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## Playing Games: Governmental Influence and Individual Assertion in Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games" Series

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Playing Games: Governmental Influence and Personal Assertion in Suzanne  
Collins' *The Hunger Games* Series

By

Benjamin J. Geistfeld

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in English Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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This Thesis has been examined and approved.

Examining Committee:

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### **Abstract**

This thesis explores the relationship between *The Hunger Games* protagonist Katniss Everdeen and the two governments, one led by President Snow and the other led by President Coin, with which she interacts. In my first chapter, I argue that Presidents Snow and Coin both try to influence Katniss to follow their own agendas by dictating certain social conditions to her through laws, educational curricula, and state-sponsored industries. Each President carefully designs these conditions to support their own agendas rather than the agendas of the citizens they govern. I use Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses and Michel Foucault's theory of discipline and punishment as frameworks within which to discuss the conditions which each President dictates to his or her citizens. In my second chapter, I argue that Katniss' most successful rebellions are the ones which reject the conditions that the Presidents try to impose on her and substitute Katniss' own conditions in their place. The path which Katniss follows in the series has been established by scholars studying other contemporary young adult novels, and this thesis seeks to situate Collins' *The Hunger Games* series within that growing field of research.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Suzanne Collins' interest in the effects of war and global politics developed out of her childhood. Her father was very engaged in global politics; he served in Vietnam as a member of the U.S. Air Force and, as a doctor of political science, lectured at West Point Military Academy. Because of her father's military involvement, Collins grew up on military bases around the world. When Collins was a child, her father would take her to visit sites of important military battles and the two of them would discuss the consequences of those battles and the wars in which they occurred. The literary manifestation of her interest in the effects of war and political power is her *Hunger Games* trilogy, in which Collins describes a society controlled by an oppressive government.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between oppressed citizens and their government is a popular issue in contemporary young adult fiction. In my Literature Review, I will argue that many young adult novels feature protagonists who rebel against oppressive governments. The oppressive governments in these young adult novels create the social conditions from which the protagonists must remove themselves, and the protagonists successfully remove themselves from those social conditions by acting on their own interests rather than the government's interests.

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1. Collins discusses her background and the influence of her father on her own interest in war and the politics of war in a 2010 interview with Rick Margolis and a 2008 interview with James Blasingame.

The same message applies to Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Katniss Everdeen overcomes governmental oppression by basing her actions on her own decisions. The presidents of each government, Coriolanus Snow and Alma Coin, try to control their citizens' decisions by influencing the ways that those citizens think about and interact with their governments and their own situations. The methods employed by each president are stylistically different, but the point of each president's methods is to allow those presidents to dictate certain social and political conditions to their citizens. In order to overcome the presidents' oppression, Katniss must reject the conditions dictated to her and submit her own conditions in their place. Once Katniss asserts her own conditions, she is free to act in whatever way she chooses rather than in ways which others dictate to her.

In my first chapter, I will argue that the two presidents depicted in Collins' *The Hunger Games* series oppress their subjects by trying to control their decisions and actions. Rather than allowing their citizens to interact with each other and their governments in ways that the citizens determine for themselves, both presidents try to control those interactions in various ways. President Snow tries to control his citizens by implementing strict laws and physically abusing citizens who break those laws. President Coin tries to control her citizens by demanding that they conform to very strict social and political standards. Once she establishes those standards, she allows the society she has shaped to

psychologically punish citizens who do not conform. President Snow's regime displays his power over the citizens as a means of controlling them, while President Coin's regime utilizes the citizens themselves as a kind of police force.

As presidents, Snow and Coin are the leaders of their respective States and control many of the institutions which govern the lives of citizens living within those States. These institutions range from laws to education systems to religious institutions such as churches and are sometimes designed specifically to cause the society's citizens to act in certain ways. In his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser calls such institutions "Ideological State Apparatuses". According to Althusser, the State is a "machine... which enables the ruling class to ensure their domination over the working class" (137). The ruling class "ensures their domination" by asserting its ideology or "the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (158). To ensure that the ruling class' ideology reaches as many members of the working class as possible, the ruling class creates and controls various social institutions which support that ideology. These social institutions are the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which operate in a given society.

When these ISAs fulfill their function, they subject the working class to the ruling class' ideology. If the working class accepts the messages and intentions which the ruling class asserts in its ISAs, the working class accepts the ideology that those messages and intentions support. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel



Foucault calls people who have accept this kind of subjection “docile” (136) and argues that “docile” subjects “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” by others (136). According to Foucault, an individual can make another individual “docile” by subjecting it to various “disciplines” (137). Disciplining an individual to behave in certain ways renders the individual useful, and “the more useful a body is, the more obedient it is and vice versa” (138). In Collins’ *The Hunger Games* series, both presidents try to influence their citizens in order to render them docile. Each president has an individual agenda, but each also needs their citizens’ consent, and sometimes even their help, in order to realize those plans.

In my second chapter, I will argue that Katniss overcomes Snow’s and Coin’s oppression by basing her actions on her own decisions. Katniss rebels against both presidents throughout the series, but many of her individual rebellions have no lasting effect because she allows either Snow or Coin to dictate the conditions surrounding them. As long as Katniss rebels on conditions that either Snow or Coin dictate to her, her rebellions are relatively weak. Her breakthrough comes when she rejects the conditions which Snow and Coin impose on her and asserts her own conditions in their place. This assertion of her own rights is what allows her to control her own decisions.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series is the story of a young female protagonist and her relationship with two of her country's governments. From the beginning of the series, Katniss believes that something is wrong with the way that President Snow's government treats its citizens. Katniss describes both the risks she must take to provide food for her family and the façade that she must adopt in order to disguise the methods she must use to provide that food. Even when she is young, she realizes that there is a difference between the way that people live in the Capitol and the way that people live in her own community, and she does not approve of that difference. As Katniss develops, she begins to understand why she doesn't approve of the government's actions, and that understanding leads her to challenge each government's authority.

While little scholarship has been devoted to *The Hunger Games* itself, the relationship between oppressed citizens and their government is a popular issue in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. In that growing section of scholarship, many scholars argue that contemporary young adult fiction often features governments which exploit the citizens they govern. These governments attempt to control their citizens by treating them as something other than human and stifling their attempts to assert their humanity. In response to this oppression, protagonists resist the government by attempting to maintain and assert what the government tries to squelch.

Governments portrayed in young adult fiction often create the social conditions from which the protagonists rebel. Because those governments assume responsibility for the welfare of the people they govern, they are in a prime position to affect the lives of those citizens in various ways. Although governments often work toward set goals, those goals do not necessarily match the goals of the citizens they govern. Sometimes, the governments portrayed in contemporary young adult fiction pursue their goals in ways which negatively affect their citizens. One effect of governments which pursue their goals in ways which negatively affect their citizens is an increase in social. In “Dystopian Visions of Global Capitalism: Philip Reeve’s *Mortal Engines* and M.T. Anderson’s *Feed*,” Elizabeth Bullen and Elizabeth Parsons discuss such negative effects and label them “risk societies”, or societies in which the government’s activities cause various social and environmental risks. Citizens living in a “risk society” face risks that citizens living in other societies do not because of the choices that their respective governments make. As an example, Bullen and Parsons cite increased nuclear technology and weapons that have resulted from capitalist activities in our own world, and Bullen and Parsons characterize increased nuclear technology and weapons as a social risk. According to Bullen and Parsons, several cities in *Mortal Engines* are “risk societies” because they have appropriated old technology which allows them to move around. The risks which result from this use of technology include the political ideology at work in the series, which justifies cities’ roaming the countryside and consuming smaller

cities for fuel. In the world of *Mortal Engines*, citizens living in a smaller city are constantly at risk of having their city consumed by a larger city.

Because of the increased risks which governments can cause in the societies they control, the citizens who live in those societies face increased risks in their private lives. Rather than affecting the relationship between an individual and individuals from a different society, these social risks affect the relationships between individuals and their governments and between individuals within the same society. For example, distrust between different social groups within the same society may cause one group to attack another. Sometimes the governments themselves create the risks in order to benefit from them. In “Predicting a Better Situation? Three Young Adult Speculative Fiction Texts and the Possibilities for Social Change,” Abbie Ventura argues that the government controlling the society depicted in *Rash*, uses its penal system as a source of capital by contracting its prisoners out as cheap labor. In her article, Ventura points out the control which the government in *Rash* exerts over the “personal freedoms” of its citizens (98). As the government gains more control over its citizens, it develops and enforces new ways in which to incarcerate them and then sell them as a source of cheap labor. In this way, citizens face an ever-increasing risk of incarceration for seemingly mundane offenses. Citizens living in other societies do not face an increased risk of incarceration, because that risk is a product of the choices that the government portrayed in *Rash* makes and

does not apply to societies governed by governments who do not make that choice.

