
This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Sáez Garrido, Ana; Martín Alegre, Sara, dir. Discourses of masculinity in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games Trilogy. Defending the alternative man, Peeta Mellark. 2017. 51 pag. (801 Grau en Estudis Anglesos)

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**DISCOURSES OF MASCULINITY IN SUZANNE
COLLINS' *THE HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY*:
DEFENDING THE ALTERNATIVE MAN, PEETA
MELLARK**

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June 2017



Universitat Autònoma
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*'The combination of active and contemplative virtues is one of the most
enduring themes in three thousand years of experience
of what it means to be a man'*

Waller Newell

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Acknowledgements

This piece of work has been the icing on the cake for my degree and it has made me realize about the importance of working hard and being constant and persevering. Moreover, it has also helped me to explore my own limitations as well as to confirm my desire to become a Literature university lecturer in the future.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Sara Martín Alegre for her dedication towards my thesis through all this hard process. Sara has taught me very important lessons during these months, the most important one keeping a responsible and an open-minded attitude when dealing with literary analysis. Sara has demonstrated her experience by teaching me to remain calm during stressful situations and has become a mirroring image for me and for my future expectations.

Secondly, I would like to thank my parents for teaching me the importance of learning and education as well as the value of working hard in order to fulfil one's dreams. Without their daily encouragement and support I would not have appreciated the essence of doing research that, somehow, represents and imprints your personal identity in it.

Finally, I would like to thank my boyfriend and my friends for helping me during these stressful months. They have become an amazing support and they have clearly encouraged me and taught me the importance of being patience and perseverant.

Abstract

Suzanne Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games* (2008-10) portrays the dystopian society of Panem, in which the population is divided into 12 districts, each of them isolated from the rest. Every year, the national celebration of the Hunger Games gathers two tributes from each district, a boy and a girl, to fight for their own survival. In this context, Peeta Mellark and Katniss Everdeen become the tributes of District 12.

Since the publication of *The Hunger Games*, much research has been carried out about Peeta Mellark's gender construction. Nevertheless, former studies, mostly based on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, seem to reach the same conclusion: Peeta allegedly embodies prototypically feminine traits.

Focusing on the three *Hunger Games* novels, this dissertation aims to replace the previous readings of Mellark's gender, denying his apparently feminine performativity. I argue that Collins seems to offer in Peeta an alternative model of masculinity. This model is far different from the one that has always been hegemonically accepted, embodied in this trilogy by Gale Hawthorne. Consequently, I aim to contrast the characters of Peeta and Gale and the intrinsic and polarized models of masculinity they embody in order to defend Peeta as an alternative man. I also read the models of masculinity that appear in *The Hunger Games* as historically American with Panem standing for a fictional representation of American fears.

Keywords: *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins, gender, masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinity, Peeta Mellark, Gale Hawthorne, dystopia, American young adult fiction.

0. Introduction

0.1. Suzanne Collins and *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

Suzanne Collins is an American fantasy and science fiction writer born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1962. Although she began her professional career as a screenwriter for children's television, Collins' fame arrived after the publication of her fantasy series *The Underland Chronicles*¹ (2003-7). Her next series, *The Hunger Games*, consolidated her as a celebrity concerned with the issues of war and personal identity in relation to gender stereotypes.

The Hunger Games trilogy² targets an audience of young readers. It portrays the dystopian society of Panem, born during an unknown post-apocalyptic time from the ashes of a destroyed and extinct American society.



Figure 1: Political Map of the United States

¹ Based on the Victorian novel *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, Collins' series became a *New York Times* bestseller.

² *The Hunger Games Trilogy* comprises the following titles: *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010).



Figure 2: Political Map of Panem

As the maps of the United States and of Panem show, the territorial area that shapes both countries is identical. Nevertheless, the internal political distribution is different: whereas the U.S.A. capital is located in Washington, on the East coast, Panem's capital is on the West coast, between the real federal states of Utah and Nevada.

In Panem the population is divided into 12 districts, each of them isolated from the rest, immersed in poverty and in charge of providing the wealthy Capitol with resources. Thus, Panem's politics turn the country into one that resembles the Roman Empire with its gladiator fights. Indeed, the slogan for Roman entertainment was 'Panem et circenses' (bread and games). Every year, the Capitol holds the Hunger Games. This competition, created as a social punishment for the past riots against the Capitol, demands yearly two tributes from each district, a boy and a girl between twelve and eighteen years old, to fight for their own survival.

In *The Hunger Games* (2008), Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark participate in the 74th Hunger Games on behalf of District 12, the poorest district in Panem. Haymitch Abernathy, who is a former District 12 victor, mentors them. Haymitch incites Peeta and Katniss to perform a fake love story that turns them into the "star-crossed lovers". Although at the beginning Peeta and Katniss are enemies, they become a team after the Gamemakers announce that if at the end of the Games the two last survivors are from

the same district, both will become victors. Against all odds, Katniss and Peeta are the two last tributes alive but finally only can survive. Defying the Gamemakers, they attempt to commit suicide by eating some poisonous berries but their trick is successful and they become victors, upsetting the Capitol with their defiance.

In *Catching Fire* (2009), Katniss and Peeta's defiance towards the Capitol triggers riots in the districts. Consequently, President Snow threatens Katniss: he will hurt her beloveds if she does not marry Peeta. Realising that Katniss is not in love with him and acting as a protector, Peeta promises to help her. Then, Snow announces a Games' special edition, the Quarter Quell³, to curb the riots down. Once in the arena again, Katniss and Peeta join other tributes as allies and they plan to electrocute the Careers tributes⁴ Enobaria and Brutus. Instead, Katniss destroys the Games' arena by short-circuiting its force field. Katniss wakes up at hospital: the rebel forces of the apparently extinct District 13 have rescued and the Capitol has captured Peeta.

In *Mockingjay* (2010), we live the rebellion of the Districts, led by Alma Coin, against the Capitol. Katniss has become the "Mockingjay"⁵ and her role in the rebellion is to convince people to fight Snow. However, Katniss wants to rescue Peeta, who has been hijacked and tortured by the Capitol in order to turn him into a weapon against her. Once Peeta is rescued and he heals, a special rebel team embarks on a mission: killing Snow. Despite the difficulties, Katniss finally approaches Snow's mansion when a

³ Special edition of the Hunger Games, celebrated every twenty-five years, in which former victors become tributes again.

⁴ Tributes who train as if they were professional sportsman and sportswomen to participate in the Games.

⁵ Katniss' nickname. Mixture of two birds: the male Jabberjay and the female Mockingbird. The Jabberjay was created by the government of Panem to spy on enemies and rebels of the Capitol, as these birds can memorize and repeat human conversations. Nevertheless, the spied ones realised about this, sent back false information and the Capitol abandoned the birds to die. Once in nature, the male Jabberjay bred with the female Mockingbird, which repeats other birds' sounds. Therefore, the Mockingjay was born.

bomb falls, killing lots of children and innocents amongst whom Katniss' sister, Prim, is included. After the rebels' attack, Snow is about to be executed and Katniss decides to have a private meeting with him. Snow makes her realise that Alma Coin has manipulated her in order to get what she really wants: his power. Full of rage, Katniss shoots Coin during Snow's public execution, which also dies laughing and suffocated with his own blood. Some years later, Peeta and Katniss are married and have two children.⁶

Although this trilogy primarily addresses young readers, it is a terrible literary saga that deals with issues such as indiscriminate violence, dictatorial power and human survival against all odds. Thus, the trilogy's complexity is difficult to detect at first sight. Consequently, only more experienced readers can understand Collins' disturbing message, as the vast majority of young readers would only pay attention to the romantic triangle formed by Katniss, Gale and Peeta.

