

A HUNGER GAMES RENAISSANCE: HOW 'THE GIRL ON FIRE' IGNITED

A GENERATION'S FLAME

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Master of Arts

Approved April 2023 by the

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August 2023

## ABSTRACT

In the years since 2020, both the use of the social media platform TikTok, and according to Scholastic, book sales have increased exponentially. The two work in tandem to create a sub-category within TikTok, affectionately named “BookTok” for its reader recommendation, the creative space for live fanfiction, or simply discussions of theme. Users of BookTok are often found to return to the “pinnacles” of Young Adult Literature, frequently through Suzanne Collins’ famed Hunger Games trilogy. Through the resurgence of The Hunger Games, society has seen the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the explosion of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the rise and fall of a global pandemic. The narrative surrounding the trilogy has thus been amplified, serving as a reminder/guidebook for readers to follow in the face of a revolution that seems inevitable. And while this may have always been the case, its social media popularity has made a great contribution to that.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The term “young adult literature” has been coined for barely six decades, but in the time since we’ve given this longstanding genre a name, it has developed an airtight grip over the young adults of the twenty-first century, whether they’re willing to dive head first into a whirlwind world of fantasy, or go to battle alongside their peers. The bounds of the YA genre are endless, allowing to house a myriad of different protagonists of all walks of life – and some even from different worlds. And sometimes, in rare, yet wonderful cases, readers can find a mixture of both a fictional world and their world.

However, it is not only a popular genre for those aged 12-18. 55 percent of YA readers are a part of the eighteen and older age bracket (Words Rated 2023), allowing for those who age out of the category to see something in characters that is often lost on readers of other genres – the image of their younger selves, or the possibility of what they may become – in a very basic sense.

At least, this had been my experience as a young teen, especially when it came down to my favorite female protagonist Katniss Everdeen. And while I did not aspire to be put in Katniss's position (the symbol of a revolution/ a victim of war trauma), I did however, want to embody everything that she stood for: strength, resilience, and power.

Of course, there were many strong and empowering female influences throughout young adult literature before her (thank you, Jo March), but Katniss seemed inherently different to me, and I wound up being correct. I was able to relate to Katniss

in the sense that she always felt the need to take care of those around her, and I also identified with her burning desire to find justice for myself and those around me who were being mistreated. But reading the books for the first time at the age of twelve did not necessarily leave me or other readers in the position to do so – at least not in the real world per se. So instead, we turned to the world of fanfiction to put ourselves in Katniss's place, and feel as if we had the power to change her world, as if that would somehow fix our own.

And even once I particularly took off my “fanfiction writer’s” hat, *The Girl on Fire* and her story seemed to stick with me in a way which I had never experienced before – as seems to evidently now be the case with the rest of her readers. While I never did think that I was alone in loving this trilogy, the rise of social media, particularly TikTok, has allowed me to see the fanfiction that I had once admired come to life before my eyes by the skill of other creators. Where fanfiction separates creator and reader by a screen, TikTok does the opposite. Since the content is visual, it creates a sense of familiarity between creator and viewer, making it more personal.

It was through the platform that I realized just how deep Katniss’s impact had gone. Upon both the spike in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 following the death of George Floyd and the eventual overturning of *Roe versus Wade* in the summer of 2022, what users affectionately named ‘BookTok’ exploded with content honoring Katniss and the war she had fought.

In this resurgence, fans use their platforms to remind others that series like Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games* trilogy have had a much more profound impact than we ever realized upon the first book’s release in 2008. The series was almost used as a

guide in how to stand up to governmental injustice. It ignited a fire in this new generation to fight for the rights to our own bodies and of other human beings in a way that is proving to be even more vicious than it has in years past.

It's important to recognize that Katniss Everdeen is not the first of her kind – Obviously, there have been other protagonists in the past who have fought against the injustices of their world – enter Harry Potter, the Pevensie children, etc., But this seems different in nature. While *The Hunger Games* is considered a part of a dystopian society, the structure of that society has hit close to home for many readers, whereas the setting of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* is set during the time of WWII, making it slightly harder for reader's in the present to identify with. Adding in the eloquence of the film adaptations of the trilogy, Suzanne Collins seemed to brew the perfect recipe for a revolution.