Sometimes the risks which governments create affect the relationships between individual citizens rather than between citizens and their government. Such risks are often based on rules that the government creates and result in distrust and fear circulating among a society's citizens. Such distrust and fear strains the relations between individuals living within that society. Don Latham examines this distrust and fear between individual citizens in "Discipline and its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of *The Giver*." In his article, Latham discusses the relationships between citizens within the society depicted in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and argues that that society's government uses its citizens as a disciplinary tool to control other citizens. Latham suggests that the citizens in the society depicted in *The Giver* are under constant surveillance from not only the government itself (through loudspeakers that both issue orders and record actions), but also from their fellow citizens. Instead of relaxing the rules when authority figures aren't watching, civilians in the society depicted in *The Giver* constantly worry about the government's rules and report violations to government officials. Latham also points out that the government tightly controls the language that the civilians use. For example, Latham cites the inability of the protagonist's family to discuss the concept of love because the government's insistence on precise language has rendered the word 'love' meaningless. Latham argues that because of all the rules and surveillance that the

government imposes on its citizens, the citizens are constantly susceptible to punishment administered by the government.

As a result of the risks citizens deal with when they do not conform to the government's rules, many societies depicted in contemporary young adult novels feature citizens who act in ways which their governments prescribe. Basing choices and actions on personal decisions may bring punishment because citizens' personal choices may not match the government's choices. In order to avoid such punishment, citizens often try to act in ways that they believe will reduce the risks they face. As an example of what happens to citizens who base their actions on personal decisions, Bullen and Parsons suggest that Violet dies in *Feed* precisely because she refuses to conform to the rules of the government which controls her society. In "Colonizing Bodies: Corporate Power and Biotechnology in Young Adult Science Fiction," Stephanie Guerra suggests that some citizens in *House of the Scorpion* are physically and intellectually incapable of doing anything other than what their leaders tell them to do. Describing one class of characters in the story, Guerra says that "in a perverse fantasy of ultimate slavery, the eejits have been completely colonized: mind, body and soul are under the sway of the masters they exist to serve" (285). In this society, citizens are literally unable to act in any other ways than ones prescribed by their governments.

When they cannot completely control the minds of the citizens they govern, governments in contemporary young adult fiction often convince their

citizens to act in certain ways by using subtle rather than forceful methods. In many cases, those methods involve public education. By teaching the citizens it governs that its goals are natural and normal, a government can often persuade its citizens to support the government's goals even if those goals do not match up with the citizens' personal ones. Governments who try to control their citizens using these methods are trying to dictate a certain worldview onto their citizens. This worldview, which the government sponsors, challenges any independent and opposing worldviews which individual citizens may develop. Governments who use these methods try to teach their citizens to think like the government rather than as individuals.

Several critics have addressed the power structures in contemporary young adult fiction and have concluded that citizens in these stories often learn and accept the power structures that they operate in rather than continually struggle against them. In "The Ideology of the Wissenvine: Critique and Closure in Zilpha Keatley Snyder's *Green-Sky* Trilogy," Rob McAlear suggests that the government depicted in Snyder's *Green-Sky* trilogy asserts its ideology through education and social rituals. Because the citizens in the series encounter the government's ideology in typical social settings, they accept that ideology as a typical part of their society. In the school system depicted in Snyder's *Green-Sky* trilogy, students are constantly sent back to lower levels of education if they do not sufficiently conform to the state-controlled educational program. In his article, McAlear points out that not only is the educational system specifically designed

to make everyone conform to the government's political agenda, but that educators and government officials are willing to teach students how to cheat so that they are able to uphold the political message concealed in the school's curriculum. The purpose of the government's education system is to support the government's goals rather than to objectively educate its students. Chad William Timm finds a similar method of making the government's ideology seem normal in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy. In "Class is in Session: Power and Privilege in Panem," Timm argues that children living in the poor districts in Collins' *Hunger Games* series learn that the oppressive governmental regime is both natural and normal by officially suggesting that the regime is actually natural and normal and by isolating poor districts from each other historically and culturally. Timm argues that eventually, the things that the children learn in school become so ingrained in their consciousness that they apply those things to other areas of their lives. In each case, children spend so much time learning that the status quo is natural that the political messages embedded in the schools and social rituals seems natural to them, and they don't question what they consider to be natural.

Because governments in contemporary young adult dystopian fiction often try to force their citizens to act in certain ways and believe certain things, many citizens in these stories lose their ability to base their actions on personal decisions. When governments in young adult dystopias allow a very narrow range of accepted behaviors and attitudes for their citizens to adopt, citizens



living within those societies have a limited amount of decisions that they can make. This diminished ability to base personal actions on personal decisions causes the citizens to become, as Ventura puts it, “an extension of the State” (100). Several contemporary young adult dystopian novels depict citizens who are forced to define themselves by their government’s interests rather than their own. Guerra argues that the near-total control which the government depicted in *House of the Scorpion* exercises over some of its citizens leaves those citizens as individuals whose “very personhood has been stripped from them” (285). In “We Enter a Time of Calamity: Informed and ‘Informed’ Young Inside and Outside Young Adult Fiction,” Natasha Giardina points out the dependence on the government which citizens in *Feed* have developed because of the government’s interference in their lives. According to Giardina, the protagonist in *Feed* is unable to function when he is cut off from the government’s direction, and he “feels like he is living in a small, quiet room” (86). Once the connection between the protagonist and the government is restored, the protagonist feels elated.

In each of the above cases, governments and scientists succeed in removing their citizens’ agency. Rather than governing societies of citizens who base their actions on personal decisions, those governments rule societies of citizens who base their actions on the government’s decisions. Because those citizens no longer define their own beliefs and actions, the government can define them in any way that it wants. In her article, In “When Science Blurs the

Boundaries: The Commodification of the Animal in Young Adult Science Fiction,” Yampell argues that scientists in *Dr. Franklin’s Island* remove Arnie, Semi, and Miranda’s status as human by convincing the world that they are dead. Because the world believes that they are dead, Dr. Franklin is free to disregard the world’s definition of what Arnie, Semi, and Miranda are. According to Yampell, Dr. Franklin turns Arnie, Semi, and Miranda into objects by denying them their ability to define themselves. Because Arnie, Semi, and Miranda can no longer define themselves, Dr. Franklin is free to define them however he wants. In her article, Ventura argues that the citizens in *Feed* exist to consume the advertisements and commercial goods, while clones in *House of the Scorpion* exist to provide body parts for the rich. In each case, the governments define the citizen as something other than human and are thus able to exploit them as something other than human. As Ostry notes in “‘Is He Still Human? Are You?’: Young Adult Science Fiction in the Posthuman Age,” citizens who are treated as objects can be “treated as parts rather than... more than the sum of their parts” (232).

By erasing their citizens’ agency and defining those citizens in ways which support the government’s goals rather than their own, governments can create entire classes of people which they can exploit. In “The ‘Other’ Country: Memory, Voices, and Experiences of Colonized Childhoods,” Christine Wilkie-Stibbs points out that capitalist governments must create a class that it can exploit in order to survive. In order to create that group when a group does not already exist, the people in power will construct and encourage divisions between people

who support their agenda (the “us” group) and people who oppose their agenda (the “them” group). Wilkie-Stibbs believes that governments in Malorie Blackman’s *Noughts and Crosses* trilogy and Anne Provoost’s *Falling* both create a group which the government can treat as something other than human. In her article, Wilkie-Stibbs argues that the government in Blackman’s *Noughts and Crosses* trilogy uses race to define one group as more human than another, while the villain in Provoost’s *Falling* uses rhetoric to create opposing groups by narrating the same story in different and opposing ways.