0.2. Peeta, Gale and the Current Discourse on Masculinity

Since Suzanne Collins published *The Hunger Games* (2008-10), much research has been conducted about the gender of Katniss Everdeen, often in comparison with Peeta Mellark. All these studies (Cook, 2013; Pailthorpe, 2015; Swenson, 2014; Vandenberg, 2016), unfortunately, reach the same conclusion: Katniss is masculine and Peeta is feminine. As Cook claims, "Peeta (...) is feminized (...) Katniss, on the other hand, is often masculinised with her tough persona and her adeptness at hunting" (Cook, 2013: 137) Thus, previous readings of Everdeen and Mellark suggest that Collins subverts the gender binary between Katniss and Peeta, which is not true. Peeta is not the

⁶ In order to read a more detailed summary of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, please see the Appendix.

only male character of *The Hunger Games*: Haymitch Abernathy, President Snow and, above all, Gale Hawthorne, the other male protagonist, embody prototypical hegemonic masculinity. Although Gale is not the truly hegemonic man of this story, for this is President Snow,⁷ he embodies the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

The differences that exist between the models of masculinity embodied by Peeta and Gale have triggered for me the formulation of the following research question: how are masculinity and patriarchy related? The comparison between these characters sheds light on the fact that gender has become more than a biological trait: gender is a cultural construction. Therefore, what does it mean to be a man and what does it mean to be masculine? Are masculinity and manliness intrinsic and inseparable realities or is there a way to consider them as individual concepts in favour of individualism, being alternative and otherness?

Consequently, the aim of this dissertation is to analyse and compare the characters of Peeta Mellark and Gale Hawthorne and the way they perform their masculinities in Collins' literary saga⁸ to defend the alternative model of masculinity represented by Peeta Mellark. In order to do so, I will first approach the character of Gale Hawthorne because he embodies the ideal of hegemonic masculinity in this saga.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a *man* is defined as “an adult male human being”, whereas *manliness* is entitled as “the characteristics that are traditionally thought to be typical or suitable for men”, which proves that the conceptualisation that there is an intrinsic relationship between biology and social behaviour exists.

⁷ Snow is a villain, a powerful man and he is capable of destabilising Panem's system of power. Thus, Snow represents hegemony from the traditional perspective of the hegemonic man being directly linked to power. Conversely, Gale is simply an idealization of the hegemonic man because he does not aspire to accruing power.

⁸ This dissertation would only focus on the representation of masculinity in the books, but not in the films, as I have no room here to discuss the adaptations.

This tie between biology and society seems to be unswerving, showing an extremely conservative position when it comes to the analysis of gender. Precisely, this unshakable relationship results in gender categorization being an artificial social construction that is limiting diversity. As Judith Butler claims, society and gender issues have always been influenced by the patriarchy and “the universal conception of a person (...) is displaced as a point of departure for a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts” (Butler: 10) Thus, Butler argues that social theory, not nature, classifies people in a specific context according to their gender.

In their article “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” (2005), R.W Connell claims that “hegemonic masculinity” resulted from this merging between gender and social structures. According to him, “Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man” (Connell, 2005:832) Highlighting the conceptual origin of “hegemonic masculinity”, Connell argues that it is the point of departure to scrutinise masculinity and its different manifestations. Likewise, in her article “Los Estudios de la Masculinidad: Una Nueva Mirada al Hombre a Partir del Feminismo”, Sara Martín argues, “Se trata prioritariamente de distinguir entre lo masculino y lo patriarcal, incidiendo en el hecho de que el patriarcado es una construcción específica de un tipo de masculinidad (...) que no tiene por qué ser la hegemónica” (Martín, 2007: 90) Her vision stresses the need to distinguish patriarchy from masculinity in order to allow alternative masculinities to be considered as valid.

Besides, Connell also claims that “true masculinity is almost thought to proceed from men’s bodies (...) So the first task of a social analysis is to arrive at an

understanding of men's bodies and their relation to masculinity" (Connell, 2005: 45) Nevertheless, Judith Halberstam disputes Connell, as she defends that "masculinity becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body" (Halberstam, 1998: 2) In other words, for her the naturalising correspondence that is believed to exist between the male body and masculinity is precisely what disempowers any alternative masculinities. Thus, when body and masculinity become two different entities, we leave room for alternative manifestations of masculinity per se. Indeed, Halberstam's argument justifies why Katniss has been constantly read as masculine despite her female body.

Butler also studied the relationship between body and behaviour and the basis of her Gender Performativity Theory comprises her books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). According to her, "gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency (...); rather, gender is an identity (...) instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1990: 179, original italics) Therefore, for Butler gender is not defined by genitalia but by the socially conditioned daily behaviour. As a result, "If sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow what to be given sex is to become a given gender: in other words, (...) 'man' need not to interpret male bodies" (Butler, 1990:112) Butler's intrinsic intention to destroy the gender binary has been misread. As Peeta does not definitely behave in the traditionally and culturally accepted manly way, he has been labelled as a "damsel in distress" (Willmore, 2014) Therefore, I firmly believe that the misinterpretation of those ideas has resulted in Peeta being misunderstood and compared to Gale and his ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

1. Conventional Masculinity: Gale Hawthorne

Before analysing Gale, I would like to begin by highlighting the fact that Katniss Everdeen is the narrator of the story and, consequently, she not only introduces the events but also categorises and analyses the rest of the characters. In fact, she is an unreliable character that, with her limited personal perspective towards the others, biases the readers' process of validation of the rest of the characters. Consequently, Katniss' validation and/or rejection of Gale and Peeta affect both the conception and the analysis of their masculinity. Her condition as first-person narrator is what really empowers her, for this is the only mechanism she uses to question the other characters and to stand out in the novel. Indeed, the claws of the patriarchal system trap Everdeen because if she really were an independent woman, she would not need to base her existence mostly on the necessity to analyse the roles that Gale and Peeta play in her life.

Katniss' unreliability as a narrator and her conditioning of Gale and Peeta's masculinities can be interpreted according to Judith Butler's idea that "there is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence" (Butler, 2005: 7). Accordingly, Butler's claim emphasises that the different models of masculinity that Peeta and Gale embody are the result of the different positions they occupy in their social environment and context and, especially, the result of their relationship with Katniss.

1.1. Analysing Gale's Conventional Masculinity: The Handsome Hunter

Gale Hawthorne, an eighteen-year-old young man, is Katniss' best friend and hunting partner. The first time we meet Gale is through his encounter with Katniss in the woods at the beginning of *The Hunger Games* (2008). Katniss is constantly making

the readers accept that her relationship with Gale is simply a friendship. Clearly, she declares, “there’s never been anything romantic between Gale and me” (*THG*: 11) Actually, Katniss is both tricking the readers and herself proving to be much more insecure than she thinks she is: Katniss is certainly in love with Gale but she is reluctant to tell him about her feelings because she, somehow, feels inferior to him and primarily, because she identifies love with feebleness.

Indeed, Katniss seems to justify her romantic rejection of Gale by asserting that “when we met, I was a skinny twelve-year-old (...), he already looked like a man (...) Gale won’t have any trouble finding a wife (...) you can tell by the way the girls whisper about him, when he walks by in school that they want him” (*THG*: 11) Thus Katniss is insisting on presenting herself as a strong and empowered girl who neither wants nor needs a love story with Gale. Thus, is as if Katniss is trying to convince herself about the inconvenience to have a romantic relationship with Gale.

As for Gale, we do not know much about him except that “he’s good-looking, he’s strong enough to handle works in the mines, and he can hunt” (*THG*, 11) and that he has got “straight black hair, olive skin; we even have the same grey eyes” (*THG*: 9) Nevertheless, once Katniss has volunteered in the reaping for Prim and she is inside the town hall, she desperately expects Gale to come. When he finally arrives, a sense of relief overruns her:

Finally, Gale is here, and maybe there is nothing romantic between us, but when he opens his arms, I don’t hesitate to go into them. His body is familiar to me- the way it moves, the smell of wood smoke, even the sound of his heart beating I know from quiet moments on a hunt- but this is the first time I really feel it, lean and hard-muscled against my own (*THG*: 44)

Katniss’ words shed light into the fact that, clearly, her relationship with Gale is much more profound and deeper than she wants to admit. Indeed, Katniss ends up confessing that her connection with Gale is not simply due to their friendship: Gale gives Katniss

security and she does not hesitate to level with the readers by making them acknowledge that “he turned into so much more than a hunting partner. He became my confidant (...) I call him my friend, but in the last year it’s seemed too casual word for what Gale is to me” (*THG*: 129)

Likewise, Katniss explains that “Gale, who is eighteen (...) has been either helping or singlehandedly feeding a family of five for seven years” (*THG*: 15) Gale’s adulthood is triggered by the death of his father. After Mr. Hawthorne dies working at the mines in the same catastrophe that also kills Katniss’ father, Gale is forced to adapt to the system in order to give his family the possibility to survive. He is, in short, a classic breadwinner. Likewise, Gale does not only care about the welfare of his family and Katniss’: he is also worried about the rest of the families that live in the Seam⁹ and their situation. In *Catching Fire* (2009), when Katniss suggest that they should escape with their families, Gale claims, “What about the other families, Katniss? The ones who can’t run away? Don’t you see? It can’t be about just saving *us* any more. Not if the rebellions’ begun!” (*CF*: 115, original italics) Thus, Gale’s breadwinner condition sheds light to the fact that he, at the beginning, despite his hegemonic masculinity is a nurturing man too. His nurturing attitude, thus, reinforces the fact that Gale’s hegemony is simply an ideal.

