UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Faculty of Philosophy

English Studies

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Violet, Klaus and Sunny in Lemony Snicket's *The Series of Unfortunate Events*

Master's Thesis

Vaasa 2016

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Discipline: English Studies
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Degree: Master of Arts
Date: 2016
Supervisor: Tiina Mäntymäki

ABSTRACT

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan Lemony Snicketin *The Series of Unfortunate Events* -nimisen kirjasarjan kolmea päähenkilöä. Tutkimuksen päämääränä on selvittää, minkälaisia hahmoja Violet, Klaus ja Sunny Baudelaire ovat ja kuinka he muuttuvat sarjan edetessä. Lisäksi päähenkilöt muodostavat kollektiivisen hahmon, ja tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan sen vuoksi myös sitä, millä tavoin päähenkilöt täydentävät toisiaan ja kuinka kollektiivinen hahmo muuttuu sitä mukaa, kun erilliset hahmot kehittyvät.

Tässä tutkimuksessa on hyödynnetty Maria Nikolajevan teoriaa selvitettäessä mitä lastenkirjallisuus on, mitä toistuvia teemoja siitä on löydettävissä, ja minkälaisia hahmoja lastenkirjallisuudessa usein esiintyy. Erityisesti Nikolajevan teoria kollektiivisista hahmoista luo pohjaa analyysille. Lisäksi teoriaosuudessa käsitellään lastenkirjallisuudessa usein esiintyviä kaavoja ja orpojen päähenkilöiden käyttöä Melanie Kimballin teorian avulla.

Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että kaikki kolme päähenkilöä ovat erilaisia, ja jokaisella heistä on omat vahvuutensa. Tarinan edetessä Violet, Klaus ja Sunny saavat lisää itsevarmuutta ja oppivat uskomaan omiin kykyihinsä. Koska päähenkilöt muuttuvat, niin myös kollektiivinen hahmo kokee muutoksen. Opittuaan tuntemaan omat vahvuutensa, päähenkilöt oppivat myös työskentelemään paremmin yhdessä ja luottamaan toisiinsa.

KEYWORDS: Children's literature, Orphan stories, Formula stories, Lemony Snicket

1 INTRODUCTION

Lemony Snicket is the pen name of the American author Daniel Handler. Snicket's most well-known work is the series of children's novels which goes by the name *The Series of Unfortunate Events* and consists of thirteen books. Lemony Snicket is also the name of the narrator of these stories and, in these stories, he explains that he has researched the lives of three children in the Baudelaire family and that he wants to tell the readers their story. The first part of this series, called *The Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning,* was published in 1999 and the last part, *The Series of Unfortunate Events: The End,* was released in 2006. Due to the popularity of the series it was turned into a movie in 2004 and a video game during the same year. Furthermore, the American company Netflix is set to release a series based on Lemony Snicket's books in the fall of 2016, which suggests that *The Series of Unfortunate Events* has not lost any of its appeal.

The aim of this study is to analyze the three main characters in *The Series of Unfortunate Events* named Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire in order to discover what kind of characters they are and how they change during the first three novels of the series. In addition, the Baudelaires form a collective character, and therefore I will also discuss how these three children with their own unique traits and skills complete each other and contribute to the collective character, and how the collective character changes during the series.

I chose to analyze these first three books of the series because Violet, Klaus and Sunny lose their parents and begin their life as orphans in the beginning of the series. I believe that the biggest struggle and growth of character can be found in these first books because the Baudelaire orphans are forced to recognize their own unique abilities and also believe and rely on their own and each other's skills. *The Series of Unfortunate Events* can be called a Bildungsroman because the three orphans grow as individual characters throughout the series, but they also begin to form a stronger bond with each other.

I will analyze the characters of Violet, Klaus and Sunny by studying what they say, do, think and feel, and also by reviewing what the narrator tells about the protagonists and

what other characters say about them and how they act towards Violet, Klaus and Sunny. I have gathered examples from my primary material of what the three main characters say, do, think and feel, and what the narrator tells about them, and these examples form the basis of the analysis. I have also chosen examples in which the three protagonists work together in order to surmount the obstacles that they are faced with. Furthermore, I will compare the formula found in Snicket's books to the formula that is often used in orphan stories. I will also compare Violet, Klaus and Sunny to traditional as well as to contemporary boy and girl characters found in children's literature.

In the theory section of this thesis, I will first establish what can be considered 'children's literature' with the help of Maria Nikolajeva's (1997) theory on children's literature. I will then discuss different characteristics of children's literature, including formula stories, orphan stories and series fiction. The usage of orphan characters is very common in children's literature, and some of the most memorable and beloved literary child characters are orphans, for instance J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter or Pip from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861). According to Nikolajeva (1997:12), formula stories are narratives that follow a recurrent pattern. Lemony Snicket's series is a formula story, because a distinctive and reoccurring pattern can be found in every book. All three books start with Mr. Poe taking the three Baudelaires to a new home, and the children are scared and worried about what obstacles they are going to face next. When they arrive to their new home, they soon discover that they are in danger. In the first book the Baudelaires realize quickly that their new guardian is only after their fortune and that Count Olaf has no intentions to provide Violet, Klaus and Sunny with a loving home. It soon becomes evident that Count Olaf has a plan to steal the Baudelaire fortune and because Mr. Poe does not believe the children when they tell him that Count Olaf is only after their money, it is up to the children to stop Count Olaf. At the end of the book, the Baudelaires are able to stop Count Olaf by using their wit. However, Count Olaf is able to escape.

Orphan stories are a form of formula stories because they often follow a distinctive pattern originating from folktales. Kimball (1999) has studied orphan stories and found a pattern that can be found in most tales with orphan protagonists. Orphan protagonists have always been popular in literature and Kimball argues that this is because orphans represent the

other; they are isolated from society, and without their parents they are forced to work harder than others in order to succeed. Moreover, orphan stories have traditionally a happy ending, which gives the readers comfort; if the lonely orphan is able to persevere, it gives hope for others. I argue that the author's choice to use orphan protagonists in *The Series of Unfortunate Events* is one of the reasons that the series has been so popular. However, the narrator keeps reminding that this particular story will not have a happy ending: "So I must tell you that if you have opened this book in the hope of finding out that the children lived happily ever after, you might as well shut it and read something else" (RR: 3). The warning, or promise, that this story will be different from the stories the target audience might have been used to, will most likely peak the young reader's interest.

I will also discuss the different types of characters found in children's literature, including collective characters and girl and boy characters. According to Nikolajeva (2002), a collective character consists of multiple protagonists who are different actants, but because they share the same purpose in the story, they form one actor. A collective character is often constructed of siblings representing both genders and different age groups and, for those reasons, the use of collective characters is an excellent way to appeal to a wider audience.

The 14-year-old Violet is the oldest of the Baudelaire orphans and acts as the leader of their small group. She is beautiful and smart and not afraid of getting her hands dirty. Violet is very clever, and her wits and inventive mind are usually the main reason for the survival of the orphans in the horrible events that they encounter throughout the series. Moreover, she is a very practical character and also an inventor. She is constantly imagining new gadgets, and she is also interested in mechanics and finding out how things work. Her practical nature can, for instance, be seen when she ties up her hair because she does not want her tresses to get in her way when she is trying to think. In addition, she also takes action and even gets hurt when she is trying to protect her younger siblings.

As the oldest of the Baudelaire orphans, Violet feels responsible for the others. She is also a very kind and polite person, and she is very grateful during those few moments when

someone shows the orphans kindness. She grieves every person that they are separated from and even though the people they are forced to leave behind are not always the best people imaginable, she remembers them fondly. Sometimes she even worries if she remembered to be as good as she wanted to be towards those who treated her and her siblings kindly. One of such instances can be seen when their guardian Dr. Montgomery is murdered and Violet worries whether she thanked him for taking the children to the movies the night before, even though her own situation is becoming unbearable.

The 12-year-old middle child Klaus is the only boy in this group of orphans. Similar to Violet, he is very smart and uses the power of his mind to deal with the unfortunate events that the orphans encounter. He spends most of his time reading books, and he is able to help his siblings by seeking knowledge of whatever danger it is that the orphans are faced with. Even though he is patient enough to seek knowledge from books, his forbearance is rather short when it comes to dealing with adults who do not take their situation seriously enough or treat them like idiots, for instance by condescendingly explaining the children words that they are already aware of.

Sunny is the youngest of the Baudelaire orphans and, since she is only a baby, she does not yet speak fluently. Sunny communicates mostly through different kinds of exclamations which her siblings understand and are usually translated to the reader by the narrator. Despite her young age, Sunny is just as smart as her siblings. She seldom cries and is a rather more serious character who keeps a close eye on everything that is going on. She is also usually the one who does most of the physical action since she is very fond of using the four sharp teeth that she has managed to grow so far.

The primary material of this study consists of the first three novels of *The Series of Unfortunate Events*, called *The Bad Beginning* (1999a; henceforth BB in references), *The Reptile Room* (1999b; henceforth RR in references) and *The Wide Window* (2000; henceforth WW in references). In the first book, *The Bad Beginning*, the three Baudelaire children lose their parents in a horrible fire and are therefore left alone without anyone to look after them. A close friend of the orphans' deceased parents, a banker named Mr. Poe, takes on the responsibility of finding new guardians for the children and also manages the

vast heritage that will be bestowed on the orphans when they become of age. The orphaned children are handed over to a distant relative, Count Olaf. The Count turns out to be an evil and greedy character who tries his hardest to get his hands on the orphans' heritage. In order to get to the inheritance, Count Olaf decides to produce a play and forces the three siblings to appear in it. The play is called *The Marvelous Marriage*, and the role of Count Olaf's bride is given to Violet in this play.

The Baudelaire children sense that Count Olaf has some evil plan in mind and, in order to find out what that plan, is they seek help from Count Olaf's neighbor, Judge Strauss. Strauss is a kind-hearted woman who is more than happy to let the three children use her library. Klaus is able to sneak a law book from Strauss' library and, after studying it, he is certain that Count Olaf's plan is to actually marry Violet because he has asked Judge Strauss to play the part of the Judge who marries the couple onstage. If Count Olaf succeeds in his plan to marry Violet, he will become fully in charge of the Baudelaire fortune. Klaus confronts Count Olaf, but the Count is one step ahead: he has captured Sunny, and the youngest Baudelaire child is hanging from a small cage high up in the tower on Count Olaf's yard. When Violet refuses to marry Count Olaf, he blackmails her to go through with the ceremony, or he will kill Sunny. Violet tries to save Sunny from the tower by building a grappling hook and climbing up the tower wall but, unfortunately, Count Olaf's henchman is waiting for her at the top of the tower and the Count issues Violet and Klaus a last warning: if they do not do as they are told he will kill Sunny.

Violet and Klaus try to find a way to stop the play, but before they have time to come up with a resolution, it is time for Violet's character to perform in the play. Backstage, Klaus attempts to convince Judge Strauss of Count Olaf's intentions of marrying Violet in real life and, once the marriage is binding, of stealing their money and most likely murdering Klaus and Sunny. However, Judge Strauss is far too excited and flattered to be given a role in the play and, as a result, she does not take Klaus seriously. Consequently, Violet has no other choice but to say "I do" and sign the marriage license, where after Count Olaf announces to the audience that his marriage with Violet is in fact legally binding and that he is now in full charge of the Baudelaire fortune. The audience, including Mr. Poe and Judge Strauss, are appalled and cannot believe what has transpired. At this point,

Klaus has given up hope but, surprisingly, Count Olaf gives his henchmen the order to release Sunny. When Violet learns that Sunny is safe, she finally has the opportunity to speak up. She states that according to the law, the marriage license has to be signed by the bride's "own hand" and that she signed the document with her left hand even though she is right-handed. Judge Strauss declares that Violet is right and that the marriage is not legally binding. When Mr. Poe and the others try to arrest Count Olaf, someone turns off the lights in the theater, allowing Count Olaf and his assistants the chance to escape. At the end of the first book, the Baudelaires have saved themselves from Count Olaf, but they are once again sitting at the back of Mr. Poe's car, not knowing where he will take them next.

In the second book, *The Reptile Room* (1999), Mr. Poe takes the three Baudelaire children to their distant relative, Uncle Montgomery Montgomery. To the children's relief, they soon discover that Uncle Monty is a loving and kind man who is eager to give the orphans a new home. Uncle Monty is a herpetologist, and he is planning to take a trip to Peru and wants the children to accompany him. Monty presents to the children the new snake breed that he has discovered, the Deadly Viper. Despite the menacing name of the snake, the snake is rather friendly and befriends Sunny as they both share a passion for biting things. However, matters start to go wrong when Monty announces that his former assistant Gustav has suddenly quit his job and that he will be replaced by a fellow called Stephano. When Stephano arrives, the Baudelaire children immediately realize that Stephano is actually Count Olaf in disguise.

Unfortunately, when the children try to warn Monty about Stephano's real identity, Monty does not believe them and instead suspects that Stephano is a spy sent by the herpetological society to try to steal the newly discovered Deadly Viper. Monty and the children agree that they will leave for Peru without Stephano but, on the next day, the children find their Uncle Monty dead in his Reptile Room. Count Olaf forces the children with him and plans to take them to Peru, where he imagines he will find a way to steal their inheritance. But as the party drives away from Monty's house, they crash into Mr. Poe's car. The children try to tell Mr. Poe that Stephano is actually Count Olaf, but Mr. Poe does not believe them since he suspects that the children are just shocked because of

Uncle Monty' s death. However, since Mr. Poe's car is destroyed in the accident, the children, Olaf and Mr. Poe drive back to Monty's house. Stephano states that he has contacted a doctor to examine Uncle Monty's body. The doctor subsequently declares that Monty's death has been caused by a snake bite because he finds two pricks on Monty's skin.