Once these classes have been established, the governments in these stories often promote a rigid class structure which maintains the situation and status of each class. By maintaining the situation and status of each class, the governments ensure that a group of citizens that it can exploit will always exist. In many cases, governments and other citizens with power separate themselves from citizens who do not have power, and those with power are able to exploit those without power. In “Capitalism’s New Handmaiden: The Biotechnical World Negotiated Through Children’s Fiction,” Naarah Sawers points out that the society depicted in Rachel Anderson’s *The Scavenger’s Tale* is divided into several social classes. The purpose that such class distinctions serve in *The Scavenger’s Tale* is as a guide the rich can use to identify which citizens they can and which citizens they cannot exploit. In her article, Guerra claims that the society depicted in Nancy Farmer’s *The House of the Scorpion* is divided into

classes which, again, allow those who have power to exploit those who do not have power.

Citizens in the classes who hold power (the upper classes) often justify their exploitation by denying the human status of the citizens they are exploiting (the lower classes). Because citizens of the lower classes no longer hold human status, they often have fewer rights than citizens in the upper classes. Because the upper classes claim the right to define the lower classes, the upper classes often choose to define the lower classes as commodities that they can buy or sell rather than as humans. In these stories, the lower classes sometimes have no more value than, for example, a tree which the upper class harvests for wood. In some contemporary young adult fiction, this difference in rights manifests in members of the upper classes literally harvesting body organs from members of the lower classes. Sawers points out that members of the upper classes of both *The Scavenger's Tale* and *The House of the Scorpion* literally harvest organs from living members of the lower classes. Discussing *The House of the Scorpion*, Sawers points out that the government creates clones specifically as living sources of fresh body organs for the rich, while members of the upper class in *The Scavenger's Tale* harvest vital organs from members of the society's lower classes in order to perpetuate an organ trafficking ring which helps support the society's economy. Yampell argues that scientists in Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* and Peter Dickinson's *Eva* grant animals fewer rights than humans in order to exploit the animals for financial profit. Although

the distinction Yampell points out is between humans and non-human animals, the hierarchy that she suggests is similar to the hierarchies proposed by Sawers in *The Scavenger's Tale* and *The House of the Scorpion*.

In other stories, the upper classes define the lower classes as consumers rather than as commodities. In these stories, the value which the upper classes assign to the lower classes rests in the lower classes' ability to consume the goods and services produced by the upper classes rather than as humans. Because the upper classes define the lower classes as consumers, the upper classes consider the lives of lower class citizens worthless when they lose the ability or willingness to consume. Ventura suggests that the society depicted in M.T. Anderson's *Feed* is based entirely on consumption, and that individuals within that society exist as consumers rather than as subjects. John Newsinger finds a similar theme in John Christopher's *The Lotus Caves*. In "Rebellion and Power in the Juvenile Science Fiction of John Christopher," Newsinger argues that Christopher uses the relationship between a magical plant and a human to depict the relationship between corporations and consumers in a capitalist society. According to Newsinger, one of the protagonists in *The Lotus Caves* survives in isolated space solely by consuming the mystical energies of the magical plant. The consuming protagonist does not need to eat, sleep, or be entertained; he simply consumes the plant's energy. In this small society, the only value that the protagonist holds for the plant is in his ability to consume the plant's energy.

Sometimes, the process of turning citizens into consumers or commodities affects societies as a whole. In this case, the governments create divisions between whole societies rather than divisions between classes of citizens operating in the same society. Bullen and Parsons claim that Philip Reeve's *Predator Cities* series depicts capitalist systems turning whole societies into collective, consumptive bodies. In the post-apocalyptic world of the series, mobile cities literally roam the countryside and search for smaller cities in order to consume the weaker cities' resources; strong cities get stronger, while weak cities either get weaker or become completely absorbed by the stronger cities. In "Ignorant Armies on a Darkling Plain: The New World Disorder to Global Economics, Environmentalism, and Urbanization in Philip Reeve's *Hungry Cities*," Robyn McCallum suggests that the governments which control the larger mobile cities in Reeve's series are more interested in consuming weaker cities than in developing methods of supporting themselves autonomously.

A common method that many governments in contemporary young adult fiction use to create classes which they can exploit is to use technology to position themselves at the center of their citizens' lives. From this central position, governments can influence their citizens by immediately and constantly presenting the government's goals to the citizens. In *Feed*, governments use technology to directly control citizens by presenting governmental interests as more immediate and important than personal interests. Because the government presents its own interests to citizens in such a direct and intimate way, citizens

come to define themselves through governmental rather than personal interests. Guerra argues that the society in *Feed* is based entirely on consumption, and that participating in that consumption is not an option for citizens. In *Feed*, children are hardwired into a digital network that delivers a constant stream of advertisements and news coverage into the individual's brain. Because the link is hardwired into the individual's brain, citizens fitted with the link have no choice but to participate in the corporate system. In exchange for the delivery of advertisements and other media, the network extracts information on the individual's tastes and preferences, which the corporations then use to fashion a stream of advertisements that suit each individual child's personal style. In this way, individuals spend each waking moment being inundated with products and messages encouraging them to consume the goods that the corporations manufacture. This constant focus on available goods and services creates, according to Guerra, "an illiterate society incapable of critical thought, focused entirely on consumption and prey to every passing ad" (282-3). Ventura reaches a similar conclusion when she claims that the digital network in *Feed* literally takes over the center of an individual's center of intelligence and identity. When the protagonist's link to the digital network is disrupted by a computer virus, the protagonist loses his ability to function. Because of the intimate relationship between a person's identity and the corporations which control the digital network, Ventura concludes that the society in *Feed* is one in which "commodity culture replaces subjectivity and autonomy with unnecessary lack of desire" (93).

Instead of using technology to present its own interests as more immediate and important than personal interests, some contemporary young adult dystopian novels depict governments who use technology to either genetically modify citizens or create new citizens entirely. By genetically modifying human citizens, governments in these novels create a class of citizens which are literally something other than human. In *Eva*, for example, scientists transplant a human mind into a chimpanzee's body, and the government depicted in *The House of the Scorpion* breeds human clones as a living source of body parts for that society's rich citizens. These genetically modified individuals are often valued for either their body parts or for the scientific achievement that they represent rather than for any inherent level of humanity that they may have. They do not have any value beyond those body parts or that scientific achievement, and therefore exist in the lowest social classes. Several critics have addressed this use of biotechnology in their articles. In "Not So Brave A World: The Representation of Human Cloning in Science Fiction for Young Adults," Hilary S. Crew argues that the protagonist in *The House of the Scorpion* is "regarded as less than human" by the his society's government and is socially "on a level with the dog, Furball" (206). Yampell argues that scientists in Ann Halam's *Dr. Franklin's Island* and Peter Dickinson's *Eva* turn animals into commodities in order to benefit financially by experimenting on and exploiting them. In her article, Yampell points out that the protagonists in both *Dr. Franklin's Island* and *Eva* are turned into hybrids of humans and non-human



animals. In *Eva*, scientists transfer the mind of the protagonist into the body of a chimpanzee, and in *Dr. Franklin's Island*, a scientist turns the protagonists into fish and birds. To the higher social classes, genetically modified individuals are often nothing more than objects that powerful citizens can exploit.

Governments in contemporary young adult fiction often claim the right to define its citizens as it sees fit. If a citizen accepts the definition which the government tries to impose, then that citizen accepts the identity which the government assigns. The issue of lost identity is especially fitting for young adult fiction because, as Ostry claims, "the trope that all young adult literature has in common is the search for identity" (224). This struggle is magnified in societies where governments constantly try to define their citizens as something other than human because the young adult must face external as well as internal challenges to their ability to define themselves. In "Monica Hughes, Lois Lowry, and Young Adult Dystopias," Carrie Hintz argues that in young adult dystopian fiction, "political and social awakening is almost always combined with a depiction of the personal problems of adolescence" (255). According to Hintz, the struggle for a young adult to define his or her own identity parallels the struggle for a citizen operating under an oppressive government to define his or her own identity.

The struggle to define their own identities rather than allow their governments to define them is precisely the struggle which protagonists face in many contemporary young adult stories. In order to resist their governments'

efforts to define them as something other than human, these protagonists must maintain and assert the things their governments try to deny. They must replace the identity that their governments try to assign to them with an identity which they assign to themselves. The degree of success these protagonists achieve often determines the difference between a citizen whom the government can exploit and a citizen whom the government cannot exploit. According to scholars, the most important way for young adult protagonists to resist or overcome oppressive governments in contemporary young adult fiction is for those protagonists to find and assert their ability to base their actions on personal decisions. If citizens can learn to base their actions on personal decisions, then those citizens can begin to remove themselves from the social class which the capitalist government can freely exploit.