She created an icon, showing readers that being strong does not always have to mean being cold, and isolated as we've seen authors attempt with characters like those in the Marvel Comics, particularly Natasha Romanoff; it also doesn't mean that you can't fall in love. It does however, mean that in the face of all of that emotion, we remain steadfast in what the ultimate goal is: to feel like we have control over ourselves.

Even towards the end of the novel where many of Katniss's pre-established beliefs have been questioned and picked apart by the fanbase, upon a closer look, the franchise was bound to lead to tense political criticism anyway and does not take away from Katniss's overall lesson to us. This is what makes her the driving force behind the fight that the younger generations continue to fight.

## CHAPTER 2

### BRIEF OVERVIEW

Throughout the lifespan of young adult literature, protagonists, regardless of gender, tend to fall victim to a few stereotypical camps when it comes to their personalities. According to Carl Jung's Four Archetypes, these are the "Great Good Mother", "Wise Old Man", "Hero", and the "Trickster" (S. Mills, A. Pancake, J. Schall, 2010). Each archetype is quite self-explanatory, and usually, a single protagonist falls into one of these roles pretty well – it isn't necessarily common that they fall into two by the end of their journey.

As readers, it is easy to think of a character who embodies one of these roles, each of whom are completely different in nature. However, it can be a little bit more difficult to find one who fits two of them, and exceedingly more rare that that character is female.

Given that in many cases leading up to the publishing of the first *Hunger Games* novel, roles in which female leadership was showcased were not only incredibly uncommon, but their roles were expressed as much more cooperative rather than competitive (Loden 1987). This, coupled with the already crucial way in which children and young adults are taught about their communities and societal norms can often make for a messy concoction, since children are given books to read so that they learn how to behave in the face of society (S. Mills, A. Pancake, J. Schall, 2010). But in light of this, the impact of self-actualization and confidence that Katniss Everdeen

has had on readers is completely logical.



## CHAPTER 3

### AN EVOLUTION OF STRENGTH: THE BOOKS

#### **THG**

Typically, when readers are first introduced to a character, versus when the story ends, the novel's protagonist has to undergo a series of trials and tribulations to become stronger and that is the payoff of the book. In this case, Katniss is already strong, but by the end of this series readers find out that her task was not in fact to become any stronger than she already was (at least not outwardly), but to embody the outspokenness and anger towards the system which had wronged her that she had so long suppressed.

In the first chapters of the trilogy's opener, Katniss embodies a hardened version of Jung's "Great Good Mother" category, as she wells up with anguish just before the reaping, knowing she's powerless against the Capitol in that moment, despite being Prim's constant protector (Collins, 2008). While she thinks the Capitol's citizens are stuck up, selfish and inhumane, she only does as much as she can do within reason to keep her sister safe. She does not heed Gale's initial suggestion to take their families and run off into the woods ahead of the reaping, but in later books – particularly *Catching Fire* – she finds herself wondering if Gale had had the right idea all along. Showing her budding evolution into the powerful war symbol of the Mockingjay, which will be discussed later on.

Even after she volunteers on Prim's behalf, and asks for Gayle to take care of her, her mind is still on her sister and her wellbeing just before she's about to be hauled

away to the train that would lead her to her supposed death. In her final interaction with her mother, she takes her mother by the shoulders and implores her that ‘she cannot and should not clock out again, because this time there would be no Katniss to make sure that Prim and her mother stayed alive’ (Collins p.35, 2008).

This type of thinking shows the reader just how little Katniss thinks of her mother as stepping into that “Great Good Mother type of role. In fact, we learn from the very beginning that her relationship with her mother is rather strained since the death of her father, so she takes on the role she should have been filling. While the hatred towards her mother is rather grudging, Katniss does seem to resent her over the fact that she had children at all; at this point in the series, Katniss is adamant that she does not want children simply because of the way the Capitol so easily rounds them up like cattle.

