

Spring 2022

Restoring Paradise Through Providence: The Emergence of the Serendipitous Hero in the Hunger Games

Alexandra Elizabeth Oberempt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Oberempt, A. E. (2022). *Restoring Paradise Through Providence: The Emergence of the Serendipitous Hero in the Hunger Games*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/6543>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Restoring Paradise through Providence:
The Emergence of the Serendipitous Hero in *The Hunger Games*

by

Alexandra Elizabeth Oberempt

Bachelor of Arts
College of Charleston, 2020

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2022

Accepted by:

Scott Gwara, Director of Thesis

Nicole Fisk, Reader

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Alexandra Elizabeth Oberempt, 2022
All Rights Reserved.

DEDICATION

The odds were in my favor when providence decided to give me the amazing network of people who surround me and without whom, I would have never achieved this level of academic success.

To my parents, for providing love and financial support that aided my expensive academic journey. My father, who never quite understood the purpose of the English major, but who never lacked pride in his children's unique successes. To my mother for sitting with me those long nights while I unraveled the inner workings of my mind and figured out what I wanted to say to the world, who edited every essay I wrote since high school, and who pushed me to use the talent I had for telling stories.

To my Nana for first introducing me to dystopian fiction and to my Boompa for teaching me the soul of storytelling.

To my sister for watching the movies in the wee hours of summer nights, reading the books on the back porch, and for generally obsessing over *The Hunger Games* with me.

Family gives you a much-needed foundation. However, family is not who surrounds a student daily. Without wonderful faculty guidance, I would not be writing this salutation.

To Dr. Kathleen Béres Rogers for mentoring me through my applications to graduate school, through my first conference, and through many inspiring literature courses at the College of Charleston.

To Dr. Timothy Carens for being the first to persuade me to continue my education through to a doctorate.

To Dr. Scott Gwara, not only for becoming my director, but for continually encouraging me to be complex and subtle in my ideas, and for introducing me to a field of academia where ideas may overlap through time, eras, and disciplines.

To Nicole Fisk for being my second reader and for geeking out with me over *The Hunger Games*.

The professors mentioned above and many others that have helped me to this point are those that seem to understand the way my mind works and, for that alone, I thank you all with all my heart.

Finally, to Alexis Ray and Kenny Root for keeping me sane.

To Suzanne Collins for writing one of my favorite trilogies.

And to fate.

ABSTRACT

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* enhanced the popularity of post-apocalyptic, young adult literature written between 2004 and 2014 (a genre I call millennial dystopia). A government that sends its people to war, spies on them, and sacrifices the sanctity of the community for personal profit while the powerful and wealthy watch from a secure distance is an anxiety addressed in this fiction. The hero of millennial dystopias satiates the suffering that emerges from this angst.

Through her story, Katniss is pushed to her destiny on a path that leads her to become the hero of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. In fact, she becomes a serendipitous hero—the savior of a secular world. Three characteristics define the serendipitous hero: moments of fate, rejection of society, and unconditional love. In the secular universes of millennial dystopian fiction, a vacuum of power and a desire for a greater, divine force demands a hero restore faith in providence, nature, and goodness. Serendipitous circumstance chooses these heroes to shepherd humanity back to paradise.

Katniss Everdeen volunteers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: The Serendipitous Hero	5
Chapter 3: Restoring Paradise	32
Works Cited.....	50

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Hunger Games shocked the world with its authoritarian, post-apocalyptic depiction of a futuristic America. Dystopias are known for expressing civilization's anxieties about their fates, revealing what is subtly wrong with society, and illustrating where the future could lead if nothing changes. The 'monster' of pre-millennial, post-apocalyptic fiction was not cold war anxieties, world war terrors, communist dictatorships, authoritarian empires, aliens, robots, or zombies. In Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, as with most dystopian literature written between 2004 and 2014 (a genre I call millennial dystopia), the monster was society.

Choosing to read Collin's trilogy was a way of searching for an answer to a question readers had not yet considered. What was wrong with *our* world? A government that risked its own people, sent them to war, spied on them, sacrificed the sanctity of the community for personal profit while they, the powerful, wealthy, politicians watched and remained a secure distance apart from the lower classes was the problem. Millennial dystopia presented us with this sickness, but what was its cure? What were readers looking for when they flipped through the pages of *The Hunger Games*? Who would save us from the future millennial dystopias predicted?

The term 'hero' is difficult to define as many types of heroes exist in our collective consciousness. There are classic, romantic heroes from antiquity: Perseus, Odysseus, Jason. There are the tragic heroes: Oedipus, Macbeth, Jay Gatsby. There are

superheroes, antiheroes, underdogs, and warriors. Shakespearean heroes: Romeo, Othello, and Hamlet. Each archetype does not achieve the same goal; so which type of hero emerged in dystopian fiction?

Katniss Everdeen is the hero of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. Beginning with the bestselling novel of 2008, the trilogy tells the story of 16-year-old Katniss on her epic quest to survive what is essentially a gladiatorial battle royale and to lead a revolution that destroys the tyrannical society that hosts the annual event. Across Panem—a post-apocalyptic society founded in the wake of America's destruction—twenty-four children fight to the death while members of the Capitol, the bacchanalian metropolis of politicians and wealthy citizens, watch for pleasure. Katniss becomes “the face of the rebellion” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 266), the “...girl who was on fire” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 67). On the surface, she is nothing more than a naive teenager, figuring out life and transitioning into adulthood. What can a 16-year-old girl do against a whole nation? Why is Katniss the hero of *The Hunger Games*?

The hero of millennial dystopia is chosen by fate, driven by destiny, and employs the power of providence to restore the world to nature. ‘Dystopian hero’ is synonymous with what I call the ‘serendipitous hero.’ From where she was born, to her father's death, to hunting with Gale, to Prim's reaping for the seventy-fourth Games, to Peeta becoming her tribute partner, Katniss is led down a path that establishes her as the hero of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Yet, she does not become just any hero. She is molded into the serendipitous hero—the savior of a secular world. A secular setting is not an uncommon trait of dystopian literature. In the greatly secular universe of *The Hunger Games*, there is a vacuum of power and a desire for a greater force. This is not *Star Wars* where Luke Skywalker wields

supernatural powers with lightsabers and Yoda sees into the future with mystical foresight. This is a divine force. The hero is ‘The One’ that takes the ever-increasingly secular world and restores its faith in providence and nature. The serendipitous hero is chosen and molded out of sacrifice, hardship, hatred, and, most importantly, providence to become the embodiment and deliverer of humanity. Above all, what forms these serendipitous heroes is the serendipity of their creations—a moment of providence that chooses them and forces them to react. Katniss volunteers.

Three characteristics go into the formation of serendipitous heroes. First, are the moments of fate that force them down a particular path. Second, are their overt rejections of the world and the societies into which they are born. Third, and particularly associated with the decade of Young Adult millennial dystopias, is the central romance that is essential in aiding the hero in understanding his or her role. These three points culminate into characters that must realize their divine objectives. Rather than choosing to be heroes, they are called to action. When finally understanding it is not a choice to be the hero, Katniss says, “It turns out the question that’s been eating away at me has only ever had one possible answer” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 31). That answer, of course, is to become the Mockingjay—the symbol of the rebellion—but it is also a calling to greatness and a calling to be the deliverer of humanity from the corrupted, postlapsarian world of Panem.

Science fiction, as a genre, tends to be the clash between spiritual and scientific. With that in mind, heroism, within sci-fi, is rooted in fatalism and cannot exist in absence of it. This is also true for the Germanic heroes from which Katniss takes inspiration. Beowulf and Grettir, both epic heroes, were conceived in an age where the world was moving toward Christianity and away from paganism. These heroes were pagan, yet they

were emboldened by providence and could move through both faiths. They symbolize the in-between, a hero who has one foot in the past and future. Katniss draws on the same concept, fitting into an era where she can survive both the world of Panem and the world after as it moves away from secularity.