Nevertheless, Katniss unreliability leads the reader to understand Gale’s masculinity in direct relationship with his physical appearance and his hunting abilities, and, consequently, Gale’s nurturing attitude is mostly overlooked. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss relies again on Gale’s body in order to reinforce the essence of his masculinity by claiming, “he was too handsome, to male” (*CF*: 6)

⁹ The poorest area of District 12

In addition, as Guanio-Uluru defends, “Gale is the essential hunter / warrior – the rebel willing to sacrifice the ethical standards in order for his cause to succeed” (Guanio-Uluru, 2016: 221) and he is basically dominated by a “hunter prowess and a warrior mind-set” (Guanio-Uluru, 2016: 215) Thus, Guanio-Uluru establishes a relationship between Gale’s hegemonic masculinity and his warrior and hunter mind-set. Therefore, Gale’s masculinity is not simply associated to his physical appearance and to his role as the new breadwinner of his family, because without his father’s death; Gale would definitely be a different man with a different mind-set. In fact, his mental approach towards the surrounding environment is what mostly defines the kind of man he is. His mind-set and his way of acting are conditioned by his bravery. Since the very beginning, Gale shows impulses that side him with a discourse of war and fight against the Capitol. In their article “Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in *The Hunger Games*: “*Scarred*”, “*Bloody*”; and “*Stunning*””, Woloshyn, Taber and Lane claim that

Gale’s character as presented by Katniss remains resolute as the trilogy progresses and he emerges as a warrior, military strategist, and weapons expert. He is willing to sacrifice himself for what he considers to be a greater cause, to regain power and autonomy from the Capitol, and is represented as an authoritative figure, holding high rank in District 13 (Woloshyn, et al, 2013: 152)

Therefore, Gale expresses his hegemony through his counter-revolutionary enterprise against the Capitol, as it allows him to manifest overtly the kind of person he is: a man who does not hesitate to fight the system directly. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the more that Gale gets involved in the rebellion, the more he abandons his nurturing former essence, as he does not hesitate to sacrifice innocents, such as Prim, in order to achieve his military goals. The manifestation of his masculinity culminates in *Mockingjay* (2010) when he proposes the stratagem against the Capitol. Indeed, his former nurturing attitude and his strong instinct to protect others are what enhance his

rage against the Capitol and what strengthen his involvement in the rebellion. In fact, Gale's hegemonic masculinity is accentuated progressively through Collins' narrative.

Hence, Gale's ideal of hegemonic masculinity is developed through different stages along his life. He begins simply by being Katniss' handsome friend in *The Hunger Games*, next he becomes Katniss' platonic lover due to her desire for him (a desire that never turns into a reality in the end) in *Catching Fire*; then Gale ends up being one of the rebels that leads District 13 and Panem as a nation during the insurrection against Snow's system. The rebellious attitude that presides in Gale is in consonance with the ideal of man that Norman Mailer¹⁰ defended in his essay *The White Negro*. Mailer stated that,

If the fate of twentieth century man is to live with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. (Mailer, 1957, cited in Kimmel, 2006:159)

As Cook also claims, 'Gale is masculine to a fault' (Cook, 2013: 147) However, this extreme representation of manliness that he embodies could be seen as a caricature and as a parody not only of the values of the patriarchal system but also of hegemonic masculinity itself. In fact, Gale's manliness feeds on what he most hates: Snow and Panem's political system. Without even realising, Gale is acting in the same way that President Snow does, as he does not hesitate to "easily sacrifice the lives of the others for his own and even murdering a few people for what he perceives as the greater good" (Cook, 2013: 147) The problem, again, is that Prim is among the sacrificed.

The internal rage that dominates his personality is precisely what puts Katniss off finally choosing Gale. Katniss is aware that with Gale she will never be able to live

¹⁰ American novelist considered one of the innovators of creative nonfiction.

a life based on peace and forgiveness. In *Mockingjay*, after the rebels commanded by Gale drop the bombs that end up killing Prim in the Capitol, the bond between Katniss and Gale is destroyed. Katniss primarily blames Gale for Prim's death and secondly, she blames herself for being unable to protect her own family while she was trying to save the whole nation. Katniss, finally, ends up recognising that "What I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself" (*MJ*: 172)

Once Gale's masculinity has been analysed regarding Collins' novels, it is now interesting to see how the model of man that he embodies is applicable to the real world. In his book *Manhood in America* (2006), Michael Kimmel analyses the development and the history of the American masculinity. As Panem is a fictional and dystopian representation of the United States, I seek to analyse the role that Gale's ideal hegemonic masculinity plays within the American masculine canon.

According to Kimmel, in 19th century American society, the Self-Made man was born. He was "made for action, and he bustling scenes of moving life (...) mobile, competitive (...), desperate to achieve a solid grounding for a masculine identity" (Kimmel, 2006: 13) Kimmel continues his argumentation by explaining that at the beginning of the 20th century, family and fatherhood were the essential pillars for the Self-Made man to reassert his manhood and that from 1960s onwards, masculinity was defined according to the relationship between men and their work. As he explains, "virtually, the only way to be a real man in our society is to have an adequate job and earn a living" (Kimmel, 2006: 161)

Although at first sight, Gale Hawthorne's profile seems to fit in Kimmel's definition of the Self-Made man because he becomes a paternal figure after the death of his father and he is a breadwinner, it is important to notice that Gale is not a Self-Made man but the contrary. He cannot be a Self-Made man by definition because he is a

breadwinner by accident, not by choice. Thus, Gale does not have the deliberate intention to become a pater familias.

Indeed, Kimmel argues that the breadwinner role “left men feeling like cogs in the corporate machine” (Kimmel, 2006: 176) and this is precisely the way that Gale feels: he is a disempowered man who is unfairly treated both by life circumstances and by Panem’s politics.

For this reason, Gale is connected to all those contemporary men that see them disempowered in their jobs and who have lost agency to decide what to do in their lives because of the pressure of external circumstances. In fact, Kimmel argues that “in the new global America, the rich have become much richer and the poor much poorer, and far more American men are pushed down than elevated” (Kimmel, 2006: 218)

Therefore, Gale’s masculinity is not simply related to contemporary American men, it is also applicable to all those breadwinner men who are working under poor conditions around the world because of the global financial crisis and who have seen how their lives are now subjected to external forces that determine their livelihood.

In conclusion, Gale Hawthorne embodies an ideal of hegemonic masculinity that is shaped along different stages throughout his life. In *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Catching Fire* (2009), Katniss’ narration enhances Gale’s masculine role through his condition as a breadwinner and with his work in the mines, his physical appearance and his nurturing attitude in relation to the general welfare of the Seam citizens. Hence, in the first two novels of Collins’ trilogy, Gale’s ideal of hegemonic masculinity is reinforced. Nevertheless, everything changes when in *Mockingjay* (2010), his nurturing attitude enhances Gale to radicalise his warrior mind-set, which makes him become one of the major leaders of the rebellion against the Capitol. This change turns him into a man that acts unscrupulously and that does not hesitate to injure innocent people if this

means that he will successfully fulfil his rebellious enterprise. Thus, at the beginning of the trilogy the hegemonic model of man that Gale embodies is simply an ideal that differs from the true hegemonic man of this trilogy, that is President Snow. Nevertheless, at the end of the trilogy, Gale resembles Snow much more than he thinks, as both intercede for the need to use violence in order to fulfil their objectives. Gale ends up orchestrating a massacre in which Prim dies. He becomes a murderer and that is the reason why Katniss finally rejects him, because she considers that Gale is simply full of rage and that he would never help her to abandon her “Mockingjay” persona. In other words, both Suzanne Collins and Katniss Everdeen punish Gale at the very end.

