



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

ENGLISH

The Evolution of the Literary Hero

The sociological impacts on hero driven literature

Isabelle Johannesson

BA thesis
Spring 2015

Examiner: Margrét Gunnarsdottir Champi
C-level essay

Title: The evolution of a literary hero- *The sociological impact on hero driven literature*

Author: Isabelle Johannesson

Abstract: The Hunger Games trilogy is a dystopian adventure tale told by a teenage girl living in future North America, now known as Panem. These young adult fiction novels, written by Suzanne Collins highlight several topical problems found within today's society. Amongst others, it addresses media control and the power succeeding it, totalitarian governments and class differentiation. The aim of this essay is to investigate how the digital turn in our society, with the extensive use of the Internet, social medias and reality TV has affected the portrayal of the literary hero. Critical sources on media power, celebrity fame and politics are brought in to contrast and compare the dystopian society of Panem with contemporary Western culture, focusing on media and the portrayal of the self. Parallels will be drawn to comic book superheroes from the 1940's and 1960's, which will be representing the literary hero before the digital turn. This essay shows that the digitalisation of our society has created a new form of literary hero following changes in our culture.

Key words: Hero driven literature, The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins, Comic books, Western culture, dystopia, social criticism, media, reality television, politics, power.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: Costumes, Consumerism and the Creation of a Digitalised Self.....	8
Chapter 2: Media and Parasocial Relationships and Politics.....	14
Conclusion.....	22
Works cited.....	24

Introduction.

In recent years the development and range of digital platforms and media in our society has dramatically increased. The extended use of the Internet, social media and reality TV has undoubtedly altered Western society and the people living in it, a shift that has had both perks and drawbacks. One could argue that the digitalisation of our society has brought us closer, made us more aware of the world we live in and made communication across the planet easier. Alternatively, it is arguable that this has made it increasingly difficult to be critical of information sources and that the extended use of machines has led to some form of dehumanisation. No matter which of the two viewpoints one would support, it is safe to say that media and digital platforms are strongly influencing our way of life.

This essay will explore in what way the digitalisation of our society has influenced hero driven literature. By investigating the change in our society using a sociological aspect I hope to find the cause for a change in literature. My goal is to find connections between theories of communication and consumption by Jean Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan, with literary theories by Robin Rosenberg and Angela Ndalianis among others. By doing this I hope to add a new perspective to the effects the digitalisation has had on hero driven literature.

Major concepts that will be used are Baudrillard's theory regarding consumption. His theory indicates that consumption is tied to the creation and production of a sense of the self. His theories will be used to explain how consumerism and capitalism has made products shift from the realm of its function to becoming the carrier of social meaning. Baudrillard's theories regarding "the death of the real" will be used and connected with Marshall McLuhan's theories regarding communication. McLuhan claimed that "the medium is the message", meaning that what change society is not the information we obtain through the medium but the actual medium itself. He also believes that language is an extension of the human consciousness and that it is because of this consciousness we have created new mediums. The two later theories will explain how and why we are connecting more and more deeply to mediums that merely simulate reality. These sociological theories will be used to demonstrate how society has influenced hero driven literature.

The main argument of this essay is, that there has been a change in the depiction of the literary hero. Two different types of heroes will be presented. One will hereafter be known as the “old literary hero” and will be represented by the 1940’s to 1960’s comic book superheroes: Spiderman, Batman and Captain America. Comic book superheroes were chosen as representatives since they are relatable in terms of the time the work was written and the time the story takes place. They all live in big multicultural cities, New York, the fictional Gotham and an undefined major American city. Their societies are almost completely non-digitalised, apart from newspapers and TV, making them uncompromised in terms of their use of social media and the Internet. Despite this, they still live in highly relatable societies for today’s reader. This enables me to do a fair analysis on the impact of the digital turn in society, and the succeeding digitalisation, on literature.

Comic books had an enormous popularity surge within literature during the 1940’s and 1960s, and originated from the then current political state in wartime America. There is a wide range of superhero stories available and almost all of them are “intensely grounded in the normal and everyday life” (Reynolds 74). In other words, they operate in a society with similar sociological and political substructures as today.

Captain America will help to develop the understanding of the political aspect of hero driven literature. As his name so starkly implies he reflects the patriotic and highly political America during both World War Two and the later fight against communism. Captain America’s real alias, Steve Rogers, provides the reader with a sense of normality and embodies the American dream via his transformation. This makes Captain America a fair representation of the political substructures that permeated literature during the time.

The story about Spiderman, or his real alias Peter Parker, “offers us a superhero we can identify with – Peter Parker is a young man who struggles with ordinary human temptations as well as the many travails of the teen years”. (Morris 165) In the later issues, Peter works as a photographer for a newspaper where his job is to take photos of Spiderman, in other words himself. This make us aware of the importance of media surveillance even before the digital turn as well as Peter’s ability to regulate his own fame through what photos he chooses to present to the paper.

Bruce Wayne, also known as Batman, is a billionaire industrialist in an arguably capitalistic state. He is the owner of one of Gotham’s biggest, wealthiest corporations and as a result is somewhat of a celebrity figure. Despite his position, he is

known for being very reserved and media shy and does not live up to the celebrity status he attains through his work. Bruce is therefore the example of someone who rejects the celebrity status he is given, making him a fair representation of Jean Baudrillard's critique of consumerism. In essence, all of these characters show different aspects of hero driven literature during the time. Together they make a suitable depiction of an old literary hero in popular culture.