The spirituality that moves Katniss is not conscious. In *The Hunger Games*, spirituality does not take the form of a higher God or church as we understand it, nor is it visualized through any evident religious symbolism. Panem has no blatant religious or spiritual beliefs. In this world, spirituality is providence, nature, and fate. This is the ‘God’ of dystopian science-fiction and the ‘God’ of the secular 21st-century. In a world without faith, audiences turn toward literature to ask the instinctive question the serendipitous hero answers—how can things get better? Written as the divinely fatalistic hero, Katniss’ quest is to uphold the ideas of providence while restoring the artificial, corrupted world back to a natural, but not perfect, paradise. Second-millennium dystopias reveal the serendipitous heroes who work to revive fate and providence in the secular world.

CHAPTER 2:

THE SERENDIPITOUS HERO

The serendipitous hero evolves out of moments of serendipity. These moments are found throughout Collins' novels. And, though subtle, simple moments of fate steer Katniss toward her ultimate destiny. Found mostly in the first chapters, where Collins sets up the ordinary world in which Katniss lives, these providential moments work like prophecy, giving Katniss the answers she needs to survive and succeed in her heroic quest, while, simultaneously, explaining to the reader exactly how the story will end. If she pays attention, watches for the signs, and looks out for strange moments where she has no control, everything Katniss needs to know is provided. In one of the only lines directly quoted from her father Katniss recalls him saying, "As long as you find yourself, you'll never starve" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 52). If she listens to the world and to his teachings, Katniss will survive. The choice of the serendipitous hero is not choosing to be the hero. It is trusting instinct. Katniss' biggest challenge is learning to trust that what nature is telling her is the righteous path. Fortunately, instinct cannot be so easily ignored and, thus, Katniss repeatedly follows the providential path without consciously realizing it.

When Katniss is with Gale in the woods outside of the borders of District 12, he plucks a berry, throws it up in the air saying, "may the odds—" then Katniss catches it in her mouth and finishes "—be *ever* in your favor" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 7-8). Katniss fully trusts this moment and situation. She is in-tune with nature and with Gale in this

little spot of isolated paradise, "...our place, a rock ledge overlooking a valley. A thicket of berry bushes protects it from unwanted eyes" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 6). We know she is in-tune because she easily catches the berry. This moment is essential in establishing Katniss as the hero in multiple ways. Unbeknownst to her and the readers, this is how she wins the first Games. On a bet that the Capitol will care if she dies by eating poison berries, giving them no tribute to win—Katniss says, "we both know they have to have a victor... If Peeta and I were both to die, or they thought we were..." (Collins, *Hunger Games* 344)—she and Peeta eat black berries similar to the ones she eats with Gale in that early scene. The first chapter foreshadows exactly how the first novel ends. Katniss, as she said to Gale, puts the odds in her favor when she gives Peeta the poison berry which will simultaneously kill them both, betting on the odds that the Capitol must have a victor. Secondly, fate plays a role in this victory because, as in the woods, Katniss is not the one to present the berries. Gale is the one to pick the fruit, like Peeta is the one to find the berries in the arena. Without these men, Katniss would not have secured the odds. Serendipity and chance are how she wins as told to the readers from the very beginning. This moment in the woods is crucial, too, because it also explains how the entire trilogy resolves.

The trilogy ends with Katniss returning to District 12, having children, and living out her days with her husband. However, in the beginning, Katniss is in no way ready for this concept of paradise. In the moment with Gale in the woods, Katniss describes:

From this place, we are invisible but have a clear view of the valley, which is teeming with summer life, greens to gather, roots to dig, fish iridescent in the sunlight. The day is glorious, with a blue sky and soft breeze... Everything would be perfect if this really was a holiday... But instead we

have to be standing in the square at two o'clock waiting for the names to be called out... "I never want to have kids" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 9).

See how this compares to the ending of the trilogy:

We are not alone. A few hundred others return because, whatever has happened, this is our home. With the mines closed, they plow the ashes into the earth and plant food. Machines from the Capitol break ground for a new factory where we will make medicines. Although no one seeds it, the Meadow turns green again... They play in the Meadow...my children (Collins, *Mockingjay* 387-390).

Coincidentally, in the same moment, Katniss is given the answers on how to win her first Games, she is shown what she will have in life once she succeeds in her quest. With Gale, Katniss sees the beauty of nature around her and what it can yield. By the end of the series, a community is working the fields and letting the earth provide food and medicines. In the first quote, Katniss is isolated and "invisible." In the second, she has become a part of a self-sufficient community, isolated from the rest of the artificial world. In the first quote, she will not consider having children because the untamed environment—not of the woods, but of the corrupted society—is too dangerous. Though the odds, mathematically, are against it, her children may still be reaped for the Games. Katniss understands how artificial President Snow's world is when she says, "...it happens too frequently to just be about odds...Given all the trouble I've caused, I've probably guaranteed any child of mine a spot in the Games" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 45-46). Fate does not exist in a world with false chance and safety does not exist where there is persistent danger.

Even though the natural world of the woods can provide roots, fish, and greens, Katniss and her family still go to bed hungry because it is a wild, untamed nature that has not yet been worked by human hands. Katniss says of the woods, there are “venomous snakes, rabid animals, and no real paths to follow” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 5). Before Katniss succeeds in her goal, the natural world is not fit for humans, especially children. There is no one to yet “plow” or “break ground.” Because this is a postlapsarian, secular world. The goal is not to return to Eden but to find somewhere more paradisiacal than before—somewhere pure. While this moment in the woods does not secure a blissful future, the happenstance of Gale questioning their future together allows Katniss to begin working toward a life that can sustain and protect her and her children, at least temporarily. The inevitability of corruption is a constant threat in a postlapsarian world. It is human nature to return to an artificial, corrupted life. To build cities, to worship leaders like gods, to seek immortality, pleasure, and gluttony is the way of humankind. It is up to the serendipitous hero to restore some semblance of paradise, to push others into understanding their responsibility to the natural world, and, then to retreat, as a wretch, to their own Eden and await the fated moment when the society, built to function on hedonism, returns to it.

The woods provide multiple moments of chance that prepare Katniss for her destiny. Again, with Gale, she describes another scene, “Suddenly all the birds stop singing at once. Except one. As if it were giving a warning call. And then we saw her. I’m sure it was the same girl” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 82). Katniss is telling Peeta about an Avox woman, “someone who committed a crime” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 77), that she happened to see with Gale one day in the woods. The punishment for attempting to flee

Panem was the removal of her tongue. Years before the Games, Katniss witnessed this girl's crime and chose not to help her, something she regrets throughout the series. However, because Katniss did not attempt to help the girl, she was given crucial information about succeeding in her mission.

Three questions come to mind about this instance. First, what is the chance that this Avox would stumble across Katniss when they were both committing a crime against the Capitol? Katniss was hunting illegally outside the fence and the Avox was escaping. Second, what are the odds that she would then become Katniss' servant during her time in the Games? This gives Katniss a companion who also knows the struggle of rebellion, "...as she slips a spoon into my hand, I feel the pressure of friendship" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 349) and "has reminded [Katniss] why [she is] here. Not to model flashy costumes and eat delicacies. But to die a bloody death while crowds urge on [her] killer" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 80). Third, how predictive that this is the first spoken mention of Katniss' future rebellion? "Just the perfect touch of rebellion," Haymitch says in regard to Cinna's idea that Katniss and Peeta should hold hands when first presenting themselves to the Capitol audience. A touch of rebellion means "presenting... not as adversaries but as friends" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 79), something Katniss did not do with the Avox that day in the woods but, instead realizes it is a valuable weapon against the vapid and friendless world of the Capitol. Also, during this moment in the woods, Katniss notices the birds fall silent. As something that happens when the hovercrafts come to pick up the fallen bodies, this knowledge later helps Katniss retrieve another weapon in her second Games: "without slowing down, I dive into the water and start for her. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see the hovercraft...I have to wrench the wire from her fingers" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 334).

