

**A Feminist Study of Suzanne  
Collins's "Hunger Games"**  
دراسة نسوية لرواية "ألعاب الجوع" للكاتبة سوزان  
كولينز

**Prof. Dr. Ansam Riyadh Abdullah Almaarof**  
**Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq**  
**Muna Mehdi**  
**Tikrit University-College of Education for  
Women- English Department**

## Abstract

This paper examines feminism in Suzanne Collins's novel The "Hunger Games". It is a 2008 dystopian novel written from the perspective of a sixteen-year-old girl who lives in the future. It hypothesizes that the writer is a feminist, portraying women as courageous people with the will and strength to fight. This paper studies the feminist aspects to better understand the author's thoughts and be aware of her message. The paper is divided into three sections: the introduction and the discussion, which embody feminism in the novel. Keywords: "Hunger Games", Suzan Colins, Feminism, Novel, Science Fiction

## خلاصة

يتناول هذا البحث الحركة النسوية في رواية ألعاب الجوع للكاتبة سوزان كولينز. هي رواية بأثسة صدرت عام ٢٠٠٨ من منظور فتاة تبلغ من العمر ستة عشر عامًا تعيش في المستقبل. تقترض الرواية أن الكاتبة نسوية، وتصور النساء على أنهن أشخاص شجعان لديهم الإرادة والقوة للقتال. يدرس هذا البحث الجوانب النسوية لفهم أفكار الكاتبة بشكل أفضل والتعرف على رسالتها. وينقسم البحث إلى ثلاثة أقسام: المقدمة والمناقشة، والتي تجسد النسوية في الرواية ثم تخت الدراسة بالخاتمة التي تعرض نتائج المناقشة. الكلمات المفتاحية: ألعاب الجوع، سوزان كولينز، النسوية، الرواية، الخيال العلمي

## Introduction

Feminism is a theory that believes in social, economic, and political inequality between women and men. It is a powerful, artistic female voice that arose to explain what it means to be a woman and that they must take the lead and articulate who they are and what role women play in society by rejecting the patriarchal assumption that women are inferior to men. The core belief of the theory is that all women must be armed with power, education, knowledge, consciousness, and economic independence. It also assures women the right to vote and become prominent activists in social issues such as health care, education, politics, art, literature, and even the military.

## Suzanne Collins and Hunger Games

He is a famous American writer known for creating the popular "Hunger Games" series for young readers. Collins has a unique way of writing that makes us feel strong emotions, connecting us deeply with the main characters. The story is set in the nation of Panem, which has 12 districts ruled by the capital. As punishment for a past rebellion, each district must choose a boy and a girl, aged 12 to 18, to fight in a deadly competition until only one person remains. The book has a feminist touch from the beginning, highlighting themes of equality and empowerment. This paper will tackle how the role of women is devoted to supporting feminist ideas. Suzanne Collins presented an excellent model of positive women in The Hunger Games novel and how women prove their societal power.

## Methodology

This paper will follow a qualitative method to tackle the feminist aspects of Hunger Games by analyzing the text, focusing on the main character "Katniss" and her actions throughout the novel. This paper will follow feminist theory and be an application of the novel. Feminism Is a collective term for systems of belief theories that pay special attention to women's rights and position in culture and society. The movement contains ideologies that aim to define and establish the sexes' political, personal, and social equality. It holds the position that societies priorities the male point of view and that women are treated unjustly. Feminism works to change things, tackling gender stereotypes and striving for better opportunities and outcomes for women in education, work, and personal relationships. Simon de Beauvoir, a trailblazer in feminism, argued that Western societies are mainly patriarchal, controlled by men. She claimed that men define what it means to be human, including the concept of femininity. According to De Beauvoir, women are seen as "the other," an object interpreted by dominant males. In this perspective, women discover their subordinate position and realize they are considered secondary in society. De Beauvoir emphasizes the need for women to break free from these constraints, assert their rights, and reject the societal notion that men are subjects while women are considered "others." She stresses that individual spontaneity should drive women's actions. This paper will explore De Beauvoir's ideas to address earlier questions and examine how feminist principles apply in the chosen novel. Feminism is a theory that advocates for equality between men and women in political, economic, and social aspects, often referred to as "core feminist theory." It consists of ten subdivisions, including cultural feminists, ecofeminism, material feminists, radical feminists, and others. Coined in 1837 by French philosopher Charles Fourier, the term initially focused on feminine qualities but evolved to