Maki Matapanyane argues that the journey of motherhood is oppressive even in benign societies such as Panem (Matapanyane, 2016), but also says that the feminist version of parenting – at least in a real life setting – eventually moves from a more passive style of mothering into a strong one, which Katniss embodies over the course of the three novels, which is not something we as readers encounter a great deal of in YA, where the role of the parent as a concept is much more passive, especially in similar trilogies like *Divergent*.

As much as this is with Prim, it also trickles into how she treats Peeta once the pair of them enter the Games. When Peeta and her separate after the bloodbath in the Cornucopia and he eventually splits from his pact with the Careers, her main concern becomes finding him and keeping him alive in an effort to repay him for burning the

bread on purpose the day she nearly starved outside of the bakery; she felt as if she had owed him something (Collins p.28, 2008).

It's also this discomfort that caused the beginnings of the pair's love story in the first place, entirely out of necessity. While Peeta's feelings

for Katniss are real throughout the books, Katniss at first sees this as a transactional arrangement. Usually, when a set of young adult novels has a female protagonist the pressure to capitalize off of sexuality is explored through romantic intention and the teenage fixation on dating (Manter, Francis, 2017). But for Katniss, her romantic journey takes a bit of a backseat, with her sole purpose being to make it back to her sister.

Even if she meets the novel's end and decides to take the nightlock berries in an effort to stop the Capitol from having her and Peeta kill each other, and Peeta is expressing his love to her, her mind is only on one thing: she does not want the Capitol to have their victor (Collins p. 329, 2008). Despite her feelings budding beneath the surface earlier in the book, she chooses not to acknowledge that, and prioritizes a rebellion over what she stereotypically would have wanted as a sixteen year old girl. Romance and relationships are the furthest thing from Katniss's mind, even seeing Gale, her longtime companion, as no more than a friend. Her only want was to survive, and then, "when she had time", would focus on other things, but a husband and children were not of concern to her.

## CATCHING FIRE

Not to put an emphasis on the love triangle, but it is a pivotal part of Katniss's character development in a way that is not necessarily expected. At this point, Katniss and Peeta are living with Haymitch in Victor's Village. Their families are now well taken care of, and Katniss has made it back to her sister. As readers this is where we see Katniss harden. She has survived the Games and is a sufferer of PTSD, with symptoms including nightmares and flashbacks. In spite of not intending to do so – or so she says – Katniss has already become the face of several uprisings throughout the districts of Panem, and now has a target on her back.

Just before the third Quarter Quell, President Snow pays Katniss a visit and reminds her that the Girl on Fire has left a mark that has the potential to sear all of Panem (Collins p. 26, 2009). Going on to say he doesn't believe she and Peeta are in love, he wants proof – knowing full well nothing she would do would ever be enough.

Peeta then making the decision to offer up Katniss and his futures with the sacrificial lamb of the novel by announcing Katniss's pregnancy with a line that shook readers of YA to their cores, sending more ripples still through social media as the Roe v. Wade debate has caught fire once again this past year. "I'm not glad, I wish we had waited until the whole thing was done officially," in response to their faux-marriage, "Surely Peeta would think more time together were better 'if it weren't for the baby' (Collins, p. 87, 2009)."

This line became a fixture in the uprising that resulted on social media and outside of the Capitol building upon the overturning of Roe versus Wade in June 2022.

Fanfiction platforms, and social media sites such as TikTok, are cultivated to niches such as *The Hunger Games*, and in this instance, “BookTok” expanded far beyond its standard

29.1 billion viewers, with over 50 billion views to videos hashtagged “hungergames”.

Peeta’s now-iconic “if it weren’t for the baby” bomb circulated throughout the platform, serving to remind watchers that even from a young age, readers are shown how an inherent rage is brought forth when the life of an unborn child is put on the line, but there is a stark difference in how society responds when it is the life of a living, and breathing child at stake – because that simply is what Katniss and Peeta are – children.

Katniss even goes on to say as such immediately after her “pregnancy” is announced on the government talk show. She says “she knows that her face is being projected on the screen, but she too couldn’t hide her expression as the Capitol audience broke out into screams and cries for help – though unsure whether they were for herself or for her unborn child.

She too is processing a future that seems inevitable to her. Her great disdain for marriage and family came from the knowing that one day she would have to surrender her children to the Games – especially as a victor – and now she would have no choice but to marry Peeta and do just that (Collins, p. 88, 2009).”