Most literary works have some form of protagonist that may be viewed as the books hero. However, what differs hero driven literature from other forms of literature is the way the hero is portrayed. Classically, a hero behaves in a virtuous manner, and pursues a goal generally regarded as good. However, this goal is not something that is only of benefit to the hero, which is arguably the most common objective of a fictional character. Instead it means that they sacrifice their own normal life and safety for the safety and greater good of others. This makes hero driven literature motivated by the actual quest of the hero and the ordeals they are exposed to when serving humanity. (Ndalialis 135)

Katniss Everdeen of the Suzanne Collins trilogy "*The Hunger Games*" will represent the "new literary hero". *The Hunger Games* takes place in a distant future whereby several natural disasters and wars have destroyed the social structures of our world. The land of Panem was created from what was left of North America. Panem has twelve districts that are controlled by the Capitol. The Capitol is a large, extremely rich, and technologically advanced city, located in the centre of the nation (Collins HG 59). In order to sustain the state the districts provide the Capitol with resources. Each district is assigned to produce one specific essential product or trade. However, great disparity caused by the increased wealth of the Capitol and poverty and class differentiation among the districts, led to an uprising by the inhabitants of Panem against the totalitarian state. The rebellion failed and as retribution, the Capitol holds an annual event known as the "Hunger Games". The games are a televised fight to the death between two representatives or "tributes" from each district. The tributes are chosen via a form of lottery where one girl and one boy, between the age of 12 and 18, are chosen to participate. When 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen's younger sister Prim, is chosen to be the female representative for District 12, she volunteers to take her place in the games. Throughout the series we follow Katniss on her way through the falsehood of the Capitol, the deadly games and witness her becoming the embodiment and symbol for the new rebellion.

The novels take place in a dystopian society seen through the eyes of Katniss

and represent a place in time where the digitalised society has had its peak and has now gone past it. In the same way comic books are intensely grounded in everyday life, dystopian literature generally explores social and political structures and reflects societies that are heading towards an irreversible obliviousness (Zimbaro 19). The main idea with dystopian literature is to lift real life issues in to imaginary circumstances, enabling the reader to think about situations that exist today (Booker 19). One could argue that Suzanne Collins is trying to pass on her critique of our contemporary Western society through her novels.

With this essay I intend to show that the change in our social structures, as a result of the increased use of digital medias, has enabled a change in hero driven literature. There has been extensive work written about this relatively new trilogy. However, there is not a lot that has been published, therefore, imposing a difficulty in evaluating to what extent previous work is relevant to my thesis. A few of the studies that have been published relate to, or have elements of media criticism. For an example, Jonah Ringelstein's discuss the novels "*direct relationship*" with the realities of the contemporary world in his essay; *Real or not real: The hunger Games as Transmediated Religion*. He argues that the "Hunger Games" is an extended form of today's reality shows, which are purely a depiction of the true reality of the world (Ringelstein 372). However his aim is to translate the books to the medium of religion and is therefore targeting a different question. However, I have found little or no studies looking at the hero from a post digital perspective.

The essay will be divided into two chapters; one will explore the heroes' use of a costume and how consumerism and the creation of a digitalised self have affected the illustration of a hero. The second chapter will further investigate how the altered relationship and usage of media has influenced hero driven literature. It will both evaluate how the media embodies the shift in social relationships, and also how it can be a source of power and affect politics.

Chapter 1

Costumes, Consumerism and the Creation of a Digitalised Self

The disguise, or the use of a costume, is arguably one of the strongest signifiers for comic book superheroes. However, the idea of a dual identity and masked heroes has its roots in older literature such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845) or *The Mark of the Zorro* (1919), or for that matter in old biblical tales and hero myths (Ndalielis 126).

Peter Parker and Bruce Wayne are no exception to this rule and let their secret aliases operate behind disguises. What one might ask, is why superheroes, which irrefutably are fighting for the good of mankind, prefer to do so hidden behind a disguise or an alias?

Tom and Matt Morris, the writers of *Superheroes and Philosophy*, argue that the reason for wearing a costume may be part of a separation process from the self. They claim that by putting on a costume the person in question transcends from being their normal self into the person who is viewed as a hero. They further argue that this is not only something found in literary heroes, but is just as common in everyday life. Examples are, among others, police and military forces who, just like superheroes, are there to protect and insure the safety of normal citizens. However, these forces do not wear a costume to disguise their identity but rather to clearly emphasise their working role. A costume might therefore not only be a way of disguising the true identity but also a way to distance themselves from the deeds performed on duty. The uniform or costume may enable the wearer to go into a different mode of self-identity and self-presentation in order to perform the given task. One can draw apparent links between this theory and the old literary heroes' use of a costume. When comic book heroes put on their disguises they clearly transform from their normal selves into a separate identity. Even though they do not completely transcend into a different person, the public view them as such. Obviously, the public is unaware of their normal identity but this only enhances their own perception of the separation, simply because they are able to benefit from separating personal and work life.