Due to the fact that Mr. Poe refuses to listen to the children's concerns, Violet decides that the children themselves must find evidence proving that Stephano is actually Count Olaf and that he has murdered Uncle Monty. As Mr. Poe and Stephano discuss how they will transport both the children and Monty's body away from the house, Violet, Klaus and Sunny form a plan that aims to reveal Stephano's true identity. In the end, the children are able to find evidence that proves that Stephano is Count Olaf and that he has murdered Uncle Monty. Nevertheless, once again, Count Olaf and his assistant are able to escape, and the Baudelaire children are yet again homeless at the end of the book.

The third book of the series, *The Wide Window* (2000), begins with Mr. Poe taking the children to stay with their new guardian, Aunt Josephine. Josephine lives by a large lake called Lake Lachrymose, and the children soon learn that their new guardian is terrified of the lake because her husband was eaten by the leeches living in the lake. Aunt Josephine takes the children into town, where they meet a sea captain named Sham who is rather flirtatious with Josephine. The children recognize immediately that although Captain Sham has a peg leg he is, in fact, Count Olaf again in disguise. Once more, the Baudelaires try to warn their new guardian about Count Olaf, but Josephine is too flattered by Captain Sham's flirting that she decides to ignore the children. After a phone call from Captain Sham, the children find a suicide note from Aunt Josephine and a broken window from where she has jumped into the lake and into her death.

The children are understandably devastated, and they decide to contact Mr. Poe. In her suicide note, Josephine wishes for Captain Sham to take care of the orphans after her death, and Mr. Poe starts to arrange the adoption − once again ignoring Violet, Klaus and Sunny when they try to tell him that Sham is actually Count Olaf. However, the children notice that Aunt Josephine has left a coded message in her suicide note, which states that

she is in fact not dead but that she has escaped to an island on Lake Lachrymose. She also states that it was Count Olaf who forced her to fake her death and give the guardianship of the children to him. The children have no other choice but to go and find Aunt Josephine or else they will once again be at Olaf's mercy. The children succeed in finding Josephine, but they are attacked by the leeches as they sail back towards the shore. When the party signals for help, it is unluckily Count Olaf who sails to their rescue. Olaf pushes Josephine into the lake, where she is devoured by the leeches. As Captain Sham brings the Baudelaires to shore and tries to act as the hero who saved the children, it is Sunny who finds a way to prove Captain Sham's true identity. Unfortunately − and unsurprisingly − Count Olaf and his assistants are once again able to escape, and the children are once more in the same situation: at the back of Mr. Poe's car on their way to a new home.

In the following chapter I will discuss children's literature with the help of Maria Nikolajeva's theory. In addition, I will discuss the reoccurring themes and characteristics found in children's literature.

2 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

While the term children's literature is widely used, there has been some difficulties in determining what children's literature really is. Maria Nikolajeva (1997) states that, while some literary scholars use the term literary genre when discussing children's literature, we cannot use the term *genre* because children's literature does not have recurring or recognizable features. She continues by stating that we can try to define what children's literature is by looking at what children actually read or by talking to the authors of children's literature, but not even by taking these matters into consideration are we able to give a sufficient or simple answer to the question. However, in order to be able to study children's literature, Nikolajeva uses a "working definition" according to which all the texts that are targeted for children are considered to be children's literature. (Nikolajeva 1997: 8−9.) I will use the same definition as Nikolajeva, and according to this definition, *The Series of Unfortunate Events* can absolutely be categorized as children's literature since it is targeted for children.

According to Nikolajeva, children's literature has traditionally been approached from a pedagogical point of view. Literature has been seen as an excellent way of educating children and, because of this, many studies on children's literature have focused on what we consider appropriate or educational literature for children. Another approach to children's literature has been to study it in relation to our society. This approach is pragmatic and studies how, for example, family life and school are portrayed in children's literature. However, Nikolajeva suggests that children's literature can be studied from an aesthetic point of view and that children's literature can simply be treated as literature. This approach allows us to study it using the same theories and methods that we use when analyzing any other types of literature. (Nikolajeva 1997: 7−8.) In this study, I will analyze the material by taking into consideration all of these approaches because I argue that the material has pedagogical, literal as well as aesthetic value. Moreover, the analysis of characters would prove nearly impossible if I chose to ignore the aesthetical approach.

2.1 Characteristics of Children's Literature

What are, then, the typical characteristics of children's literature? To start with, I will discuss the archetypal plots that can be found in children's fiction. According to Nikolajeva (1997), conventional narrative plots present in children's fiction originate from oral stories. The 'master plot' − a recurrent element in the majority of children's literature − entails the same pattern: home, departure from home, adventure and homecoming. Nikolajeva elaborates by stating that the characters have to leave home in order from something interesting to happen to them. Nevertheless, it is also dangerous to be away from home, and that is why the characters always return to the safety of home after the adventure. (Nikolajeva 1997: 32.) The presence of this 'master plot' can also be found in my material. The series of unfortunate events that the Baudelaire children are faced with would not occur if the children were not forced to leave their home.

Another characteristic of children's fiction is the notion of a happy ending. Most of the readers expect a happy ending from stories that are targeted for children. Maria Nikolajeva states that it is often the adults who expect a happy ending from a children's book and, to them, it is essentially seen as a necessity. This trait found in children's literature can also be traced back to oral stories and folktales. While happy endings are common in traditional children's literature, Nikolajeva continues that modern children's literature has started to shift away from this tradition. As a replacement for a closed ending where, for instance, the protagonist wins the battle against the antagonist, new openings or apertures can be found in more recent books for children. When the author leaves an open ending, it is left for the readers to decide what happens next − and, in this way, the author does not offer them a self-evidently happy or sad ending. Nikolajeva also states that apertures have become almost more common than closed endings, and that some scholars even consider apertures predictable and boring. (Nikolajeva 1997: 33−34.) Apertures can also be found in my material, and I argue that an open ending leaves room for imagination.

An additional characteristic of children's fiction are the recurring motifs. According to Maria Nikolajeva, the most typical motif is the 'quest'. The quest for something can

involve the search for an actual object or a person, but it can also refer to the quest of finding one's own identity. Other common motifs in children's fiction are the 'journey' as well as 'running away', 'pursuit' and 'escape'. 'Survival' is a motif that is recurrent in a so called 'robinsonnade', which originates from *Robinson Crusoe*. 'The struggle between good and evil' is most common in fantasy novels, but it can also be found in detective and adventure stories. 'Mystery' is a motif that is usually connected to criminal novels, although murder is something that rarely occurs in children's fiction, and the mystery typically involves a crime such as smuggling. (Nikolajeva 1997: 35−36.) Most of these motifs can be found in my material. The Baudelaire children are on a quest to find a home and someone to care for them, while at the same time they are on a quest to find their own identities. By discovering their own identities and their own skills, they are able to escape from Count Olaf and survive.

'Death' as a motif has changed during the history of children's literature. Death was a common motif during the 19th century because it was present in everyday life. This changed after the Second World War when child mortality decreased and people's life expectancies increased. Because death became less present in the lives of children, it became an eschewed subject in children's literature. However, according to Nikolajeva (1997: 36−38), there has once again been a change in the portrayal of death in modern children's literature, and death has made an appearance in children's literature for a second time. Death is very much present in my material since the series begins with the death of the Baudelaire children's parents. Moreover, Uncle Monty is murdered in the second book, and in the third book, the Baudelaire orphans are made to believe that their Aunt Josephine has committed suicide (and although she is later found alive, at the end of the book she is devoured by leeches).

After roughly determining what can be considered children's literature, how it can be approached, and naming some of the most common characteristics, I will next discuss one of the most frequent form of children's literature: formula stories.

2.2 Formula stories

One of the most common types of children's literature is formula stories. Maria Nikolajeva (1997: 12) describes the term 'formula stories' as follows: "Formula stories are narratives that follow a recurrent pattern dictated by the mode: for instance, adventure, mystery, and romance." These types of stories can also be found in mainstream literature. Crime fiction, for example, is a very good example of a literary genre that repeats the same pattern.

Formula stories have been criticized for their repetitiveness, but Nikolajeva states that while some critics view formula stories and repetitiveness as a negative feature, empirical studies have shown that formula stories are favored by children of a certain age when they develop their skills as readers. Nikolajeva writes about "the joy of recognition" and that children who enjoy reading adventure stories do not want to learn anything new but instead enjoy the book as a form of entertainment. After having read formula stories, the children are familiar with the basic patterns found in literature and, henceforth, it is easier for the young readers to develop their skills further and start reading more complex stories. Nikolajeva continues by stating that formula stories should not only be viewed as a useful form of "training exercise" but, instead, they should be recognized as having a value of their own. (Nikolajeva 1997: 12.) This is a very plausible argument, and also very true: we should not judge one genre as good or bad as compared to other genres. I will discuss formula stories in more detail in subchapter 3.1 and explain how formula stories and collective characters are connected to each other.

2.3 Literary orphans

Orphan stories are formulaic fiction, and I will discuss the pattern found in most stories containing an orphan protagonist with the help of Melanie A. Kimball's article "From Folktale to Fiction: Orphan Characters in Children's Literature" (1999). According to Kimball, the use of orphan characters is very common in fiction aimed at children, and that these orphan characters originate from folktales. Orphan protagonists are popular

because they represent *the other*; they are isolated from the rest of society because they do not belong anywhere, and they do not have a family or a home. Even though orphans are, in many ways, sad characters because of their loneliness and isolation, they also fascinate the readers precisely for these reasons: they are alone and they have to work hard to find a place in the world. (Kimball 1999: 559.) The protagonists in *The Series of Unfortunate Events* are orphans and they are certainly isolated from the rest of the people. The whole novel series is essentially a narrative of these three orphans trying to find a home and someone to look after them.

Furthermore, tales with orphan protagonists usually end happily, and the readers are left feeling reassured and comforted that if the lonely orphan manages to survive, everybody can do the same. Kimball (1999) explains why orphan characters have been popular for a long time and why it is highly likely that they will preserve their position in the future:

> It is because the orphan so deeply represents the feelings and pain of us all that the character continues to exist in children's literature. And until the day when none of us feels the pain of isolation, orphans will continue to symbolize it for us. (1999: 573.)

Kimball's explanation of the popularity of orphan characters seems convincing, for who could be more alone in the world than an orphan child who has nowhere to go and nobody to take care of him or her?

Kimball continues by elaborating on the pattern of these formula stories. In the beginning of the story, the protagonists are not alone and receive help in the form of humans or even supernatural forces − however, these helpers only appear when the protagonists are in dire need, after which they disappear from the story. There are, of course, also bad characters in these stories, but there are usually no bystanders or persons who are ambiguous to some extent: all characters are either good or evil. (Kimball 1999: 562.) For example, in the Harry Potter novels written by J.K. Rowling, there is a clear division between good and evil characters. Everyone has to choose a side: either to support the good Harry Potter or to fight against him beside the evil Voldemort. In my material, the division between good and evil is not as clear. Count Olaf and his henchmen are obviously

evil; they are violent, drunk and greedy. But the other adults in the series are not visibly either evil or good. For example, Mr. Poe does not wish anything bad to happen to the orphans and he tries to keep them safe, but ultimately he just does not care enough about them to do whatever he can to make the Baudelaire children happy. Mr. Poe is far too busy with his work, and he seems more interested in keeping the Baudelaire fortune safe rather than helping the children themselves.

The orphans are also usually mistreated, either verbally or physically. According to Kimball, the orphan usually has something that the villain wants and, in the worst cases, the villain wants the orphan dead. Furthermore, it is common that the ones who abuse the orphans are their relatives; boys are usually mistreated by their uncles and girls by their female relatives. (Kimball 1999: 562.) A classic example of such mistreatment can be found in the story of Cinderella in which she is abused by her stepmother and her stepsisters. Furthermore, Harry Potter is mistreated by his aunt Petunia. The Baudelaires, similarly, are also mistreated; Count Olaf is verbally and physically abusive and threatens to murder the orphans in order to get to their inheritance.

The orphan characters are also frequently faced with a quest which, as mentioned earlier, is one of the most common motifs in children's literature, and there are many reasons for why these orphan characters have to embark on an adventure. Kimball names a few of these: the orphan seeks a place in the world; the orphan wants to avenge something that has been done to their brother or sister; the orphan's life is threatened; or the orphan simply has to go somewhere because his or her parents die. Kimball concludes that, most of all, the orphan needs to find a place in the world. (Kimball 1999: 562−563.) For example, in Roald Dahl's *The Big Friendly Giant* (1982), the main character Sophie is snatched from her bed in the orphanage by a friendly giant, and the two of them decide to fight against the evil human-eating giants to stop them from eating any more humans.