In a way, Katniss is thrust into the very same dichotomy that today’s women are facing now – and somehow, Suzanne Collins wrote a prophecy into her novel: that a revolution would have to occur in order for there to be change; i.e., the value of the life of another human being.

The moral dilemma that occurs when discussing the development and birth of

intrauterine life is one that has been going on for the greater part of time. In Kathy Rudy's *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice: Moral Diversity in the Abortion Debate*, Rudy argues that our "tendency to describe abortion one way or another is produced not by our own individual intentions but rather on the logics of the system that makes the world intelligible to us (Rudy, 10)."

To piggyback off of Rudy, let's use Katniss's supposed pregnancy as an example.

The Capitol is offering up children aged 12-18 for the Games. While these are still children, the Capitol's leaders are not valuing the lives of minors. The moment that an unborn child is in the mix, however, the Capitol is running amuck with naysayers begging President Snow to cancel the Games. This in part, has to be due to Rudy's argument that the Capitol is processing the life of an infant as significant, but views these contestants as nothing more than pawns in a game, because they're seemingly living, breathing, and self-sufficient enough to compete.

In Rudy's words, the way in which the debate sparks relies solely on upbringing and personal stance, but at the end of the day we are "the method by which these mechanisms survive." and such the same can be extended to the very concept of *The Hunger Games* in relation to Katniss and her child.

At that exact moment, President Snow and the Gamemakers are plagued with the decision whether to allow Katniss to compete in the Games, allow Peeta to go alone or cancel the whole thing altogether. As the option reveals itself to be a not-shocking "none of the above", the Capitol and Districts of Panem fall into an uproar, which is mirrored in society as we know it.

And of course, President Snow seems to be aware of Katniss and Peeta's bluff,

so so he then takes it upon himself to resort to even more extreme measures. In the next chapter of the book, when Katniss and Cinna enter the launching area, Katniss watches her friend beaten to death and dragged from the room by the government's Peacekeepers. And as Katniss screams, she reveals then that her only thought when entering the arena was that from that moment on, it was a place that existed for a “Girl on Fire (Collins, p. 104, 2009).”

This is the first time that readers witness Katniss come into her own, finally embracing the “Girl on Fire” image that the Capitol had endowed her with. From that moment on Katniss’s display was no longer for show, and she wanted to be a symbol of rebellion – from her perspective, she would die anyway, so might as well leave chaos in her wake.

Katniss’s desire to be a war symbol is not simply because she wants to bring justice to the citizens of Panem, but rather that she wants to also make sure that the country is a safe place for her sister and other children her age to grow up, sans anymore Capitol bombings raining down on their homes.

Katniss’s revolutionary idea is not only corroborated by herself and Peeta, but also by other tributes; District Four’s Finnick O’Dair, District Two’s Johanna, and District Three’s Wiress and Beetee all join an alliance not only to help one another through the Quell, but to also, in tandem, conspire against the Capitol (Collins. P. 180, 2009).

It speaks to the fact that the rage that Katniss and Peeta feel is not just localized to them, or the poverty of their District, but that this is a holistic result across all of

Panem. It is during the Quell that it hits Katniss that “these other victors were all children too, once (Collins, p. 202, 2009)”, and they had all had their childhoods, their innocence, stolen from them together, and to be thrust back into the Games for sport once again was the greatest injustice of all.

This speaks to the same rage that young Americans feel in the face of the appeal of *Roe v. Wade*; especially prevalent to Katniss’s journey.

While in our case, the “polarizing conflict” over abortion and human rights is much attributed to the fault of the Supreme Court, the case could have stayed its hand or been approved on narrower grounds and avoided backlash, etc. (Greenhouse, 20228), the bottom line is that nothing would have changed at all, and people would have been dissatisfied either way. With that said, Greenhouse also goes on to note that it is better to act in the favor of the human, rather than the preference of the body of government.

The same can be said for the victors of the *Hunger Games* and their families. Obviously, the parents of Panem aren't terribly excited to send off their young adults to fight in a war to the death as repayment to their government for an uprising that occurred long before any of them were even born.