This is the same wire Katniss uses to destroy the arena, an event that becomes the catalyst for the rebellion. Additionally, when she wonders where the Avox is escaping, Katniss begins to consider somewhere beyond Panem. District 13 becomes the headquarters for the rebellion in the third novel and her meeting with the Avox is the first moment Katniss suspects the existence of a world apart from the Capitol. Although, it is revealed that District 13 is no better than the Capitol by the end of the trilogy, discovering that a world can survive without Panem plants the seed in Katniss for the possibility of a new world altogether.

There are less overt moments of fate in Katniss' life that are still essential to her development as the serendipitous hero. Katniss was born in District 12, specifically, the part of District 12 known as the Seam. This area is the lowest of societal classes in all of Panem, even distinguished from the wealthier section of District 12 where her mother and Peeta were born. Further, her house "is almost at the edge of the Seam" and she only needs to "pass a few gates to reach the scruffy field called the Meadow" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 4). This easy-access to the woods facilitates her ability as a hunter where she develops skills with a bow and arrow—a signature talent that distinguishes her as a threat in the first Games. The act of hunting, itself, is steeped in fate, "...waiting motionless for game to wander by" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 21). Katniss sells strawberries to a girl named Madge, a name that happens to mean pearl. Pearl symbolism is found in two other places: one when Effie Trinket erroneously claims that if coal is pressed hard enough, it turns to pearls (when referring to Katniss and Peeta) and, second, when Peeta, by chance, finds a pearl in an oyster shell and gives it to Katniss as a token of love. Madge, too, is the provider of the famous mockingjay pin that becomes the symbol of the revolution and Katniss' alter ego.

Without the strawberries and the small friendship Katniss secured with Madge, the mockingjay would be irrelevant. Instead, it becomes a crucifix—a display of Katniss (the Mockingjay) pinned to a ring of gold by her wings. And, of course, all the serendipitous moments with her father when Katniss learned how to survive off nature form some of the infinite moments of fate found in Katniss’ life. Obviously, however, the most prominent moment of fate occurs when Prim is reaped for the Hunger Games.

We know there is a greater force at work when even the Games rely on fate. “May the odds be *ever* in your favor” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 19) is the motto of the Games. Katniss’ thoughts summarize it perfectly, “Prim was one slip of paper in thousands! Her chances of being chosen were so remote that I’d not even bothered to worry about her...One slip. One slip in thousands. The odds had been entirely in her favor” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 21). Whatever is at work behind the scenes, whatever force is at work that controls fate, chose Prim, betting that Katniss would take her place. This one moment distinguishes her as the serendipitous hero, but why was it necessary for Prim’s name to be called instead of Katniss’?

The beauty of the serendipitous hero is that, like fate, Katniss never has a choice to be the hero or not. The books show the reader this time and time again when Katniss realizes all the little moments over which she had no power. Katniss is “powerless against the reaping” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 15) which is clear when Prim’s name is called, though she has only one slip in the bowl. She “took over as head of the family. There was no choice” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 27) because, when her father fell victim to a providential death in the mines, Katniss was the only one equipped to survive. There was no choice but one when she became the Mockingjay or when she chose to fight in the

rebellion alongside Gale, “because what has been done to them is so wrong, so beyond justification, so evil that there is no choice...” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 123). There was no choice to volunteer for her younger, helpless sister, “...but I know I was right about not running off. Because who else would have volunteered for Prim?” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 25). And she had no choice in falling in love with Peeta, “...the same force that holds the loved ones of the dying. How often I’ve seen them, ringed around our kitchen table and I thought, *Why don’t they leave? What do they stay to watch?* And now I know. It’s because you have no choice” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 348). There are no choices in the creation of the serendipitous hero, though there are times when it seems there is one.

Another prominent moment of fate happens in the first Games. Down to her last two arrows, Katniss uses one to shoot at Cato, but it bounces off and lands somewhere in the dirt. She and Peeta then chase after Cato as he runs from a pack of muttations—creatures artificially created to kill the remaining tributes. In safety, Katniss uses her last arrow to tourniquet Peeta’s leg because he is losing too much blood. However, since the Gamemakers ruled before that Peeta and Katniss can win together as they are from the same district, the only way to win is by killing Cato, so Peeta demands she risk his life and use the arrow against the other tribute. Katniss agrees, killing Cato, yet the Games are not won as promised. The two decide to put space between them and Cato’s body in case that was the problem. However, the Capitol reverses its ruling at the last minute. To survive the Games, Katniss must kill Peeta and, just as the Gamemakers announce this, she spies the arrow that had bounced off Cato’s armor. She is given an option, but one without real choice, to kill Peeta and win the Games by the Capitol’s rules or to sacrifice herself. Either way, she is victim to the Capitol’s sadism. Fated to find the singular arrow that gives her

this moment, Katniss knows she cannot save herself by killing Peeta, “Because if he dies, [she will] never go home, not really. [She will] spend the rest of [her] life in this arena trying to think [her] way out” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 343). So, she does just that and thinks of a different way out, choosing, instead, to defy the rules of Panem and overtly reject her society. The choice of the serendipitous hero is to understand that there is nothing to be done except to accept destiny and to reject anything that goes against providence. Societies in dystopias make choices that are antithetical to nature and providence and, specifically, train the whole of their population to reject those ideals, which is why the choice is already made for the hero. The hero can only reject these postlapsarian laws. Yet, only certain characters have the traits and drive to do this.

Certain characteristics must be present for the serendipitous hero to be conjured. They must be from a lower-class environment, whatever that may mean to the society of the novel. This means they must be almost completely removed from the luxuries and the pleasures of the society. They must not have been tainted by the artificial world around them and be able to straddle the line between society and nature. Katniss is from, not only District 12, “where you can starve to death in safety,” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 6), but also from the Seam where coal is mined, goods are sold on the black market, and citizens are mostly ignored by the greater population. Katniss says, “maybe being the least prestigious, poorest, most ridiculed district in the country had its advantages” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 203).

These heroes must also attempt to find beauty in nature in every aspect of their lives. Always watching the birds, noticing the wildflowers, watching the water in the lake and in the streams, sitting in silence in the breezes, there are countless moments where

Katniss seeks beauty in nature. One moment that stands out is when Katniss believes she is on the brink of death and says, “my eyes strain to capture one last image of beauty to take with me. Right before the explosions begin, I find a star” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 379). Serendipity, as a word, evokes feelings of good luck, love, warmth, and beauty. These heroes, while they rely on chance, fate, and providence to mold them, above all, find love, beauty, and goodness in everything.

Thus, most importantly, the serendipitous hero must reject what corrupts the beauty of nature, love, and goodness. They stand as righteous forces against evil to dole out justice as needed. For example, in the first Games, Katniss is spared from committing murder. Both deaths that occur at her hand are justified. She kills Rue’s murderer instinctually, without thought, a killing that is more like a jural sentencing. Cato’s death is described as, “Pity, not vengeance, sends my arrow flying into his skull” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 341). By the end of the trilogy, Katniss is positioned as Snow’s executioner by Coin in a symbol of the new age of Panem and, instead of accepting this, (remember, the serendipitous hero cannot accept a false society), she kills Coin to prevent another Panem from forming. If Coin were allowed to live, Katniss’ goal of destroying the corrupted society would fail. We know this new society would be just as corrupted because Coin wishes to enact a new Hunger Games with Capitol children. From the moment she is introduced, children’s safety is Katniss’ objective. Prim is the subject of the opening line, “When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim’s warmth...” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 3). This, too, is a predictive line as it is because of Prim’s death that Katniss knows to kill Coin and prevent the formation of another artificial society.

Katniss works in tandem with the greater force because she rejects all aspects of any artificial society. Below, I list a few noticeable moments from the first novel where Katniss rejects almost everything related to the Capitol and greater Panem.

She rejects the food, “I’m fighting to keep the food down” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 45) because the food is overly rich and too decadent. She rejects the people and their lifestyles:

1. “I can’t stand the sight of the Capitol people myself” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 49).
2. “...the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal. All the colors seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes...” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 59).
3. “Most of the stylists they interview on television are so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they’re grotesque...” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 63).