The pattern also includes obstacles that the hero or heroine has to face on his or her quest. Kimball states that it is often the new guardians or relatives (and sometimes employers) who cause problems to the protagonist. For instance, the orphan can be forced to work hard, be physically abused and be deprived of food. The protagonist also has to find a

way to get through these obstacles. Especially in folktales, it is highly common that the protagonist is assisted by supernatural forces, magical humans or creatures. For example, the spirit of the orphan's deceased mother can emerge in order to help the protagonist through the obstacles he or she faces. The orphan protagonist can also use other means to overcome obstacles, such as their own wits or, alternatively, they can prevail by simply being virtuous. The protagonist might also be rescued by the help of kind people. (Kimball 1999: 563−565.) For example, in *Oliver Twist* (1837) by Charles Dickens, the protagonist is a poor orphan who is abused by those who are supposed to take care of him. Even though Oliver is led into trouble because of his naivety, he is given a loving home in the end partly because of his own good nature and wits, but also because of the help of kind adults. The Baudelaires are also being abused by Count Olaf and, in order to save themselves, they have to rely on their own wits.

After the protagonist has overcome the obstacles, he or she is rewarded. According to Kimball, the majority of orphan protagonists are rewarded by getting married, by gaining wealth and power, or by attaining the respect of others. The reward can also be that the protagonist is saved from a life-threatening villain or that the orphan finally finds a family where he or she experiences love and a feeling of belonging. In only three of the fifty tales that Kimball analyzed for her study, the protagonist does not get a reward. The reason is usually that the protagonist has been ungrateful or greedy. In most orphan stories, the protagonist is a witty and good-hearted orphan, and the reader cannot help but to wish that the story ends happily for the protagonist. (Kimball 1999: 565−566.) Well known examples of such lovable orphans are Harry Potter, Anne of Green Gables, Oliver Twist and Pip in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861). Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire are also kind and lovable orphans; otherwise the reader would probably not be interested in whether they survive their hardships or not.

Part of the recurring formula of orphan stories is that the villains are punished at the end. According to Kimball, this takes place after the protagonist is rewarded. It is common that the villains in orphan stories are punished with death and that their deaths are often induced by 'deus ex machina', and only very rarely by the protagonist. In some tales, the orphan protagonist is so virtuous that even those who have mistreated him or her turn into

good people. (Kimball 1999: 566.) Examples of these virtuous protagonists can be found in the female characters of 19th century literature, such as *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and *Pollyanna* (1913). Both of these protagonists are known for their upright yet fiery personalities that allow them to affect the people around them in a positive way. In my material, the antagonist Count Olaf is not punished but, instead, he is able to escape at the end of each book. Olaf is a typical arch enemy; he always returns.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how characters in children's literature are constructed and analyzed and, moreover, study the types of characters that are common in children's literature.

2.4 Fiction Series

Formula stories are suitable for serialization because of their repetitive structure. Brodie, Latrobe and White (quoted in Russell 2011), define the term 'series' as "[…] a group of works centering on a single subject, author, format, or character. Developed in the nineteenth-century […] based on formulas yielding superficial characters and predictable plots".

While series have been popular among child readers, the majority of critics have treated series as poorly written, mass-produced and belonging to low culture. However, they are 'developmentalists' who look past the aesthetics of the books and instead focus on what kind of a reading experience these books can offer to young readers. Series fiction is a developmental phase that young readers go through and that it is more important that the children are encouraged to read, and therefore we should focus on the reading itself and not what is read (Russell 2011: 22−23.) This coincides with Nikolajeva's view on formula stories: formulaic fiction is appreciated by children of a certain age, and its repetitiveness helps children to develop their skills as readers.

Both Nikolajeva and Russell mention that many critics generalize and consider all formulaic fiction to be repetitive and to have no room for variation or imagination.

Russell, however, argues that Lemony Snicket is able to break these misconceptions concerning formulaic fiction. Even though a distinct pattern can be found in all of the thirteen books that belong to *The Series of Unfortunate Events*, Russell states that "difference is found in the content of the narratives rather than the style of the series." (Russell 2011: 24.) While the series is clearly a formula story, that does not indicate that every book in the series is similar or that there is no chance for development regarding the story and the characters.

> *A Series of Unfortunate Events* revels in its predictability and rebels through its pushing at the boundaries of series fiction. The overarching pattern of the books has the children delivered to an unfamiliar setting and a new guardian. The promise of a new beginning is soon threatened by a disguised Count Olaf. Invariably, the children cannot get an adult to take their concerns seriously. Silenced and seemingly disempowered, Violet, Klaus and Sunny must take control of their own fates through brain power, books, and their bond of love. (Russell 2011: 24.)

As stated in the previous chapter, Kimball argues that orphan protagonists overcome the obstacles they are faced with because they are good and likable characters. Russell (2011: 27) also discusses in her article that good characters always prevail but that the *Series of Unfortunate Events* differs from this typical pattern found in children's literature. Even though the Baudelaire children are faced with unimaginably horrible events and experiences, they still remain as kind and good-hearted as in the beginning of the series. In contrast to traditional children's literature, the Baudelaire children are not rewarded for their good behavior, but instead continue to suffer and struggle to find a place to belong.

Moreover, Russell (2011: 31) states that the recurring formula found in Snicket's series acts as a comfort and "provides space in which difficult material can be explored". I agree with Russell because Snicket is able to cover some difficult topics that are not usually present in children's literature without making the topics and themes too overwhelming for the young readers. In addition to exploring difficult motifs, I argue that the formula also gives a chance for the author to introduce unconventional protagonists. In the next chapter, I will focus on different types of characters used in children's literature.

3 CHARACTERS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will discuss different types of characters found in children's literature. I will first focus on collective characters − i.e. characters that are almost exclusively used in children's novels − and, afterwards, I will move on to discuss gender roles found in texts written for children and study the gender stereotypes that are still present in Western culture and literature. Regarding the analysis of the characters, I will follow Nikolajeva's (1997:43) definition that states that "characters are revealed to us either through actions, through speech, through appearance, through the other characters' comments or through the narrator's comments".

3.1 Collective characters

Nikolajeva explains the term 'collective protagonist' by stating that if a novel has more than one main character and if these characters have the same role and importance in the story, they form a collective protagonist or collective character. She continues by stating that the characters sharing the same role in a story are all actors, but because as characters they are equally important in the story or have the same function, the different actors form one actant. (Nikolajeva: 2002: 67.) The three Baudelaire children can be said to form a collective character; they are all unique individuals with their own special skills, but they are also all important characters and share the same function, which is to survive and defeat Count Olaf. Because all the Baudelaire children have different personalities and different skills, they need to unite and work together in order to survive. Violet, Klaus and Sunny are brilliant children, and the author simultaneously celebrates the uniqueness of these three characters while highlighting the importance and necessity of cooperation.

Nikolajeva also states that the usage of collective characters is an unusual narrative device and that it is almost exclusively used in children's literature. Moreover, the use of collective protagonists "supply a subject position for readers of both genders and of different ages" (Nikolajeva 2002: 67.) To be more specific, if the author of a children's book wants to attract as many readers as possible, the easiest way of doing so is to use a

collective protagonist. When the collective protagonist is constructed of different actors, the author does not have to choose, for instance, between a male and a female protagonist, but can instead use a collective protagonist representing both genders.

The gender of the protagonist might determine whether the young reader wants to read the book or not, as Jane Sunderland (2011) states in her study on what kinds of books boys and girls prefer to read. According to Sunderland, boys prefer reading literature with a male protagonist and girls prefer books with female protagonists. However, the majority of girls do not mind if the main character is male, while the majority of boys would not choose to read a book with a female protagonist. Sunderland continues by reminding that the majority of children's literature with male protagonists can be categorized as adventure stories. Therefore, one could argue that the reason why boys would rather choose a book with a male protagonist is more concerned with the plot and theme of the book rather than with the gender of the protagonist. (Sunderland 2011: 14−15.) Nonetheless, the decision to use a collective character representing both genders is an excellent way of introducing different types of main characters to young readers, regardless of the plot or theme of the book.

When the author's purpose is primarily to attract both male and female readers, the author can choose to form the collective protagonist of brothers and sisters. Nikolajeva (2002:84) states that if the collective protagonist is formed from characters representing both genders and if the gender roles are not highlighted, the reader can interpret these two characters as interchangeable. If, then, the reader is a male reading a children's book that has a collective protagonist formed of a brother and a sister and the siblings are interchangeable in the novel − they share the same thoughts and feelings and act in the same way − the male reader will most likely regard the female character as an equal to her brother.

In addition to appealing to readers of both genders, a collective protagonist can also be used to introduce main characters of different ages. For example, while collective protagonists consisting of siblings of different ages have been used in children's literature, Nikolajeva states that the siblings do not usually have a vast age difference.

This is because two characters that have a significant age difference are not interchangeable. If, for instance, the older sibling is fourteen and the younger sibling seven, the age difference is far too great for a young reader. If the reader is fourteen, he or she will most likely share the subject position of the older character, but the younger character would seem childish in the eyes of the reader and, consequently, the reader would not share the subject position of the younger character. (Nikolajeva 2002: 86.)

Even though Nikolajeva makes a valid argument that if the age difference between the characters forming the collective protagonist is too great, the reader will find it difficult to choose a subject position. Nevertheless, if one of the purposes of using a collective protagonist is to introduce different types of characters disguised as a collective protagonist, I believe that a young reader could accept characters with large age differences. This is due to the fact that it is not so uncommon to find big age differences between siblings in real life. An older sister can, in my opinion, empathize with her younger sibling in real life and, therefore, I do not see a reason why a reader who might have siblings of different ages could not share the subject position of characters of different ages.

3.2 Gender and Child Characters

Judy Simons states in her article "Gender roles in children's fiction" (2009) that, for a long period of time, girlhood and boyhood have been described differently and unequally in children's literature. Simons continues by stating that "eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's books are full of strong, active boy characters, and much more submissive, domestic and introspective girls" (Simons 2009: 143).

This is a perfect description of most of the popular characters in children's literature populated by, on the one hand, strong boy characters such as Huckleberry Finn, Oliver Twist and Tom Sawyer and, on the other hand, by domestic girl characters such as Pollyanna, Emily of New Moon and Anne of Green Gables.

In traditional tales, the difference in portraying women and men is even greater. According to Linda T. Parsons, in patriarchal fairy tales women have been represented as submissive, self-sacrificing and weak, whereas men have been portrayed as active and dominant. Moreover, a woman's worth is usually determined by her appearance, and while the female protagonist is regularly rewarded with marriage, the prince chooses the female protagonist because of her beauty rather than based on her own actions or other qualities. Furthermore, the heroine usually has to suffer to some extent before she is rewarded or saved. (Parsons 2004: 137.) It seems that in fairy tales the heroine needs only her beauty and patience to survive and succeed.

In fairy tales, the heroines are beautiful and patient, but they often have no power. Parsons notes that, in addition to portraying heroines as beautiful and weak, women who have power or crave power for themselves are often portrayed as ugly and evil. The lack of good and powerful female characters tells the reader that it is unnatural for a woman to be powerful or active. Those females who have power and are able to help the heroine are usually nonhuman, for example fairy godmothers. And, furthermore, the help that these fairy godmothers usually bestow to the heroine is beauty. While male protagonists often have a sidekick or other helper, the male hero is also bestowed, for example, strength or a magical device such as a sword to help him on his quest. (Parsons 2004: 138.)

Furthermore, the female characters are often secluded from others. According to Parsons, the heroines in traditional tales are often isolated from their families or even from society which highlights the lack of power of these characters. Moreover, because the heroines are usually alone, they do not collaborate with others. Even when a helper (the fairy godmother, for instance) appears, she does not work together with the heroine but only gives her something. This further reinforces the image of women as powerless members of society; women are secluded from the society and they are incapable of collaboration. (Parsons 2004: 138.) In a similar way, orphan protagonists are also isolated from society.

Although some of the traditional fairy tales were written a long time ago, the gender stereotypes found in these tales still seem to exist in Western culture. In the field of

sociolinguistic studies, women's speech has often been described as 'powerless language'. Sally Johnson quotes Robin Lakoff (1973) who suggested that women's language can be described as 'powerless language' because women use so called weakening devices in their speech, such as hedges, tag questions and statements formed as questions, and that their language is overall more hesitant and cautious. In addition, women are claimed to be responsible for the majority of work during a conversation, and this claim has often been described with the catch-phrase 'men compete, women cooperate'. Johnson continues by stating that even though some of the conclusions made about women's language and its status as powerless language have been questioned, it still seems to form the basis of women's linguistic studies. There have been some studies suggesting that powerless language is not exclusively used by women, but that it can be used to describe the language of anyone with a lower status. (Johnson 1997: 9−10.) It could even be argued that children's language might be called powerless language since children are in a subordinate position compared to adults. For example, in the work of Roald Dahl, a common theme is obnoxious adults who misuse their powerful position and ignore the needs of children.

Connected to the idea of women's speech as being powerless language is the notion that women are more emotional than men and cannot control their feelings. Johnson discusses this issue and states that there are theories about men being trapped by their 'rational self' and that men suffer from not being able to express their feelings. However, Johnson seems to think that the idea of men suffering because of their inability to express emotions is rather banal and that this is the source of male power; women have been dismissed from the public domain into their homes because women are accused of being emotional and, thus, irrational. (Johnson 1997: 18.) In *The Series of Unfortunate Events*, the adults often dismiss the complaints of Violet, Klaus and Sunny because they deem that the children are obviously 'upset': "'He's not taking us to get a doctor!' Klaus shouted. 'He's taking us to Peru!' 'You see what I mean?' Stephano said to Mr. Poe, patting Klaus' head. 'The children are obviously distressed.'" (Snicket 1999b: 103.)