Scholars examining contemporary young adult fiction have identified two ways in which young adult protagonists maintain and assert their identity. The most basic is to simply accept their governments' definition as their own. Protagonists who follow this path accept the identity their governments assign to them and then try to undermine the government's control by expanding that identity in various ways. The second way protagonists maintain and assert their identity is by developing their own moral or ethical perspectives. Protagonists who follow this path use the moral and ethical perspectives that they develop to inform personal decisions and then base their actions on those decisions rather than on the decisions dictated by their governments. Protagonists usually

develop these moral or ethical perspectives only after gaining some kind of access to the histories of their own cultures and to cultures beyond their own.

In a simple sense, the protagonists in young adult dystopias can simply accept any changes that governments and scientists force onto them.

Genetically altered protagonists who actively accept their new nature (rather than allowing that new nature to control them) often retain the subjectivity that governments and scientists seek to deny. Yampell notes that in both *Dr. Franklin's Island* and *Eva*, human protagonists who have been turned into animals gradually accept the changes that happen to their bodies. The protagonists in *Dr. Franklin's Island* gradually realize that the new animal aspects of their selves present benefits that their human natures do not, while the protagonist in *Eva* leaves the human world so that she can live with other chimps and help them with their own lives. Ventura points out that the protagonist in *Rash* acknowledges that something may be wrong with the government's system, but he does nothing to change his situation.

Simple acceptance and assertion of basic human rights, however, may not be enough and can even be dangerous. Just because a lower-class citizen believes that he or she deserves to be treated as a human doesn't mean that the government is willing to accept that individual into the upper classes. Although being identified by the government and identifying themselves as human can help protagonists to maintain their subjectivity, such simple assertions can be an unstable and unreliable platform to stand on. Sawers suggests that the

protagonist in Rachel Anderson's *The Scavenger's Tale* is initially exempt from government labels and programs which would deny his subjectivity. He is in good physical and mental condition, which initially exempts him from the social classes marked for exploitation. Unfortunately for the protagonist, the human status that he enjoys does not last throughout the novel and, according to Sawers, the government which initially defined him as human eventually denies his status as human and defines him as a commodity. Critics discussing *Feed* have also concluded that the simple assertion of humanity is not enough. Bullen and Parsons point out Violet's failed rebellion as an example of the inadequacy of personal assertions of agency. Although Violet challenges the government's political agenda by refusing to consume like the rest of the citizens, her rebellion fails when the government allows her to die because she no longer has any worth as a consumer. In each case, the interest of the government overpowers the interests of the citizen and the citizens are forced to continue operating under the government's interests rather than their own.

According to Ventura, personal claims to agency often fail simply because they are nothing more than personal claims. In order to succeed, Ventura suggests, a rebelling protagonist must be able to change the entire system. According to Ventura, the problem with Violet's rebellion in *Feed* is that she does not actually change the system in which she operates. She may succeed in removing herself from the government's control, but her rebellion ultimately has no lasting effect because the system continues to function normally. Ventura

cites the protagonist in *The House of the Scorpion* as the leader of a rebellion which may succeed. Instead of counting on his own actions to hold up against a powerful government, the protagonist in *The House of the Scorpion* rallies his peers around him before he attempts to change the social system.

A more steady method of maintaining and asserting a personal identity that critics have identified in contemporary young adult fiction is developing morally or ethically advanced perspectives. In order for citizens to base their actions on personal decisions, they need to be able to make those decisions in the first place. Instead of allowing their governments to dictate what is ethically or morally acceptable, protagonists who develop their own perspectives on those issues have the ability to make the decisions on which they can base their actions. In "Power and Ethics in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*," Darja Leskovar-Mazi suggests that the protagonists in both *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* gain the ability to question the governments of their respective societies by developing more mature moral perspectives. For a theoretical framework, Leskovar-Mazi cites Lawrence Kohlberg's theory which consists of three distinct levels of moral development. In the lowest stage of Kohlberg's theory, individuals distinguish between right and wrong by anticipating whether a given action will bring a punishment or a reward from an authority figure. In the middle level of Kohlberg's theory, individuals determine right and wrong by anticipating whether their actions will be approved or disapproved by authority figures. In the highest level of Kohlberg's theory, individuals determine right and

wrong by weighing different options for themselves. In this last stage, individuals realize that a difference may exist between what is morally right and what authority figures tell them to do.

According to Leskovar-Mazi, the protagonists of both *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* ascend from lower levels of Kohlberg's theory to the highest level. In her article, Leskovar-Mazi argues that the society depicted in Lowry's *The Giver* functions at Kohlberg's middle level of moral development. Leskovar-Mazi notes that citizens of the society in *The Giver* look to authority figures in order to determine right from wrong, and that the driving force behind the citizens' moral perspective is the desire to please their parents and the Committee of Elders. In *Gathering Blue*, Leskovar-Mazi finds a society which operates at the lowest level of Kohlberg's theory. Instead of seeking to please authority figures, the citizens of the society in *Gathering Blue* simply seek to avoid punishment. At some point in each story, the protagonists encounter circumstances which cause them to question their society's power structure. In *The Giver*, the protagonist learns that he is allowed to lie when he turns twelve years old. This new ability causes him to begin to wonder whether the authority figures which hand down the laws of his society also have the right to lie. This, according to Leskovar-Mazi, signals maturation from the mid-level moral perspective of his society to the highest level of Kohlberg's theory. In *Gathering Blue*, the protagonist interacts with a social outcast who causes the protagonist to question her society's power structure. This, according to Leskovar-Mazi,

signals a similar maturation from the lowest level of Kohlberg's theory to the highest level.

In order to develop an advanced moral perspective, protagonists often need to gain access to history, culture, and memory. These three elements are important because they offer the protagonist an alternative perspective on his or her social conditions. In "Lois Lowry's *The Giver*: Interrupted Bildungsroman or Ambiguous Dystopia," Michael M. Levy claims that the Giver's social function in *The Giver* is as "archivist, historian, and advisor" (53). Levy argues that as the keeper of his society's past, the Giver retains all of the history and culture which existed before the society became the way that is in the novel. Because the Giver has access to his society's history and culture, he has access to a time when the current, oppressive government did not exist. When Jonas receives the memories held by the Giver, Jonas also receives access to that history and culture. Ostry argues that exposure to, and recovery of, memory is often important in the protagonists' search for their self: "part of (the) process of developing selfhood involves reclaiming memory" (232). Ostry cites Peter Dickinson's *Eva*, Ann Schlee's *The Vandal*, and Rodman Philbrick's *The Last Book in the Universe* as examples of books in which protagonists do not comply with governmental practices which are designed to suppress their memories. In each case, according to Ostry, maintaining ownership of personal memories grants the protagonists an awareness of their selves which other characters in their respective stories lack. Leskovar-Mazi believes that the governments in

both *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* suppress common knowledge of history, culture, and memory, and that the protagonists' experiences with these suppressed elements contribute to their moral development.

Sometimes, young adult protagonists must be entirely removed from their social structure in order to find history and culture. Bullen and Parsons point out that the protagonist in Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* is literally thrown out of the city by the story's villain. After the protagonist is outside both the city's walls and social structure, he must deal with people who do not share the social perspective that he learned while growing up. Bullen and Parsons argue that the protagonist's interactions with new cultural perspectives introduce him to alternative social structures which do not bind him to a specific social class. Because the protagonist no longer binds himself to a specific social class and all the constraints that accompany that class, he gains a political awareness which allows him to question the social structure of his home city.

The preceding literature review argues that contemporary young adult dystopian novels often depict governments which try to define the identities of the citizens they govern. Governments who do this often intend to define their citizens as something other than human in order to exploit those citizens and use them to achieve the government's own goals. As a result of that oppression, citizens operating within societies controlled by those governments lose the ability to define themselves and assert their own interests. In order to properly respond to those oppressive governments, protagonists in young adult dystopian



fiction must develop ways in which to define themselves and assert their own interests instead of the interests of the government.

In this thesis, I argue that the government depicted in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy tries to exploit its citizens by defining them as something other than human in order to use them to achieve the government's own goals. Against their government's exploitation, the series' protagonist maintains and asserts her own identity and in doing so resists subverts the government's system. Very little scholarship has been devoted to Collins' *Hunger Games* series because it is so new. This thesis provides a reading of Collins' series which situates it within a growing sub-category of contemporary young adult fiction which examines the relationship between oppressed citizens and their government.