The new literary hero found in Katniss, uses the costume in a similar but yet very different way. She does not wear a costume to hide her true identity, but rather to emphasise her alternate role as "The Mockingjay"- the leader of the rebellion. Despite having an alter ego she does not benefit from the same separation process between the

hero and the self, as the old literary heroes do. She is still only known as Katniss Everdeen to the public, because that is the person the public got to know her as during The Hunger Games. In other words, Katniss transformed into a hero whilst in the public eye. Our old literary heroes changed or attained powers away from the public, making them unaware of the transformation. However, Katniss is well aware of the role she portrays when wearing her costume. For her, the costume is not only there for protection when in battle, but is used as a medium to reinforce her position as a celebrity in front of the cameras. When she wears the costume she represents herself as the trademark for the revolution, and is expected to behave accordingly with the revolutions mission.

The costume is presented in the context of being part of Katniss's trademark and one can question if this is Collins way of questioning the celebrity role and influence in our modern consumer society. The celebrity role in media and politics is something that will be further discussed in chapter two; however, this chapter will focus on the links between the costume, consumerism and the image of the self.

The lack of a secret alias whilst wearing a costume is something that can be connected outside of literature to our contemporary lifestyle. Few things play as significant a role in our lives as consumerism. Consumption is immediately tied to the creation and production of a sense of the self (Baudrillard, *Consumer society* 21). It allows us to accentuate or rather create an image of ourselves that we use to define our place within the social structure. Social media, blogs and newspapers all promote consumerism, and make us think that our consumption patterns set us apart from the rest of society, falsely marking us as individuals. However, it is practically impossible to buy any product not embedded with certain symbols of identity. Consequently, one could argue that the consumer driven production of the self is not about who we are as individuals but more to do with who we are as a society, that is, that consumption may function as a way of creating a sense of the self. The aim of old literary heroes is to stand out and emphasise their working role when wearing their costumes. Conversely, we are made to fit in to a given standard created by our surroundings. As with the representation of our new literary hero Katniss, through consumerism and marketing we also adopt "costumes" to manage our image, whilst truly being tied to the norm.

French theorist Jean Baudrillard produced several theories regarding consumerism and claimed that "needs are constructed, rather than innate" (Baudrillard, *System of objects*, 63). Drawing on Saussure's semiotics and the "theory of the sign",

Baudrillard uses the sign/ signifier technique to explain consumption.

The sign is the actual commodified object that we are able to produce or own. The psychological and semiotic, signifier and the signified construct the sign. The signifier is the sound image of the object. It is purely used as a referent but lacks substantial meaning without the signified. The signified is the concept and indicated meaning of the sound image. It is not to be confused with the actual object but is merely a psychological concept of the item (Saussure 97-102). Together they create the sign or when referring to consumerism the goods. Baudrillard contended that products have, through consumerism and capitalism moved from the realm of its function, reflected in their use and exchange value. Instead, the product reflects the sign value made up by the consumption of the goods and the goods therefore become the carrier of social meaning (Baudrillard *For a critique*, 37-39).

The fundamental problem of contemporary capitalism is no longer production, but rather the contradiction between a virtually unlimited productivity and the need to dispose of the product. It becomes vital for the system at this stage to control not only the mechanism of production, but also consumer demand (Baudrillard *The Consumer Society*, 41).

In this way consumption reflects our innermost desires and therefore creates a psychological production of the self. Meaning that: goods previously were presented based on their material qualities and function. However, gradually this gave way to an association of the sign with a lifestyle and integration with the social life of people. This enables parallels to be drawn between the use of costumes, followed by consumerism and thereafter the presentation of the self.

"I arrived as a tribute in the Capitol. Only that was different, since I was a contestant. As a rebel, I thought I'd get to look more like myself. But it seems a televised rebel has her own standards to live up to" (Collins, HG3, 67).

As the quote implies there has been a shift in how heroes are presented. This seems to be an evident result of the current state of society. Old literary heroes are naturally good looking because that was the ideal during the time they were created. Today, digitalisation with the increased use of, for example Photoshop has created a different expected standard that transcends into literature.

The question about self-representation is deeply rooted in our society and has gone through an enormous change with an increasingly digitalised society. As seen in the representations of our literary heroes the costume has been approached in different ways dependant on when in time the fiction was written. One could therefore question, if the costume should be viewed as part of the hero's identity or whether it is separate. If we, like Tom and Matt Morris acknowledge that there is a certain separation between the normal person and the person behind the disguise, one might ask which of the two identities is the real one. For example, is Spiderman merely an extension of Peter Parker or are they two completely different characters? Also, is the representation of Katniss in the televised propaganda anything like the person she is when the cameras are off?

As previously mentioned the question regarding identity and dual personality is something that is highly topical in our digitalised society. A wide range of digital platforms allows us to have digital versions or so called "profiles" of ourselves online. The aim is to allow us to express our opinions or share our lives and experiences with people all around the globe. What one could question is how much truth actually lies behind our digitalised self.