2. Alternative Masculinity: Peeta Mellark

Peeta Mellark, a sixteen-year-old youngster, is the main protagonist of Collins’ *The Hunger Games* trilogy. As it has been previously argued in this dissertation, former readings on Mellark’s gender claim that Peeta is a character that allegedly embodies femininity and that Peeta’s life is based on the constant necessity to “be in the position of the one caring (...) by drawing Katniss’ attention to her character flaws” (Vandenberg, 2016: 42) Instead, in this dissertation I aim to defend that Peeta is not a feminine character because he embodies a kind of masculinity that differs from the ideal of the hegemonic and prototypical man that Gale represents. Thus, if Mellark is not a hegemonic man, what kind of masculinity does he embody?

Two possibilities arise: Peeta as an atypical man or as an alternative one. Nevertheless, claiming that Peeta is an atypical man is a terrible mistake as it would mean that the model of man he represents is an anomaly which cannot be applied to the real world and whose success as a viable model to follow is not tangible. Therefore, Peeta is not the embodiment of an atypical masculinity but of an alternative one instead.

Alternative models are successful, they are not anomalies and this implies that the model of man that Peeta represents can be applied as a role model to follow in the real world.

2.1. Defending Peeta Mellark's Alternative Masculinity

The first time that readers acknowledge Peeta is through Katniss' narration and memories. Although Everdeen has never spoken to Peeta before, she exactly knows who he is: Mellark, the son of the baker, is the boy that once showed Katniss the existence of hope, as he gave her some bread when she was starving and trying to help her mother and her sister Prim after her father's death when Peeta and she were only eleven years old. Thus, from the very first moment and without Peeta having spoken at all, the reader becomes aware that Mellark stands out as the embodiment of human nurture and that this caring condition has accompanied him since the very early stages of his life. Katniss first-person narration flows in a way that, far from dramatizing her first encounter with Peeta, shows the meeting from an apparent detached perspective.

As she narrates,

The boy took one look back to the bakery as if checking that the coast was clear, then, his attention back on the pig, he threw a loaf of bread in my direction. The second quickly followed and he sloshed back to the bakery, closing the kitchen door tightly behind him (...). To this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the dandelion that reminded me that I was not doomed. (*THG*, 2011: 35-37)

Rationalising Katniss thoughts, Peeta is presented by Collins as a saviour from the shadows, as a blurred presence who has never been in direct contact with Katniss but who has definitely shed some light, colour and thoughtfulness on her life. Indeed, this is one of the characteristics that define Peeta as an alternative man: he does not want to expose himself directly, as he prefers to be unnoticed and although he is also a hero, he is most often regarded as Katniss' squire. Katniss also associates Peeta with dandelions

because after giving her some bread, Katniss sees a growing dandelion at her feet and she automatically recalls that she used to gather dandelions with her father. Therefore, dandelions are symbolic for Katniss, as they remind her of the happy times she used to have with her deceased father.

Once Katniss assimilates that Peeta has been chosen in the reaping of the Games as the male tribute to participate with her on behalf of District 12, she laments but most importantly, a sense of guilt and disturbance overwhelms her because in the past she never thanked Peeta for giving her the bread. As she expresses “I feel like I owe him something, and I hate owing people. Maybe if I had thanked him at some point, I’d be feeling less conflicted now” (*THG*, 37) Therefore, Peeta’s past kind action awakens in Katniss the remembrance of a secret emotional connection with him and this flashback to past memoirs also acts as a prolepsis that subtly anticipates information about the inner nature that will characterise their future relationship based on unconditional help from Peeta. Indeed, Katniss feels indebted to him.

Nevertheless, Katniss actually breaks her initial emotional bond with him after she sees Peeta as a potential enemy. When they arrive to the Capitol and Peeta is “waving and smiling at the gawking crowd” (*THG*: 69) for these people may be rich and they can become their potential sponsors during the Games, she starts thinking, “he has a plan forming. He hasn’t accepted his death. He is already fighting hard to stay alive. Which also means that kind Peeta Mellark, the boy who gave me the bread, is fighting hard to kill me” (*THG*: 69) Therefore, for Katniss Peeta is simply playing a game and she decides to constantly remind herself that “*the more likeable he is, the more deadly he is*” (*THG*: 83, original italics)

Although Peeta and Katniss spend their first days together in the Capitol working as a team and acting as if they were almost siblings, Peeta suddenly decides to

distance from Katniss and to train alone. At the same time, Peeta publicly shows his inability to fight in front of the other tributes and he openly manifests that the only skills he has are related to cakes' decoration and patisserie. As he says, "I don't have any secret skill (...) I can't do anything unless you count baking bread" (*THG*, 102)

According to Swenson, "his skill is feminized" (Swenson, 2014: 44) and as Vandenberg also adds "the ways he chooses to act are not in line with traditional ideas of masculinity" (Vandenberg, 2016: 44) because "the ability to decorate cakes does not seem like a skill that would be useful during the battle of the games" (Vandenberg, 2016: 50) Thus, former readings on Mellark's skills consider that baking and patisserie are mainly feminine dexterities. Accordingly, one of the issues that have most commonly surrounded the analysis of Mellark's masculinity is his connection with bread and baking (which is his father's business). As Christi Cook highlights, "Peeta is doughy and round, and he is associated with bread and heart throughout the novel" (Cook, 2013: 147) Indeed, Peeta's relationship with bread is carried out in a double-direction: externally, Peeta is related to bread through his father's profession and internally, he is identified with the encouraging bread that have Katniss hope. Consequently, Peeta's masculinity is both affected by Katniss' perception on him and by the image of bread. In fact, his name and the word "pita", which is a kind of bread, are homophones. Although it seems quite naïve to associate Peeta with bread to defend him as an alternative man (bakers appear to be, generally speaking, manly men capable of working nights), it cannot be overlooked that thanks to his ability to bake, Peeta is able to exhibit his sensitivity and his nurturing attitude towards the rest of the characters. For instance, in *Catching Fire*, Peeta "keeps all of us in fresh baked goods" (*CF*: 17) and it is bread what once gave Katniss the necessary hope to fight for her family's survival.

Nevertheless, although Peeta is an astonishing baker, his mastery on patisserie is even more outstanding. In fact, once he is at the Capitol's Training Centre, Peeta enjoys the camouflage station by "swirling a combination of mud and clay and berry juices around on his pale skin" (*THG*: 110) Undoubtedly, it is Peeta's ability on cakes' decoration what saves his life during the first Games because after he is wounded, he uses some camouflage techniques that allow him to hide from the Careers until Katniss finally finds him. As Katniss declares, "I guess all those hours decorating cakes paid off" (*THG*: 295) to which Peeta answers back "Yes, frosting. The final defence of the dying" (*THG*: 296) Nevertheless, Swenson rejects Peeta's merit and achievement by claiming,

Peeta is located in a place to be compared to Gale through his lack of skill. Peeta is proficient at camouflage, and uses this to his advantage; however this has relatively little value compared to more offensive tactics, especially as it is a technique only applied once he has been injured (Swenson, 2014: 44)

In fact, Swenson is not the only one that underestimates Peeta's abilities, as Peeta seems to underestimate himself too because he is unassuming. However, Katniss is the one that makes the readers acknowledge that Peeta has some skills that he has overlooked: he is very strong, as he is able to "lift fifty-kilo bags of flour" (*THG*: 103) and he can also wrestle, which is useful for hand-to-hand combat. The fact that Peeta underestimates himself and his physical skills demonstrates that he is alternative, as he neither needs nor wishes to prove his masculinity. Katniss, even though she reveals to Haymitch that Peeta has important physical skills that could help him to survive in the arena, thinks that Mellark simply wants "to appear weak and frightened, to reassure the other tributes that he is no competition at all" (*THG*: 47)

In addition, she complains about Peeta being constantly crying and about the fact that he "does not seem to be trying to cover it up" (*THG*: 47) Undoubtedly, it seems

that Peeta annoys Katniss with his attitude and she believes that he is performing the role of a coward. Yet, the inner truth is that he is not following any strategy at all. As Vandenberg argues, “Peeta’s emotions are natural and genuine. He has no shame on showing grief and fear” (Vandenberg, 2016: 48-49) Therefore, Peeta indirectly displays himself as an emotional man that does not hide his genuine sentiments, because “he never chooses the manly stoic unemotional route” (Vandenberg, 2016: 44)

Hence, the main problem that arises from Katniss’ unreliable narration is that her thoughts project in the reader’s minds a very dangerous view: she is questioning Peeta for not being the model of a man he is expected to be (or that she wants him to be). For this reason, Katniss is also influenced by the ideological basis of Panem’s policies in relation to hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity.