She hates the Games, “...sickened by their excitement, knowing they can’t wait to watch us die” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 60), which might sound like a commonsense response to anyone reading, but there are many people who delight in the Games, including a few districts whose residences make it a life goal to compete. She says, “The whole rotten lot of them is despicable” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 65). Additionally, she rejects that world by “...ordering an outrageous number of delicacies, eating [her]self sick, and then taking out [her] anger at Haymitch, at the Hunger Games, at every living being in the Capitol by smashing dishes around [her] room” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 118).

She rejects her place in the whole of society, “The truth is, I feel a million miles from another living soul” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 169).

She rejects the way the Games are played, choosing to clean herself even if it risks her safety, “I strip down to my underclothes and wade into the mild current. I’m filthy from head to toe...letting it wash off the soot and blood and skin that has started to peel off my burns...” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 198-199). In a way, these moments of bathing imply baptism—a purification and a rejuvenation. They are a rejection of a “filthy” world.

And, what most scholars notice about Katniss, is that she rejects her natural feminine role, declaring “I’ll never marry, never risk bringing a child into the world. Because if there’s one thing being a victor doesn’t guarantee, it’s your children’s safety...I swear I’ll never let that happen” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 311). This is a complete rejection of societal ideals. Although she does end up having children by the conclusion, it is, initially, a conscious choice she makes to reject her role as a woman. While the Games exist, she will not bear children in a world where they might be sacrificed. Katniss becomes a candidate for the serendipitous hero because it is from the rejection of the artificial that the providential can manifest.

Multiple characters could have been the hero of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, but it is Katniss who secures the title. Peeta is the obvious second choice and, with the *Romeo and Juliet* storyline of the first novel, many believe that he and Katniss are, at the very least, equivalent heroes. I disagree. We know Katniss is the sole hero simply because the trilogy is written from her perspective. *The Hunger Games* is not titled Katniss and Peeta like Shakespeare’s famous play. Peeta was chosen by fate to be in the Games with Katniss and was able to survive by chance until he allied with her. His survival depended on

Katniss. He, too, was born in District 12, but was a resident in the wealthier part of the village and never needed to understand the world outside the fence. He was not trained to survive by nature or a father figure. This is apparent when he accidentally kills Foxface with nightshade berries because he did not realize they were harmful. Peeta is a critical cog in Katniss' development, but he could never be the serendipitous hero.

Haymitch is another great possibility, even described similarly to Katniss with the Seam's dark hair and gray eyes. Unlike Katniss, Haymitch was selected, or reaped, for his Games. Yet, like her, he won and always rejected the Capitol, choosing also not to marry or have children. Gale, as well, has the description of Collins' hero, "straight black hair, olive skin, we even have the same gray eyes..." (*Hunger Games* 8). He rejects Panem and helps to lead a rebellion. Why were neither of these men chosen to be the hero? It all circles back to fate.

When Haymitch was reaped for the second Quarter Quell, fate worked to place him against the Capitol. Coincidentally, during the third Quarter Quell, Katniss initiates the revolution in the sequel novel, *Catching Fire*. Fate allowed Haymitch to win, setting him up to be a potential leader of District 12, if he had been the serendipitous hero. However, Haymitch was victim to time. Simply, it was not the right moment to start a revolution. Secondly, he had no one for whom to fight. Love is required in the creation of a serendipitous hero. Unlike with Katniss, Snow killed off Haymitch's entire love network—"my mother and younger brother," Haymitch explains, "My girl. They were all dead two weeks after I was crowned victor...Snow had no one to use against me" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 172). Haymitch is isolated and devoid of the unconditional love that is required of the serendipitous hero—the thing that makes them fight. Katniss says, "I think of

Haymitch, unmarried, no family, blotting out the world with a drink. He could have had his choice of any woman in the district. And he chose solitude” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 46).

Fate also worked against Gale. Numerous times we see similarities to Katniss. As with Haymitch and Katniss, Gale has Collins’ heroic look. He has all the strength, drive, and, as Katniss puts it, “fire” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 388), to lead the rebellion, but does not become its leader. His father was killed in the same mining accident as Katniss’ father. And he learned to survive in nature. Yet, there is one crucial distinction between Gale and Katniss that makes all the difference in the world. Simply, Prim was reaped for the Games.

Gale has siblings, more siblings than Katniss, so an even greater chance that one of his would be chosen for the Games. I fully believe that, had one of his siblings been reaped, Gale would have volunteered like Katniss. This one moment of serendipity, a forceful moment of providence, launches Katniss into hero status above anyone else, “a shift has occurred since I stepped up to take Prim’s place, and now it seems I have become someone precious” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 24). When Prim is chosen, Katniss is called to action.

The serendipitous hero relies on unconditional love. It is a key factor in their drive and motivation to see the world repaired. Throughout the phenomenon that was YA fiction, love triangles were expected. *The Hunger Games* was no exception. The choice between Gale and Peeta is a driving factor of Katniss’ story. She says about Gale, “...maybe there is nothing romantic between us, but when he opens his arms I don’t hesitate to go into them” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 38) Katniss, though adamantly rejecting anything societally romantic, such as marriage and having children, does desire something beyond friendship. Maybe this is not with Gale, but there is a yearning for unconditional love. She asks,

“Outside Prim, my mother, and Gale, how many people in the world love me unconditionally?” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 195). In this moment, she is considering Peeta and how he has been corrupted by the Capitol to not love her anymore. The transformation of his affection toward her almost breaks her.

Love is the crux of the serendipitous hero because it is unconditional love that empowers them. In a secular world, hope, love, family, and friendship become synonyms for divine, unquestionable faith. Restoring unconditional love within people restores unconditional love within a higher power—someone to love you even when you sin, make mistakes, or break down, someone to love you at your lowest and weakest. In a society like Panem, love is a conditional currency, claimed with strength, brains, or beauty—who wins the Games, who sponsors the Games, and who is the best? Weakness and flaws do not survive, literally. Katniss, as always, puts it best when she says, “Alone, I can’t be the Mockingjay” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 73), because the serendipitous hero never works alone. They are the deciding factor in the quest, they have the knowledge to succeed, and they have the heroic talent to win, but will only use it righteously and for unconditional love. Prim’s reaping displays a sisterly love which, eventually, transmutes into a love for Rue in the Games. When Prim is reaped Katniss volunteers in her stead. This becomes a defining moment for Katniss as it is where she rises into the role of the hero. Her selfless action makes people in District 12 believe in her as something more than a 16-year-old girl.

Rough around the edges and hesitant to trust anyone, something that is very apparent in her character throughout the trilogy, Katniss is not generally liked. Haymitch explains, “...when you open your mouth, you come across more as sullen and hostile...You’ve got about as much charm as a dead slug” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 116-

117). Katniss relies on others to make her empathetic, “And there I am, blushing and confused, made beautiful by Cinna’s hands, desirable by Peeta’s confession, tragic by circumstance, and by all accounts, unforgettable” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 137-138). By all other accounts, Katniss would not be well received by the general population of Panem. This is the very nature of her heroic character, that she is not fighting to be liked by the majority, nor by those who want change, but is simply a personified rejection of anything that exists in the present society. However, as the saying goes, you catch more flies with honey, and Katniss, encouraged to be gentle, empathic, motherly, affectionate, and beautiful, wins the hearts of millions across the country. Rebellions in her name spring up across the districts and she becomes saintly, a reason Snow is hesitant to kill her outright—in fear she will transform into a martyr. Slowly and sweetly, Katniss molds into a darling face in the Capitol and a warrior in the districts.