The parallels between our real lives and the lives of Katniss and the other victors in this novel are becoming far too close to be ignored in this day and age; especially once Katniss exits the arena, wakes up looking for Peeta, and finds Gale there to tell her that not only had President Snow taken Peeta hostage, but that a parade of fire bombs had rained down on District 12, leaving most of its occupants dead or



displaced (Collins. P. 387, 2009).

## MOCKINGJAY

Between *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* a fire is lit in the belly of Panem's citizens as well as our protagonist. Mockingjay's Katniss is out for blood after the bombing of District 12 (Collins, 10, 2010). At the point where she and her family have sought refuge in the bombed and supposedly non-existent District 13, Katniss does something that is rather out of character for her; and that she is conspiring with a government official.

President Alma Coin of District 13 approaches Katniss under the guise of wanting to help organize a nationwide Revolution against the Capitol, which we later find is a more sinister plan of wanting the same power and control that is heavily sought after by President Snow.

Regardless of the setbacks that deterred her, Katniss is well aware of her end goal: stop dictatorship, and furthermore, stop the Games. It is important to note that up until now Katniss has practiced a kind of passive silence when it comes to an uprising or anything that could put herself or her family (Gale and Peeta included) in danger. In previous novels she even says that she learned to hold her tongue (Collins, p. 15, 2008) when it came to these matters, or when Gale was ranting about the injustices of his family having to take out tesserae in exchange for food and water.

This goes back to the passivity that Jung speaks of in his motherhood archetype, but it is in the precise moment that Prim is reaped during the first Games in which Katniss decides that all the trouble that they went to asking their families to not take out any tesserae was all in vein. In that moment, she decides that it doesn't matter

if she angers the Capitol, especially when she was going to die doing it anyway; it may as well be in the name of her sister and all the children who would come after her.

But now she is seen as very active in this revolution. As Cinna had hoped, the Mockingjay had become a symbol of much more than Katniss could have anticipated during her first visit to the arena. Everything about Katniss became a symbol from the Mockingjay pin, to her braided hair, to the song her father sang to her as a child, “The Hanging Tree”. The tune specifically recurs throughout the novel at several points, during the first of which Katniss reveals to the reader that the song is not supposed to be sung in

public, as the song was a song from the first rebellion; which was unbeknownst to her for quite a long time (Collins, p. 54, 2010).

Because of her previous stillness on the matter, Katniss’s original willingness to heed to whatever demand Coin made of her is quite rational, seeing as the one thought that remains consistent throughout the novel is this: anything is better than President Snow.

Given that readers have a much broader scope of Katniss’s surroundings than she does, her approach seems at first counterintuitive, but once again ties into our own political ideation of “anyone is better than \*insert President of choice here\*.”

Without realizing it, Collins created a blueprint for what we now know to be our own ideals about government systems, but having the perspective of an adult versus a young adult is in fact different and causes the wonder of whether or not these feelings were always a part of us.

Personally, the trilogy has taken on a much different meaning in my adult life

than it did in my adolescent years. As a teen, I was primarily focused on the dynamic of the love triangle – who would she choose, and when would we find out? But in rereading them as an adult, I have taken the time to analyze the socio-political undertones of the novel, especially seeing as this year was my first time rereading them in my adult life.

Now, I as a reader see the series as much more than the love triangle it was portrayed as, and more as a critique of society as we know it, and it has become my favorite comparison to draw. But in that same vein, just because romance is not the focal point of the story, it does not mean that it doesn't contribute to Katniss's overall arc.

Katniss's sudden willingness to fight back in *Mockingjay* is fueled by the very thing we touched upon earlier in her first Games: love. Love for her family, love for her people, and love for Peeta. While Manter and Francis do argue about the need to explore female character development through romance and sexuality, Collins does this without making it the focal point of Katniss's development, but still keeping it at the heart.

With Peeta having been stolen by Snow and the rest of the Capitol's cronies, Katniss's main concern through the first part of the novel is retrieving him. When she learns of Peeta's whereabouts and demands they stage an operation to retrieve him, the idea is shot down. That is until, there is more than one life at stake.