In real life we are all subject to our immediate actions. These actions are experienced by people around us and therefore assessed by them, giving us a certain reputation in our social group. This portrayal of a person is arguably the way old literary heroes are represented. The difference is that their immediate social group is much bigger than the average persons because of their fame. However, they are assessed by their endeavours and are unable to alter their fame or reputation in any other way than through future deeds. Even though they may be portrayed in a different light in newspapers, they have no possible method of editing this shared printed information. In contrast to today, they do not have a Twitter profile, Instagram account, Facebook or other social media where they could, with the touch of a button, share their own truth with the public.

However, the rise of technology has made editing information possible and we are now able to portray ourselves in whatever way we find suitable. We can choose what activities to make public and the ones we want to keep private. Even though people still experience our conduct first hand, we have the power to alter their perception or influence people we are not in direct contact with via social media. All these digital updates can be deceptive when trying to review the given information. The increasingly altered truth is something Collins uses both when portraying the use of media in the Capitol and that of the

Rebels. President Snow and the Capitol have total control over the TV broadcasts. This enables them to alter, or rather give the people of Panem their side of the truth. Later when the rebellion rises, they broadcast short promotional films with Katniss in order to promote another uprising in Panem.

However, we are far from in control of our own mediated truth. The information that is shared online is in no way verified or authenticated and can lack truth. This means that anyone can share information about anything or anyone without having any substantial truth behind it. Whilst this obviously was possible during the time of our old literary heroes, all information given in newspapers had a named source. One could therefore, determine the authenticity of an article by questioning the motives of the writer. Digital profiles enable us to be whoever we want to be, even if that means being someone completely fictitious or different from ourselves. This makes it possible to share information without naming a source leading to difficulties questioning the motives of the writer.

One of the possible causes for the individual's portrayal of the self might be the subject of what is considered the norm. Norms are cultural products that represent an individuals' basic knowledge of what others do and what others think that they should do (Cialdini 105-109). In other words, they are "the informal understandings that govern individuals' behavior in society"(Marshall 9). Although the rules of the norm are not formal laws within society, they still tend to work to promote social control.

These social studies transcend into the world of literature. Peter, Bruce and Katniss are all victims of societal conventions and expectations of how someone in their position should act or be. Although Katniss is only viewed as herself, both Peter and Bruce have two separate identities. Therefore, one could question if our old literary heroes are subjected to the norm or if they are deviant. Deviance is defined as "nonconformity to a set of norms that are accepted by a significant number of people in a community or society" (Appelbaum, et al 173). Due to the fact, both Spiderman and Batman are unique within their worlds and there is no given convention as to how a superhero is supposed to act, and therefore, no custom to follow. Although people have certain expectations of them as heroes, their uniqueness makes them free to create a norm for their alter egos. Therefore, they are not deviant to the set rules of the norm, nor controlled by them. Consequently, the masks represent the liberating process of being their true selves, without the influence of societal conventions.

Even though Katniss represent the new literary hero in this essay, she cannot be viewed exclusively as a digitalised hero. She does not grow up using media and digital mediums in the same sense the reader are using it today. However, she show proof of being ruled by media and is growing up in a world where media is a big part of normal life. She is therefore affected by it even though she is unable to control it. One could view this as Collin's way of rejecting our increased use of media. Meaning that even though we are connecting more deeply with digital platforms, we are in doing so loosing a part of ourselves and the ability to control our own participation. Conversely, it is arguable that Katniss is both ruled by the norms and defiant of them, as she has always lived within the given system of the Capitol and has accepted their created norms. Whilst later on she works against that system by defying the rules of the Hunger Games, but in the same breath conforms to a new set of rules created by the rebels.

The rules of the norm make the participants of any given social group available for constant assessment. As previously noted, old literary heroes who wear a mask, benefit from a separation from the self whilst new literary heroes do not. Wearing a disguise gives them the opportunity to escape judgement and also escape the risk of assessment. This is very useful for a superhero whose motives are regularly questioned.

Both Bruce and Peter acknowledge this separation and quite often talk about Spiderman and Batman in the third person, and as a separate identity to that of them selves. Although it is indicative that the heroes themselves acknowledge a separation between the hero and the individual, it is not possible to solely view the hero as being a separate entity. Whilst the hero may possess different traits to that of the individual, they are still part of the same moral codex, mind and spirit as the unmasked individual. The superhero would not exist without the determination, efforts and sacrifices made by the individual. This concludes that the hero and the individual are in essence the same identity, but with a probable tweak in the self-presentation.

The same conclusion might go for the separation between the normal and the digitalised self. Whilst we may indeed only show one side of ourselves online, there is only so far we can divert from the true self and still be accepted for being ourselves. If we divert too far from the truth or the representation of ourselves, creating a completely different person, we would be unable to live up to that standard when meeting people in real life. On the other hand, social media allows us, to similarly circumvent judgement and hide behind a mask as the old literary heroes did.

Chapter 2

Media and Parasocial Relationships and Politics

As noted in the first chapter, the media plays a prominent role in our lives in terms of creating our personal image. This chapter will further discuss the way media has changed our society as well as the literature reflecting it. It will not only look at how the media embodies the shift in social relationships, but also how it can be a source of power and affect politics.