As previously stated, the serendipitous hero, like that of the ancient pagan heroes, must be able to traverse both worlds. Katniss can move between being a hardened survivor, to a selfless nurturer, to an artificially sweet celebrity almost flawlessly and unconsciously. “She has no idea. The effect she can have” Peeta says to Haymitch (Collins, *Hunger Games* 91) and “You could do so much” Gale tells her in *Catching Fire* (Collins 100). As much as she can be beautiful, play the role of the star-crossed lover, and be charming in her interviews, these moments are very much staged. Cinna, her designer in the Games, fashions her supernatural charm through clothing. In the first Games, Katniss claims she is “engulfed in tongues of fire” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 120) when Cinna’s dress continues the Girl on Fire theme. ‘Tongues of fire’ was the Holy Spirit in the Pentecost, acting through the disciples to enable them to speak the word of God in many languages. Katniss

is doing the same in this scene. She speaks to both worlds at once wearing a dress that parades her as a Capitol elite while also kindling the rebellion brewing in the districts. However, it is not solely the dress that allows for her liminality. Katniss is not the leader of the movement because she can giggle at the right moments, twirl in interviews, or say what she believes people want to hear. It is her instinctual actions that allow her to not only navigate between the Capitol and the districts, but between Panem and paradise.

While Katniss' girlish moments in the Games spark admiration in the citizens of the Capitol and her moments of strength inspire those in the districts, her instinctual, heroic moments stand out to everyone across Panem. After she accepts her role as the Mockingjay, her uniqueness becomes a question of debate among those trying to harness it for the rebellion. The purely good, righteous moments stand out unanimously. A member of her council confirms this, stating, "when she volunteered to take Prim's place at the reaping. Because I'm sure she thought she was going to die" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 74). Peeta, too, emphasizes her sisterly bond saying, "...the sister you love so much you took her place in the reaping..." (Collins, *Hunger Games* 273). Katniss' sacrifice for her sister is as unconditional as it is divine and everyone watching it take place knows this. Her district salutes her choice:

At first one, then another, then almost every member of the crowd touches the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out to me. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our district... It means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love (Collins, *Hunger Games* 24).

The three-finger symbol is directly associated with love. A salutation of love in a gesture akin to the sign of the cross and reminiscent of the doctrine of the Trinity, they blessed her as something more than human. Katniss, as she says, becomes “precious,” becomes saintly, becomes angelic.

When Rue’s song is added to the symbol (a four-note melody that Katniss whistles as she buries Rue in wildflowers after she dies in the Games), Katniss is forced to confront what she knows within herself. She says, “Rue’s death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 236) and “it’s the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us... I want to do something...to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can’t own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 236-237). Which part of *us* can the Capitol not own? In this scene, it seems to be a righteous and dignified death, one which illustrates Katniss’ unconditional love for Rue. The Capitol cannot own the soul. They cannot have what is divine. They cannot take love, even if they try: “one of the few freedoms we have in District 12 is the right to marry who we want or not marry at all” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 45). Death and love go hand in hand in this trilogy. The father was made more divine by his death, Rue’s murder strengthens Katniss’ resolve against the Capitol, Mags shows her the altruism of sacrifice, Finnick’s death teaches her to love while she can, and Prim’s, like Rue’s, reminds Katniss of the true enemy. Katniss stands as witness to these truths and acts as the deliverer of righteous judgment based on the unconditional divine.

Rue’s death in the first Games forces Katniss to kill. It is her first killing, one that can be argued is out of self-defense and righteous justice, because it is automatic and

without vindictive forethought. It is a just execution. She kills the boy who killed Rue—the sweet, innocent, child. This death pushes Katniss to who she is—a rebel, a hero, one who will defy the Games, take down the corrupted system, and enact justice when needed. Katniss finally hates the Capitol openly and rejects everything about it out loud and with her actions. Akin to the classic hero Antigone, she gives Rue a funeral, a divine tradition that defies the secular, artificial, and the law of man. The act condemns the hovercrafts that lift away bodies coldly and inhumanely, the cameras, knowing they will have to show the burial, and President Snow, as it is he who rules.

A similar attitude emerges when Prim dies and Katniss makes the instinctually righteous judgment to kill Coin. Katniss links the two girls as representations of love that is innocent, delicate, and easily destroyed by the Capitol. Again, it is the natural and the providential Katniss aims to protect. She says, “Rue is a small yellow flower that grows in the Meadow. Rue. Primrose” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 99). Wildflowers are drastically important to the symbolism of the divine love between Katniss and those that truly set her on her path. Prim, Rue, and Peeta are all associated with yellow flowers and many instances of fate occur around them. Along with Primrose and Rue named literally after yellow flowers, Katniss and Peeta are linked together by the yellow dandelion.

Katniss recounts the hardships she faced after her father’s death. Following her mother’s mental breakdown, she became the authority in her household, but that came with the responsibility of raising her sister, keeping a home, and making sure everyone was fed. At 11-years-old when her father died, her mother not working, and her sister too young to help, Katniss was lost and without hope. As discussed earlier, her father had given her the necessary information to survive off nature. However, there were months when Katniss

forgot those teachings—she had lost sight of faith. However, many times, she would cry out, almost in prayer, “*Where are you? ...Of course, there was never any answer,*” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 26). It is not until Peeta gives her bread that she is able to make the connection in her mind that there is hope to be found. She states,

Our eyes met for only a second, then he turned his head away. I dropped my gaze, embarrassed, and that’s when I saw it. The first dandelion of the year. A bell went off in my head. I thought of the hours spent in the woods with my father and I knew how we were going to survive. To this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the dandelion that reminded me that I was not doomed” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 32).

Peeta is referenced with the bread frequently—a Eucharist—even nicknamed “the boy with the bread” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 374), but his connection to Katniss is through the dandelion. It is her symbol of hope and is tied to those that remind her of it. On the train to the first Games, she says,

Unfortunately, the packet of cookies hits the ground and bursts open in a patch of dandelions by the track. I only see the image for a moment, because the train is off again, but it’s enough. Enough to remind me of that other dandelion in the school yard years ago... I had just turned away from Peeta Mellark’s bruised face when I saw the dandelion and I knew hope wasn’t lost (Collins, *Hunger Games* 49).

The packet of cookies happens to land near a patch of dandelions just as the train takes her to her fate. It is a providential moment that aids in reminding Katniss of her faith and of

the gospel of her father and of her allies. The initial dandelion is “the first of the year,” no less. That, at risk of sounding melodramatic, symbolizes the dawning of a new day. The dandelion reveals itself, for a third time, at the end of the trilogy when Katniss realizes providence has pushed her into Peeta’s arms. She says,

Peeta and I grow back together...I know this would have happened anyway. That what I needed to survive is not Gale’s fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that (Collins, *Mockingjay* 388).

Not only does Peeta represent untarnished nature but, just as dandelions are notorious for growing through small cracks in asphalt, concrete, and artificial surfaces, Peeta represents a healed future. In an act of compassion, Peeta plants primrose for Katniss, “‘For her,’ he says” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 383). Though, Katniss initially registers the flowers as simple roses—a symbol associated with President Snow. Snow’s white, artificial rose directly juxtaposes the primrose in a show of what the postlapsarian world will do to nature if allowed to remain—take its color and add unnatural perfection and saccharine sweetness.

Katniss, in her final act against Snow, destroys his essence,

The white rose among the dried flowers in the vase. Shriveled and fragile, but holding on to that unnatural perfection cultivated in Snow’s greenhouse. I grab the vase...and throw its contents into the embers. As the flowers flare up, a burst of blue flame envelops the rose and devours it. Fire beats roses again (Collins, *Mockingjay* 383).

