themselves for both familial love and for the greater good. One of the female heroes' storylines ends with them making the ultimate sacrifice by dying for their family and in order to create a better world. The motivation of family is also broadened to a larger community, and the female heroes sacrifice themselves in order to create a better world for their families and the entire civilization.

This portrayal of female heroes reinforced traditional gender roles by complying with

the notion that self-sacrifice is integral to motherhood, and by portraying female heroes who represent and whose actions are guided by the ethics of care. The analysis found that the female heroes represented ethics of care by valuing their family members' lives more than their own and by viewing familial love, especially motherhood, as something that requires one's life for another's. The analysis concluded that the female heroes' actions were motivated, and consequently their agency was affected by, this traditionally feminine way of thinking, which denotes that women belong to the domestic/private sphere. The analysis also concluded that the genre of YA dystopia reinforced traditional gender roles by portraying a contrast between the agency of female heroes compared to male heroes. Male heroes' actions were less often motivated by nurture than those of female heroes'. Moreover, self-sacrifice was not as integral to male characters as it was to female characters presented in YA dystopia. The male love interests were not motivated by the ethics of care; instead, some of them sacrificed their family selfishly to survive, or exploited the ethics of care in order to outsmart those who adhered to this feminine way of thinking, and hurt them in ways that opposed everything that the ethics of care stand for. This exemplifies how family and nurture are not as prevalent in YA dystopia narratives about male heroes as they are in Girl on Fire narratives.

All in all, the thesis provided insight into the types of gender roles some of YA dystopia's first female heroes had, while focusing on shedding light on the previously less studied patriarchal aspects of their heroism. In light of the analysis and the patterns that it identified, it is possible to characterise a Girl on Fire as a strong masculine hero who simultaneously inhabits the feminine role of a mother and whose heroic actions are mainly motivated by their family and the goal to recreate a stable nuclear family unit. Thus, Girls on Fire correspond to the male traits expected of YA heroes due to the masculine legacy of heroism, but they simultaneously occupy traditionally feminine roles. One of the most important traits of a Girl on Fire is their willingness to unselfishly sacrifice themselves for their family and for the greater good. All the aforementioned factors define and affect the heroism and the agency of a Girl on Fire. Therefore, due to the findings of this thesis,

the female protagonists of YA dystopia during the analysed time period could in fact be called Mothers on Fire instead of Girls on Fire.

The analysis of the Girl on Fire trend established that the themes analysed in this thesis are common to most of the female heroes of YA dystopia during the time period when the genre became immensely popular. The patriarchal aspects of Girls on Fire can be explained to some extent by the lack of diversity in the YA dystopian genre during the time of these novels' publication. Consequently, the initial female heroes were still very much influenced by traditional gender roles. This thesis only analysed three YA dystopian novels from the aforementioned time period; thus, it is important to note that this amount of primary material does not offer results that can be automatically generalised to apply to all female heroes of the genre. However, this thesis identified important themes and patterns common to YA dystopia's initial female heroes, providing further insight and a valuable basis for further research on the patriarchal aspects of the genre's female heroes. The findings of this thesis could be applied to further studies on YA dystopia's female heroes, which could, for example, concentrate on the same patriarchal themes and how they are portrayed in other novels of the time period.

Additionally, the findings of this thesis provide further insight into the diversity of the YA dystopian genre during the time period when it rose to popularity. The findings of this thesis could be applied to studies on contemporary YA dystopia's female heroes as well as the genre's diversity, to ascertain whether the specific patterns identified are repeated or challenged by female heroes in contemporary YA dystopia. The contemporary YA dystopian genre has developed in diversity, featuring more diverse characters regarding race, gender, and sexuality. Green-Barteet notes that from 2018 onwards, the number of more diverse heroes increased considerably with some critiques detailing this phenomenon as an earthquake of diverse texts. These diverse heroes challenged the previous restrictions of the genre and portrayed how anyone can be a hero, thus proving that YA dystopia, and YA in general, are no longer identified by lack of diversity. (10) This

thesis provided an analysis of the genre's first steps towards diversity; these female heroes paved the way for more diverse heroes regarding gender, sexuality, and race.

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