champion equal rights and opportunities for women. Throughout history, women have faced rights deprivations, leading to the feminist movement's three waves. The first wave, from the 19th to the early 20th centuries, centered on women's suffrage and property rights. The second wave, from the 1960s to the 1980s, expanded its focus to issues like job disparities, domestic abuse, and reproductive rights. This period witnessed legal reforms, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Education Amendments of 1972. The second wave of feminism emerged as a response to the post-World War II era, which imposed the belief that women's fulfillment was confined to being mothers and homemakers. Betty Friedan, a key figure in this movement, critiqued the idea that women could only find satisfaction in traditional roles. In her influential work, "The Feminine Mystique" (1963), she argued against the notion that a woman's ultimate purpose was to adhere to conventional gender roles by marrying, living in the suburbs, and raising children. Friedan urged women to seek personal satisfaction beyond these traditional roles, challenging societal norms. This approach, notably post feminism, gained prominence in the 19th century, with thinkers like Inness introducing new beliefs and representations of women. Tong aligns with and supports radical feminist ideologies. Using feminist ideas as a foundational framework, the researcher investigated the study subject, drawing insights from Inness and Tong. The analysis explores Collins's series, examining the portrayal of contemporary post feminism as a dystopian narrative. The protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, challenges conventional standards by embodying compassionate principles, questioning heteronormative ideals, and embracing a critical posthuman perspective. The narrative of Katniss's dystopian society underscores the importance of feminist engagement and advocacy, challenging the individualistic concepts of neoliberalism prevalent in postfeminism (Ruthven, 2017). Following feminism, the study examines and explains the various displays of autonomy that Katniss Everdeen, the main female protagonist, exhibits and demonstrates the profound significance of her independence. The novel functions as the primary data source using qualitative methodologies and content analysis. The research identifies four distinct factors encompassing Katniss's autonomy: societal, educational, occupational, and economic. In their study, Santhi and Candraningrum (2019) argue that Katniss exemplifies autonomy, intellect, and bravery, enabling her to emerge victorious in the novel using strategic reasoning. The study differentiates feminist analyses in literature from those conducted in other research domains (Santhi & Candraningrum, 2019).

### Discussion

The chosen theme of the study, centered on the novel "Hunger Games," revolves around the theme of women's autonomy. Initially, the book highlights the concept of women's independence in society through various dialogues involving the protagonist. Moreover, the novel categorizes women's autonomy into four aspects: societal, educational, professional, and economic. An examination of preceding chapters demonstrates that women's independence significantly impacts the characters in the novel, with nearly all facing substantial challenges. Despite these obstacles, the main character, Katniss, persists in her efforts to protect her family and triumph in the Hunger Games. In summarizing the analysis and discussion of the main character's survival in Collins's text, the central insight is that achieving victory is a demanding journey filled with numerous hurdles and challenges. Success demands ongoing strategic endeavors and an unwavering determination never to surrender (Ibid.). There are different ways to analyze the novel, and one of these approaches is through a feminist lens. In the 19th century, a significant movement known as feminism emerged, with women advocating for their rights. Feminism became a notable perspective during this period, encompassing various interpretations. Hornby defines feminism as a movement that strives to acknowledge women's rights in various realms, including politics and the legal system. According to Humm, feminism represents a combination of doctrines emphasizing equality and advocating for women's rights. It is an organized movement with the goal of securing women's rights and fostering societal transformation to empower women. Feminism identifies gender as the fundamental cause of discrimination against women (as cited in Mz & Marlina, 2023). The researcher opts for feminism as the fundamental theory because in the "Hunger Games," instances of oppression are apparent, compelling Katniss to confront these challenges. The initial oppression manifests within her family, as Katniss, at a very young age, assumes the role of her deceased father, while her mother neglects both her and her younger sister, Prim (32). Katniss reflects on this, stating, "I was terrified... I took over as head of the family. There was no choice. I bought our food at the market, cooked it as best I could, and tried to keep Prim and myself looking presentable" (32). Given these circumstances, the researcher deems it essential to employ feminism to underscore the diverse facets of Katniss's character. It proves to be an engaging subject for analysis, mainly focusing on the female characters. The novel captivates the public by vividly portraying the struggles and challenges the female