As stated above, women are said to be more cooperative during a conversation, and Roger Hewitt discusses how one can indicate "cooperative behavior". Different types of

cooperation during a conversation are, for instance, hugging, asking questions and using minimal responses. In addition, cooperation can also be performed by "distancing oneself from any potential implication of self-assertion", meaning that when a speaker shows modesty, he or she pursues to omit his or her own ego and instead encourages others to speak. This can be achieved by using hedges, apologies and tag questions. (Hewitt 1997: 29.)

Politeness is closely connected to the performance cooperation. According to Sara Mills (2003: 9), choosing to be polite or impolite is an important factor when an individual constructs his or her identity as a gendered being and as a part of the community. Mills adds that politeness seems to be closely and nearly exclusively connected to women's speech, and politeness is often associated with powerlessness, friendliness and vulnerability. Mills also states that these stereotypes concerning women's speech styles, including politeness, cooperation and the avoidance of conflicts, are based on the postulation that women have no power in the society. (Mills 2003: 204.)

While women's speech styles have been described as being powerless and not aggressive enough, Mills states that there is a new type of feminist analysis that aims to re-assess women's speech styles. According to these re-evaluations, women's speech styles and politeness are actually valued when it comes to assessing oral skills in a group discussion or during a debate. Mills mentions that such speech styles, like supportive comments and minimal responses as well as listening and turn-taking, are appreciated by companies that aim to train their employees in communication skills. (Mills 2003: 167.)

As the heroines of fairy tales, many of the most popular female protagonists have usually beautiful and gentle personalities, and they are able to overcome the obstacles and hardships thrown in their way by relying on their virtuous nature. For example, the young and fairy-like character of Emily in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* (1923) is able to prevent her neighbor from cutting down her beloved forest just by the help of her sweet nature. Although these gentle and traditional female characters can still be found in children's books and TV series, modern popular culture has introduced a growing

number of tougher and more aggressive female characters who aim to challenge the gender stereotypes found in traditional tales and within our Western society.

Sherrie A. Inness (2004: 4−6) writes that there is a clear rising trend of more muscular, aggressive and tough female characters in popular culture − from Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (1996−2015) to the characters of the children's TV-series *Powerpuff Girls* (1998−2005). Inness explains this phenomenon by the feminist movement that began to influence mostly the American society and women's roles in society from the 1960s onwards. For the first time, women began to share the same occupations as men, ranging from firefighters to CEO's, participate in the same sports, and favor a more muscular appearance. While women's roles have changed in society, women cannot be portrayed in the same traditional and stereotypical way in popular culture. The female audience demands more realistic female characters to whom they can relate and, moreover, the male consumers of popular culture are more willing than before to accept strong female characters as protagonists.

Inness continues by stating that the new and tough female characters are independent and do not need men to help them. These new characters do not accept the conventional gender roles or quietly accept their place in society but, instead, they fight for their new role in society. Although there has been a significant change in the way in which female characters have been portrayed in popular culture, there are still some old-fashioned expectations that these new female characters have to conform to: "the characters are predominantly white, upper or middle class, attractive, feminine, and heterosexually appealing". (Inness 2004: 7−8.) In conclusion, even though the new and modern female characters fight against the traditional gender roles and expectations, it still seems that there are some unwritten rules about how women can be portrayed that regulate the extent to which these characters conform to the expectations of society.

Simons (2009: 143) also states that in contemporary children's literature, the most loved characters are characters who "long to defy the simple gender categorization imposed on them as members of the Anglo-American middle classes, or actually actively transgress the roles assigned to them". These observations go hand-in-hand with the findings of

Sherrie A. Inness: there has clearly been a shift in literature, seen through the introduction of characters that do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes.

What are, then, the characteristics of a strong and empowered female character? According to an article published in *The Reading Teacher* (2000), characters that break against stereotypes provide important role models for young readers. They define strong female characters as active characters who are able to solve the problems that they are faced with and able to endure despite the difficult circumstances surrounding them. These females are celebrated for their accomplishments and actions. (Giorgis, Johnson, Colbert, Conner, King & Kulesza 2000: 521.) Therefore, the ideal strong female character could be described as almost the exact opposite of the dependent heroines found in traditional fairy tales. This definition used by Giorgis et al. also differs slightly from the new aggressive females described by Inness, because the emphasis is on the actions of these characters and not their appearances.

Nikolajeva states in her work that mainstream literature and literature for young readers have been criticized for being too male-oriented and that female characters have always had less power than their male counterparts. It has also been argued that literature imposes oppressing expectations, pressuring young female readers to perform their gender in a certain manner. Nonetheless, also male readers are being bombarded by different expectations, and "young males have always had the pressure on them to be strong, aggressive and competitive". (Nikolajeva 2010: 105−106.)

Simons states that 19th century literature aimed at children was often filled with characters that were clearly created to enforce the prevailing stereotypes of masculine boys and effeminate girls. Judy Simons (2009: 145) describes the classical boy hero as "courageous, daring, athletic, strong, yet also moral despite his tendency to challenge authority". However, during this period, such lovable characters as Enid Blyton's George in *The Famous Five* series (1942−1963) and Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) were created, and these characters were clearly breaking the existing gender roles. Simons continues that Jo March is the archetype of a tomboy; she does not want to conform to the traditional roles reserved for women and, according to some

interpretations, she feels abjection towards her own body, rejecting the feminine ways of dressing and ultimately longing to be a boy. (Simons 2009: 147.)

Moreover, Simons states that while tomboys have been accepted and even loved as characters in children's literature, there are no real equivalents of tomboys for boys who act in a feminine way. She continues that the absence of effeminate boy characters seems to suggest that the prevailing gender roles seem to affect boys more than girls. (Simons 2009: 152.)

However, Simons continues that even though feminine boy characters are not as common as tomboys, masculinity has still not been represented in a simple and unilateral manner. There are boy characters who have shed tears and showed a more compassionate and emotional side. According to Simons, one of these characters is, for example, Bilbo in J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). Bilbo is not exactly a stereotypical male character: he is calmer and less aggressive than most male characters and it is made clear that if Bilbo was not calm and humble, he would not be able to resist the evil powers of the One Ring. (Simons 2009: 154−155.)

Simons concludes that tomboys and resourceful girl characters are common in children's literature but that feminine boy characters are still rare and often labelled as 'sissies'. In addition, it would appear that the use of more traditional feminine girl characters is seen as a negative feature in children's literature. (Simons 2009: 156.) In conclusion, the number of aggressive female characters is increasing but, at the same time, there is a clear lack of more gentle male characters.

The representation of male characters in literature and prevailing stereotypes concerning men in the field of sociolinguistics are compatible. Deborah Cameron (1997: 47) states that men's speech has usually been described as "competitive, hierarchically organized, centers on 'impersonal' topics and the exchange of information, and foregrounds speech genres such as joking, trading insults and sports statistics".

Mills (2003: 188) also mentions the stereotypes concerning male speech and states that men's speech is usually described as being aggressive, direct, forceful, and that the use of swear words has almost exclusively been connected to men's language − the aim of this speech style is to ultimately defeat one's opponent and thus claim one's dominance in the group. Moreover, men have the tendency to interrupt others and be more confident than women, whose speech style has been seen as more hesitant. Once again, men and their speech styles are described as being more powerful, whereas women's speech represents the lack of power.

What could, then, be the solution to creating characters in children's literature who would not encourage gender stereotypes but instead empower both sexes? Trites offers an answer to this so called 'feminist texts'. She elaborates that a feminist text aims to empower both sexes and that the characteristics of such a text are that the protagonist is an active character, he or she aims to achieve autonomy and the control of his or her own life, and that the protagonist's own determination drives the plot of the text. Moreover, the protagonist regularly uses his or her own imagination and creativity as well as also makes choices and takes responsibility for his or her own actions. This agency of the protagonist aims to courage the protagonist to grow into an independent person and find one's true self rather than to strive to control the life of others; instead of competing with others, interdependency and cooperation is highlighted. In addition, Trites states that the simple reversal of gender roles might give a comedic effect instead of an empowering one, and that the best way to fight against gender stereotypes is to create plausible characters who have, for example, traditional feminine or masculine characteristics but who are not afraid to show that not all feminine traits should be devalued by society. (Trites 1997: 4−6.)

4 VIOLET, KLAUS AND SUNNY AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COLLECTIVE CHARACTER

In the analysis section I aim to find out what kind of characters Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire are and how they change during the first three novels of the series. I will also compare the characters of these three Baudelaires to the traditional protagonists found in orphan stories, and also analyze how they are gendered. Furthermore, I will discuss how each of these three actants contribute to the collective character, what their function is, and how the three children complete each other.

4.1 Violet

The fourteen-year-old Violet Baudelaire is the oldest sibling, and she is introduced as follows:

> Violet had a real knack for inventing and building strange devices, so her brain was often filled with images of pulleys, levers, and gears, and she never wanted to be distracted by something as trivial as her hair. (BB: 3.)

It is immediately made rather clear that regardless of Violet's name, which alludes to a flower and could therefore be used for a somewhat effeminate female character, she is not a stereotypical female protagonist; she is interested in science and mechanics, interests usually reserved for boys. Moreover, she does not care about her appearance, and her hair seems to be more of a disturbance to her than anything else.

Throughout the novels, the image of Violet as an inventive and clever character is constantly reinforced, such as with her citation: "[…] and then, if you don't mind, I should love to look at any books concerning mechanical engineering. Inventing things is a great interest of mine." (BB: 37). Violet clearly defines herself as an inventor, and this is what makes her unique and acts as the basis of her personality.

It is Violet's inventive mind, intelligence and quick wit that often save the Baudelaire children. In the first novel of the series, Violet invents a grappling hook that she uses to climb up the tower where Count Olaf is holding Sunny captive. Unfortunately, Olaf's henchmen are waiting for Violet at the top of the tower and she is not able to save her sister − nevertheless, her invention works perfectly. When Count Olaf tries to force Violet to marry him, she realizes that by signing the marriage license with her left hand she prevents the marriage from entering into force and thus becoming legal.

In the *Reptile Room,* the Baudelaires discover that Count Olaf, disguised as Stephano, has murdered their new guardian Uncle Monty, and Violet realizes that she has to find evidence that proves him guilty. Violet then picks the lock on Stephano's suitcase and indeed finds the evidence needed. In the *Wide Window,* Count Olaf has once again found the Baudelaires and is this time disguised as Captain Sham. The orphans' new guardian, Aunt Josephine, has apparently committed suicide, and she states in her suicide note that she wishes for Sham to adopt the Baudelaires. Mr. Poe ignores the children when they try to tell him that Captain Sham is in fact Count Olaf and that they do not believe that Aunt Josephine is dead. Violet knows that they need time to find out a way to stop the adoption. She manages to buy them time buy eating a peppermint and giving some to her siblings, thus causing an allergic reaction that gives them the chance to discover what really happened to Aunt Josephine. Moreover, when the orphans learn that Aunt Josephine is hiding on an island, Violet is the one who knows how to operate a sail boat. In addition, she is able to invent and create a signaling device when they are surrounded by the Lachrymose leeches. Because of Violet, they receive help and are able to get to shore.

Even though it is clear that Violet is not a traditional girl protagonist because of her actions and interests, the adults in the novel try to impose old-fashioned gender roles on her. After Violet successfully picks the lock on Stephano's suitcase, she is scolded by Mr. Poe: "Nice girls shouldn't know how to do such things", whereafter Klaus responds by stating "My sister *is* a nice girl […] and she knows how to do all sorts of things", accompanied by Sunny's exclamation "Roofik!" (Snicket RR: 168). Mr. Poe is horrified that Violet has picked a lock and does not understand that Violet had no other way to

prove that it was actually Stephano who murdered their Uncle Monty. However, Violet's siblings defend their older sister and support her interests.

While the author makes it explicit that Violet is a brilliant person with a passion towards inventions and mechanics and celebrates her talent, the adult characters in the novels have a rather sexist view on how girls should behave, which can be seen in the following passage: "And what will I do?' Violet asked. 'I am very handy with tools, so perhaps I could help you build the set.' 'Build the set? Heavens no,' Count Olaf said. 'A pretty girl like you shouldn't be working backstage.'" (BB: 75−76.)

Violet is beautiful and white − similar to many other stereotypical female characters − but in her case she herself is not concerned with her appearance and, instead of being flattered or even being rewarded because of her looks, she suffers on account of her appearance. Female heroines often receive marriage as a reward at the end of a story but, in this case, marriage to Olaf is a punishment. However, Violet's loving siblings and their one decent guardian, Uncle Monty, are the ones who accept her for who she is and encourage her.

When Aunt Josephine buys presents for the children, she gives Violet a doll. This is yet another example of the adults trying to impose traditional gender roles on Violet.

> 'Oh, thank you,' said Violet, who at fourteen was too old for dolls and had never particularly liked dolls anyway. Forcing a smile on her face, she took Pretty Penny from Aunt Josephine and patted it on its little plastic head. 'It's so generous of you,' Violet said, 'to give us all these things.' She was too polite to add that they weren't things they particularly liked. (WW: 20−21.)