Fire, like light, beats darkness. Darkness, like evil, is the anti-natural. Peeta, in planting the primrose for Katniss, reverts the rose's corruption back to the natural. Peeta's gift awakens Katniss, again, to hope and faith. Peeta represents a restoration of paradise and a promise. Katniss is the deliverer of justice working together with Peeta as the restorer of nature. Nature, itself, told her this was the inevitable future throughout the series. In one of these instances, Katniss notices, in District 11, the "Justice Building, a huge marble structure...must have been a thing of beauty, but time has taken its toll. Even on television you can see ivy overtaking the crumbling facade..." (Collins, *Catching Fire* 56). This is the millennial dystopia's Tintern Abbey. In this secular world, faith is nature and the house of God is a justice building where righteousness can be enacted and nature can coexist with human. It is in this moment that Peeta, on a whim, gives Rue's family and the other tribute a month of their winnings for life. Katniss says, "as long as we live, they will not hunger" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 59), a direct defying of the very foundation of the society they live in. How can the Hunger Games function and prevail if people are not hungry? What saved Katniss from going hungry so that she could defy? The dandelion is a symbol of serendipity. What is the chance the first flower of spring would be beneath her feet right as she sees Peeta? What is the chance that this flower would be her key to survival that night—"I grabbed a bucket and Prim's hand and headed to the Meadow and yes, it was dotted with the golden-headed weeds...we'd filled the bucket with dandelion greens, stems, and flowers. That night we gorged ourselves on dandelion salad..." (Collins, *Hunger Games* 50). The hero must choose to have faith in love, providence, and humanity. Katniss chooses to accept her fate by the end of the trilogy and be content with it partly because of the dandelion. To the audience, her acceptance is both closure and hope for their own destinies.

The dandelions and yellow flowers not only represent providential circumstance, but also symbolize the characters that Katniss loves unconditionally. The dandelion is also survival, so it is only natural that Katniss becomes attached to those that keep her alive. All other characters she forces herself to love. Gale is valued because “good hunting partners are hard to find” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 10). She forces herself to forgive her mother. She surprises herself with how much she admires Haymitch but does not ever trust him the way she trusts Peeta. “I need you,” she says to Peeta in *Catching Fire* (Collins 352). And everyone else are Capitol citizens or members of other Districts, not deserving the trust bestowed to someone from Twelve—unless it is Cinna, that is.

Cinna is the one responsible for the gowns, the look, and her overall appearance during the Games. He is crucial in making Katniss empathetic to the Capitol. After Cinna transforms Katniss for the Capitol audience, she describes her appearance as:

Huge dark eyes, full red lips, lashes that throw off bits of light when I blink...the creature standing before me in the full-length mirror has come from another world. Where skin shimmers and eyes flash and apparently, they make clothes from jewels... I am engulfed in tongues of fire. I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 120-121).

Angelic, divine, and godly, Katniss has become a savior-figure in Cinna’s hands. From her debut costume, to the *Catching Fire* gown, to her wedding dress, Cinna works to weave divine fabric and mold her, literally, into a mockingjay. While Katniss is keen to reject anything from the Capitol, Cinna is an exception. He is characterized as,

a young man... I am taken aback by how normal he looks.... Cinna's close-cropped hair appears to be its natural shade of brown...the only concession to self-alteration seems to be metallic gold eyeliner that has been applied with a light hand. It brings out the flecks of gold in his green eyes" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 63).

Green is a symbol of providence and the green of Cinna's eyes is an allusion to his loyal connection to Katniss. Green is Katniss' favorite color, assumingly because of the woods and nature. It is the color of the shirt she wears when she is given her famous pin. It is the color of a verdant, Earthly paradise. Green is luck. Luck is providence. Cinna acts as her guardian angel. In the literary sense, he is the supernatural aid, ready to guide Katniss on her heroic quest and give her the magic necessary to succeed, but she still must accept his help and the teachings he offers.

As mentioned previously, Cinna's Girl on Fire gown helps facilitate Katniss' innate liminal talent. "Tongues of fire," while a reference to the Pentecost, can also allude to the perversion of God's word from the human mouth. The Media, the interviews, the look Katniss presents to the people of the Capitol, the Games, and everything else are twisted beneath the artificial, surface-level pleasure dome of Panem—a dome that Katniss eventually destroys. The modes of society have been corrupted to fit the function of civilization and not nature. Collins' world is upside down where what is righteous is made bad and what is hedonistic is made good. Through Cinna's unique talents, this reversal is made right. The costumes that should be uninspired are made divine in his hands. Katniss says that District 12's outfits are "always dreadful and [do] nothing to win favor with the crowd" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 66). Rather than glorifying the people of the Capitol with

lifeless designs for his tribute, Cinna's designs for Katniss accentuate her beauty and salute the people of her district. Directly Promethean, Cinna gives Katniss what she needs, "the thing I want to secure so badly...is the light" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 153). While this is in reference to Peeta, what Katniss does is secure the light of awareness, leading individuals to a recognition of their responsibility to the natural world. Katniss is not a general, nor did she ever expect to be made President or leader of the new world. She simply leads people, in all senses of the metaphor, to the light where they may find paradise if they want it. She exists to shepherd in the restoration of paradise. Everything reverts to its natural state like the Justice Building in District 11. And, for a moment, the tongue of fire returns at the end of the series when Katniss is injured by the bombs District 13 drops, effectively killing her sister. She says, "I am on fire... [it] ran its tongue up the back of my body" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 348). Again, the fire, which is supposed to be used for enlightenment, is used for violence against the innocent. Katniss realizes the new world she trusted under Coin is, in fact, the same type of corruption as Snow's Panem, "All those people I loved, dead, and we are discussing the next Hunger Games in an attempt to avoid wasting life. Nothing has changed" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 370).

The final relationship that needs to be discussed is between Cato and Katniss. Cato is another of the characters that had heroic potential had the story been more classically-centered. Cato is the antiquated hero. Beautiful, strong, brave, and loved by all, he is the Grecian Theseus designed, bred, and culled to fight in the labyrinth (the Games). Katniss, herself, even finds kinship with him, "Maybe I do understand Cato better than I think" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 324). This is because they are alike, only separated, like Gale, by a moment of fate and twisted reversal.

As the trilogy is from Katniss' perspective, initially, we are led to believe Cato is a bad guy—the minor villain of the first novel. He and Clove are the enemy against our protagonist, but there is one subtle moment where this line of thinking completely alters. Katniss, as she runs from the murder scene looks back and sees “Cato kneel[ing] beside Clove, spear in hand, begging her to stay with him” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 289). Had we read the trilogy from his view, could Cato have been the good guy? Did he love Clove the way we are led to believe Katniss loves Peeta? While Katniss and Gale were separated when Prim was reaped, Cato and Katniss were similarly divided by another sacrifice of the innocent.

Rue is from District 11, “‘Agriculture,’ I say. ‘Orchards...’” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 200).” Agriculture, biblically, is associated with Cain. Cain slays his brother and commits the first murder which is, as we know, is emphatically immoral and makes his action inherently bad. However, in the reversed world of Suzanne Collins, Cain is made good. Agriculture is a providential force. It is nature. Sacrifice of innocence (a.k.a. Rue, Prim, reaped children) is wrong. Only Katniss and Peeta and Cato and Clove can return with their partners after the Gamemakers rule that two people from the same district may win the Games together. When it comes down to a life-or-death situation between Katniss and Clove—the remaining women—Thresh, Rue's tribute partner, kills Clove by striking her in the head with a rock, “...about the size of a small loaf of bread...Thresh brings the rock down hard against Clove's temple” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 287). According to some interpretations, how did Cain murder Abel? If Clove's death was meant to allude to Abel's murder, had Thresh done the right thing in killing her? Serendipity, again, distinguishes

Katniss. Had Katniss not befriended Rue and Thresh not spared her because of it, Cato might have won.

Not a debate between good and evil, rather this moment is an example of how complexly Collins plays with reversing biblical roles. Understanding why she alludes to these details of Genesis helps to unravel just how upside down the world is that she created within *The Hunger Games*. When these reversal themes are understood, it is all the more satisfying when Katniss finally fulfills her quest in restoring paradise.

CHAPTER 3:
RESTORING PARADISE

Paradise in Collins' universe is twisted. Yet, the constant is that everything returns to nature. Nature to this world is providence. It is divine. This can be proven simply by the natural names Collins selected for her District 12 characters. Katniss and Primrose are named for the flowers. "Haymitch" implies 'hay' and his surname "Abernathy" is Scottish for "the mouth of a river." "Peeta" evokes images of peat, fitting as he paints himself into the moss to hide in the Games, "it's the final word in camouflage... most of what I judge to be his body is actually under a layer of mud and plants" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 252). And Gale Hawthorn's name is the bushes and hedges blowing in the wind. Nature demands the trust that Katniss must have that the world is telling her the right things. Everything harks back to the natural world and a need to trust in nature. In this post-apocalyptic world, there is always distortion in providence. Even the corrupted President Snow has a natural name and says, "I thought we had agreed not to lie to each other" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 358), claiming that Katniss should trust his information. She does. However, Katniss never trusts Coin, a name evoking a manmade currency directly contrasting the natural. The innate process of an artificial society is to distort nature however it can.