protagonist faces and her resilience in overcoming them. This research, titled "Women Struggle for Self-Authority in the Novel 'Hunger Games' by Suzanne Collins: A Feminist Approach," centers on examining these themes within the context of today's post-feminist era, where women no longer demand equality based on male norms or seek liberation. Instead, contemporary women prioritize self-development, emphasizing norms and values that align with their interests. Binary barriers no longer impede women from attaining top positions. Inness (2004) underscores the notion that a resilient, independent woman does not need protection from men. Hills (1999) observes that by emulating the actions of heroines in adventure narratives, women can confront and rebel against the gender system rooted in binary distinctions. (Oktavia, 2020; Almaarof & Nu'man, 2023: 22–37). The discussion about resilient women arises in reaction to the existing gender system that maintains male dominance in society. The second wave of the feminist movement contested the idea that women lacked instinct and capability, prompting a reassessment of gender equality. Women began aspiring to roles traditionally reserved for men. Inness emphasizes women's call for influence and authority in the professional realm, showcasing their capacity to excel in challenging occupations (Ibid.). In the modern context, women focus on self-development to compete equitably with men across various domains. The contemporary woman is characterized as independent, autonomous, and empowered, possessing the capability to compete with men in politics, the workplace, and within the home. The issue of women's struggles or oppression is a significant phenomenon that can be analyzed through a feminist perspective. This problem gained widespread attention in the 1920s, primarily linked to the patriarchal system where males exerted dominance over women in various aspects of life during the early 19th century. By the 1920s, women began addressing concerns such as workplace inequality, community dynamics, sexuality, reproductive rights, and both de facto and legal disparities. In addition to these issues, instances of rape and domestic violence also became focal points for second-wave feminists. Post-feminist thinkers like Inness propose that women can surpass men, aligning well with radical feminism—a perspective that advocates for a comprehensive restructuring of society to eradicate male supremacy in all social and economic contexts (Oktavia, 2020).. Within radical feminism, there are two subdivisions: radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists. The focus here is on radical libertarian feminism, which suggests that adhering exclusively to a feminine gender identity may hinder a woman's development as a complete human being. They advocate for women to embrace androgynous identities, embodying both masculine and feminine characteristics or any combination that suits them. In affluent districts and the Capitol, where residents enjoy luxury and the freedom to dress and behave as they wish (within government-set limits), adhering to stereotypical behaviors is less emphasized. This flexibility is often associated with wealth, influencing people's perceptions and behaviors. Money can impact how we perceive the world, as well as how we understand and express gender. Gender, manifesting in our behaviors, speech, reactions, and approach to situations, is an inherent aspect of individuals (Němečková, 2021). Katniss demonstrates independence by providing for her family and taking on her father's role after his passing. However, she is compelled to adhere to societal expectations when volunteering for the Hunger Games. Certain behaviors are anticipated of her to attract sponsors and increase her and Peeta's chances of success. Culture plays a significant role in shaping one's gender development and societal perception. While culture is a societal creation grounded in beliefs and principles, it undergoes continuous changes influenced by time and location. Gender, considered a deviation from standard principles, is regulated by societal norms. For example, music created for entertainment is a societal creation. However, the universal classification of humans into binary genders (male and female) is a cultural concept, and these gender distinctions vary cross-culturally based on cultural influences and backgrounds (Ibid.). Collins diverges from traditional character depictions, particularly with the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. Katniss disrupts conventional gender norms as a female lead and narrator, underscoring Collins's feminist objectives. The novel introduces feminist elements from the outset, showcasing the evolution of Katniss's gender as the narrative unfolds. In Panem, gender roles seem equitable, with men and women assuming comparable societal responsibilities. District 12 esteems qualities such as strength and bravery in individuals of both genders, fostering a sense of equality. In Panem's society, there are no rigid expectations imposed on individuals based on their gender, challenging traditional norms. Women, including Katniss, participate in physically demanding activities such as mining. Katniss, mentored in hunting by her father, possesses remarkable skill with bows and arrows, distinguishing herself in society. Men in Panem also defy conventional gender expectations by adorning themselves with luxurious attire and cosmetics. Katniss's character is nuanced, evolving from a resilient individual with a strong focus on her family in the initial novel to a formidable force that sparks significant societal change in subsequent