Firstly, it needs to be determined whether one can in fact state that the old literary hero came from an 'un-digitalised' time. Even though they lived and operated before the digital turn they still had access to newspapers, radio and television. Television and films were on the rise during the time of our old literary heroes (1960s to 70s), evidently making them part of the shift towards the current media society. However, their day-to-day lives were not filled, and to a certain extent controlled by media and digital equipment. The change can best be explained by Marshall McLuhan's communication theories. He claimed that "the medium is the message" because it is the "medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan 9). In other words, it is not the message that affects society but the medium by which it is delivered. So when considering comic book superheroes, they are living in an information society but are not ruled by the media proclaiming it. This makes the old literary hero part of the change in society merely by living before and partly during the technology boom. One can also take in to account that many of today's readers have personal experiences from the change in society. Just like our old literary heroes they have lived and grown up in a more un-digitalised society than the one we live in today. It is therefore, easier to relate to comic book heroes than, for example Zorro, who is created in a non-digital society.

The use of television rose considerably between 1949 and 1969 and the number of households in America with at least one TV set rose from less than a million to 44 million (Genzel). According to McLuhan, the increased use of television as a medium changed society. As a result of this new medium in our homes, television shaped and controlled the scale and form of human action, effectively changing our habits and life patterns. He postulated that "*content had little effect on society—in other words, it did not matter if television broadcasts children's shows or violent programming—the effect of television on society would be identical.*" (McLuhan, 18, 20). McLuhan often used the term of

technology as an extension of consciousness. He means: that spoken language is the original extension of our inner thoughts, ideas and consciousness. It is also the spoken language that is key to the evolution of human consciousness and culture and the medium from which subsequent technological extensions have evolved (Bobbitt).

Jean Baudrillard developed McLuhan's theories and was fascinated by how media can affect our perception of reality and the world. He concluded that in our postmodern world we experience something called "the death of the real". This means that we live our lives in the realm of hyperreality, connecting more and more deeply to things like television sitcoms, music videos, virtual reality games, things that merely simulate reality (Horton & Wohl).

There has been a visible change in literature with the rise of technology and the changing life patterns of people. Robin S Rosenberg, in his book *The Psychology of Superheroes- An Unauthorized Exploration*, raises an interesting point regarding the turn in fictional heroism. He states that the image of superheroes as role models came from their "conspicuous strengths of character" (Rosenberg 9). This is something that in many ways was an extension of American patriotism, and became increasingly important in an era filled with political uncertainty. He also acknowledges an evident turn, whereby in later decades the anti-hero has ascended and has become the new role model. An antihero is defined by their human frailties and flaws. Unlike the classic hero, who fights for the good of mankind, the antihero may reach past what is morally accepted and what society would consider as the "right thing to do", when making decisions. They often reject traditional values and think that the ends justify the means. Rosenberg proposes that the cause for the rise of the anti-hero is a direct result of "the undressing of other potential candidates in contemporary journalism"(Rosenberg 11). In other words, the more extensive use of media, as a result of our increasingly digitalised society, may affect the way we view and define a hero and heroism. The strengths and virtues of old superheroes no longer seem interesting and particularly real; instead we want to see their unscrupulous ways in order to relate to them.

This can be connected to Baudrillard's theories of communication and the hyperreal. When being introduced to homes, televisions provided a source of entertainment and the programs were not viewed as something real. But with the increased use of television and other digital tools we have gone beyond McLuhan's extension of the consciousness and entered Baudrillard's hyperreality. In recent years,

reality-television programs have gained a bigger audience and present “real people” living “real lives” removing the separation between a fictional character and the person. The reality of the people and circumstances in reality TV shows are most likely constructed, however, the programmes enhance the illusion that what is being watched is something real or genuine, challenging our suspicions that it is staged for the cameras (Turner 13). This hyperreal relationship between the viewer and the medium can be further explained through the concept of “parasocial interactions”.

Richard Wohl and Donald Horton coined the term in their paper 'Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance'. It describes the altering relationship between media and celebrities. They argue that “*one of the most striking characteristics of the new media – radio, television and the movies, is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer*” (Van Krieken 83). This form of mediated intimacy might already have been experienced through literature and radio; however, the addition of “live images with television, significantly heightened its psychological impact” (Van Krieken 84).

One could argue that *The Hunger Games* are a further extension of this relationship between what is real and what is an illusion. However, the illusion of reality has been subtracted from the equation and what is left is a reality show based on people’s actual lives. In *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins has constructed a game show consisting of murdering children for entertainment. One could interpret this as her way of rejecting the direction the media of today is taking.

Another obvious factor to the change in hero driven literature is the involvement of “ordinary” people in the media. Ordinary people have always been “discovered”, extracted from their everyday life and processed for stardom (Turner 13). They may not have reached the same celebrity status as actors and musicians, but have still had their given role in the media. Lately, this practice has grown dramatically and become systematic. Ordinary people have a far more advanced spot within the entertainment business than ever before.

Casting ordinary people into game shows, docu-soaps and reality TV programming enables television producers to ‘grow their own’ celebrities and to control how they are marketed before, during and after production (Turner 15).