### Chapter 3: Katniss and the Two Governments

At the outset of the series, President Snow's government, in Panem, maintains control of its citizens, including Katniss, through economic oppression, state apparatuses – state-sponsored coal mines, national spectacles, schools, and the media – which normalize government ideology, language which hides the governmental role in its citizens' opportunities and outcomes, and punishments and threats. In *Mockingjay*, the final book of the series, Katniss finds herself in District 13 where she encounters the rebel government led by President Coin. Coin's government, too, strictly controls the lives of its citizens. Coin uses militaristic discipline, carefully oversees all of her citizens' actions, and promotes an ideology of shared sacrifice with the goal of overthrowing Snow's government and eventual rebel rule of all Panem. Both governments also enforce their laws through threats and punishments and both governments seek to commoditize Katniss and turn her into a symbol to gain support for their particular goals.

The level of interference which Snow's government maintains over its districts is not arbitrary or without purpose. Plutarch Heavensbee, Head Gamemaker under President Snow, articulates the purpose of Snow's behavior when he explains to Katniss the significance of their country's name. According to Plutarch, the name "Panem" comes from an old Latin phrase which translates into "Bread and Circuses" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 223). Plutarch tells Katniss that the citizens in ancient Rome had exchanged their political power for luxury and

entertainment. He then tells Katniss that their own country is in a similar situation. According to Plutarch, the citizens of the Capitol have decided to exchange their political power for luxury and entertainment. The citizens in the districts provide the bread and circuses, while the citizens in the Capitol enjoy the fruits of the citizens in the districts' labor. Because of the power it enjoys through this arrangement, the government wants to keep the political situation in place.

The social and economic conditions in District 12 help to reproduce the economic cycle at work in Panem. Most of the district's able-bodied citizens work in the coal mines because the jobs in the mines are the only available steady and legal sources of income. Simply refusing to work until a better opportunity comes along is not an option for most of District 12's citizens because most of those citizens are very poor. Even those who do work in the mines are so poorly paid that they are unable to save any money to attempt to find a job other than the coal mines. Similar conditions exist in District 11, which is the only other district that Katniss spends much time in while under Snow's control. Because District 11's citizens are so poor, they have little choice but to work in the fields in order to have enough money to survive. By maintaining the poverty level and outlawing opportunities for citizens to improve their economic condition, the government ensures that a steady stream of workers will always be available to perform the roles which support Panem's economy.

In his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser argues that methods of production and reproduction within a society must perpetuate themselves. Rather than simply completing the current cycle of production, each cycle must prepare and maintain the status quo so that each cycle can smoothly transition into the next. By assigning a different industry to each district, Panem's government can ensure that each aspect of Panem's economy is accounted for each cycle. There is no confusion over who will harvest the cotton, who will spin the cotton, or who will sew the cotton into clothing at the beginning of each cycle of production because those assignments are already given and assumed.

After the goods are produced in the districts, trains transport those goods to the Capitol. At the Capitol, the Capitol's citizens consume those products. This role, the role of the consumer, is the role the Capitol's citizens play in Panem's economic system. Rather than contributing something positive to Panem's economic cycle, the Capitol's citizens simply consume the goods produced in the districts. This constant consumption is the reason that the cycle must be repeated in the first place.

Katniss and Peeta experience the level of consumption in the Capitol firsthand during their Victory Tour. At a party President Snow has thrown in honor of Katniss' official engagement to Peeta, "the real star of the evening is the food" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 77). There are so many dishes that Katniss is unable to sample everything, so she samples a tiny portion of each dish and then makes

Peeta eat the rest of the dish. Eventually, both Katniss and Peeta have full stomachs so they naturally stop eating. The citizens of the Capitol, however, do not treat the meal in the same way as Katniss and Peeta. The reason Katniss makes Peeta finish the dishes that she samples is because “the idea of throwing food away is abhorrent to [her]” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 78). Growing up in poverty in District 12, Katniss has learned to not waste food by eating unnecessarily or by throwing away things that she doesn’t want. The citizens of the Capitol, however, seem to think that there’s nothing wrong with eating unnecessarily and throwing away unwanted food. In fact, one table at the party contains a series of glasses which have been filled with clear liquid which is designed to make the drinker vomit. The point of these drinks is that vomiting will empty the drinker’s stomach so that the drinker can eat more food. As one of the party’s guests says, “Everyone does it, or else how would you have any fun at a feast?” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 79).

President Snow himself admits that controlling the districts is necessary for his government to maintain this system of using the districts’ citizens to satisfy the Capitol’s citizens’ needs. After discussing the possibility of uprisings in the districts at the beginning of *Catching Fire*, Snow says that “if [the Capitol] released its grip on the districts for even a short time, the entire system would collapse” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 21). During the uprisings that follow Katniss’ Victory Tour, Snow’s government does lose its grip on most of the districts and the system begins to collapse. While reporting on District 8’s rebellion, a

television reporter states that “all textile production has ceased” in Panem as a result of that rebellion (Collins, *Catching Fire* 88). After District 4 rebels, a member of Katniss’ prep team complains about a lack of shrimp available in the Capitol (Collins, *Catching Fire* 165). After District 3 rebels, that district no longer produces the electronic devices that the Capitol’s citizens have grown accustomed to (Collins, *Catching Fire* 165). The districts which rebel against Panem’s government presumably no longer carry out the role which the government has assigned and, as a result, the Capitol loses some of the amenities it once enjoyed.

In order to ensure that the citizens of District 12 continue to play their role in its system, Snow’s government tries to leave the districts’ citizens few options to support themselves financially. One striking feature of the area of Panem where the series’ protagonists live is the poverty of many of the families who live there. Many families in District 12 struggle to feed themselves, and “starvation’s not an uncommon fate” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 4) in that part of the country. Many of the men in the district work long hours of manual labor, and even then they are not guaranteed enough food to support their families. Gale, Katniss’ friend and hunting partner, works “twelve hours a day” and still he needs help supporting his large family (Collins, *Catching Fire* 5). Katniss’ first encounter with Peeta involved Peeta throwing Katniss a loaf of bread so that her family wouldn’t starve.

In order to feed their families, many people in District 12 work in the district's coal mine. Mining coal is the only steady work available in District 12, although people who either can not or will not work in the coal mines try to find other sources of income. Katniss' mother runs a small apothecary business and Gale's mother launders clothes for other people in the district. No kind of work in District 12 pays well, though, and even working long hours does not guarantee that a worker will bring home enough money to feed his or her family regardless of where that worker works.

The citizens' poverty directly supports the Hunger Games themselves, which is the most visible institution which the government uses to interfere in the districts. As an alternative to the illegal practice of hunting, the government offers the citizens of the districts a legal way of obtaining food for their families other than by working in the mines. By maintaining the level of poverty in District 12, the government can use the Games as a form of leverage over its citizens. Rather than dying of starvation, young citizens can offer themselves to the government in exchange for help. Citizens who are eligible to be selected as Tributes in the Hunger Games are able to enter their name in the drawing one additional time per year in exchange for "a meager year's supply of grain and oil for one person" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 13). The government never officially forces children to enter their names into the drawing more than the mandatory once per year, but children who come from poor families often exchange an additional entry for the ability to help feed their family. Snow's government does

offer poor citizens some relief from their poverty, but the form of relief that the government offers directly supports Snow's own needs rather than the needs of his subjects.

The poor economic conditions drive some citizens to break the law in their attempts to feed their families. Many laws in District 12 limit the opportunities that poor citizens have to improve their situation even though those opportunities are often more lucrative than the opportunities sanctioned by Snow's government. Snow's government officially bans hunting in the woods and, according to Katniss, "trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching is punishable by death" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 5). Despite this threat, however, "more people would risk it if they had weapons" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 5). Those citizens who have weapons sometimes try to provide for their families by hunting in the woods surrounding the district. A fence which surrounds the District is supposed to be electrified, but the electricity is rarely active. Even the citizens who risk punishment to feed their families are not guaranteed enough food, however, and "there are still nights when game has to be swapped for lard or shoelaces or wool, still nights when [citizens] go to bed with... stomachs growling" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 9).

The laws prohibiting the kinds of illegal activities which citizens can use to improve their situation are easy to evade because those laws are not always strictly enforced in District 12. On many of those issues, Snow's laws are largely ignored by District 12's citizens and even by the government's own officials.