volumes. As the sole narrator, Katniss provides a unique perspective, allowing readers to trace her identity. Both Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark hail from District 12, the last district in Panem, with the Capitol serving as its administrative hub. The Capitol's President organizes competitions for adolescents aged 12 to 18 to maintain control and authority by instilling fear. In this oppressive environment, Katniss lives in constant apprehension, fearing the consequences of rebellion and subjugation, significantly shaping her character. She exhibits introverted tendencies, engaging in introspection, maintaining a small social circle, and displaying a more reserved demeanor.. While Katniss possesses exceptional archery skills typically associated with masculinity, she also embodies feminine traits. Her empathy is noteworthy, and she exhibits a level of maturity that surpasses her age. On the other hand, Peeta, often viewed as a symbol of masculinity, showcases qualities commonly associated with femininity, such as compassion and understanding. He places a high value on community and openly expresses his emotions. In contrast, Katniss is frequently depicted as distant and seemingly devoid of emotion. In facing the challenges of life in Panem, Katniss strives to improve her circumstances by participating in illicit hunting expeditions in the forbidden forest to provide for her family. Her daring act of breaching the electric barrier to secure sustenance highlights her compassionate and self-reliant nature. This bold action, undertaken for the well-being of her family, underscores her bravery and assertiveness. Katniss frequently expresses her masculinity through her choice of attire, opting for clothing traditionally associated with men, such as pants and shirts. This decision stems from her role as the primary provider for the family, taking on responsibilities previously held by her deceased father. While she occasionally wears dresses, such as during the annual reaping, it is more of a cultural obligation than a personal preference. Katniss conceals her long braid under a hat, symbolizing a deliberate effort to downplay her femininity and challenge established social norms. Her transformation into a warrior, a role traditionally dominated by men, is evident through her exceptional skills in archery and marksmanship. Her bold and assertive demeanor challenges societal expectations that dictate women should confine themselves to domestic roles. After her father's death, Katniss assumes the roles of both a mother and a father, embodying aspects of both masculinity and femininity. This dual position becomes more pronounced when her mother struggles with depression, and Katniss encourages her not to succumb to it. Aware of the slim chances of her surviving the Hunger Games, she emphasizes the importance of her mother maintaining stability for the continued well-being of the family..During the initiation of the Hunger Games training, Katniss heavily relied on her physical abilities and self-sufficiency. However, both Haymitch and Cinna, her stylist, advise her to adopt a more theatrical gender role during public appearances and in the arena to increase her chances of survival. This involves wearing specific clothing and using cosmetics while conforming to traditional feminine norms. Despite these expectations, Katniss's true character emerges during private conversations, especially with Cinna. The cultural influence on Katniss becomes evident as she adjusts her appearance and behavior for the games, potentially conflicting with her personal beliefs. To attract sponsors, she must maintain a strong public presence, projecting an image of humility and expressing admiration for the audience and the Capitol. Katniss displays empathy and maternal instincts when forming a connection with Rue, a young tribute, and mourning her tragic death within the arena. This encounter reinforces Katniss's resolve to hold the Capitol accountable for the tributes' deaths. Katniss Everdeen's demonstration of masculine traits is evident in her mastery of archery, a skill often associated with males. As a skilled hunter, she has been able to provide for her family since the age of 11 and is highly proficient at negotiating for meat on the underground market. Despite her proficiency with a lethal weapon, Katniss maintains a modest demeanor and only resorts to violence when necessary for self-defense. Her unique personality draws comparisons to the goddess Artemis, known for her protection of the youth and skill in archery. The protagonist's character is further defined by her lack of interest in romantic connections, challenging conventional norms. This disinterest is not just a trait associated with masculinity but may also align with a feminist perspective that opposes the objectification of women. In contrast to conventional young adult heroines focused on romantic relationships, Katniss stands out as a multifaceted character with bravery and a specific mission. This sets her apart from characters like Bella Swan from Twilight, whose storyline revolves around romance. The comparison between Katniss and Bella prompts reflection on the factors contributing to the remarkable popularity of certain narratives, such as Twilight, in the 21st century (Loobek, 2014). Katniss Everdeen represents the tenets of third-wave feminism, distinguishing herself from the largely middle-class second-wave feminism because of her modest economic background. Her integration of both "feminine" and "masculine" qualities resonates with the fluid understanding of gender and sexuality championed by third-wave feminism. While second-wave standards might brand her