During the height of comic book popularity in the mid and late 1900s fame and

celebrity were associated with a career, such as being an actor or musician. More recently, fabricated stardom has increased resulting in a change in the perception of celebrities. The merging of the new and the old has created celebrities out of ordinary people, of which there are evident parallels with *The Hunger Games*. Before the tributes are imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena to fight until death, they have to go through many different forms of public parades and talk shows in order to let the people of the Capitol get to know them. However, the aim is not to get to know the real person, living in poverty in the districts. Instead, the aim is to market and control the contestants through a fabricated truth. They are encouraged to show excitement about the prospect of fighting for the glory of their districts and to simply put on a good show for the viewers. The relationship between the people in the Capitol and the contestants can be described through the theories of the artificial social world developed by John Caughey.

Reality can be divided into two different categories, the “real social world” and the “artificial social world”. The real social world is the one we experience first hand through personal experiences, whereas, the artificial one is the reality we obtain through different types of media. The people who get to know characters through the screen, view the inhabitants of the artificial social world as “intimate strangers” instead of being the completely fictional characters they are (Caughey 80-94). The contestants of the games are in the same way processed for stardom and meant to be an intimate stranger to the viewers. By distancing the authenticity of the contestants they paradoxically become somewhat unreal to the viewer. This gives the viewer an illusion of constructed reality in the same way reality TV shows do today. The singular difference to today’s reality shows is that the participants in the Hunger Games are experiencing real events and not something constructed for the pleasure of the viewer.

Katniss and the other contestants in the games, quickly learn the importance of managing their public image and popularity, as this can increase their chance to survive the games. If the people of the Capitol appreciate the contestants’ image, as seen through their public appearances, they will give them crucial help in the games in the form of donations. Donations can later be used to get medicine or food to the tributes in the arena.

Through her participation in the Hunger Games, Katniss attains a celebrity status in the Capitol, where the inhabitants celebrate her for her participation. This can be related to the way celebrities are formed or find fame today. As previously mentioned, stardom does not have to be a product of any real talent or working role. In order to stay

topical and to nourish their fame, celebrities have to constantly develop some sort of power or spur interest in order to stay famous. A consequence of fabricated stardom, for example reality TV stars, is that the concept of the program is built on their ordinariness. A performance or attendance in a TV show can generate a celebrity within a matter of days; at the same time, they can disappear just as fast. Essentially, the industry is built in such a way that the participants are supposed to be easily replaced by the next group of ordinary people waiting to become celebrities. *“Ordinary people in the entertainment business can therefore truly be regarded as a manufacturing process in which the product’s planned obsolescence is incorporated”* (Turner 14).

Through her defiance of the rules in the Hunger Games, leading to both her and Peeta’s life being spared, Katniss’s fame continues even after the first Hunger Games she participates in. Her fame not only comes from the people of the Capitol, as it is even greater amongst people in the districts who now view her as a hero. As a result of her celebrity status, the rebels choose her as the symbol of the rebellion against the Capitol. They hope that her celebrity image attained in the arena will increase the support for the rebellion. It is noteworthy that Katniss is merely the symbolic leader of the rebellion, not the actual leader. Even though she is the front figure and poster girl, she is far from the one in charge.

Due to the lack of communication between the districts, most people are unaware of the rebels’ existence. The rebels hide in District Thirteen, a district everyone in Panem thought was destroyed with no survivors during the last rebellion. Therefore, trying to create an uprising in the districts using an unknown leader claiming to be from a vanquished district would be insufficient, if not impossible. Instead, they use the familiarity of Katniss who is already well known as a rebellious figure from her participation in the Hunger Games. This enables people to believe in the rebel’s message since she is the one proclaiming it.

Celebrity involvement within politics is not something exclusively found in literature but a common occurrence in every day politics. The development and spread of personality in politics began in the nineteenth century and has been established even further in later years (Celebrity society p 101). Examples of this are the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger who became the governor for California in 2003, or the singer Wyclef Jean who ran for presidency in Haiti 2010. They both exemplify how celebrities use their trademarks and recognition to get powerful positions in politics. Their political positions

are not only for their own benefit, but more so a strategic move by their political parties to reach a wider audience.

Politics has a prominent role in hero driven literature and comic books are no exception. Comic book superheroes were created from a highly political background in wartime America and had their rise during the Second World War in the 1940s. The aim of the comic books was to reassure the people about their safety and to implement trust in the government's decision when entering war (Johnson 156). Despite not yet addressing the civil rights movements in America, the politics of patriotism were in many ways born from collectivism. Collectivism stresses the priority of group goals over individual goals and the importance of cohesion within social groups (Triandis, 44-45). Even though there has always been a conflict in American politics between collectivism and individualism, when referring to the mid-twentieth century America were mainly practising a light version of vertical collectivism. Vertical collectivism means that their politics were based on hierarchical structures of power, i.e. the government, to make necessary decisions for the greater good of the people. Even though they in many ways followed a horizontal structure by promoting common goals and interdependence, the war demanded a stricter submission to authorities. This system of power transcended into the comic books of the time.

One of the most obvious wartime propaganda comic book heroes is Captain America, originally released in 1941. The series introduces us to the physically disadvantaged Steve Rogers who was unable to sign up with the American army due to his physical condition. However, he soon gains the opportunity to be part of a military experiment converting him into a superhuman, and a soldier with incredible strength, healing powers and acrobatic abilities. Whilst Steve is a hero he is still subject to the government's decisions when being in war. He does not seem to ever question the people in power and operates after what the government classifies as "the greater good". He can therefore be viewed as a somewhat controlled hero. This series can be viewed as the government's way of creating assurances and trust, but also a way of celebrating patriotism and recruiting new candidates to their "superarmy". Captain America once again reached immense popularity in 1953 when the main task of the character was to fight communism (Johnsons 74).