When Katniss receives her iconic mockingjay pin, later a symbol of the revolution, it becomes a symbol of Katniss' own distortion:

During the rebellion, the Capitol bred a series of genetically altered animals as weapons. The common term for them was *muttations*, or sometimes *mutts* for short. One was a special bird called a jabberjay that had the ability to memorize and repeat whole human conversations. They were homing birds, exclusively male, that were released into regions where the Capitol's enemies were known to be hiding. After the birds gathered words, they'd fly back to centers to be recorded. It took people a while to realize what was going on in the districts, how private conversations were being transmitted. Then, of course, the rebels fed the Capitol endless lies, and the joke was on it. So the centers were shut down and the birds were abandoned to die off in the wild.

Only they didn't die off. Instead, the jabberjay's mated with female mockingbirds, creating a whole new species that could replicate both bird whistles and human melodies (Collins, *Hunger Games* 42-43).

The mockingjay was not only a distortion of the original mockingbird and an offspring from the genetically altered jabberjay, but a mutation of the original mutation. Like Katniss, the mockingjay can exist in both worlds. When Katniss is given the pin, she says "I fasten the pin on my shirt, and with the dark green fabric as a background, I can almost imagine the mockingjay flying through the trees" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 44). And, like Katniss, the mockingjay was formed out of a distortion of nature and moments of providence that accumulated to allow it to exist. It did not revert back to its original perfection but found a way to survive comfortably in nature. As with the symbology of the three-fingered rebellion sign, her father, the mockingjay, and Katniss also become a sort of

trinity where they meld into one natural essence—Katniss, the savior, the bird, the spirit, and her father, The Father. District 12 becomes this trilogy’s Eden that needs to be saved.

Similar to many other dystopias from this era, there is a lingering sense of a paradise—a garden—that needs restoration. Dystopian fiction becomes an allegory for correcting the natural order and destroying false idols. They are Miltonic retellings of Genesis where Lucifer has won and distorted the world around him so much that the Prodigal hero must return and fix it. Snow is “a real snake, the venomous kind” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 19), the anti-father of this universe, and his world is filled with anti-Edens. From the arenas where the Games are held, to the corrupted diction Collins uses to describe the Capitol and aspects of District 12 which have fallen victim to the Luciferian government, to the disturbing and distorted allusions to biblical stories, we see the parallels of providential life throughout all three novels.

In *The Hunger Games*, District 12 is a type of Eden, though it is corrupted by society, thus children are still reaped for the Games and are victims to sacrifice. Collins displays this subtle corruption through language (i.e., broken fences and cracked mirrors). Nothing is quite as it should be, everything slightly off-kilter, “...the Hob [is] the black market that operates in an abandoned warehouse that once held coal” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 11). Ultimately, District 12 acts as the providential territory that needs to be revived. Restoring the natural order becomes Katniss’ goal when she tells Peeta “...if you want to spend the last hours of your life planning some noble death in the arena, that’s your choice. I want to spend mine in District Twelve,” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 142). When Peeta and Katniss are whisked away to the artificial landscape of the Games, Peeta asks Katniss to

“Come see the garden” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 81). Always, there is reference to some kind of paradise whether it be false or in need of restoration.

In *Catching Fire*, we see a mirror image of the first book. Katniss is stripped from her former life. Once living in the providential, natural, and mostly undisturbed area of the Seam with her mother and Prim, is, after winning, placed in the Victors Village, an area that is directly tied to the Games and to Panem. It is apart and, coincidentally, the only area of District 12 not destroyed in the Capitol’s bombing. Katniss is, again, chosen for the Games and she states in this book, “I don’t plan on making it back alive...” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 186), implying she will never see District 12 again. In a lot of ways, she is right in this prediction. The District 12 we came to know from the first book will be fully destroyed by the end of the second book. “There is no District 12,” Gale says in the closing lines of *Catching Fire* (Collins 391). However, Collins makes sure to include a paradise in every book and, because the goal of *Catching Fire* is to truly reveal the corruption of Panem, the paradise that is present in book two is the second Games’ arena. Haymitch’s arena of the 50th Quarter Quell is a perfect garden:

It's the most breathtaking place imaginable. The golden Cornucopia sits in the middle of a green meadow with patches of gorgeous flowers. The sky is azure blue with puffy white clouds. Bright songbirds flutter overhead... (Collins, *Catching Fire* 198).

However, because this is a distorted paradise, it does not heal nor keep the players safe, rather it kills:

The beauty disorients many of the players... Others begin to die off and it becomes clear that almost everything in this pretty place—the luscious fruit

dangling from the bushes, the water in the crystalline streams, even the scent of the flowers when inhaled too directly—is deadly poisonous (Collins, *Catching Fire* 198).

Through Haymitch’s Games, Collins reveals the kind of artificial providence created by the Gamemakers, Panem, and the society that needs to fall by the end of the trilogy. The arenas are deadly in every way and, like the metaphor of the mining canary that is used throughout the second book, when the environment is poisonous, no matter how unassuming, it will eventually kill its inhabitants. Therefore, there is a need for a hero to restore a non-poisonous nature, one with paths and safety. In the second book, Katniss adds to her original prophecy (that being she wants to die in District 12) by imagining a world where “Peeta’s child could be safe” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 354). The prophecy then becomes restoring paradise so that it may protect instead of harm, specifically the innocent.

Katniss proves she is capable of fulfilling the prophecy by destroying the artificial firmament— “The forcefield has us trapped in a circle. A dome, really” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 287)—of the arena: “I let the arrow fly, see it hit its mark and vanish...” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 378). The artificial paradise is destroyed, which sends Katniss onto her next task—to take down the whole of society.

Fate causes Katniss to make a left instead of a right and to end up at Snow’s quarters. In one of the most direct assertions of an anti-paradise, she asks, “could it be that I am near the garden where the evil things grow?” After the rebellion, Snow is confined to his own anti-garden awaiting judgment. And standing in front of this garden is “a man and a woman” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 352). Why is Collins keen on clarifying a man and woman standing before the gates? Why specify if not to suggest a warped Adam and Eve, not

expelled from paradise, but guarding what evils lay inside and where Katniss, ‘Girl on Fire’ mimics the biblical angel with the flaming sword who should stand before the gate? Collins, again in a perversion of the classic understanding of biblical allegory, is revealing that Snow’s world is not the Eden it seems.

Paralleling this scene to another moment in the woods, Katniss says “I reach an old house near the edge of the lake. Maybe “house” is too big a word for it...” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 93) “It’s a place I’ve never really wanted to share with anyone... a place that belonged to my father and me” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 34). Paradise is where nature and human coexist. The areas of the woods where Katniss feels safe are slightly tamed and provide protection whether by a house or concealed in bushes. Eventually, her isolated site is revealed to the rebellion. It is where runaways tell Katniss of District 13 and it is the place where Gale brings survivors after the bombing of District 12. Snow’s garden grows genetically altered, synthetic roses that are meant to conceal poison, but the Father’s lake provides “waterfowl,” “katniss,” and natural sustenance.