a "man-hating feminist," third-wave feminism interprets her choices as individual rather than a broader societal statement (Ibid.). Even though the competition ostensibly exhibits gender equality by selecting one male and one female tribute from each district, Everdeen's resolve to survive challenges the first-wave idea that women require protection. She refuses to adhere strictly to traditional gender roles, embodying a nuanced blend of traits that authentically mirrors real personalities and sexuality. Everdeen's unorthodox character serves as a constructive influence on American culture. To comprehend this influence, it is essential to grasp the concept of "culture," as elucidated by Raymond Williams (Loobek, 2014). Culture can be understood in two senses: one refers to a comprehensive way of life, encompassing common meanings, while the other pertains to the arts and learning, involving the distinctive processes of discovery and creative effort. Some authors may limit the term to one of these senses, but it is crucial to acknowledge both and recognize the significance of their combination (Williams as cited in Jones & Holmes, 2011).. Everdeen's multifaceted character aligns with this dualistic definition, contributing to an expanded cultural understanding by challenging traditional norms. Despite lingering judgments in the American worldview, Everdeen's gender-non-specific qualities defy conventional perceptions of femininity. She serves as a role model for young women, embodying strength and nurturing qualities, while also presenting a positive example to men that a woman can be powerful and attractive without conforming to stereotypical roles. Instead of glamourizing, she normalizes a non-traditional feminine identity, reinforcing the idea that an independent woman can be admired by her male counterparts. The United States has a rich history of feminism, evolving through three main phases. The first wave sought legal parity with males, the second focused on women-specific issues, and the third encompasses women from all backgrounds, emphasizing sexual fluidity and advocating for the freedom to express it openly. The 2012 film "The Hunger Games" ignited debates on feminist themes, with its main character, Katniss Everdeen, exemplifying qualities traditionally associated with both femininity and masculinity. She embodies sexual orientation fluidity and promotes women's liberation, aligning with the principles of third-wave feminism. An analysis of Peeta Mellark, a character defying standard gender norms, could further contribute to gender studies, offering support for non-conventional movie characters like Everdeen. The pivotal moment in Katniss and Peeta's relationship occurs when a rule change allows two victors from the same district. Witnessing Peeta's severe injuries, Katniss becomes genuinely worried about his survival, leading to a kiss. She realizes that their pretended romantic connection might enhance their chances of winning, a notion reinforced by Haymitch awarding them steaming soup as a prize. Katniss starts conforming to societal norms and grasps Haymitch's original intention. She intentionally embraces her assigned gender role, feigning affection for Peeta. Despite her attempts to treat Peeta's wound, it doesn't heal, prompting Katniss to seek medicine at the Cornucopia. However, Peeta insists on accompanying her, revealing a clash with traditional notions of masculinity. Katniss challenges the idea of a dominant male figure, advocating for equality in their partnership. This challenges the conventional view of men as protectors and women as fragile, as Katniss takes on the role of protector for Peeta. Peeta demonstrates certain characteristics often linked to femininity, albeit within certain boundaries. He possesses good listening skills and empathy, exemplified when he saves Katniss's family from hunger years prior to the games by providing them with bread. This act leaves a lasting impact on Katniss's life. Furthermore, Peeta showcases his feminine side by assisting his mother with household chores, typically associated with women's responsibilities. His tender and nurturing qualities become apparent when he tends to Katniss after she gets stung by a bee.