Over time Western politics have come further away from collectivism and closer to individualism, with literature subsequently following suit (Johnson 47). In Collin's

novels, Panem may have been set up with the intention of serving as a collective political state. However, over time the power has become centralised to the Capitol, and political practices have become more individualistic. Consequently, the Capitol even though it is unsustainable alone without the help of the districts, has isolated itself from the collective of Panem and recognised itself as a superior state. The previous vertical collectivism has been taken to the extreme and the disparity between the people in power and the people in the districts has increased enormously. Due to the extreme gap in the hierarchical structure, the Capitol has lost support as a centralised power for the nation and has become totalitarian. In essence, one can draw the conclusion that comic books promoted unity and the belief in the government based on the greater good for the collective. *The Hunger Games* can be seen as both questioning and highlighting the flaws of the centralised power of the government, whilst encouraging us to think for ourselves rather than to merely follow the collective. One can especially see this in Collins' admonition in her repeated sentence "*remember who the real enemy is*" throughout the series.

Comic book superheroes do not try to remake the world in profound ways. They do not try to cure cancer, eliminate poverty, or promote universal literacy. (Rosenburg 13).

As Rosenberg explains in the quote above, old literary superheroes do not fight for a bigger cause; they fight a singular villain, who most often wants to eradicate humanity. The threat is most commonly not something the population is aware of, or something that affects their everyday life. This is predominantly because the superheroes find out about the threat and eliminate it before it affects humanity. Even though Katniss, in one way, has a sole nemesis, President Snow, he is the leader of a "system" that everyone is aware of and wishes they could escape. Whilst the aim of President Snow is to control the world in the same fashion as old time super villains, his cause would not fall into oblivion if Katniss conquered him. Instead a new member of the system would rise to take his place and continue the work. This is portrayed in *Mockingjay* when Katniss takes the decision to kill President Coin, the intended successor of President Snow in order to stop the systematic oppression. This evidently makes Katniss a hero who wants to "remake the world in profound ways", not only to conquer her nemesis but also to change the world for the better. *The Hunger Games* trilogy is a perfect example of how power and politics triumph over a sole hero with superpowers.

In the Capitol, all they've known is Panem et circenses. (...) it's a saying from thousands of years ago, written in a language called Latin about a place called Rome. Panem et Circenses translates into 'bread and Circuses'. The writer was saying in return for full bellies and entertainment, his people had given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power (Collins Hg3 249).

Juvenal, the originator of this saying in the 1st century AD, was highlighting a generation of public approval. He used his satires to attack the ignorance among the people of Rome and criticised the selfishness of common people and their neglect for wider concerns. Almost two thousand years later this saying is still highly topical. As Collins implies, the wealth of the Western world distracts us from on-going crises in the rest of the world. As in the portrayal of the wealthy people of the Capitol, we are somewhat institutionalised into thinking that we are unable to cause a change. Our trusts in external sources of power, such as the government, aid organisations and others make us give up our civic responsibilities in order to continue our own wealthy lives. The portrayal of contemporary politics in literature during the mid 1900s encouraged us to fight for our freedom against whoever tried to constrain it. Popular literature today, with *The Hunger games* as an example, is arguably trying to tell us to go one step further by asking ourselves if this freedom is available to everyone and who it is that is actually trying to constrain it.

Conclusion

Marshall McLuhan claimed that what changes society is the medium and not the message. But when it comes to an old medium, such as the book, I would argue that the message far exceeds the medium. Literature makes it possible to follow the cultural patterns in society and the fiction analysed in this essay demonstrates that comprehensively.

The digitalisation of our society has been the main concern for investigation in this essay, and has illustrated how the portrayal of a hero in hero driven literature corresponds with the current society. Old literary heroes have proven to be connected to the un-digitalised society they lived in, especially when discussing their ability to hide behind a separate secret identity. One can see an evident change in literature with the increased use of the Internet and social medias in Western society.

The portrayal of the new literary hero has demonstrated how an alternate separate identity has risen alongside the digitalisation. Instead of hiding behind a mask, Katniss hides behind a separate identity, whilst she is still perceived to be herself by the viewer. As shown, this can be connected to the increased use of digital identities in our society. Through digital platforms, people are able to create an identity separate from themselves, whilst still claiming to be themselves. One can in the same way see the different ways of portraying a hero in literature, dependant on the current sociological state.

Theories by Jean Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan have deepened the understanding of how consumerism can be connected with the psychological production of the self. They have demonstrated how the demand for identity can be connected to the increased wealth of the Western world and how capitalism and consumerism have affected literature. *The Hunger Games* can be viewed as a social critique of consumerism. In today's society, we are experiencing previously unrivalled levels of productivity as a result of a fabricated consumer demand. As *The Hunger Games* are dystopian novels, Collins is trying to show how the continued consumption of unnecessary products will rebound on society and change it for the worse.