Although Snow's government officially outlaws hunting in the woods, Snow's local police force, the Peacekeepers, often allow District 12's citizens to hunt and then sell the game they catch. Speaking of her poached game, Katniss says that "the butcher would buy my rabbits but not squirrels... the baker enjoyed squirrels," and that "the Head Peacekeeper loved wild turkey" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 52). Katniss even illegally sells food to District 12's mayor, who has "a particular fondness for" poached strawberries (Collins, *Hunger Games* 10). District 12 also has a formal black market called The Hob in which illegal transactions, such as selling poached game and bootlegged liquor, happen every day. District 12's Peacekeepers know about the illegal activities and even actively engage in them with District 12's bootleggers. The Peacekeepers allow such illegal activities to persist as long as they can benefit from them. Cray, the Head Peacekeeper before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, buys liquor from a bootlegger in the Hob and Darius, a Peacekeeper under Cray, eats a bowl of soup with Katniss before Katniss leaves on her Victory Tour (Collins, *Catching Fire* 11).

The Peacekeepers can get away with not enforcing the official policy because the central government largely ignores District 12 "as long as [the district's citizens] produce [their] coal quota" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 203). As long as the districts' citizens go along with the status quo by working in the coal mines and foregoing opportunities that allow them to leave the mines, President Snow leaves them to their poverty. Rather than caring for the needs of the districts' citizens, President Snow cares for the ways that those citizens help him

achieve his own needs. As long as Snow's own needs are met by District 12's coal production, Snow's government does not interfere in the district too deeply.

The Peacekeepers' apathy is shattered after Katniss wins the 74<sup>th</sup> Games and a new Head Peacekeeper, Romulus Thread, takes charge of District 12. Instead of allowing the citizens of District 12 to continue breaking the law in order to survive, Thread reasserts the government's laws forbidding the citizens to hunt in the woods and burns down the Hob. Rather than buying the poached game, Thread punishes those who would sell that game to him. The first time Katniss sees Thread, he is publically punishing Gale for breaking the law regarding hunting (Collins, *Catching Fire* 106).

Snow sends Thread to District 12 after Katniss wins the 74<sup>th</sup> Games because of the manner in which Katniss wins those Games. Instead of submitting to the Gamemakers' will, according to which only one Tribute can win each Games, Katniss asserts her own will and forces the Gamemakers to allow two Tributes to win the 74<sup>th</sup> Games. This "act of defiance," as Snow calls it, causes rebellious sentiments to begin circulating through several districts which, if allowed to grow, could "lead to revolution" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 21). Snow sends Thread to District 12 to quash those rebellious sentiments.

By reasserting Snow's laws, Thread reestablishes the government's control over the lives of District 12's citizens and ensures that they comply with the economic system which Snow endorses. Several of the aspects of life in District 12 that Thread forbids, hunting and the black market, provide methods

for District 12's citizens to improve their economic situation. When Katniss hunts in the woods, she provides for her family in a way which the government can not control. By forbidding District 12's citizens from improving their own economic situation, Snow's government ensures that it can control that portion of their lives.

The economic conditions in District 12 after Thread arrives make plain the goal which Snow has for District 12. Rather than helping the district's poor pull themselves out of poverty, Snow pushes them further into poverty by removing the few viable alternatives that the poor citizens have to the coal mines. The way that Snow's actions affect his citizens implies that he wants to keep them at the economic level that they currently occupy. Rather than focusing on the citizens' desire to not live in poverty, Snow focuses on his own desire to maintain the way that things are in the districts.

Snow's government supports this cycle of production with various institutions, such as the schools and coal mines in District 12. Rather than trusting the cycle to reproduce itself, Snow's government helps that cycle along by convincing the districts' citizens that the status quo is a normal and natural part of life in the districts. Once the districts' citizens accept the status quo as normal, they accept it as nothing more than another part of their lives. As a normal part of their lives, the districts' citizens would, ideally for Snow, function within that status quo without questioning it.

In order to accept the status quo as normal, the districts' citizens must know how to function within it. The citizens who participate in Snow's system must know what their role is and how to properly fulfill that role. In Snow's system, the citizens in District 12 must know how to mine coal. According to Althusser, the reproduction of labor power requires sufficiently skilled laborers to maintain a constant level of production. While the men in District 12 manually practice the skills that they have already learned in the mines, many children in District 12 learn about their District's chief industry in school. As Katniss says, "somehow it all comes back to coal at school... besides basic reading and math, most of our instruction is coal-related" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 41-2).

Chad William Timm argues that District 12's schools prescribe certain behaviors to District 12's children in his essay, "Class is in Session: Power and Privilege in Panem." According to Timm, schools in general reinforce the "dominant culture" in a given society (284) by teaching schoolchildren how to properly behave. Timm argues that in District 12's schools, the Capitol teaches District 12's children to accept the Capitol's power by suggesting that the Hunger Games are a natural part of life, by deliberately not teaching the children about other Districts, and by presenting a history of Panem which glorifies the Capitol (283-4). District 12's schools reinforce the dominant culture which, in Panem, is controlled by the government: "The ultimate purpose of schooling in District 12 is to learn how to labor in the mines" (284). Learning how to labor in the mines, of course, directly supports the government's attempts to reproduce the conditions

of production by ensuring that a steady stream of laborers will always be ready to work in District 12's coal mines.

The coal mines and the public schools are two examples of what Althusser calls "Ideological State Apparatuses," whose function is to reproduce the conditions of production in a given society. Older citizens' work in the coal mines and younger citizens' work in the public schools represent two ways in which the government presents its ideology to District 12's citizens. Men manually engage in the prescribed practices while working in the coal mines, while children learn to accept the prescribed practices by learning that those practices are normal and necessary within District 12. Both the coal mines and the public schools are material manifestations of the government's ideology, which seeks to reproduce the conditions of production in the Districts. They are material manifestations because, rather than being abstract beliefs, they are physical locations or observable actions. Participating in the mines and the schools supports the government's plan and teaches or conditions the participating citizens to continue that participation. Through these and other, similar institutions, Panem's government trains the citizens of District 12 to accept and implement the economic system which keeps President Snow's government in power.

Once District 12's citizens know their role in Snow's system, Snow's government makes sure that they stay in that role by punishing people who refuse to do what the government wants them to. Rather than reprimanding criminals quietly and away from the public, Snow's government treats

punishment as a public ceremony. In many instances throughout the series, the punishments in the outer districts are very public. Gale's punishment after the Peacekeepers catch him breaking the law is a public flogging which nearly kills him (Collins, *Catching Fire* 106-9). Shortly after Romulus Thread takes over as Head Peacekeeper in District 12, he sets up an "official whipping post, several stockades, and a gallows" in the District Square (Collins, *Catching Fire* 128). After the crowd in District 11 responds favorably to Peeta and Katniss on their Victory Tour, District 11's Peacekeepers publically shoot the man who incites the crowd's reaction (Collins, *Catching Fire* 62).

The various punishments handed out by Snow's government may be different from each other, but nearly all of them involve some degree of physical pain. Some punishments involve extended physical pain and leave physical reminders on the bodies of the punished. After Gale is flogged by Thread, his flesh is "mutilated" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 112) and movement "causes fresh blood to stain his bandages and an agonized sound to come from his mouth" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 114). Katniss takes a lash to the face during Gale's ordeal, and "the pain is blinding and instantaneous" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 106).

The tortures which Snow's government often use as punishments coincide with Foucault's account of the minor tortures which constitute the technology of power which emphasizes the sovereign. According to Foucault, such minor tortures have three characteristics: the torture must involve some measurable degree of physical pain (33), the production of pain must be regulated and

intentional (34), and the torture must be at least partially ritualistic (34). The first two of Foucault's characteristics can be easily identified in the floggings. The lash obviously causes the criminal to feel sharp physical pain which, at least in Gale's case, eventually causes the criminal to lose consciousness. The production of the pain which the criminal feels is, of course, regulated by the whip and the official wielding the whip. After Katniss intervenes in Gale's flogging, one of Thread's subordinate officers suggests to Thread that "the required number of lashes has been dispensed" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 108). After hearing this, Thread ends the flogging because his punishment has met "the standard protocol" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 108). Thread does not flog Gale out of exasperation; Thread flogs Gale because President Snow's laws require him to. Thread's standing on protocol suggests that a system of regulations for punishment does actually exist in District 12 even though that system has not been used in a long time. Haymitch acknowledges that a standard of minor tortures once did exist in District 12 when he admits to Katniss that there "used to be a lot of whippings before Cray" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 112). Such punishments are not arbitrary decisions made by individual, frustrated officials. They are sanctioned by the government in a very general way and must follow various guidelines that the government prescribes.