Whereas the Father is the desired good, Snow is the naturally immoral state of humankind. The Father is always absent, while the anti-father is always present, continually pushing for the innate, inexorable evil of the anti-paradise. In this case, the Father is the divine and Snow is time. The Father is immortal, whereas Snow is temporal—the President, sure to be replaced due to death or usurpation. Katniss, as always, balances between them and can access both worlds. It is in this balance that she must make the choice that she does which leads to her exile. She must choose between paradise or anti-paradise and trust in what nature, providence, and her father taught her or to not. This is decided when “The point of [her] arrow shifts upward...And President Coin collapses over

the side of the balcony and plunges to the ground. Dead” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 372). Killing Coin, as she killed Rue’s murderer and Cato, it is an act of justice. The fates agree with this decision as Snow, too, seems to die from his natural ailments at the same moment, “I see him bend forward, spewing out his life...” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 373). Both anti-gods are dead. In the absence of the divine, Katniss is the conduit for the Father’s mission and is still subject to time. The world she fights for is only temporary and a new hero will take her place once the anti-paradise gains too much strength again.

Signs of spirituality are present throughout the novels. A book, written by her father, becomes Katniss’ gospel of safe plants. The lake where her father took her outside the wall of District 12, is where Katniss baptizes herself from the grime of Panem. A cabin by that lake acts as a secret meeting place for those that believe in the Mockingjay. Songs sung to her by her father act as psalms that, in part, ignite the rebellion. When Katniss succeeds in her mission she unexpectedly “begin[s] to sing” in “a voice that would make the mockingjays fall silent” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 376). Hidden, there is divinity and it is all centered around one figure—the father. Metaphorically, this figure acts as the higher force at work in molding the serendipitous hero.

Katniss’ father is her guide and she relies on his teachings to keep herself alive. Katniss’ pleadings sound as though she is considering an afterlife, something not common in secular ideology: “*Where have you gone?*” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 26). However, the most divine example of providence is when Katniss compares her father to the mockingjay and that comparison lingers throughout the series to establish Katniss as the translator of providence. She sings like him and prays to him through the birds.

The mockingjay was also her father's favorite bird, "he would whistle or sing complicated songs to them and...they'd always sing back" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 43). For the birds to sing back is a sign of respect and, often, they would stay quiet altogether just to hear him sing. Later in the series, Katniss fills this role, "Peeta's right. They do fall silent when I sing. Just as they did for my father" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 124).

Without her father singing to the mockingjays, Katniss could not have used them as a communication tool in the Games, nor would she have connected with Rue. Without her father crafting her bow, writing her plant bible, and teaching her how to scavenge for food, Katniss would have not survived childhood, let alone the Games. And without her father's fascination with the bird, the symbol of the Mockingjay would not have aided in the rebellion, nor would the pin have become a part of Katniss' rosary:

I keep the few items I have on me... My mockingjay pin. Peeta's token, the golden locket... A silver parachute that holds a spile... and the pearl... [my fingers] close around the pearl... [I] find myself rubbing the smooth iridescent surface... back and forth against my lips. For some reason, it's soothing" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 32-33).

Aptly titled *Mockingjay* for the symbol of the restoration of the natural world, the third novel wholly revives paradise and fulfills the providential prophecy. Katniss does, in fact, return to a naturally restored District 12, as she predicted, and Peeta's children—her children—are safe in nature, "The Meadow turns green again...They play in the Meadow...My children, who don't know they play on a graveyard" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 388-390). Providence, to the serendipitous hero, is a return to a state of paradise, not quite a divine Eden, but an Elysium where the hero may have satisfaction and safety in nature.

The secularity of dystopian societies begs for the arousal of providence. Collins is masterful at alluding to a biblical paradise in Katniss' home District, but why is Katniss born in District 12, a starving mining colony, a place the Capitol barely notices? Because it is the closest thing to an Eden that Collins' world has. To repeat this quote, Katniss describes the outside world, "the fence has been successful at keeping the flesh-eaters out of District 12. Inside the woods they roam freely, and there are added concerns like venomous snakes, rabid animals, and no real paths to follow" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 5). The world beyond the fence is dangerous, unprotected, and without purpose because it is wild and uncultivated for humanity. Still, Katniss seeks comfort in the wilderness because natural corruption is safer than Snow's corruption. She and her family would have starved had they relied on Panem. However, District 12 is what needs to be saved merely due to the serendipity that procured it as Katniss' home.

District 12 is an Eden, complete with the tree of life, "resting my hand on the rough trunk of a maple where the birds perch. I have not sung "The Hanging Tree" out loud for ten years...but I remember every word" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 123), and the tree of good and evil—the apple tree where she first meets Peeta.

Peeta and Katniss complete an Adam and Eve dichotomy. However, with the nature of these books warping the original understandings of the biblical stories, Katniss, in the beginning, is the Adam figure, and Peeta provides the fruit, so to speak. We notice, in a moment of fate, Katniss stands beneath an apple tree when Peeta decides to give her bread:

...I made my way behind the pen that held their pig and leaned against the far side of an old apple tree...but I was watching him. Because of the

bread...he threw the loaf of bread in my direction...The heat of the bread burned into my skin, but I clutched it tighter, clinging to life... It didn't occur to me until the next morning that the boy might have burned the bread on purpose...and then delivered them to me (Collins, *Hunger Games* 30-31).

In this section, we not only have providential references to food—the apple is the tree of knowledge and the bread alludes to the body of Christ—Collins uses biblical diction such as “clinging to life” and “delivered” to further make this connection. Also, the bread was no ordinary bread, it is “filled with raisins and nuts” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 31), so there is fruit involved. The Adam and Eve parallel continues when they both are cast from ‘paradise’ and thrown into the Games together. In the first Games, another reversal occurs. In District 12, Peeta plays the role of Eve, giving Katniss the ‘knowledge’ to survive (the bread) which gets them banished, i.e., forcibly removed from District 12 to the Games. In the Games, where ‘paradise’ is warped by the Capitol, Katniss plays Eve and gives Peeta the apple, “The best I can do is to get him to eat a few bits of dried apple” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 255). Directly after this moment, Katniss points out her embarrassment of nakedness, “all right, maybe the idea of him being naked makes me uncomfortable. That’s another thing about my mother and Prim. Nakedness has no effect on them, gives them no cause for embarrassment” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 256). It gives her mother and Prim no cause because they have not yet been cast from the Eden of District 12. Finally, and ironically, Katniss only survives the first Games by giving Peeta the berries (fruit), an act that had the biblical couple banished.

Considering the reversals at play in the warped garden of the Games, it is fitting that only a poison berry can save them. As eating the apple casts out Adam and Eve from paradise, so does the berry. Though, instead of leaving a safe world where nature provides all, Peeta and Katniss are cast out of a dangerous world run by an artificial and corrupted power.

Fatalism, providence, and apocalyptic writings have been around for centuries. However, the anxieties in YA dystopian fiction are intriguing when tied with the increasingly secular world in which we find ourselves. Due to secularism, American apocalyptic ideas become man-made and pointless. No longer is it predetermined by God that one day someone will usher in a new paradise. In science fiction, the end of the world is not the fault of some force beyond our consciousness, rather it is our fault and we cannot handle that responsibility. We need someone to enlighten us. Millennial dystopias of the 2000s lift the veil, revealing that there is fate at work and providence will be fulfilled through the serendipitous hero.

Heroes are born to be great and they find themselves in circumstances that lead them to challenge the monster, whatever it may be. Somehow, through divine talent, they win. Though He is hidden, God is there behind the facade of a totalitarian regime. “May the odds be ever in your favor,” Effie says when she draws the Everdeen name. What chance did Prim have to be drawn in a bowl of thousands? What force was at work in the selection of tributes?

Katniss Everdeen was fated to be the Girl on Fire—the hero—from the moment her father died because, in the absence of The Father, the hero must adhere, instead, to His divine mission. It is up to the divine ‘chosen one’ to save our society from ourselves by

choosing to trust in providence and reviving the world to a moral state where nature is the greatest force against evil. It is the process of reestablishing goodness and humanity back from an artificial, sacrificial world. As Katniss says to close the trilogy, “I’ll tell [my children] how I survive it... I make a list in my head of every act of goodness I’ve seen someone do. It’s like a game...But there are much worse games to play” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 390).

WORKS CITED

Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. Scholastic Press, 2009.

Collins, Suzanne. *Mockingjay*. Scholastic Press, 2010.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic Press, 2008.