As it happens with Gale, Katniss is also in charge of describing Peeta physically. When she introduces him, she explains that Peeta is “medium height” (*THG*: 29) and that he has a “stocky ashy blond hair that falls in waves over his forehead” (*THG*: 29) In addition; she compares his hands with “solid and warm (...) loaves of bread” (*THG*: 38) Peeta’s physical description is plain and simple, as she only highlights the images of Peeta’s height, hair and hands. Thus, his description is much more superficial than Gale’s and it stands out as a symptom of Katniss’ superficiality towards the unknown and as a clue that she is experiencing an internal debate between what she really knows about Peeta, which is nothing, and what she thinks she knows about him due to her past experience and memoirs. Whereas Katniss focuses primarily on Gale’s physical description and then she proceeds to analyse his mind-set, with Peeta she does the contrary process: she makes emphasis on Peeta’s psychological description instead of focusing on the physical one.

The descriptions of both Peeta and Gale as men enhance Katniss's unreliability as a narrator and reinforce the models of masculinity that Gale and Peeta embody. Apart from the kind action that Peeta had with her five years ago, she does not know anything about him. However, she decides to describe Peeta's mind-set according to her personal perceptions. When it comes to Gale, it would have been more logical for her to focus on his psychological description from the very beginning, as she knows him and they are confidants. Instead, Katniss focuses on his physical description. Both descriptions shed light on the fact that Gale's masculinity, for Katniss, is primarily related to his body and secondly to his mind-set. Yet, Peeta's is primarily associated to his mind-set and not to his body, which also proves that he is an alternative man.

As it has been attested, Peeta proves himself an alternative man through his skills, through his relationship with bread and patisserie and even through Katniss's superficial physical description of him, which presages that the best way to prove that Peeta is not a hegemonic man is through the analysis of his central morality and values.

Pailthorpe (2015) argues, "a common thread throughout the scholarships on *The Hunger Games* suggests that the fundamental distinction between Gale and Peeta are their moral centres" (Pailthorpe, 2015: 57). Accordingly, Gale and Peeta are physically and morally dissimilar. Whereas Peeta represents tenacity, determination, nurture and the ability to fight by means of an indirect and peaceful way of doing, Gale embodies the same attributes but he simply shows them more directly. Therefore, the approach that both men use in order to project publicly their mind-sets may lead towards the confusing impression that Gale is more masculine than Peeta. Consequently, it seems that in Collins' trilogy, the concept of masculinity and its correspondent analysis rely upon the correlation between body and behaviour.

Thus, former analyses on Peeta's manhood seem to be based on Connell's idea that masculinity depends on possessing a male body and not on Halberstam's approach. It is precisely this sociological problem, along with Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, what has biased Peeta's gender categorisation in former works.

Nonetheless, Peeta has been considered to "incorporate aspects of the Sensitive New Man (...) and represent the narrative's overall ideal" (Guanio-Uluru, 2016: 215), which is "other-regarding in personal relations: affectionate, calm, self-possessed, but approachable; considerate and respectful of the space and feelings of female companions" (Guanio-Uluru, 2016: 220) The sensitive new man is the first approach to Peeta's masculinity that highlights his gentlemanliness but without this meaning that he is a feminine man. Therefore, Guanio-Uluru praises both Peeta and his alternative masculinity.

Peeta is a kind and an honourable youth: he takes care of Katniss and he is constantly trying to save her from the dangers of the Capitol. Peeta may not be skilful in the art of war as Gale is, but he is also brave, courageous and resilient. Besides, from the very beginning, Peeta proves himself a boy that is not willing to follow the Capitol's doctrines. In *The Hunger Games*, the night before the Games start, Peeta tells Katniss "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me in some kind of monster that I'm not" (*THG*: 165)

Indeed, Peeta's kind-heartedness and his unconditional love towards Katniss are so genuine that, paradoxically, he does not hesitate to perform a fake-love story with her if this results in Katniss' life to be safer. Indeed, when in *The Hunger Games* Peeta declares during his interview with Caesar Flickerman that he is in love with Katniss, he does not only make Katniss more desirable but he humanises both of them. It is precisely during the pivotal step of their fake romance in *Catching Fire* (Peeta and

Katniss are going to get married and Peeta spuriously announces that she is pregnant to prevent her death) when Katniss realises about his inner goodness. She thinks,

I can't do it. I think. I'm not that good; Peeta's the good one, the likable one. He can make people believe anything. I'm the one who shuts up and sits back and lets him do as much of the talking as possible. But it isn't Peeta who has to prove his devotion. It's me (...), while Peeta as the very model of what a young man should be (CF: 35, original italics).

Along the same line, Katniss also explains, “Finnick knows then what Haymitch and I know. About Peeta. Being truly, deep-down better than the rest of us” (CF: 310) If Katniss believes this, how do her words prove that Peeta is an alternative man? On the one hand, Katniss argues that Peeta is desirable, as he always knows how to behave, perform and speak in public due to his sensitiveness and assertiveness towards the other. On the other hand, Katniss differentiates Peeta from Panem's male population and even from herself. She claims that Peeta does not follow the country's prototypical model of manhood and she uses the modal verb “should” in order to warn herself and the readers that Peeta is not only an alternative man, but she is also indicating that the canon of masculinity in Panem needs to change radically.

Consequently, Peeta's alternative masculinity lies in his sensitive approach towards the environment and on his nurturing attitude towards humanity. Nevertheless, and following this premise, the only moment throughout the whole trilogy in which Peeta's alternativeness as a man is compromised is when in *Mockingjay* (2010) he is hijacked and tortured by the Capitol. During his captivity, Peeta is brainwashed and he becomes Snow's most powerful weapon to destroy Katniss. This suggests that ‘Katniss is not the only person who contributes to his notion of authentic self’ (Pailthorpe, 2015: 57), as the Capitol tries to imprint in Peeta a model of masculinity based on the use of verbal aggression and threats.

However, this process backfires against the Capitol because although Peeta is tortured to act against Katniss, his public discourse is full of hidden desperate messages for help. Instinctively, Peeta is aware of the manipulation of the Capitol and he wants to keep protecting Katniss at all costs. Thus, the Capitol reinforces Peeta's 'contextual power of memory and identity' (Pailthorpe, 2015: 57) Indeed, the fact that Mellark is progressively able to curb the injurious effects of the tracker jacker venom¹¹ and that even Gale grants to Katniss that against all odds Peeta 'is trying to keep you alive' (*MJ*: 22), reinforces his alternative manliness at the same time that distances him from the hegemonic masculinity imposed by Snow's patriarchal policies. Peeta, simply, will not be used. Indeed, scholars such as Meghann Meeusen consider that "if dystopia represents that which we fear from an unchecked society, then Peeta's brainwashing indicates a cultural anxiety over blending social constraint with an embodied self" (Meeusen, 2014: 54)

Additionally, in the same way that the Capitol's brainwashing compromises Peeta's mindset, it is also important to recall that in *The Hunger Games*, Peeta loses one of his legs¹² after a pack of mutant wolves¹³ attacks him. Although she knows that it is very risky because "Peeta may end up losing his leg" (*THG*, 395-396), Katniss decides to tie a tourniquet around his injured calf. After their victory in the Games, the Capitol amputates Peeta's leg and replaces it with a prosthetic iron one instead.

Undoubtedly, this is one of the most controversial issues regarding Peeta's characterisation because someone who has not read the books but who has simply

¹¹ Venom used by the Capitol for torturing the prisoners and for manipulating their memories and mind-set. In *The Hunger Games*, this venom is also present in the genetically altered bees that attack Katniss during the Games.

¹² Collins' does not specify which leg is it, although it could be his left leg, which is the same leg that gets injured after he is stabbed by Cato (Career and tribute from District 1).