It is interesting to note that the adults who cannot understand Violet's interest in mechanics are described as unsavory characters, whereas those who encourage Violet to be herself are described as kind and understanding. This is clearly a conscious decision made by the author; the villains of the story are seen to express negative opinions. The young reader will most likely be on Violet's side and realize how old-fashioned and silly their views are and accept Violet for who she is. Furthermore, Violet is not discouraged

by these sexist comments, nor does she ever question her own interests. This mediates a subtle lesson for the young reader: if you are passionate about something, do not let other peoples' opinions affect you. Moreover, although Violet has qualities that are rather masculine, she cannot be regarded as a tomboy; she does not once express a wish to be a boy or, for example, refuse to wear a dress.

It is clear that all the Baudelaire orphans are exceptional children, but it is Violet who is described by the narrator as "a wunderkind" (WW: 174). However, while Violet is beautiful and intelligent and could be called perfect, the author has given her weaknesses − sometimes her inventions fail: "Violet thought of an automatic harmonica she had invented that had made such horrible noises that she had hidden it so she didn't have to think of her failure" (WW: 119). Her reaction to this failure is understandable and relatable, and she is often scared, timid, angry or frustrated. Even though Violet is referred to as a wunderkind, she has her weaknesses, but it is precisely these flaws that render her a believable and therefore relatable character for young readers. In contrast to traditional orphan heroes, the Baudelaires are not perfect and do not always succeed in their ventures.

Violet is an inventor and an intelligent and witty character, but she also possesses the courage to execute her inventions. In addition to being very clever, she is an active character who is not afraid to get hurt. Therefore, she could be described as a modern female character or even as an *action chick*. Violet manages to build a grappling hook, which she intends to use to climb up the tower wall and rescue Sunny.

> She hadn't told Klaus about her plan, because she didn't want to give him false hope, so without waking him, she gathered up her grappling hook and tiptoed out of the room. […] The night also had a slight breeze, and when she pictured herself swinging in the breeze, clinging to a rope made of ugly clothing, she almost gave up entirely. […] But, standing there shivering in her nightgown, Violet knew she had to try. (BB: 118−119.)

In this situation, Violet could be said to represent a protagonist often found in feminist texts; she is the one who takes action and perseveres despite the seemingly desperate situation. She is also the one who performs the actual physical action in the situation. Therefore, Violet is rather unlike the typical heroines found in fairy tales, who are passive

and wait for someone else to rescue them. In addition, her interest in mechanics as well as her role as an active character are features that are usually bestowed on boy protagonists. Furthermore, she does not tell Klaus about her plans but instead chooses to act alone.

An example of Violet's nature and perseverance is given when she attempts to throw her grappling hook in the darkness of the night and succeeds only after several desperate tries. The following passage accurately describes Violet's struggles:

> *Clang!* The grappling hook hit the tower, and fell down again, hitting Violet hard in the shoulder. One of the arms tore her nightgown and cut her skin. Biting down on her hand to keep from crying out in pain, Violet felt the place in her shoulder where she had been struck, and it was wet with blood. Her arm throbbed in pain. At this point in the proceedings, if I were Violet, I would have given up, but just as she was about to turn around and go inside the house, she pictured how scared Sunny must be, and, ignoring the pain in her shoulder, Violet used her right hand to throw the hook again. […] Nervously, she gave the rope a good yank, and it stayed put. The grappling hook had worked! […] Violet closed her eyes and began to climb. Never daring to look around, she pulled herself up the tower. […] She was certain that at any moment the cloth would tear, or the hook would slip, and Violet would be sent tumbling to her death. But thanks to her adroit inventing skills−the word "adroit" here means "skillful" −everything worked the way it was supposed to work […]. (Snicket BB: 120−121.)

Unfortunately, Olaf's henchman is waiting for her when she reaches the top of the tower. One could argue that the reason for Sunny's helplessness in this first part of the series is that the two older siblings are given the task of caring for her − a task that gives them additional courage. If it was not for Sunny, Violet would probably not have had the courage to climb up the tower. Furthermore, by forcing Violet to test and push her own limits, she realizes that she is cleverer and braver than she had imagined. Losing their parents and having to take care of Sunny forces Violet and Klaus to utilize their full potential.

Violet has the courage and strength to do what is necessary, even though she is often scared. This can again be seen in the following quotation:

> When she reached his door, Violet stopped. It was amazing, she thought, how everything having to do with Count Olaf was frightening. […] Violet found herself half hoping that Stephano would bound up the stairs and stop her, just so she wouldn't have to open this door and go into the room where he slept. But then Violet thought of her own safety, and the safety of her two siblings. If one's own safety is threatened, one often finds courage one didn't know one had, and the eldest Baudelaire found se could be brave enough to open the door. (RR: 130.)

Once again the thought of her siblings gives Violet more strength. These emotions seem authentic and highlight the fact that even though the Baudelaire children are extraordinary and talented they still have genuine and relatable feelings that make it easier to the young reader to identify with them.

Although Violet acts bravely throughout the series and is able to control her fears from the start, she is often described as being nervous, especially in *The Bad Beginning:* "'Where will we go?' Violet asked nervously." (BB:14.) Violet is also the most nervous of the three children when they have to leave Mr. Poe's house: "She felt very nervous about leaving. 'Do we have to go right this minute?'" (BB:17.) Violet is described as very nervous in these examples, even though the children are not face-to-face with a life-threatening situation. However, later in the series Violet is no longer described as being nervous, although their situation becomes more dangerous as the story progresses. She is, of course, still scared at times, but she seems to gain confidence during the first three novels: "'If it weren't for you,' Violet said fiercely, 'we wouldn't be in Lake Lachrymose to begin with.'" (WW:184.) At the end of the third book, Violet has developed from a nervous character to a brave person who is not afraid to stand up to Count Olaf.

After discovering that the adults who are supposed to help Violet and her siblings are actually not to be trusted, Violet's attitude towards them changes. When at first she was always polite, her patience starts to run out by the end of the third novel: "'What's wrong, Aunt Josephine?' Violet said tiredly." (WW: 164.) Another example her exasperation is seen when she attempts to rescue the party from the vicious leeches.

> 'I don't have time to argue with you!' Violet cried. 'I'm trying to save each of our lives! Give me your hairnet right now!' 'The expression,' Aunt Josephine

> said, 'is saving *all of our lives*, not *each of our lives*,' but Violet had heard enough. Splashing forward and avoiding a pair of wriggling leeches, the eldest Baudelaire reached forward and grabbed Aunt Josephine's hairnet off of her head. (WW: 176.)

Violet is nervous and overly polite when she still relies on the adults in her life but, as she gradually realizes that she cannot trust anyone else except herself and her siblings, she becomes braver and more assertive. Perhaps this revelation is one of the reasons for Violet maturation during the first three novels. She is nervous when her life is in other people's hands, but as she takes control of her own life she gains confidence and starts to trust herself and her skills.

As established above, Violet does occasionally get scared but she is able to act despite her fears. She often gathers up the courage to act by thinking about her younger siblings. She is the oldest of the Baudelaires and, consequently, she feels that it is her responsibility to act as a parent for Klaus and Sunny.

> As she worked, she remembered something her parents had said to her when Klaus was born, and again when they brought Sunny home from the hospital. 'You are the eldest Baudelaire child,' they had said kindly but firmly. 'And as the eldest, it will always be your responsibility to look after your younger siblings. Promise us that you will always watch out for them and make sure they don't get in trouble. ' Violet remembered her promise, and thought of Klaus, whose bruised face still looked sore, and Sunny, dangling from the top of the tower like a flag, and began working faster. Even though Count Olaf was of course the cause of all this misery, Violet felt as if she had broken her promise to her parents, and vowed to make it right. (BB: 117−118.)

Violet also seems to feel responsible for what has happened to the children, and she experiences guilt when her younger siblings are in danger. This is yet another example of how psychologically multi-dimensional she is, having to struggle both physically and mentally in order to overcome the obstacles that she is faced with.

The characteristics of Violet covered so far are traits that are often possessed by boy characters. Nevertheless, she does have a more feminine side to her, as can be seen when she "[…] immediately went over to Sunny, and put a hand on her little head […] Violet

stroked Sunny's hair and murmured that everything was all right." (BB: 126−127.) Her caring nature is again exhibited when she cares for her siblings:

> Violet rushed over and the two older Baudelaires fussed over the youngest one. 'Somebody bring her something to eat,' Violet said. 'She must be very hungry after hanging in a tower window all that time.'" (BB:154.)

These examples portray Violet acting as a mother figure to Sunny, engaging in cooperative behavior and comforting Sunny by stroking her hair, cuddling her and trying to reassure her that everything will be alright. Moreover, Violet is concerned that Sunny is hungry, which is a classic example of a mother figure: Violet wants to nurture and feed Sunny. In addition to being a nurturing mother figure, Violet also feels that she is responsible for her younger siblings' behavior.

> But Sunny was staring at Dr. Lucafont with a determined look in her eye, and in a moment she leaped into the air and bitten him on the hand. 'Sunny!' Violet said, and was about to apologize for her behavior when she saw Dr. Lucafont's whole hand come loose from his arm and fall on the floor. (RR: 179−180.)

She also attempts to teach her siblings good manners and respect.

> 'Aunt Josephine obviously worked very hard to prepare this room for us,' Violet said sadly. 'She seems to be a good-hearted person. We shouldn't complain, even to ourselves.' 'I want to complain, anyway,' he said. Violet put her hand on Klaus's shoulder and gave it a little squeeze of comfort. (WW: 24−25.)

Here, Violet can be seen as acting as Klaus' parent. She comforts Klaus but makes it clear that they should not complain. She is calm and reasonable, taking Klaus' feelings into consideration but encouraging him to be polite and well-behaved.

In *The Bad Beginning,* the orphans are discussing how to escape from Count Olaf's care: "'Mr. Poe is in charge of our affairs, and I'm sure if he knew how horrid Count Olaf is, he would take us right out of here.'" (BB: 58−61.) Violet has faith in Mr. Poe and she is certain that if they tell him what a horrible guardian Count Olaf is, Mr. Poe will surely help them. However, as the series continues, Violet and her siblings start to realize that

even though Mr. Poe might have good intentions, he is not capable of keeping the Baudelaires safe.

In *The Wide Window,* there is a noticeable change in Violet's behavior towards adults. She attempts to console the others by saying "but it's been hours since we've eaten" (WW: 164) and promising to look after them: '" If it makes you feel more comfortable,' Violet said, wiping her mouth with her napkin, 'I will answer the phone.'" (WW: 58.) What's more, she even has to look after certain adults: "She wasn't sure they were perfectly safe, not at all, but it seemed best to tell Aunt Josephine that they were perfectly safe." (WW: 167.) Violet is the leader and parent of their tiny trio, but as the series progresses, she takes on a more important role and provides comfort even to her guardian − although it is Aunt Josephine who should be taking care of the Baudelaires. Violet does no longer need adults to protect her, and the role of the leader and the one offering comfort to others comes to her quite naturally. She has realized that the three of them have to take charge of their own destiny. One could even argue that, at this point in the novel, Violet is no longer a child but on the same level as the adults.

In addition to acting as a parent to her younger siblings, Violet is also clearly the leader of their small group. Klaus and Sunny seek Violet's advice and expect her to take the lead, which can be seen in the passage:

> Sunny continued to wail, and Klaus found that his eyes were wet with tears as well. Only Violet didn't cry. […] 'This is terrible, terrible,' Klaus said finally. 'Violet, what can we do?' 'I don't know,' she said.' I'm afraid'. 'Me too,' Klaus said. (BB: 50.)

It is of importance to note that Violet is the one who stays calms and does not cry. This example clearly shows once more how Klaus and Sunny rely on Violet for guidance.

Violet acts as a leader and gives instructions to Klaus and Sunny, especially when they are in the middle of hectic and dangerous situations. When Uncle Monty passes away, the orphans decide to discover the truth of his death; Violet gives Klaus orders to search the

books in the library and try to find something that will help them, and she also gives Sunny instructions to guard the door while Klaus studies the books.

> ‘All right, all right,’ Klaus said. ‘Let’s get started. Here, you take this book.’ ‘I’m not taking any book,’ Violet said. ‘While you’re in the library, I’m going up to Stephano’s room to see if I can find any clues.’ ‘Alone?’ Klaus asked. ‘In his room?’ ‘It’ll be perfectly safe,’ Violet said, although she knew nothing of the kind. ‘Get cracking with the books, Klaus. Sunny, watch the door and bite anybody who tries to get in.’ (RR: 126.)

When Violet makes a decision and knows what has to be done, she does not hesitate to act and implement her plans. She does not wish to worry her younger siblings, so she always takes on the most dangerous tasks. This can be seen when they try to operate the sailboat and she instructs the others: “‘Sunny, sit in back and work the tiller. Klaus, hold the atlas so we can tell where we’re going, and I’ll try to work the sail.’” (WW: 147−148.) She gives orders but often takes on the hardest jobs herself. She is not a bully − instead, she takes on the role of the leader. This role is yet another characteristic that is often associated with male protagonists. However, as Violet is the oldest of the three siblings, the role sits quite naturally on her shoulders.

Violet is able to act as the leader of their little trio because she has the ability to stay calm and rational even in dangerous situations, which can be seen in the following passage:

> ‘Count Olaf,’ Violet said, and then stopped herself. She wanted to argue her way out of playing his bride, but she didn’t want to make him angry. ‘*Father*,’ she said, ‘I’m not sure I’m talented enough to perform professionally. I would hate to disgrace you good name and the name of Al Funcoot.’ (BB: 77−78.)