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However, despite these characteristics, Peeta desires to manifest his masculinity as a strong, courageous, and protective figure. Originating from a relatively affluent family, he professes his love for Katniss during a televised interview, introducing doubt for Katniss regarding the authenticity of his emotions. Peeta's true feelings become evident in the arena when he is willing to put himself in harm's way for Katniss following a rule modification. This action highlights his masculine attributes through bravery and self-sacrifice, illustrating his fearless nature when confronted with the possibility of death for the person he loves. There are many quotations in the novel to show certain moments in situation to expose the feelings of the characters (Katniss and Peeta) such as the following: in Chapter 28 "I want to scream that every tear, every choked sob, every second of fear I've shown in the Games has been real. That the only thing that's been an act is my love for Peeta." (Collins, 2008, p. 286). And in Chapter 30 that "Peeta knows me. He knows I wouldn't do that. Not really. He has to know." (Collins, 2008, p. 302). As well as in Chapter 39 that "The

trust... I don't know where it went. Or if it can come back." (Collins, 2008, p. 399) In a desperate situation, Katniss and Peeta contemplate a strategy to survive the Hunger Games by consuming poisonous berries. Recognizing that she cannot bring herself to harm Peeta, Katniss acknowledges her deeper feelings for him than she had initially realized. The harsh and survival-focused environment of the arena prevents her from allowing herself to embrace romantic emotions. Katniss's apparent aloofness and emotional distance may be attributed to the perilous and demanding circumstances. While their act of defiance against the Capitol's rules by threatening a double suicide secures their victory, it also puts them in jeopardy with President Snow. Haymitch cautions Katniss that their only defense is to claim they were so deeply in love that they were not in control of their actions. During an interview, Katniss pretends to be in love with Peeta to maintain the Capitol's favor, but on the journey back, Peeta realizes that the romantic gestures were a strategic move. Katniss struggles to convey her true feelings during the performance, leading to a breakdown in trust. Trust, a vital element in a healthy relationship, is strained as Peeta grapples with distinguishing what was authentic from what was a performance for the audience, making the process of rebuilding trust challenging..As Katniss and Peeta prepare for the Victory tour, President Snow visits Katniss and expresses concern about the potential rebellion sparked by her defiant act with the poisonous berries. He threatens her family, compelling Katniss to promise to maintain the façade of being in love with Peeta during the tour to pacify the districts. At this juncture, Katniss realizes that she and Peeta have become public figures, their lives constantly under scrutiny. Feeling like captives of the Capitol, she comprehends the expectation for her to marry Peeta. Ultimately, Peeta proposes, marking a significant shift in Katniss's identity and setting the stage for her future rebellion against Capitol oppression (Loobek, 2014)..The Capitol's oppression persists through the Quarter Quell, selecting tributes from previous winners. Katniss, unaware of Peeta's secret plan, re-enters the arena. Rebels from District 13, presumed to be eradicated, rescue her but leave Peeta in Capitol captivity. This ordeal prompts Katniss to reevaluate her values. Despite evolving into the face of the rebellion, she remains a compassionate warrior. Post-war, she discovers contentment with Peeta, underscoring their mutual support. The quote is attributed as per the specified citation: "Peeta says it will be okay. We have each other" (Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*, 2011: 32).

### Conclusion

The United States has a long-standing history of feminism, which remains impactful today. The movement has undergone three different phases, characterized by their respective focuses. The first wave prioritized legal equality, while the second wave focused on female-specific rights such as abortion. Conversely, the third wave embraced diversity in ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Third-wave feminism emphasizes the malleability of women's sexual orientation and their entitlement to express or diminish it openly. Katniss Everdeen, the main character in the novel, represents a combination of feminine and masculine attributes. The 2012 picture generated debates over feminist issues since Katniss embodies a fusion of traits. Although she identifies with second-wave feminism, her openness to all sexual orientations and her endorsement of female empowerment also accord with the principles of third-wave feminism. An in-depth analysis of Peeta Mellark's character, who defies established gender stereotypes, has the potential to advance gender studies and advocate for unconventional cinematic protagonists such as Katniss.

Katniss is renowned for her reticent and mysterious demeanor, which originates from her adversities. She refrains from disclosing her real feelings, particularly to someone she does not know. Conversely, Peeta has more openness and amiability, displaying exceptional interpersonal skills. However, he might benefit from acquiring skills in weapon handling. Seeing Peeta's susceptibility in the arena, Katniss is resolute in safeguarding him. Their roles defy conventional gender stereotypes. Contrary to conventional norms, Katniss assumes a defensive position, whilst Peeta urges her to express her emotions more openly. This inversion disrupts the conventional narrative that places the burden on women to elicit emotions from males. Both characters challenge conventional gender norms, rejecting traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. The novel exposes the impact of society on moulding gender norms and behaviors.

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