¹³ They are humanly creatures. The Gamemakers have transformed the tributes that have previously died into mutant wolves.

watched the film adaptations may miss this, as in the film Peeta does not lose his leg and he is simply badly injured. The loss of his leg is an external factor that is trying to compromise Mellark's masculine identity from a physical perspective because, as it has been previously argued in this dissertation, body and behaviour are intrinsically linked when it comes to the analysis of the different models of masculinity presented in this trilogy. Indeed, if we link Peeta's lack of physical skill with his mutilation, we are reinforcing the idea that his masculinity is biased by his lack of skill and therefore, we are far away from defending Peeta as an alternative man. Yet, I firmly believe that the fact that Peeta loses his leg has a deeper meaning: despite being crippled, Peeta demonstrates that he is a born fighter because he is not only able to survive this incident but he is also able to persist in his personal aim of unconditionally helping Katniss. Thus, his new condition as a crippled man deeply reinforces and asserts his alternative masculinity as a viable model of man by showing that, as Halberstam defended, more than simply a prototypical physical body define men's masculinity. Therefore, the amputation of Peeta's leg is a kind of symbolic castration of his masculinity¹⁴, but also a test on his manhood that he passes successfully. Consequently, for Collins' the notion of test becomes an essential issue and she pushes Peeta to extreme limits in order to prove that his alternativeness and the model of the New Sensitive Man that he embodies are viable.

Moreover, the amputation of Peeta's leg has become a topic of interest amongst scholars of the Disability Studies field, which examines disabilities and their meaning in social contexts. In their paper "The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity", Russell Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood and Nathan J. Wilson argue that

¹⁴ Peeta's symbolic castration reminds us to one of the most famous amputations of the history of cinema: when Luke Skywalker loses his hand.

Framing their research on disabled masculinity within Connell's general conceptual schema, Gerschick and Miller¹⁵ developed a typology of three types of relational responses to hegemonic masculinity – reliance, reformulation and rejection (...) Gerschick and Miller concluded that some disabled men continue to rely on hegemonic masculine ideals (...), some reformulate these ideals with their limitations and others reject hegemonic masculinity, formulating instead an alternate masculinity for themselves.

(Shuttleworth et al., 2012: 177)

Thus, Peeta fits in the group of those disabled men that reject hegemonic masculinity, but it is important to notice that Peeta does not reject it after he loses his leg, but he has always done so. Consequently, he has formulated an alternative masculinity for him since the very beginning. In the same vein, Katherine Ann Lashley argues, “the narrative prosthesis present in *The Hunger Games* is best exemplified in Peeta's prosthetic leg. This physical disability, and how it is cured with medicine indicated how the Panem society has chosen to ignore the damage caused by the Games” (Lashley, 2016: 132) For this reason, Peeta's experience can be read from two different perspectives: on the one hand, he can be compared to all those war veterans that after being injured during the war were treated in order to hidden the evidence of the destructive nature of wars, as it happened with the Vietnam War veterans. On the other hand, his prosthetic leg can be interpreted as a symbol of Peeta's heroism and as an issue that proves that life goes on even after destruction. Therefore, Peeta stands out as an exception for the premise that in Collins' trilogy masculinity and body and intrinsically related and the fact that he loses his leg proves again his alternativeness, although it must be said that Peeta would continue to be an alternative man even if he had both legs.

¹⁵ Men's Health Specialists. In 1994, these American authors wrote the chapter “Coming to Terms: Masculinity and Physical Disability” of the book *Men's Health and Illness: Gender, Power and the Body*, edited by Donald Sabo and David Frederick Gordon.

2.2. Analysing Peeta Mellark's Alternative Masculinity: The Saddest Ending for Peeta

Another issue that is worth to comment on when dealing with Peeta's masculinity is the ending of *The Hunger Games* trilogy itself. Guanio-Uluru has defended that "through Peeta, the rhetoric of gender in *The Hunger Games* coincides with the series' masculine ideal in the sense that Peeta, the morally better man, eventually emerges victorious in the competition for Katniss' affection" (Guanio-Uluru, 2016: 215) But, how does the "morally better man" differ from the "hegemonic man"?

The "morally better man" is that who wants to maintain at against all odds his purity of the self. As it has been previously demonstrated, Peeta rejects all the opportunities that the Capitol has to turn him into someone he is not. In his paper "The Three Faces of Evil: A Philosophic Reading of The Hunger Games", Brian McDonald compares Peeta with Socrates. As the Greek philosopher, Peeta

Can think beyond the immediacy of death and realize that what is at the stake is not just his life, but his humanity. He can ask the question of whether the short life that lies ahead of him is worth struggling for if his mere survival is purchased at the expense of making him both a "monster" and a mere prop for the violent entertainment of others

(McDonald, 2014: 68)

Thus, the "morally better man" fights against all the external and internal attempts that aim to change his persona. On the contrary, the hegemonic man that Gale embodies proves to more chameleon-like, as he adapts his morality and actions according to the social environment. The hegemonic man, dominated by rage, is not consistent and does not fight to maintain the purity of the self. Regarding Gale, his former goodness and manly idealisation in relation to Katniss are destroyed by the external constraining social forces of Panem and the rebellion when he directs the operation against the Capitol that results in innocents' blood spilling and in Prim's death.

However, although Peeta is the “morally better man”, the fact that Katniss finally chooses him and why she does so seem to be indirectly reinforcing the final triumph of hegemonic masculinity in Collins’ trilogy. Along the whole trilogy, Katniss experiences an internal debate: whether to choose Peeta or Gale as her life partner. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is constantly using the word “compare” in order to tackle her indecision. In fact, in Katniss’ comparisons, Gale is always triumphant because as Katniss confesses “I can’t help comparing what I have with Gale to what I’m pretending to have with Peeta” (*THG*: 130) and “Gale would be my first choice” (*THG*: 92) Hence, Katniss is constantly trying to convince the readership about the fake and bogus nature of her romantic relationship with Peeta and her decision to love Gale is tightened in *Catching Fire*, when she declares that “I have chosen Gale and the rebellion, and a future with Peeta is the Capitol’s design, not mine” (*CF*:57) Consequently, Katniss associates Gale with free will and on the contrary, she associates Peeta both with the Capitol’s politics and impositions on her but also with an extreme sense of guilty and with the fact that she owes him something.

How, then, can Katniss end up living her life and having children with someone that is simply a symbol of Snow’s control and impositions on her? Critics such as Victoria Vandenberg have argued, “instinctively, Katniss returns to the person who embodies nature and hope for renewal. She and Gale are destructive forces, but Peeta is the symbol of hope and new life” (Vandenberg, 2016: 62) Likewise, Katniss abandons her “mockingjay” persona to lead a simply life because, “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 are. That is can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that” (*MJ*: 172) Accordingly, Katniss does not choose Peeta because

of genuine love and desire but because of the stability that this alternative model of masculinity seems to offer her.

Not to be forgotten, Katniss punishes Gale after the death of her sister Prim during the attack against the Capitol that he commands. For Katniss, Gale is guilty of assassinating Prim and it is precisely the death of the youngest of the Everdeen siblings the excuse that both Suzanne Collins and Katniss adopt to finally reject Gale. For this reason, Katniss' rejection of Gale and her consequent choice of Peeta prove that, in Collins' trilogy, hegemonic masculinity finally triumphs upon alternative masculinities, as the reason why Katniss chooses Peeta is based on a previous dismissal of Gale. Therefore, although Collins offers in *The Hunger Games* an alternative model of masculinity based on sensitivity and nurture through Peeta's character and she tries to make it work, the sad ending of the trilogy destroys all her efforts and poses the debate to what an extend hegemonic masculinity is still being considered nowadays the role model of masculine behaviour. Sadly, neither Collins nor Katniss believe in Peeta's model: Peeta's alternative masculinity is simply a rhetorical device used by Collins' in order to explore the limitations of the masculine discourse and in order to pose a debate not only to Katniss but also to the readers. Throughout the whole trilogy, Katniss is not the only one that has to choose between Peeta and Gale, but also the reader has to decide if they want to join team Peeta or team Gale. Although it is true that Collins and Katniss recognise that Peeta is an alternative man in relation to Gale and to the rest of the male population in Panem, Katniss genuinely loves Gale not Peeta. Peeta and his alternative masculinity seem to be oratorical gadgets that are useful to question hegemonic masculinity and its limitations. Therefore, in the same way that Peeta's masculinity cannot be understood without Gale, Gale's masculinity cannot be assessed without Peeta. In this trilogy, Peeta and his masculinity would have been really

defended by the author and Katniss if the latter had chosen Peeta without the need to reject Gale first. Thus, for Katniss and Suzanne Collins, alternative masculinities take a back seat in relation to hegemonic ones. Therefore, the representation of hegemonic masculinity seems to be discarded in front of otherness and alternativeness but just because it is convenient both for Katniss and for Collins' as an author, not because they really believe in the alternative that Peeta embodies.