Violet is observant and knows that Count Olaf is a vain man. Therefore, she tries to flatter him because she has already noticed that arguing and shouting will not work. When Count Olaf is already celebrating and thinking that he is finally in charge of the Baudelaire fortune, Violet interrupts him:

> ‘Begging your pardon,’ Violet said suddenly, ‘but I think you may be wrong.’ […] ‘I’m *not* your countess’ […] ‘At least I don’t *think* I am.’ […] ‘Like most people,’ Violet said, ‘I am right-handed. But I signed the document with my left

> hand.' […] 'If you like,' Violet said, 'I shall be happy to sign my name again, on a separate sheet of paper, with my right hand and then with my left. Then we can see which signature the one on the document most resembles.' (BB: 151.)

Violet has planned the situation perfectly and is prepared to prove that she is right. Because she has taken everything into consideration, she is able to thwart Count Olaf's plan. Her ability to control her emotions and her quick thinking are the reasons that the Baudelaire children are saved.

Below is an excellent example of how Violet uses politeness and her calmness and rationality to handle difficult situations. She is patient and awaits for the opportune moment to confront the adults: "'Stephano doesn't want us to be alone with you,' Violet said, finally speaking up. She had been waiting for the proper moment to make her case." (RR: 106.) Even when she has to resort to improper behavior, she is sure to have a proper defense ready: "'My suitcase,' Stephano said, 'is private property, which you are not allowed to touch. It's very rude of you, and besides, it was locked.' 'It was an emergency,' Violet said calmly, 'so I picked the lock.'" (RR: 168.) Violet is aware that the adults were sure to point out that one was not allowed to go through other people's belongings and, consequently, she had already prepared her defense. She acknowledges that the adults in her life do not listen to children. She has also learned that if she wants them to believe her, she has to make her case clear, find evidence and talk in a calm manner so that they cannot argue that she is only an upset child and therefore imagines things.

In this example from the second novel of the series, Violet listens quietly while Stephano talks about their dead Uncle Monty, and she only interrupts him when she notices that Stephano has accidentally mentioned murder: "'Murder?' Violet said. She turned to Stephano and tried to look as if she were merely politely curious, instead of enraged. 'Why did you say *murder*, Stephano?'" (RR: 114.) She is well aware that adults easily dismiss what the children try to tell them and that if she wants them to take her seriously, she has to have undeniable proof and also present her evidence in a calm manner, otherwise the adults will accuse her of being emotional or upset. One's ability to control one's emotions has often been regarded as a stereotypically male quality and, therefore,

it could be said that Violet's calmness and rationality are characteristics that are usually connected with male characters.

In addition to being very calm, Violet is also extremely polite. Politeness is often seen as a feminine quality, and it is frequently connected with powerlessness. However, Violet's politeness works for her benefit in the sense that it helps her to handle all difficult situations that she is faced with. She understands that adults do not respond well to yelling or screaming and, instead, she has to present her matter calmly with undeniable evidence to support her case. Moreover, Violet does not seek power to herself and, as a result, she is able to remain polite and wait for the right moment, even though she knows that she is right all along.

While Violet's politeness is in many cases an asset, she is at times almost too considerate of other peoples' feelings. When Mr. Poe arrives to the beach to tell the Baudelaires that their parents have perished, she even tries to start up a conversation during an awkward silence before Mr. Poe states his business. Moreover, Violet feels ashamed when she feels that she is still holding a stone in hand that she almost wanted to throw at a friend of their parents. (BB: 7.) Violet is ashamed that she contemplated throwing the rock, although she was only trying to protect her siblings from a stranger that approached them. It does not even occur to her that she herself could get upset because Mr. Poe has scared them.

When the Baudelaires live with Count Olaf, they visit his neighbor, Justice Strauss, who is surprised to learn that Count Olaf wants the three young children to prepare dinner for ten people. Violet answers her: "'Count Olaf gives us lot of responsibility,' Violet said. What she wanted to say was, 'Count Olaf is an evil man,' but she was well mannered." (BB: 37.) She cannot even reveal to others that someone is treating the children gruesomely because she is too polite. Furthermore, she is also very considerate of other peoples' feelings and tries her best not to upset anyone: "'Of course not,' Violet stuttered, not pointing out that Aunt Josephine was the one who had brought up the subject. 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you.'" (WW: 22.)

Despite Violet's extreme politeness, there is a darker side to her as well, which can be seen in the quote: "She stared miserably at Olaf's plate of food and found herself wishing she had bought poison at the market and put it in the puttanesca sauce." (BB: 51.) This is only a side note from the narrator, but this small piece of information reveals a new side to Violet. She is mostly portrayed as an almost perfect child with delightful wit and manners, but this particular thought reveals that there is a darker side to her, as well.

In addition to being polite, Violet has also other more effeminate traits. For instance, while Klaus is reading a book he stumbles upon a passage about a play where the actors perform naked: "Violet blushed. 'You mean they were all naked, onstage?'" (BB: 84−88.) Violet is horrified by the fact that people were nude onstage, whereas Klaus finds it simply amusing. Violet's reaction, especially blushing, is definitively a more effeminate reaction than Klaus's. Another example portraying Violet's more effeminate traits can be seen in the third novel of the series when Violet asks her brother about the Lachrymose Leeches:

> 'Leeches?' Violet asked. 'Leeches,' Klaus explained, 'are a bit like worms. They are blind and live in bodies of water, and in order to feed, they attach themselves to you and suck your blood.' Violet shuddered. 'How horrible.' (WW: 32.)

In this third example, Violet does not want to listen to Klaus when he tries to explain what really happened to their Uncle Monty and how his dead body does not indicate that his death was caused by a snake bite, as Stephano wants them to believe: "'Stop! Stop!' Violet cried, covering her ears. 'I don't want to hear any more about what happened to Uncle Monty!'" (RR: 133−135.) All these three examples above demonstrate that Violet is quite sensitive and that she also possesses characteristics typical of a conventional girl character.

In conclusion, Violet is often polite − even in situations where her conversation partner does not deserve to be treated with respect or kindness. Moreover, Violet is clearly aware that sometimes it is better to be silent or polite than to express one's true emotions. There are times when she clearly disagrees with the adults in her life but, because she knows that they will not listen to her if she did say what she was really thinking, she understands

that it is better to wait for the right moment in order to be taken seriously. However, when the Baudelaire children are in danger and Violet knows what needs to be done, she does not hesitate to act. She is not polite because she is scared to state her opinion but rather because she has good manners and she is wise enough to wait for the right time to make her statement.

Violet is the leader of her group of siblings and often acts as the parent for them. Her inventive mind and intuition to wait for the right moment are often the reasons why the Baudelaires are able to defeat Count Olaf. Nevertheless, there are several situations where Violet is nervous, scared or at her wits end and, during these times, it is Klaus who takes charge of the situation. Violet has traditional feminine characteristics; she is white-skinned, beautiful, polite and occasionally nervous and timid. However, she also possesses characteristics typical to a modern and active female character: she is active and has taken the role of the leader of their small group. Violet can be seen as a combination of effeminate traits and the modern *action chick.*

As mentioned earlier, *The Series of Unfortunate Events* can be described as a bildungsroman because the protagonists mature and develop as the series progresses. Violet changes during the first three novels of the series. She is almost overtly polite in the first novel and she tries her best to be grateful and friendly to everyone, although she rarely gets anything in return. However, as she begins to realize that the adults in her life are not able to protect her and her siblings, she understands that they can only trust and rely on each other. Violet remains polite and kind throughout the series, but she learns to stand up for herself and her siblings. She also learns that sometimes it is necessary to contradict adults. In addition, she is often described as being timid or fearful, and the children's arch enemy Count Olaf scares her to the point that she is barely able to function. But as the story progresses and Violet develops, she learns to take action despite her fears, and she soon learns to trust herself. At the end of the third book, she has the confidence to stand up to Count Olaf and others who do not listen to the Baudelaire children. Violet maintains her kind nature but also gains some of Klaus' temperament, and she does no longer avoid confrontation, but instead learns that it is sometimes necessary.

It is important to note that while Violet gains confidence throughout the series, she is also faced with failure in the third book when one of her inventions fails to work: "'It's not working,' she said again, and dropped the oar in despair. 'We need a fire, but I can't invent one.'" (WW: 178). Violet is defeated for a moment but, after encouraging words from her siblings, she is able to think of a new solution. Violet develops into a more independent and confident character during the first three books; she realizes that she is truly an inventor with useful skills and that she is able to overcome fears, to protect herself and her siblings, and to recover after failures.

When it comes to the question of how Violet contributes to the collective character, it is clear that she has a significant role in the beginning of the series. When in the beginning the Baudelaires where searching for a home and someone to take care of them, their mission changes to defeating Count Olaf, their arch enemy. Violet is the one who's inventions and quick mind often saves the orphans from Count Olaf and she also acts as the leader of their group. Furthermore, especially in the first novel, Violet acts as a mother figure for her younger siblings. Moreover, Violet is calm and often acts as the voice of reason when Klaus is not able to control his temper and when Sunny is a helpless victim.

4.2 Klaus

When Klaus is introduced, he is described by the narrator as follows: "He *was* intelligent. Being only twelve, Klaus of course had not read all of the books in the Baudelaire library, but he had read a great many of them and had retained a lot of the information from his readings." (BB: 3−4.) The character of Klaus is very much defined by his intelligence, love of books and the need to seek knowledge. When the orphans visit their neighbor Justice Strauss, she apologizes for not visiting the Baudelaires sooner and explains that she has been working on a case. "'What sort of case was it?' Klaus asked. Having been deprived of reading, he was hungry for new information." (BB: 35.) This is a great example illustrating Klaus' eagerness to learn new things. He is not at all nervous or afraid to ask Judge Strauss about her case − he simply cannot hide his need for new knowledge.

Klaus' intelligence and attention to details, as well as his patience to search for answers, proves to be a key element for the Baudelaire children's survival. After Count Olaf announces that he wants Violet to play his bride in the upcoming play, the Baudelaires sense that he has formed some menacing plan that will grant him access to the Baudelaire fortune. The children decide to seek help from their neighbor and ask Judge Strauss if they can use her library. When Klaus and Violet cannot find anything of significance or help in the library's books, Violet starts questioning whether Count Olaf is indeed as wretched as they think:

> Violet sighed. 'Maybe Count Olaf isn't up to anything,' she said. 'I'm not interested in performing in his play, but perhaps we're all worked up about nothing. Maybe Count Olaf really *is* just trying to welcome us into the family.' 'How can you say that?' Klaus cried. 'He struck me across the face.' (BB: 88−92.)

This passage shows that Violet has given up the hope of discovering anything useful in Strauss' library, and leaves Klaus alone to study.

When Klaus is left alone in the library, even he begins to feel hopeless despite the fact that he has always believed that all problems can be solved with the help of books. Suddenly, a member of Olaf's theatre troupe walks into the library and ushers the children back to Olaf's house. Klaus manages to smuggle a book into Count Olaf's house. This incident shows that this time it is Klaus, not Violet, who stays focused and does not fall into despair. Then again, Klaus is the one who loves to read and seek knowledge; he is more likely used to solving these types of problems, whereas Violet prefers action and quick solutions. Moreover, when Violet starts to question whether Olaf is actually planning anything sinister, Klaus is all the while certain that Olaf is up to no good.

Klaus does not let his siblings know that he managed to smuggle a book with him from Strauss' library because he does not want to give them false hope. He is desperate to find something that would reveal what kind of an evil plan Count Olaf has concocted, and he feels utterly tired when he reads this difficult book in their bedroom at night. Nonetheless,

his efforts pay off and he does indeed find something useful. He decides not to wake up his sisters and confronts Count Olaf alone, as is seen in the following passage:

> Klaus's heart was beating fast, but he felt calm on the outside, as if he had on a layer of invisible armor. 'I've been up all night,' he said, 'reading this book.' He put the book out on the table so Olaf could see it. 'It's called *Nuptial Law*,' Klaus said, 'and I learned many interesting things while reading it.' … 'The word 'nuptial',' Klaus said, 'means 'relating to marriage.' 'I *know* what the word means,' Count Olaf growled.' Klaus proceeds by explaining to Olaf that he has found out that Olaf wants them to perform in his play because he intends to marry Violet for real. By doing so, he would control the Baudelaire fortune and he would not have to wait until Violet is of age. Because Count Olaf acts in loco parentis he can legally permit Violet to marry even though she is only fourteen. (BB: 96−97.)

Even though Klaus has managed to discover Count Olaf's plan, the children cannot stop the wedding because Olaf has taken Sunny as hostage. However, owing to Klaus, the orphans now know what Olaf's plan is.

Another example of Klaus' inquisitive mind and search for knowledge can be seen in the second novel, when Klaus studies books in their Uncle Monty's library and is able to find evidence that Uncle Monty was not killed by a snake bite because the snake that Stephano accuses of Monty's death kills its victims by strangling. Moreover, in *The Wide Window,* Klaus is the one who notices that there are odd grammatical mistakes in Aunt Josephine's suicide note − grammar was her great passion in life, meaning that she was not likely to make such mistakes. Klaus is once again able to find the answer with the help of the books from Josephine's library when he realizes that Josephine used the grammatical mistakes in order to let the Baudelaires know that she escaped to the Curdled Cave.