In this section, Katniss recoils at the mention of Haymitch reminding her that done any sooner, this operation would have been very "costly" for their team (Collins, p. 156, 2010). In her eyes, any cost at this point would have been worth Peeta's life

being saved.

And this is not the first time where we see her voice her concern for Peeta, and let her romantic affinity for him shine through. During both the first and second Games, she's fixated on keeping him alive. Perhaps this is the parent in her, the first Games showcased Peeta as inherently weak in the eyes of the careers

In *Catching Fire*, particularly, Katniss realizes that in spite of their fake romance, she truly doesn't know much about Peeta. But as they learn each other's favorite colors, and share in their PTSD experiences from the arena, she finds a sense of comfort in him. This is especially clear when they're inside the arena and Peeta collides with the perimeter, stopping his heart. Katniss melts down, thinking she's lost her one tether to sanity.

Having arrived here from the point in the first Games at which she viewed their relationship as fully transactional shows a great deal of growth on Katniss's part, and also serves to remind the reader that vulnerability and empathy are something to which any human – fictional action hero or not – should have a capacity for.

This in turn helps lead her forth to the end of the novel where she realizes that President Coin's intentions are not pure. For one, her willingness to engage in another Games, but this time reaping Capitol children, which is ultimately no better than reaping from the individual Districts. Katniss's priority is no longer revenge, but instead righting a wrong (Collins., p. 220, 2010)..

This is immediately following the death of the other pillar of her sanity: Prim. It is in this moment in the final third of the novel that Katniss sees that at the end of the day, it is not the individual in charge who is the largest problem at hand, nor is revenge what

she should be seeking. The system is the thing that needed to die all along; So she stages a coup.

This coup is actually why we see the distance immediately solidify itself between Katniss and Gale, but it begins in *Catching Fire* – understandably so, by the end of the book. As mentioned, Gale was eager for Katniss to fit into the mold which he'd created for them. Rebellious Capitol children with a thirst for revenge, who would later settle down and inevitably have the nuclear family dynamic he'd so desired.

Earlier in the second novel, after his flogging in the town square, Gale even mentions to Katniss that he'd always thought it would be them, and for a moment, Katniss seems to consider that, plagued still by her feelings throughout *Mockingjay*, but the pull to Peeta was astronomical for her.

Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that Peeta consistently needed saving, a nice change to the gender roles so often exhibited in YA, even by default (example: Hermione being petrified, in spite of being smarter than Harry and Ron put together in *The Chamber of Secrets*). But Gale never needed Katniss's help, nor did he ask for it.

In District 13's final plot against the Capitol as Coin and Katniss plot to execute President Snow and address Panem with Coin as the new leader – Katniss does the unthinkable, yet correct, thing: she shoots Coin down instead and allows the citizens to take care of Snow, allowing everyone to have their justice and still sending the message that unity is more important than victory; a message that our society would do well to take when it comes to the political debates at hand.

Additionally, this also brings about the bombing that killed her sister, initiated

by Gale and proving that not only did he never need Katniss to save him, but he also had no respect for her and her wishes whatsoever, since she had vetoed the idea of an attack in the first place.

## CHAPTER 4

### BOOKTOK', FILM, AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE

From a fan's perspective, the reason that this trilogy and Katniss's story remains as popular as it does is the evolution mentioned above. Through a world of dystopian literature, we witness many things that happen on American streets every day: the deaths of adolescents, the mistreatment and disregard of bodily autonomy in men, and women, human trafficking, racism, and so much more. But when first reading at the age of 12, that may not always be the first thing on a young reader's mind – it was not on mine.

But whether you read as a teen or an adult, all it requires is a single scroll on social media to see the correlation between the books, and what is going on in our world today.

Previously mentioned, and at the focal point of all of this, is the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. June 24, 2022 incited a “War on Women” on social media, when the news broke that The Supreme Court had made the decision to overturn the legislation to grant abortion as a federal right across the country. Since then, Mashable reports that tags of “The Hunger Games” have garnered 2.6 million views across the board, since that day. Several accounts began posting in honor of Katniss Everdeen to express how disheartened and fearful they were in the face of this ruling, stating that many of them would have to be “burned to the ground” before turning in another woman for having an abortion.