Moreover, the notion of pity becomes an essential issue to understand Katniss' ultimate decision: she is aware of the fact that Peeta has always helped and protected her. Accordingly, Katniss associates Peeta's sensitiveness with the inner guilt she would feel unless she finally ends up choosing him and with the idea that she owes him something since the day of the reaping. Undoubtedly, Peeta is the only character of the trilogy that is faithful to his emotions and personality. After Katniss chooses him, Peeta's life becomes a lie: Katniss will never genuinely love him; he is only a symbol of stability cut off from destruction and death.

Once Peeta's masculinity has been analysed regarding Collins' novels, as it happens with Gale, it is now interesting to test how Peeta's alternative masculinity is applicable to the real world. Kimmel's discourse is also useful for analysing Peeta's role within the American canon of masculinity.

Peeta can be associated with the model of man that Michael Kimmel baptizes as the "Heroic Artisan". According to him, the Heroic Artisan is a man who "saw himself as deeply embedded within a community of equals" (Kimmel, 2016: 21) For the Heroic Artisan; manliness relied on independence and self-reliance. Their businesses were mainly located near their homes or even in the family house, so they were not only able to provide their neighbours with the necessary things to live, but they also took care of the family at the same time.

Peeta is the son of the baker; he is the heir of man who runs his own business in order to make a living and to be a proper breadwinner. Peeta also bakes artisan bread and uses all his knowledge in relation to pastry in order to survive in the Games and to feed those who surround him. Indeed, if Peeta were not the son of the baker, he would not have had the opportunity to give Katniss the loaf of bread that encouraged her to keep surviving in the past.

In addition, the Heroic Artisan feels himself equal to those that surround him and he does not seek power. Peeta, throughout the whole trilogy, proves to be a modest and humble youngster, as he does not consider himself superior to the rest. On the contrary, there are many instances when Peeta underestimates himself. In the same way that Collins and Katniss do not believe in the alternative model of man that Peeta embodies, in the 19th century America, the leading figure of the Heroic Artisan became antiquated due to the success of the Industrial Revolution and mass production. Thus, the Heroic Artisan manly prototype was pushed into the background of American manliness.

Therefore, due to his father's business, his artisan baking skill, his nurturing and egalitarian relationship towards the environment and his relative success as man in Collins' narrative, Peeta can be analysed as both as the dystopian and contemporary embodiment of the American canonical Heroic Artisan.

Nevertheless and to conclude, I firmly believe that Peeta is the most genuine male character of this literary saga: he always sticks to his ideas and against all odds, he proves himself a brave man and a survivor. Peeta never uses violence in order to achieve his goals and demonstrates that manliness goes further than the traditional and socially accepted roles of fatherhood, physical prototypical skills and working in places such as a mine. Peeta's masculinity is shaped from a different angle, a more subtle one at a first sight but once it is discovered and properly analysed, it proves its efficacy and

viability. Former studies on Mellark's gender (Cook, 2013; Pailthorpe, 2015; Swenson, 2014; Vandenberg, 2016) are reductionist attempts to simplify Peeta's character. Hence, claiming that Peeta is feminine because he does not follow a stereotypical manly behaviour shows that still nowadays, there is plenty of work to be done to decrypt gender. Thus, the previous disfigurement of Mellark's masculinity has been denied in this dissertation, as Peeta Mellark is an alternative masculine man and his alternative condition does not only need to be analysed but also praised and celebrated, because characters such as Peeta demonstrate that gender categorisation is subjective and that there is no right or appropriate way to manifest masculinity. Thus, thanks to characters such as Peeta Mellark, masculinity is becoming, systematically, a more democratic issue.

3. Conclusions and Further Research

This dissertation has analysed the different models of masculinity that Suzanne Collins depicts in *The Hunger Games* trilogy through the characters of Peeta Mellark and Gale Hawthorne, the former embodying an alternative masculinity and the latter embodying the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. The antagonistic relationship between both characters is based on the clash between the models of masculinity they embody and, as I have stated, this antagonism is due to the social and political control that society is still nowadays imposing on what it means to be a man.

Judith Butler is the main theorist in Gender Studies to defend the necessity to consider sex and gender as two separate entities. According to her gender performativity theory, the formation of identity is not based on the intrinsic relationship between body and behaviour, but on the actions and routines that someone daily undertakes. For this reason, previous readings of Mellark's gender that have used Butler's theories as a basis

have misinterpreted her, as they claimed that Peeta is mainly a feminine man. Nevertheless, this dissertation has tried to shed light on the fact that Peeta is a masculine alternative character.

As the analysis of the trilogy has attested, Collins' is trying to defend Peeta's alternativeness but she does not completely succeed. Although Collins tries to praise Peeta and his alternativeness by making him become Katniss' life partner and by making him overcome all the difficult situations he has to confront despite being crippled, Peeta is not chosen by Katniss due to genuine love, but simply because she has rejected Gale first after Prim's death in *Mockingjay*. Thus, Katniss does not choose Peeta due to his inner goodness but because Gale is imperfect. With the coexistence of two clearly different models of masculinity, Collins' coerces Katniss and the readers to choose between Peeta and Gale. Therefore, Katniss' narration and the readers of the trilogy validate both characters as men.

Peeta's masculinity is not simply atypical: he proves himself as an alternative and viable model of man. If he were labelled as simply being an atypical man, it would imply that the model of masculinity that he embodies would be neither reliable nor plausible to be embodied in a real society. Instead, his is an alternative model of man, whose manliness is supported by his sensitiveness, his assertiveness, his indirect warring skills, his loyalty, his perseverance and his ability to overcome different situations after he loses his leg. Definitely, Peeta is a good fellow and by claiming that all the characteristics that he embodies are not properly manly or manly enough would lead to the triumph of hegemonic masculinity and the endless perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Therefore, this dissertation defends those alternative models of masculinity such as the one embodied by Mellark in order to break the static and immobile normative of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic manifestations of masculinity have always coexisted and will always coexist with the presence of alternative masculine manifestations. Nevertheless, as this dissertation has also analysed, the models of masculinity that Peeta and Gale embody are applicable to the American historical context. Whereas Gale's masculinity seems to proceed, at first sight, from the American Self-Made Man, he cannot be so because he does not choose to become a breadwinner. Indeed, he adopts this role because of the tragic death of his father. Thus, he is cog a in the machine, undervalued and trapped by the paws of Capitol's system in the same way that contemporary men are trapped by the paws of the capitalist system. Thus, Gale embodies a universal model of man. Regarding Peeta, his alternative masculine seems to rely also in the model of the Heroic Artisan, which belongs to the American historical masculine canon. In this sense, Peeta is a more local character than Gale, but at the same time, his alternative masculinity is related to all those contemporary men that express their masculinity by means of alternative ways.

Finally, it would be interesting to do some further research on the differences that may arise between the depictions of Peeta and Gale as men in the books and the films. On the one hand, whereas the books seems to strengthen Peeta's gentle character and his capacity of resistance against the system, the films prefer to present Peeta more as a man in the shadows that is simply conditioned by a romantic triangle. On the other hand, Gale's depiction seems to be more stable and lineal: he is simply depicted in both cases as a strong, handsome and brave boy who ends up losing Katniss' love. Hence, apparently, the representation of hegemonic masculinity seems to be an easier process than the one of representing otherness and alternativeness. In addition, it would also be interesting to analyse Katniss' relationship with the rest of the female characters of the

trilogy, Prim and Alma Coin in particular, in order to establish whether her inner agency comes from her alienation or alliance of the women's collective.