The third characteristic Foucault identifies requires a bit more explanation. Expanding on the idea of 'ritual', Foucault gives two sub-characteristics of minor tortures. First, Foucault says that the minor tortures must somehow mark the

condemned as condemned: it should “brand the victim with infamy” so that everyone will see that the citizen has been condemned as a criminal (34).

Second, Foucault says that the torture “must be spectacular... must be seen as [the law’s] triumph” (34). Foucault argues that in this technology of power, crimes are treated as affronts to the sovereign himself because the law is indivisible from the sovereign’s will (48). Punishing criminals publically provides a vivid, tangible reassertion of the sovereign’s power and emphasizes that similar offenses against the law will not be tolerated.

The ritualistic aspect of punishments meted out by President Snow’s regime appears in several ways. The “brand” which President Snow’s government leaves on its criminals literally marks the bodies of the government’s criminals. The victims of public floggings will have scars on their backs to remind everyone that they have broken President Snow’s laws. By flogging Gale, Thread literally brands him as a criminal. The punishments meted out by President Snow’s regime are also, as Foucault would say, spectacular. The floggings and shootings which President Snow uses to control the District’s citizens are intended to be witnessed by the citizens. When the Peacekeepers shoot the man in District 11, they drag him to the top of the steps in front of the Justice Building rather than taking him to a secluded area (Collins, *Catching Fire* 62). When Thread flogs Gale, he flogs him out in the district’s square, and many of District 12’s citizens have gathered to watch (Collins, *Catching Fire* 104). The



Hunger Games themselves are broadcast across all of Panem, and citizens are required to watch the Tributes suffer and die in each Games.

Perhaps the most visible and regular public form of punishment is the Hunger Games themselves. Nearly every aspect of the Games is displayed for the public. Attendance at the reappings is “mandatory unless you are on death’s door,” and the reaping is “a good opportunity for the government to keep tabs on population” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 16). While the Games are happening, the government shows updates on the Games during the lunch hour. The recap of the Games is also “required viewing for all of Panem” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 362). The point, of course, is that the government wants the people to watch the punishments as they are carried out.

These television broadcasts are one of the most comprehensive ways in which Snow shows his power over the districts’ citizens. The district’s adults do not attend schools and citizens physically unable to work in the coal mines struggle along by working at odd jobs such as laundering other peoples’ clothes or selling things on the black market. Rather than ignoring these demographics or assuming that past conditioning will keep them in line, Snow’s government reaches out to them via its national television broadcast. In many ways, Snow’s television broadcast is a more general and pervasive tool than schools or industries sponsored by the government. Snow’s government requires each citizen to watch the reaping, live updates of the Games, and the recap of the Games after they’re over each year, so every citizen is exposed to the State’s

national television broadcast at some point regardless of age, location, or economic status (Collins, *Hunger Games* 362).

This mandate ensures that the Games fulfill their political function each year. As a violent spectacle, the Games are meant to be seen by each person rather than heard about from someone else. In the Games, Snow's power is repeatedly displayed on the bodies of the Tributes. Rather than allowing the district's citizens to look the other way when confronted with Snow's power over them, his government's order to engage in the Games as an observer forces each citizen to watch as the government imposes its will on them. Whether or not the Games directly affect the citizens is irrelevant. Older citizens who have no personal interest in the reaping are not allowed to ignore the event because "attendance at the reaping is mandatory unless [the citizen is] on death's door" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 16).

Aside from forcing the districts' citizens to watch the Games, President Snow's government uses its television broadcast to influence the peoples' perception of District 13. According to Snow's government, District 13 represents the extreme consequences of defying the government's rules. Before it was destroyed, District 13's chief industry was nuclear weapons development (Collins, *Mockingjay* 17). At some point, however, the citizens of District 13 rebelled against the government and reached a kind of stand-off in which neither the government nor District 13 was willing to attack the other. As part of a peace treaty, the government and District 13 agreed to leave each other alone. In order

to prevent citizens of the other districts from rallying around District 13, President Snow's government uses its national television broadcast to present District 13 as a kind of wasteland in which nothing grows and no one lives. Rather than pretending that District 13 never existed, the government repeatedly airs news stories and commercials which reference it. In those stories, the government depicts District 13 as nothing more than "ruins... that still smolder from the toxic bombs" which the government used to destroy the surface of the district (Collins, *Hunger Games* 83).

With its depictions of both the Games and District 13, Snow's government uses technology to influence its citizens. Rather than allowing people to form their own opinions about either the Games or District 13, President Snow's government uses its television broadcast to carefully construct the way that the districts' citizens think about both. By requiring citizens to watch the Games on television, President Snow's government constantly reminds those citizens that his government exercises nearly total control over their lives. Without television or some similar technology to dispense that reminder, the citizens would not see the effects of Snow's power displayed on the Tributes. The citizens may read about the deaths in a newspaper or hear about them from other citizens, but the power of the spectacle would be gone. Television allows President Snow's government to spread this bloody manifestation of its control over large areas of space in a very cheap and effective way. Similarly, reading about District 13 in a newspaper may not have the same effect on citizens as seeing the smoldering

ruins for themselves. As with the Games, televising biased images of District 13 allows President Snow's government to construct its citizens' opinions in ways that may not be possible without television.

President Snow uses the exposure which his television broadcast grants him to justify manipulating the Tributes' images for each Games. Although only one Tribute is supposed to survive each year's Games, the Capitol spends a considerable amount of time and energy preparing the Tributes for those Games. Each year, the government provides a Training Facility in which the Tributes can learn basic survival and weapons skills as they prepare for the arena. In addition to this training, the government assigns each Tribute a stylist and prep team which are charged with dressing the Tributes in an appealing way. The amount of attention which Snow's government gives each Tribute suggests that each Tribute has a purpose other than to simply die in a bloody television program. If the point were simply to make the districts' citizens watch their children die, Snow could feed the Tributes to wild animals in front of the television cameras. Instead, Snow takes the time to create images which he tries to use to influence Panem's citizens.

Although Snow's attempts to influence the districts' citizens seem to work on most of the population, some citizens reject them and the message that they deliver. Peeta, for example, rejects Snow's worldview even though he has lived in District 12 and encountered Snow's methods his entire life. In Peeta's case, Snow's real-world apparatuses fail to produce the kind of obedience Snow

wants. In order to subdue Peeta, Snow resorts to the science fiction technology of tracker jacker venom to tamper with his memories (Collins, *Mockingjay* 180). After the Capitol tampers with Peeta's memories, Peeta "can't tell what's real anymore, and what's made up" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 270). Because Peeta initially does not recognize that something is wrong with his memories, he accepts the Capitol's version of things and attacks Katniss during their first reunion (Collins, *Mockingjay* 177). At this point, Peeta has two distinct sets of memories: memories that he has created for himself and memories that the Capitol has created for him. In order to help himself distinguish between the two, Peeta plays a game called "Real or not Real", in which he poses a statement to someone he trusts and then that person tells Peeta whether that statement is real or not real, and true or not true (Collins, *Mockingjay* 272).

The status of Peeta's hijacked mind, which causes his need for this little game, parallels the way in which ideology in general works on the citizens in a society. For Althusser, ideology is "the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (158). After the Capitol tampers with Peeta's memories, Peeta's mind is 'dominated' by the system of ideas which the Capitol wants him to follow. This new "system of... ideas and representations" which the Capitol has imposed on Peeta causes him to do things he would not have done while he operated under his old "system of... ideas and representation". Under the system of ideas he developed before the Hunger Games, Peeta loves Katniss and is willing to sacrifice himself to save

her from danger. Under the system of ideas that the government has imposed on him after the Quarter Quell, Peeta believes that Katniss is “life-threatening” to the point that “he might try to kill her” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 181).

When the Capitol tampers with Peeta’s memories, it shapes his new “system of ... ideas and representations” to accommodate its own interests. Because of the tracker jacker venom which taints some of his memories, Peeta is no longer the source of his own “system of... ideas and representations”. In effect, Peeta can no longer make all of his own decisions. Instead, the decisions he makes regarding Katniss are at least partially determined by the “system of... ideas and representations” which President Snow imposes on him. Rather than being an autonomous citizen, the hijacked Peeta is an extension of the State.