Many *Hunger Games* creators on the app have also spoken about their recent



rereads, as they have begun posting content in the light of all this news. Creator Nia Ola Hill gained 5,500 followers in the month of March 2023 alone after posting a string of popular analysis videos about the series, sharing that “in reading it now, she realized that it can be used to discuss real world themes about capitalism, the way we relate to each other and our relationship to violence as a culture (Mashable, 2023).

And another creator continued to say that the *Hunger Games* community is emphasizing the disparity between rich and poor, with a prioritization of entertainment. Which, as we see, is exactly the story that Collins tells through Katniss’s eyes.

This combined with the overturning of Roe has sent an explosion of activism through social media, with many videos relating to the country’s state of being tagged with a *Hunger Games* hashtag.

Regardless of whether or not the content of the novel is being used for analyzation, the impact of the series has been a chasm in the way that young adults begin to understand and relate to the issues of the world, with posts about gun violence in school, or even in the direction of abortion, relating it to Katniss and Peeta’s predicament in *Catching Fire*. Both scenarios use popular audios from the *Hunger Games* film franchise, such as the theme from *The Hanging Tree*. Because of the widespread popularity of the films, the song is known as a song of both hope and rebellion even by those who have never touched one of the novels, and hearing it so many years later puts into perspective as a consumer just how heavily we have been impacted both from a literary and film standpoint.

Fans have even gone as far as to relate Katniss’s eventual children into the narrative, arguing whether or not Suzanne Collins herself went against her word and

gave Katniss her children in spite of saying she did not want them earlier in the novel.

One creator justifies the choice with the reminder that because the evil in Katniss's world "the Games" had ended, she wanted her children. The only reason she hadn't is because she didn't want to bring her children into a world where she had to surrender them to the Games."

In the very same narrative regarding autonomy, creators bring up details that even the most observant of fans may have missed regarding the inner workings of being a victor after the Games have ended; i.e., singling out the victor's children to continue the trauma of the victors, victors from Career Districts being sex-trafficked (Finnick, Cashmere and Gloss), and so on.

The app shines a light on the fact that Suzanne Collins somehow proceeded to cover all of our nation's greatest issues in three separate novels, which is why they remain so prevalent today. But in reality, it wasn't a prediction for Collins at all.

In an interview with Dr. James Blasingame, Collins said that she was "fully aware that there are socio-political undertones in the *Hunger Games* books were very intentional, and meant to characterize current and past events, including the use of world hunger as a weapon to control populations (Blasingame, 726).

But there was no way to know the explosion that this would have even a decade and a half later. Perhaps this is due to an influx in social media presence, and the growth of Collins' original audience, but nonetheless, the impact that this commentary has had on the young adult world continues to shape this generation through releases of content both by the author and by the reader.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

For a longstanding fan of this trilogy such as myself, it's taken quite a few rereads to truly

internalize Katniss's purpose within her story, and how much it has had an impact on me as a young adult, as well as those around me.

To pivot off of the impact of TikTok as of late, in the time before TikTok was popular, fanfiction sites were – and still are, the fandom's prime source of extra content following the end of the series. In fact, according to *Plugged In*, more than 100 million people worldwide read and write fanfiction for the masses, and many writers average at least 100,000 readers per story (I speak from personal experience).

These pieces of self-created literature allow for characters like Katniss to lead a much longer shelf life, and allows for the author to see tangibly how fans are interacting with their communities, especially years later, given that the average age of a fanfiction author is in their early-mid 20s (Evans, 2022).

Much of these fan made stories involve a deeper dive into Katniss and Peeta's love story, however, they are made to help the series stay fresh in the minds of those who love it. Even in the TikTok sphere as mentioned, creators often go in depth on why they

believe Collins made certain choices throughout her writing, even creating popular audios that have been used in the face of national hardship.

As mentioned previously, Katniss's *Hanging Tree* song weaved itself throughout

*Mockingjay* as a symbol of what the revolution stood for. Normally, book-to-film adaptations do not carry a stunning amount of weight with the audience, but the *Mockingjay Part 1* release grossed an estimated 755.4 million dollars worldwide according to Box Office Mojo, with Jennifer Lawrence's rendition of *The Hanging Tree* skyrocketing to the top of the charts at the time of the film's release.