As the previous examples demonstrate, Klaus' intelligence and ability to search for knowledge helps to Baudelaire children to defeat Count Olaf. Moreover, Klaus is shown to be more interested in details than Violet − who, when frustrated, sometimes gives up − and it is Klaus who has the tenacity to study small details and clues. He also clearly enjoys what he does and receives pleasure from finding answers to their problems. When Violet asks if Klaus has found anything of use, he "[…] smiled for an answer and began

to read out loud from the book he was holding" (RR: 133). Furthermore, when Klaus realizes what Aunt Josephine wants them to find out, he "[…] smiled and showed his sisters the two words he had written on the bottom of the note" (WW: 115). In addition to giving him great satisfaction, research and focusing on specific problems in dire situations seems to serve as a coping mechanism for Klaus, as can be seen in the following citation: "His face was pinched with the effort of focusing on their predicament rather than going to pieces" (RR: 93).

However, although Klaus is excellent with details, he seems to sometimes lose sight of the bigger picture: "'You've been so busy figuring out the message,' Violet said, 'that you don't understand what it means'" (WW: 118). Violet states this after Klaus solves that the mistakes in Aunt Josephine's letter spell *Curdled Cove* and does not understand why she has planted the name of this place in her secret message. It is Violet who realizes that Curdled Cove is where Josephine has escaped to. In addition, this example also shows how Violet and Klaus complete each other: Klaus has the theoretical knowledge while Violet is the practical one. Furthermore, it is important to note that Klaus also fails at times, just as his older sister: "Klaus thought of a book on the Franco-Prussian War that was so difficult that he had hidden it so as not to be reminded that he wasn't old enough to read it" (WW: 119). Klaus' reaction to this is also the same as Violet's: he hides the book, just as Violet hides the automatic harmonica, so that he would not have to look at it and be reminded of it.

Although Klaus is able to stay focused and calm when he concentrates on a single problem, he often gets angry when he is faced with a difficult situation. One of such instances occur when Klaus gets mad at Mr. Poe when he tells them that their parents have perished and begins to explain what the word 'perished' means. Klaus replies angrily that he knows what the word means. (BB: 8−9.) Anger seems to be another one of Klaus' coping mechanisms and, instead of crying, he converts his sadness into anger towards Mr. Poe. Furthermore, when the children's guardian Uncle Monty has been murdered, Klaus once again converts grief into rage: *"'That's Uncle Monty's food!'* Klaus cried out suddenly, his face contorted in anger. He pointed at Dr. Lucafont, who had taken a can out of the cupboard. *'Stop eating his food!'"* (RR: 119.)

Klaus is also shown to react with anger during other trying situations. When the orphans realize that Count Olaf has no intentions of actually taking care of them, they start to miss their parents even more:

> 'If they were here,' Klaus said, his voice rising as he got more and more upset, 'we would not be with Count Olaf in the first place! I *hate* it here, Violet! I *hate* this house! I *hate* our room! I *hate* having to do all these chores, and I *hate* Count Olaf!' (BB: 31−32.)

Klaus' frustration and anger are, of course, an understandable reaction in this situation, but his inability to control his rage makes their circumstance with Count Olaf even more difficult, as can be seen in the following passage: "Klaus had been glaring at the floor, trying to hide how upset he was. But at this he could not remain silent. 'You mean our *bed*!' he shouted. 'You have only provided us with one bed!'" (BB: 52−53.) This outburst causes Count Olaf to strike Klaus in the face.

Klaus' difficulties with controlling his emotions could be said to be a rather effeminate feature, although he is also quite aggressive which, in turn, is often seen as a masculine quality. Moreover, at least from the adults' point of view, Klaus has a habit of contradicting authorities, which is usually a stereotypical feature for a boy protagonist. When Mr. Poe tells the children that their new guardian is a man named Count Olaf, Klaus starts to ask questions about their new guardian: "But our parents never mentioned Count Olaf to us. Just how is he related to us, exactly?" (BB: 15.) When Mr. Poe explains that Count Olaf is an actor and that he often travels, Klaus is still not satisfied and demands some clarification: "I thought he was a count" (BB: 16). In addition, when Mr. Poe takes the children to Uncle Monty, Klaus yet again demands for more information: "How exactly is Dr. Montgomery related to us?" (RR: 6.) The readers will most likely understand that it is only natural that Klaus wants to know more about their new guardians, but Mr. Poe finds his questions annoying and a sign of bad manners. As Mr. Poe drives the children to Uncle Monty's house, he gives Klaus some advice: "Now, Klaus, don't ask too many questions right away" (RR: 9).

The adults' condescending treatment of Klaus becomes apparent once more when he tries to tell them the truth about Count Olaf and is scolded for interrupting others: "'But Uncle Monty−' Klaus said. 'How many times must I remind you it's not polite to interrupt?' Uncle Monty interrupted, shaking his head." (RR: 72.) Another example of this is seen in the following passage: "'Please, Klaus,' Mr. Poe admonished, a word which here means 'reprimanded Klaus even though he was interrupting for a good reason.' 'It is not polite to interrupt.'" (RR: 101.) It seems that the adults misunderstand Klaus' intentions because he is only trying to make them understand what is really going on instead of trying to dominate the conversation or being intentionally rude. Furthermore, Klaus does not accept it when the adults try to scold him without any valid arguments:

> 'I can't believe you would dare to disagree with a man who has eye problems.' 'I have eye problems,' Klaus said, pointing to his glasses, 'and you are disagreeing with me.' 'I will thank you not to be impertinent,' Aunt Josephine said, using a word which here means 'pointing out that I'm wrong, which annoys me.' (WW: 56.)

One could argue that the reason why the adults try to silence Klaus is because he is almost too intelligent for them and they do not have answers for his questions. In addition, it seems that the adults are annoyed that a child has such strong opinions and is not afraid to express them. Just as the adults try to change Violet and think that her interest in mechanics is not suitable for girls, they also try to change Klaus. Fortunately, Klaus is not discouraged by these remarks, and he continues to search for answers and some justice for himself and his siblings.

Besides not being afraid of standing up to adults, Klaus does not hesitate to express his more negative emotions or displeasure: "Klaus looked distastefully at each ugly shirt Mrs. Poe had bought for him" (BB: 16). Even though Mr. Poe and his wife had taken the Baudelaires into their home for a night after the fire, Klaus is not overly grateful. He differs from the overly polite Violet in the sense that he demands a little more from others and is not afraid to express his dismay, although the clothes in the aforementioned example were received as a gift. Moreover, when Klaus expresses out loud that Aunt Josephine's house does not really seem like a loving home, Violet reminds him that Aunt

Josephine is probably doing her best and that they should not complain. While Klaus agrees with Violet, he still has some defiance left: "'I want to complain, anyway,' he said" (WW: 24−25). Compared to Violet, Klaus might seem a little ungrateful, but his feelings are still very understandable. Moreover, many readers will surely identify with Klaus because he is not as calm as Violet and only expresses out loud the frustration that all three of the Baudelaires really feel.

Klaus is described as being very protective of his siblings. When Count Olaf grabs Sunny and she starts to cry, Klaus reacts very aggressively and yells: "'Put her down immediately, you beast!'" (BB: 47). In this situation, Klaus is the one who acts as the hero and protector. Moreover, when Violet tries to concentrate and closes her eyes to think, Aunt Josephine states that Violet is doing the right thing by closing her eyes and blocking out the fear. Nevertheless, Klaus does not want for anyone to think that her sister is ignoring their horrible situation and refusing to do something about it: "'She's not blocking out anything,' Klaus said crossly. 'She's concentrating.'" (WW: 173.)

Although Klaus can at times be aggressive and negative, this kind of behavior actually emphasizes the fact that he is ultimately quite emotional and sensitive. For example, when Stephano shows up at Uncle Monty's house Klaus notices immediately that he is actually Count Olaf (again up to no good), but he does not force him to leave. This can be seen in the passage below:

> *Stop!* Klaus would think to himself, even though it was too late to do anything about it. *Stop! Take this man away!* Of course, it is perfectly understandable that Klaus and his sisters were too surprised to act so quickly, but Klaus would lie awake in bed, years later, thinking that maybe, just maybe, if he had acted in time, he could have saved Uncle Monty's life. (RR: 44.)

Klaus also expects a great deal from himself, and he cannot forgive himself for not taking action when he had the chance. This is also another great example of how Klaus is just as complex a character as Violet.

When Uncle Monty passes away and people start emptying his house, Klaus cannot accept that his Uncle's beloved collection is being touched: "'But they're Uncle Monty's

collection! Klaus cried. ‘It took him years to find all these reptiles! You can’t just scatter them to the winds!’” (RR: 184.) Klaus knows how much the collection meant to Uncle Monty, and it breaks his heart to see that it is being taken away. He is ultimately a kind character and does not want to upset others, as can be seen in the citation: “‘We’re sorry we brought it up,’ Klaus said quickly. ‘We didn’t mean to upset you.’” (WW: 33.) Klaus says this to Aunt Josephine after they ask her about her late husband, causing her to become upset after talking about him. Moreover, even though Klaus is extremely intelligent, he does not mock others for their lack of knowledge: “‘Strangulatory? Conjunction? Tenebrous? Hue?’ Violet repeated. ‘I have no idea what you’re talking about.’ ‘I didn’t either,’ Klaus admitted, ‘until I looked up some of the words.’” (RR: 135.) Klaus does not make Violet feel bad about not knowing what the words mean and, in addition, he is honest and explains that he also had to look up the words from a dictionary. Therefore, Klaus is by no means trying to appear smarter than he is or trying to make others feel inferior.

Furthermore, when Mr. Poe takes the three Baudelaire children to their new guardian, Dr. Montgomery (also known as Uncle Monty), he explains to Klaus that Dr. Montgomery’s first and last names are both Montgomery and that the children should not ridicule him because of his name. Klaus is really annoyed by this piece of advice because he would never ridicule someone for having an unusual name (RR: 6−7.) It seems that Klaus is yet again misunderstood − just because he asks questions and is outspoken does not mean that he would mock someone’s name. He is clearly upset and slightly insulted about Mr. Poe’s comment and feels that he has been misjudged.

Especially in the first two novels of the series, Klaus relies on Violet and expects her to always know what to do. He can be seen asking for her advice in the following passage: “Sunny continued to wail, and Klaus found that his eyes were wet with tears as well. Only Violet didn’t cry.” […] “‘This is terrible, terrible,’ Klaus said finally. ‘Violet, what can we do?’” (BB: 50.) Furthermore, this is not the only occasion when he asks for guidance or seeks comfort in Violet: “‘Could we spend the night in the same room?’ Klaus asked Violet timidly. ‘Last night I felt as if I were in a jail cell, worrying all by myself.’” (RR: 82.) Regardless of Klaus’ habit of lashing out and getting angry, he also shows a more

sensitive side to his sisters; he cries and feels scared and is not ashamed of it or of asking Violet for help.

Similar to Violet's character, Klaus also changes and matures during the first three novels. He is noticeably less aggressive in the third novel and has clearly comprehended that it is sometimes wise to remain silent. He no longer lashes out at the adults because he understands that they will not listen to him anyway. Moreover, he no longer relies as much on Violet and, in turn, is able to offer some support to her:

> 'It's not working,' she said again, and dropped the oar in despair. 'We need a fire, but I can't invent one.' 'It's okay, Klaus said, even though of course it was not. 'We'll think of something.' 'Tintet,' Sunny said, which meant something along the lines of 'Don't cry. You tried your best,' but Violet cried anyway. (WW: 178.)

This is the first time when Violet is shown to be completely defeated and distraught, and it is up to Klaus to remain calm and comfort his older sister.

In conclusion, Klaus has a more aggressive temperament than his sisters and is often described as impatient, angry or irritated. He also has trouble controlling his feelings, and he often contradicts authorities because he is not able to hold his tongue. Klaus cannot stand injustice and is quick to defend his sisters and himself. Moreover, he is shown in the books to express the negative feelings that Violet is too polite to say out loud. The character of Klaus is a combination of a traditional boy character who is aggressive but also possesses characteristics that are quite effeminate; he cannot always control his feelings, and he cries and seeks help from his sister. However, as the series progresses, he learns to control his emotions. Just as Violet learns to be more assertive, Klaus realizes that he needs to control his temper and that sometimes the best way to handle a situation is to be calm, like his sister.

As the Baudelaires have to work together in order to defeat Count Olaf, Klaus contributes to the collective character by being the one who is intelligent and having the persistence and attention to details needed in order to find the answers the orphans are looking for.

Moreover, even though Klaus has at times trouble with controlling his emotions, he is the one who is not afraid to express the negative feelings that all three Baudelaires experience. Klaus is the temperament actant, and he has the courage to contradict adults when they are in the wrong, and he does not hesitate to support and protect his siblings when needed.