Parallels between McLuhan's theories of technology as an extension of our consciousness and Baudrillard's "death of the real" have shown the altering society portrayed in literature. Collins has taken these theories to the extreme when depicting society in *The Hunger Games* and further questions how media affects our perception of the

real. Comic books show us that the question of what is real is not under any direct question during the 1900's. In our current society the question has immense importance. Reality TV has created the concept of simulated reality where normal people are processed for stardom and scripted whilst still trying to portray the real. Collins has once again taking this concept further and changed it. Instead of portraying the unreal as real, she has made the realness of *The Hunger Games* feel unreal to the viewers of the Capitol.

The digitalisation has also paved the way for the normal person's entrance into the media. Processed stardom and current media have changed the literary hero from the comic book heroes' conspicuous strengths of character, to the new literary heroes' imperfections. One can also see an altering relationship between the hero and the external viewer, as comic book heroes were previously mysterious and inaccessible to the people.

The altering view on politics has also been shown to affect literature. Comic books were founded in wartime America and were influenced by the way the population viewed the government as a protection against external threats. The popular literature promoted unity and belief in the communal greater good the government endorsed. New literature depicts a shift in power from the communal government to the individualistic people. As a result of the increased use of media, we are more used to question the motives behind the information given to us, including that of the people in power. *The Hunger Games* is intended to show us what happens if we forget to question the authorities and exchange our power for entertainment.

As mentioned before, literature says a lot about the current sociological state our society is in. My investigations have led me to believe that new hero-driven literature, such as *The Hunger Games*, aims to influence the reader to take action before a dystopian future becomes reality.

This essay has examined how sociological structures have influenced hero-driven literature. An interesting topic to further investigate would be how literature affects our culture and societies. One might wonder if dystopian literature such as *the Hunger Games* will continue to be produced in order to affect society. One can also question if literature fundamentally will change our perception of the world, or if we, as predicted in dystopian literature, will continue to head towards an irreversible oblivion. In other words, the question is whether we need a new medium to promote change or if the message of literature, will overpower it and promote change.

Works cited:

Primary Source:

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. 2008. New York, Scholastic Press, 2009. Print. ---. *Catching Fire*. 2009. New York, CPI Group (UK), 2009. Print. ---. *Mockingjay*. 2010. Croydon, CPI Group (UK), 2011. Print.

Secondary Sources:

Appelbaum, R. P., Carr, D., Duneir, M., & Giddens, A. *Conformity, Deviance, and Crime: Introduction to Sociology*. New York. W. W. Norton & Company. 2009. Print

Baudrillard Jean. *The Consumer society: myths and structures*. London. Sage publications. 1998. Print.

Baudrillard, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St Louis. Telos publishing. 1998. Print

Bobbitt, David. "Teaching McLuhan: Understanding Media" *Enculturation.edu*. Rutgers-Camden Digital Studies Center, 30 Dec 2011. Web 23 February 2015

Booker, M Keith. *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. New York. Greenwood Press. 1994. Print

Caughey, John. *Imaginary social worlds: A Cultural Approach*. Lincoln. Univeristy of Nebraska Press. 1984. Print

Cialdini, B Robert. "Crafting normative messages to protect the environment". *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol 12(4),(2003) pp.105–109. Web, 16 Feb 2015

Ganzel, Bill. "Television in the 1950's and 1960's" *Livinghistoryfarm.org*. Ganzel Group. n.d. 20 March 2015

Horton,D & Wohl, R "Mass communication and para-social interaction; observations on intimacy at a distance" *Pubmed.gov*. U.S. National Library of Medicine. n.d. Web 13 April 2015

Johnson Jeffrey. *Super-history: comic book superheroes and American society, 1938 to the present*. New York. McFarland & Company Inc. 2012. Print

Mann, Doug. "Jean Baudrillard: A very short introduction" *uwo.ca*. University of Western Ontario. n.d. Web 13 April 2015.

Marshall, Gordon. *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2009. Print

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. London Routledge. 2001. Print

Morris, Tom & Matt. *Superheroes and Philosophy - Truth, Justice and the Socratic Way*. Illinois. Carus Publishing Company. 2005. Print

Ndalianis, Angela. *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*. New York. Routledge. 2009 Print

Reynolds, Richard. *Superheroes- A Modern Mythology*. London. Batsford Ltd. 1992. Print

Ringelstein, Jonah, *Real or not real: The hunger Games as Transmediated Religion*, Journal of Religion and Popular Culture, 2013, Vol.25(3), pp.372-387

Rosenberg, Robin. *The Psychology of Superheroes- An Unauthorized Exploration*. Dallas. BenBella Books, Inc. 2008. Print

Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in general linguistics*. London. Bloomsbury Publishing. 2013. Print

Triandis, C Harry. *"Individualism-Collectivism and Personality"*. Journal of personality Vol.69(6),(2001) pp.907-24. Web, 4 Feb 2015

Turkel, Sherry. *Life on the Screen- Identity in the Age of the Internet*. London. Orion Books Ltd. 1996. Print

Turner, Graeme. *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn*. Nottingham. SAGE Publications. 2010. Print.

Van Krieken, Robert. *Celebrity Society*. Oxon. Routledge. 2012. Print

Zimbaro, Valerie. *Encyclopedia of apocalyptic literature*. Santa Barbara. Oxford University press. 1996. Print