This had to be noted due to the resurgence the song had on the popular video app in late 2022, as well as the popular Katniss quote: "If we burn, you burn with us," in the face of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

In fact, this pandemonium surrounding the series across social media platforms is in part the reason that Suzanne Collins made the humble decision to release *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, the prequel in which we follow the romance of the first ever District 12 victor and a young President Snow. Had fan buzz not been so prevalent for years on end, Collins may not have taken a deeper dive into Panem as we know it.

But the important thing is *why* it has remained so prevalent. If Katniss had remained stagnant, had she not volunteered for Prim, had she decided she would be the one to end Peeta's life, had she fallen to her feet in the face of Snow's threats, as many of us do on a day-to-day basis in societal pressure, her story would not exist.

Katniss serves as a stunning example for young girls. While our life situations are not in the face of war, they are often shown to us in life and death scenarios, and Katniss does not let those harden her. Of course, she deals with grief as any human does, but she does not back down, and does not allow the grief in question to overtake her.

Even upon the death of her sister, she could have chosen to give up. Coin could

have taken over, and she could have resigned herself as the Mockingjay. But she chose herself. She chose to end the revolution in honor of her sister, not in spite of. And in regards to love, she chose the option of the boy who understood her the most, not the one she would have been with had she not endured the trauma.

The thing about Katniss is that, in spite of living in a dystopian universe, her story is undeniably raw, real and relatable. She does not sugar coat herself, or bend into a mold. She is simply strong in a way which is realistic to be strong. And even more than that, she proves that kind of strength to be possible against the powers that be. Even when that strength comes from a pseudo-mother's love, it proves to readers in this way that femininity and motherhood are not death sentences, nor should they be a sentence to pacifism, but rather an incentive for justice.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

While the digital age has certainly helped matters when it comes to staying immersed in Katniss's story, the reasoning for which it remains so prevalent hinges on one thing and one thing: it's relevance to the ongoings of the world around us. Young adult literature is not often regarded by adults as having a high sense of educational value, but Katniss's case proves that such stories stay with us.

While many are of the opinion that the narrative that surrounds BookTok and fanfiction is a "way for books to hype their way into being published (Symonds, 2022)", it also has a profound influence on how we as a society of young adults view the literature we read, because the impact it has on the average reader is seen rather than read about in a book review.

In this digital age of female empowerment, body positivity and body choice, Katniss is the perfect character in which to place our faith. It has been 15 years since the release of the first *Hunger Games* novel, and while the age of film adaptations has had its effect on the book industry, one would be remiss not to acknowledge that it is also what has helped the revolution that it has incited stay alive.

According to ReadingLiterature.com, the definition of a good piece of literature "contains ideas that are startling, unexpected, unusual, weighty, or new (2017)". Speaking purely on technicality, the *Hunger Games* trilogy is none of those things. It is not new to have a protagonist fed up with the world around them, nor is a love triangle new. And for the sake of argument, neither is societal frustration with the

nation's government.

What *is* new, bold and unexpected, however, is the way that Suzanne Collins chose to come out with these ideals and very bluntly put them on paper in the face of a society that is not ready to face the consequences of its own actions.

To put this in perspective, in March 2022, the New England Journal of Medicine reported an increase of 29.5 percent of armed violence-related deaths in adolescents per year. The *Games* can be attributed as an ode to that same violent death, in which higher government powers have done precious little to stop it.

This may be why the American Library Association dubbed *The Hunger Games* as one of its most frequently banned books, with media censorship at its highest. But this goes back to the disregarding of YA in general.

If YA does not hold powerful pieces of literature, as critics say, then why must we feel the need to ban YA books? If the ideas that are worth filling our heads with are only of the adult classical genres, then why ban a book like *The Hunger Games*?

The answer: fear. As often as the stereotype has been that young adults are incapable of true understanding, the ideas that formulate in the heads of the younger generations are the ones which will one day shape the world we live in, and administrative powers like exactly that – their power.

Katniss's strength has begun a revolution that has yet to burn out, and will not for a long time to come.

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