4.3 Sunny

The youngest of the three Baudelaire orphans is Sunny, who is only an infant at the beginning of the series. She is described by the narrator as follows: "What she lacked in size, however, she made up for with the size of her four teeth" (BB: 4). Sunny does indeed make the most of her four teeth and often uses them as a weapon. For example, when an odd-looking doctor arrives after Uncle Monty's death and confirms Stephano's claim that Monty's death was caused by a snake bite, it is Sunny who notices that there is something off with this doctor, and she proceeds to bite the doctor's hand with her teeth. In doing this, Sunny reveals that the doctor is actually one of Count Olaf's henchmen and the hand she bit was a plastic hand used to cover up a hook. In addition, Sunny uses her weapon again when she bites Captain Sham's peg leg and reveals Count Olaf's own leg with the incriminating eye tattoo he was trying to cover in order to hide his true identity. Although Sunny is only an infant, she is undoubtedly as brave as her older siblings, as can be seen in the following description:

> As all the taller people argued and paid no attention to Sunny, the littlest Baudelaire crawled as close as she could to the peg leg, opened her mouth and bit down as hard as she could. Luckily for the Baudelaires, Sunny's teeth were as sharp as the sword of Alexander the Great, and Captain Sham's peg leg split right in half with a *crack!* that made everybody look down. (WW: 201.)

While Sunny uses her teeth effectively, she is also the one who notices that the doctor's hand was made of plastic and that Captain Sham wore a fake peg leg. Moreover, when at the beginning of the first novel the children are on the beach, it is Sunny who notices first that someone is approaching them. Based on these examples, it can be said that Sunny is highly observant of her surroundings. Furthermore, when everyone else is talking, it is

Sunny who often remains silent. This is the reason why she is able to notice things that others do not register or consider insignificant.

At times, Sunny appears to be almost like watchdog: "'Sunny, watch the door and bite anybody who tries to get in.' 'Ackroid!' Sunny said, which probably meant something like 'Roger!' Violet left, and true to her word, Sunny sat near the door with her teeth bared." (RR: 126.) Also, when Captain Sham tried to approach the Baudelaires, Sunny acted protectively and "[…] growled at him" (WW: 190).

In addition to using her teeth as a weapon, Sunny uses them also in order to communicate. When the Baudelaires are leaving Mr. Poe's home, Sunny bites the shoes of Mr. Poe's children so that they will see the teeth mark and thus remember her. What is more, when the orphans meet Count Olaf's neighbor Judge Strauss, Sunny bites her hand gently. Violet explains to Strauss that this is Sunny's way of showing that she likes someone. However, it is once again Mr. Poe who does not properly understand the Baudelaires and thinks that Sunny's biting is only a bad habit: "'And somebody please make sure Sunny doesn't bite Dr. Montgomery. That wouldn't be a good first impression.'" (RR: 9.)

In addition to biting, Sunny uses different kinds of shrieks to communicate because she cannot yet speak fluently. Fortunately, her siblings seem to understand what she wants to say and often act as interpreters. Sunny's language ties the siblings together, and because only the three of them are able to understand what is being said, Sunny's shrieks act as their own common code The narrator also translates Sunny's shrieks for the reader, but he often downplays her intelligence: "'Yeeka!' Sunny shrieked, which appeared to mean 'How interesting!' although of course there was no way that Sunny could understand what was being said." (BB: 35.) Even though the narrator states that Sunny could not possibly understand what is going on, it becomes clear that Sunny is in fact very well aware of everything that happens around her.

As mentioned earlier, Sunny is the only one that notices the fake hand and peg leg, and this alone proves that Sunny is an exceptionally brilliant infant. The narrator attempts at first to downplay Sunny's intelligence and abilities because her character would

otherwise be too unbelievable and unrelatable. But, as the story progresses, Sunny's brilliance is revealed to the reader through small hints, until it is finally clear that also Sunny can be described as a wunderkind. Already in *The Bad Beginning* Sunny shrieks out loud the word 'book' when Violet and Klaus are discussing how they could possibly find out why Count Olaf wants Violet to play his bride in the theater production. Again the narrator tones down Sunny's intelligence by stating that "she probably meant something like 'Would somebody please wipe my face?'" (BB: 79−80). Despite the narrator's comment, Sunny's shrieks make Violet and Klaus realize that they should try to find the answer in a book.

As the story progresses, Sunny's shrieks become more understandable. For example, when the children have to leave Uncle Monty's house and discuss what a wonderful and kind man he was, Sunny also takes part in the conversation: "'Brilliant!' Sunny shrieked, in mid-crawl, and her siblings smiled down at her, surprised she had uttered a word that everyone could understand." (RR: 186.) Another example of Sunny's verbal skills can be seen in the citation: "'*Jose!*' Sunny shrieked, which probably meant something like 'No way!'" (RR: 104.) Sunny shouts this objection when Stephano tries to convince Mr. Poe to let him take the children with him after Uncle Monty's death. Of course, this objection only makes sense if the reader is familiar with the catch phrase *No way, Jose*. Moreover, Sunny's character serves to provide comic relief in an otherwise gloomy story, as the abovementioned example reveals. Sunny lives up to her name and has a rather happy and sunny personality.

Sunny can be described as an active character, who is often responsible for the physical activity. For example, when Violet gives Klaus and Sunny orders to distract the adults while she tries to find evidence that will proof that Stephano murdered Uncle Monty, Sunny does not hesitate to put on a show with her new friend and pretend that she is being attacked by the Incredibly Deadly Viper:

> Sunny was lying down on the marble floor, her tiny arms and legs waving wildly as if she were trying to swim. Her facial expression was what made Klaus want to chuckle. Sunny's mouth was wide open, showing her four sharp teeth, and her eyes were blinking rapidly. She was trying to appear to be very frightened, and

> if you didn't know Sunny, it would have seemed genuine. But Klaus *did* know Sunny, and knew that when she was very frightened, her face grew all puckered and silent, as it did when Stephano had threatened to cut off one of her toes. (RR: 145.)

If Klaus and Violet had failed to realize that Sunny is only pretending to be scared, they would have tried to rescue her and consequently ruin Sunny's plan to distract the adults. The fact that the siblings know each other so well, is one of the reasons for their survival. Besides managing to distract the adults, Sunny is also able to make Klaus chuckle − once again delivering some comedic relief into the Baudelaires unfortunate situation.

There are also other situations where Sunny performs the physical activities needed to save the Baudelaires. One of these incidents occur after the orphans have decoded Aunt Josephine's note and decide to go and fetch her from the Curdled Cave; it is Sunny who crawls into the boathouse and steals the keys from one of Count Olaf's henchmen (WW: 137). In addition to being able to steal the keys, Sunny acted of her own initiative and solved their dilemma − while Violet and Klaus argued with each other of what would be the best way to snatch the keys, Sunny had already taken action. Furthermore, when the children finally reach the Curdled Cave, Violet and Klaus are scared to go into the cave, but Sunny does not hesitate:

> 'Geni,' Sunny said and began to crawl into the mouth of the cave. She probably meant something along the lines of 'We didn't sail a stolen sailboat across Lake Lachrymose in the middle of Hurricane Herman just to stand nervously at the mouth of the cave,' and her siblings had to agree with her and follow her inside. (WW: 153.)

At this point, it is clear that Sunny has matured into an equal member of their little trio. In the beginning of the series she is a victim but, as the story continues, she becomes a more active character. At first she does what Violet tells her to do, but at the end of the third novel she makes decisions on her own and is not afraid to take action. Sunny is a rather masculine character: she is active and the one who wields the weapon (her teeth). Moreover, Sunny takes at times the role of the leader of their group, which is a role often given to male characters.

In the first novel of the series, Violet and Klaus act as parents to Sunny, comforting and cuddling her to make her feel better: “From time to time, they would go over to Sunny and smile at her, and pat her head, to reassure her” (BB: 130). However, as Sunny changes and develops during the three novels, she does no longer need as much support from her siblings as earlier. What is more, she begins to offer support to Violet and Klaus. When Violet is desperate after her invention fails: “‘Tintet,’ Sunny said, which meant something along the lines of ‘Don’t cry. You tried your best.’” (WW: 178.)

Furthermore, when Klaus and Violet start fighting with each other, Sunny is the one who puts a stop to it, as can be seen in the following passage:

> ‘Aget!’ Sunny shrieked, which meant something along the lines of ‘Please stop fighting!’ Violet and Klaus looked at their baby sister and then at one another. Oftentimes, when people are miserable, they will want to make other people miserable, too. But it never helps. ‘I’m sorry, Klaus,’ Violet said meekly. ‘You’re not unbearable. Our situation is unbearable.’ ‘I know,’ Klaus said miserably. ‘I’m sorry, too. You’re not stupid, Violet. You’re very clever.’ (WW: 74−75.)

Sunny is seen here as almost taking the role of a parent in this situation, and this is also another fine example of Sunny’s maturation and growth. Moreover, this example shows once again that Sunny is a quite masculine character. She is the one who is able to control her feelings when her siblings start to quarrel.

In addition to taking a bigger role in the Baudelaire trio, there is a change in the power relation between the adults and Sunny. As established earlier, Sunny is a rather helpless victim in the beginning of the series, but when the orphans live with the fearful Aunt Josephine, it is Sunny who comforts her guardian and not vice versa: “‘Delmo!’ Sunny offered, which probably meant something along the lines of ‘If you wish, I will bite the telephone to show you that it’s harmless.’” (WW: 17.) Furthermore, when Captain Sham threatened the Baudelaires and Aunt Josephine, it was Sunny who placed herself between Aunt Josephine and Sham in order to protect her Aunt (WW: 188). Sunny has most likely had the same revelation as her siblings: the Baudelaires cannot trust the adults to help them, meaning that they can only rely on themselves and each other.

In conclusion, because Sunny does not speak yet, she is often portrayed as a quiet observer who notices things that others do not. Because of her four sharp teeth (which she uses as a weapon), she is the one who performs tasks involving physical effort. Moreover, she reminds at times almost an animal or a watchdog when she uses her teeth, growling and guarding something. In addition, Sunny is the one who provides comic relief in the novels, whether with her shrieks or with actions. Similar to the two older Baudelaires, also Sunny changes and matures during the first three novels of the series. In the beginning, she is portrayed as a helpless victim whom her older siblings must protect. However, she gradually starts to take a more active role and, by the end of *The Wide Window,* she has become a vital member of the Baudelaire trio.

Sunny contributes to the collective character by being the one who executes the majority of the physical activity needed in order to defeat Count Olaf. Furthermore, because Sunny is often silent she has the ability to notice things that her older siblings pay no attention to. In addition, Sunny brings comic relief into the story, and she has the ability to make Violet and Klaus laugh. At the beginning of the novel series Sunny is a victim that her siblings have to save, and the thought of Sunny being in danger gives Klaus and Violet additional courage. A collective protagonist is no longer whole if one part gets lost, and this is the reason why the three siblings take care of each other. However, as the story progresses and the three actants change and develop, so does the dynamics of the collective character. At first the three actants have to start believing in themselves and their own unique skills, and when this is accomplished they also start to work together. As Violet, Klaus and Sunny mature into characters with unique personalities, they also mature as a collective character. The function of all the three actants is to defeat Count Olaf, and when they combine their different personalities and skills, they are able to form a collective character who is able to accomplish this task. Moreover, it is the "bond of love" as Russell (2011: 24) phrases it, among the tree Baudelaires that also plays a role in their survival. Because the orphans love each other so much, they are willing to do anything to protect one another. Moreover, because the children know each other so well, they are able to work so seamlessly together.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Series of Unfortunate Events does not follow the same patterns as many other orphan stories and, perhaps owing to this fact, the characters of Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire also differ from many other literary orphans. One of the most evident differences discovered in this thesis is that the three Baudelaire orphans do not follow the traditional gender roles that can be found in most of the books aimed at children. Because Violet, Klaus and Sunny form a collective character, the author has been able to combine different traits of traditional masculinity and femininity but detach them from bodies.

Furthermore, each one of the actants has their own personalities and unique skills. Violet is the oldest and the leader of the children's small group. She also feels responsible for her younger siblings. Klaus is an intelligent boy, who loves to read and gather information, and it is often because of his knowledge and wit that the three orphans manages to outwit Count Olaf. He is more temperamental than the polite Violet and often has problems managing his anger, especially if someone thinks that he is stupid. Sunny is an inarticulate character, but perhaps because she is mostly quiet, she notices things that her siblings do not see. She is also a practical little girl, and her fascination for biting things helps the children survive through a series of unfortunate events.

Violet, Klaus and Sunny also change and mature during the first three novels. Violet gains confidence in herself as an inventor, and she develops into a more assertive character. Klaus also learns to trust his own unique skills and learns to control his temper. Sunny also matures and she changes from a helpless victim into an active and independent character. Moreover, as the three actants develop on their own, the collective character also goes through a change. As the Baudelaires learn to know and trust themselves, they also learn to trust each other and therefore work better together. Violet, Klaus and Sunny complete each other, and this is the reason why they are able to defeat their arch enemy Count Olaf.

The plot in the three books, *The Bad Beginning*, *The Reptile Room* and *The Wide Window*, follows the same pattern: Mr. Poe takes the three orphans to a new guardian, something

terrible happens, and the three children have to find a way to outmaneuver Count Olaf – and when they do, Count Olaf manages to escape and the children are once again taken to a new home, fearing the return of Count Olaf. The children do not receive as much assistance as they would need from the adults in their lives; even if the adults are kind-hearted, they do not believe Violet, Klaus and Sunny when they try to warn them about Count Olaf's evil intentions. Or, alternatively, the adults are too selfish to put their own lives into jeopardy in order to save the orphans.

By choosing to write a formula story with unconventional characters, the author has succeeded in writing a popular children's book series which appeals to a wide range of readers. The author has also managed to fulfill the didactic purpose of children's literature: the series is not only entertaining, but it also educates children and encourages a new generation to read.

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