Moreover, as Macaluso and Mickenzie defend, “unlike other typical dystopias (...) the trilogy is not warning of things that might happen, but a mirror of what has happened (and is happening) without our being aware of it” (Macaluso & Mickenzie, 2014: 129) Hence, it would also be very interesting for political and sociological reasons to profoundly analyse the parallels and differences between Panem and the United States as well as to analyse to what an extent the masculinity embodied by the fictitious character of President Snow can be translatable to the masculinity embodied by the actual president the United States Donald Trump and if their masculinities fit within the historical American canon of what does it mean to be a man.

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4.3 Image Credits

United States' Political Map,

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/92/Map_of_USA_with_state_names_2.svg/2000px-Map_of_USA_with_state_names_2.svg.png

Panem's Political Map,

http://www.panemprompaganda.com/storage/post-images/panem-school-map-23x35_print1.jpg?_SQUARESPACE_CACHEVERSION=1379416678520

5. Appendix

In *The Hunger Games* (2008), Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark end up participating in the 74th Hunger Games on behalf of District 12,¹⁶ the poorest district in Panem. He is chosen, and she volunteers to replace her sister, Prim. During this bloody adventure, Haymitch Abernathy mentors Katniss and Peeta. Haymitch is an alcoholic and a gloomy man but most importantly, he is a former District 12 tribute and the victor of the 50th Hunger Games. Haymitch is a clever man and he exactly knows what Peeta and Katniss need to do in order to gain supporters: they need to perform publicly a fake love story that makes them the “star-crossed lovers” of the Games. Consequently, and thanks to Abernathy’s plan, Katniss and Peeta become the victims of the intrinsic destructive nature of the Games in the eyes of the public opinion.

Although at the beginning of the Games Peeta and Katniss are enemies and Katniss even thinks that Peeta is a traitor, they finally become a team. Peeta helps Katniss to escape after an attack held by the tributes of Districts 1 and 2 and consequently, Peeta is wounded. For this reason, from this moment onwards Katniss’ mission is to meet Peeta again in the arena in order to pay her debt with him: Peeta saved Katniss’ life and she is now the one who wants to help Peeta. Once Katniss finds

¹⁶ District 12 could stand out as a fictional representation of the real American states of Indiana and Illinois, where some of the most important coalmines of the country are found. In Panem, District 12 is the main coal supplier of the country.

Peeta, she discovers that he is hiding because his leg is terribly wounded. Indeed, this encounter becomes a new starting point in their relationship: they will strengthen the “star-cross lovers performance” at the same time that their love seems to become genuine for the first time. This mutual help and nurturing becomes even stronger when the Gamemakers announce that, exceptionally, if the last two survivors of the Games are from the same district, both will become victors. Thus, Katniss and Peeta’s bond strengthens: they want to survive, they want to go back home and they want to win the Games.

Against all odds, at the end of the Games Peeta and Katniss are the two only surviving tributes. When they think that they are both safe, the Gamemakers change again the rules of the competition: only one of them can finally survive, which means that they need to kill each other. Nevertheless, defying the Gamemakers, Peeta and Katniss try to commit suicide by eating some poisonous berries. Their trick is successful and they are both proclaimed victors, although the Capitol is upset with their threatening defiance. Peeta and Katniss become the first Panem citizens that defy the Capitol after many years of terror, and from then onwards, their only way to survive is to continue their public fake love performance.

In *Catching Fire* (2009), Katniss and Peeta’s defiance towards the Capitol’s politics in the previous Games triggers riots in the vast majority of the districts. Consequently, President Snow threatens Katniss: he will hurt her mother, her sister Prim and Gale (Katniss’ friend and true love), if she does not marry Peeta. Realising that Katniss is not in love with him, and acting as his protector, Peeta promises Katniss to help her unconditionally.

Peeta and Katniss next take the victors’ tour around Panem. During the tour, Peeta and Katniss realise that the districts are fighting the Capitol and that they, with their

berries' trick, have become the trigger of the rebellion and a symbol of hope for the oppressed in Panem. At the same time, Peeta and Katniss cope with their strong feelings of guilt for the violence that people are suffering in the districts in the hands of the Peacekeepers¹⁷ and they plan their wedding as a public show in which the whole country seems to participate.

In order to curb the riots down and thus show his strength, President Snow announces a special edition of the Games, the Quarter Quell, a special edition of the Hunger Games in which former victors must become tributes again. This event occurs every twenty-five years. The Quarter Quell is a symbol of Snow's power, as the message that he transmits is that insurrection has a price and that you may survive once but not a second time. Katniss knows for sure that she will participate in the Games again because she is the only female victor from District 12. As for the male tribute, Haymitch is elected but Peeta volunteers to replace him, as Katniss did for Prim. Once in the arena, Katniss and Peeta join other tributes as allies: the twenty-four-year-old Finnick Odair and the eighty-year-old Mags, both tributes from District 4. They are aware that this time their survival does not only depend on them, but also on the rest of the tributes, who are much more experienced than they are.

One day, the group comes across a poisonous fog that paralyzes Peeta. In order to save the whole group and Peeta especially, old Mags sacrifices herself and dies. After her death, the group creates an alliance with Johanna Mason from District 7 and with Beetee and Wiress from District 3. The latter are technological mavericks and Wiress discovers that the arena is arranged like a clock and that every hour a new disaster

¹⁷ Policing body run by the Capitol government in order to keep peace in the districts.

happens. Using this knowledge, the group plans to electrocute the Careers¹⁸ tributes Enobaria and Brutus. Instead, Katniss destroys the Games' arena by short-circuiting the force field, crashing the system that recreates the virtual reality of the arena.

After this incident, Katniss wakes up in hospital: she is in the apparently extinct District 13. Beete, Finnick and Haymitch are with her and she realises that everything was planned since the very beginning of the Quarter Quell: she has been a pawn used to accomplish the final step of the previously arranged plan among half of the tributes to destroy the arena. Katniss then realizes that she has become the symbol of the future rebellion against the Capitol, that District 12 has been destroyed and more importantly that the Capitol has captured Peeta and Johanna.

In *Mockingjay* (2010), we witness the rebellion of the Districts, led by Alma Coin, against the Capitol and we experience the process through which Katniss becomes the symbolic "Mockingjay", her new nickname in the rebellion against the Capitol. The Government is incapable of controlling her just as it cannot control these birds, which are both able to reproduce human conversations and other birds songs; likewise, Katniss is the spokesperson for the rebellion that reproduces the thoughts and the voice of the oppressed rebels. Moreover, her main role in this rebellion is to convince people as fast as possible about the need to fight Snow and to destroy his political system. However, Katniss is worried mainly about rescuing Peeta, hijacked and tortured by the Capitol in order to turn him into a weapon against Katniss to demoralise and kill her. Once Peeta is rescued by the rebels, and after his several attempts to kill Katniss, he becomes a prisoner of the rebels until doctors find a way to restore his sanity and health.

¹⁸ The Careers are the tributes from the wealthy districts, which have been professionally trained to succeed in the Games. They are against Peeta, Katniss, Johanna, Finnick, Wiress and Beete.

Eventually Gale proposes a stratagem: launching a final rebel campaign in the centre of the Capitol, against Snow's mansion. Katniss and her 'propo team'¹⁹ along with Peeta, Gale and Finnick, are enlisted in the mission. Once in the Capitol, a succession of violent actions results in the death of most of Katniss' team members. As Katniss is reaching Snow's mansion, parachutes carrying bombs explode and many children die. The rebel medics, including Prim as a nurse, are helping the children when a second set of bombs explodes. Prim is killed and the rebels take the Capitol.

Katniss awakens again in hospital and is informed that Snow is waiting for his execution. Katniss decides to confront Snow personally. During their meeting, Katniss realises that Alma Coin orchestrated the bombings and that Gale is somehow guilty of Prim's death. Thanks to this conversation with Snow, Katniss realises that Coin's actual intentions are not the establishment of a democratic republic, but rather assuming Snow's dictatorial power; she wants to punish the children of the Capitol's leaders by forcing them to be the only participants in the Hunger Games. Full of rage, Katniss shoots Alma Coin with an arrow in what supposedly is Snow's public execution. Katniss attempts suicide but Peeta saves her and both return to District 12. Peeta has gradually recovered his memory and his love for Katniss and she decides to accept Peeta finally as her beloved. In the epilogue, set twenty years later, Katniss and Peeta are married and they have two children.

¹⁹ A film crew that records Katniss and all her rebellious actions in order to create the rebels' propaganda.