In our world, of course, doctors do not often literally inject citizens with venom which turns them into fanatical killing machines. More often, a society’s citizens seem to know how to function within that society because they have lived in it for so long. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser argues that citizens seem to know how to live in their society because they have been trained or conditioned to do so. The “system of... ideas and representations” which citizens construct for themselves is actually imposed on them by the government. While this imposition is not as direct as Peeta’s hijacking, citizens who are subjected to this imposition end up in a similar position.

Along with convincing the districts' citizens to accept their place in the cycle of production as normal, Snow's government tries to convince them to accept it as natural. Snow's government tries to accomplish this by shifting the blame for the negative consequences of the system away from the government and its interference in the districts. Several times throughout the series, the government's representatives suggest that chance is dominant force surrounding the Hunger Games themselves. Before announcing the Tributes for the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Effie Trinket proclaims "And may the odds be ever in your favor" to all of District 12 (Collins, *Hunger Games* 19). At the end of Katniss' interview with Cesar before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Cesar wishes Katniss the "best of luck" in the arena (Collins, *Hunger Games* 129), and after Peeta tells Panem about his love for Katniss, Cesar remarks that Peeta being sent to the arena with Katniss was "a piece of bad luck" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 133).

The citizens of the Districts have noticed the government's idea of chance, as well. When they're alone in the woods, Katniss and Gale mock the phrase by repeating it in an accent which reminds them of the accents of people who live in the Capitol (Collins, *Hunger Games* 8). When Effie announces Peeta as District 12's male Tribute for the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss sullenly thinks to herself that "the odds are not in [her] favor today" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 25).

The idea that the hardships suffered by citizens of District 12 are due to chance, an idea which the government actively encourages, is a trick to divert blame away from the government. One of the most visible manifestations of the

government's oppression is the Hunger Games themselves. The citizens of the District, of course, don't approve of the Games. By treating chance as an operative force, the government shifts part of the blame away from itself and onto an abstract concept which no one can rebel against. When Effie announces Peeta as District 12's male Tribute for the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss does not explicitly blame the government for her misfortunes. Instead, she explicitly blames an abstraction which she cannot affect or resist: "the odds are not in my favor today" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 25).

This little trick by the government reinforces the government's grip on the districts by fostering a feeling of powerlessness among the district's citizens. As mentioned earlier, diverting some of the blame for the conditions in the Districts away from the government absolves the government of some responsibility in the eyes of citizens who buy into that diversion.

Snow's government augments its rhetoric by indirectly contributing to disasters which it can attribute to chance. The districts suffer from few natural disasters or wild animal attacks and those that do happen, such as the blizzard in *Catching Fire*, tend to have neutral rather than strictly negative consequences. Instead, the disasters which are a part of life in District 12 are usually the result of the government's influence. As mentioned earlier, most of the men in District 12 must work in the coal mines because they have few other legal ways to support their families. Mining coal may not be inherently negative, but the explosions that sometimes rip through the mines are. And because such



explosions probably occur naturally, the government can blame chance for the deaths of the miners who die in the explosions. The point is not that the government causes the explosions which kill so many of District 12's men, but that the government forces District 12's citizens into a situation in which such explosions frequently occur. Then, when an explosion happens and thousands of citizens die, Snow's government can reiterate that bad luck causes the hardships which District 12's citizens must suffer.

Such explosions adversely affect life for many citizens in District 12. Many of the men who die in the explosions leave behind families which must struggle even harder now that their primary source of income is gone. Katniss' own family went through such an ordeal when her father died in a mining explosion years before the series takes place (Collins, *Hunger Games* 26). After Katniss' father died, her mother became "locked in some dark world of sadness" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 27). While her mother was mourning, Katniss shouldered the responsibility of providing for her small family. When Katniss confronts her mother with the reality of losing another member of her family when Katniss is chosen as a Tribute, Katniss' mother says that she "couldn't help" what happened to her when her husband died (Collins, *Hunger Games* 35). The "dark world of sadness" which Katniss' mother fell into after her husband died may not have been directly caused by the government, but the conditions which the government imposed on citizens of District 12 prepared the way for those events.

Katniss herself explicitly acknowledges the effect that all of this governmental influence has when combined with the poor economic conditions which the government enforces in District 12. While discussing the district's academic curriculum, Katniss confesses that she knows “that there must be more than they’re telling us... but I don’t spend much time thinking about it... whatever the truth is, I don’t see how it will help me get food on the table” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 42). This kind of reaction, of course, is what the government wants. Even though Katniss recognizes that the story she’s being told probably isn’t true, she’s too busy dealing with the economic and social situation which the government has constructed to challenge that story.

As long as Katniss accepts the worldview which Snow’s government constructs for her, she loses her ability to base her actions on her own decisions. Instead of developing her own perspective on her world, Katniss accepts a worldview which Snow has severely restricted and almost entirely constructed for her. By accepting the government’s story even though she suspects that the story is not true, Katniss allows the government to control that aspect of the way that she views her world.

The worldview which Snow’s government presents to Katniss, of course, supports the system which the government is trying to maintain. The system in which Katniss operates is set up so that the work performed by the districts’ citizens supplies the Capitol’s citizens with their material goods. In that system, the districts’ citizens have no other function than to keep each district’s industry

running. As long as the districts' citizens fulfill that function, Snow's government needs to do nothing more than maintain the status quo. According to Katniss, District 12 is "largely ignored by the Capitol as long as [they] produce their coal quotas" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 203). Because the worldview which Snow's government presents to Katniss requires each district citizen to be nothing more or less than a cog in the industrial machine, accepting that worldview implicitly accepts the idea that each of the district's citizens has no other purpose or value than as such a cog.

A citizen who has no other purpose or value than as a cog in the industrial machine lacks such attributes as the ability to define him- or herself. Even if that citizen does somehow develop that ability, then the government which assigns such value to that citizen will probably not recognize the definition developed by that citizen because that definition does not adhere to the government's plans.

Eventually Katniss escapes Snow's reach and finds shelter in District 13, where she encounters a whole new government with different goals. Instead of trying to maintain the economic system which regulates Panem, President Coin is trying to overthrow that system and depose President Snow. Although President Coin has a different agenda than President Snow, their governments have similar effects on their citizens.

President Coin's government has its own methods of presenting its ideology to its citizens. The government in District 13 holds its citizens accountable to a strict schedule. That schedule typically includes commands

such as “*Command Center*” and “*Education Room*” and other such locations where the citizens engage in activities which are sponsored by the government. Each citizen receives a schedule that is individual to that person and each person’s schedule changes every day, but the government still expects citizens to follow that schedule closely. Citizens of District 13 are also expected to be very frugal, regardless of their social or political rank. As Katniss says, “waste [in District 13] is practically a criminal activity” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 18). When Katniss’ prep team takes extra food in the cafeteria, they are confined, beaten, and starved as punishment for not observing District 13’s rules.

President Coin’s regime in District 13 is an example of a system which trains its citizens to behave in certain ways. Rather than punishing unruly citizens in ceremonies designed to humiliate or even kill its criminals, President Coin’s regime seeks to teach its criminals how to behave according to the government’s laws. Unlike President Snow’s regime, District 13 does not receive support from any outside agencies and therefore must entirely support itself. Because President Coin’s government must support itself, it needs each individual citizen to contribute to the State’s efforts, and the way it recruits its “soldiers” is by training them to conform to the government’s ideology. Just as District 12’s citizens learned how to live in their own district, so District 13’s citizens learn how to live in District 13.

One way in which President Coin’s government trains its citizens is by controlling the ways in which they spend their time during the day. Citizens living

in District 13 have almost no free time. When they wake up each day, an apparatus in the wall of each living facility prints a schedule on the inside of each citizen's forearm. Citizens are expected to follow that schedule closely (Collins, *Mockingjay* 17). Rather than simply dictating when citizens will begin and end their work shifts, the schedules which the government assigns to people prescribe where and how each citizen is to spend each minute of the day. Citizens must wake up at the prescribed time, eat at the prescribed time, bathe at the prescribed time, and even reflect on the day's events at the prescribed time (Collins, *Mockingjay* 18-9).

The result of this careful prescription of citizens' time is a "clockwork precision" in which each citizen must participate (Collins, *Mockingjay* 19). This "clockwork precision" implies several things. First, the schedules which the citizens follow ensure that each citizen is in a precise location at a precise time. If a government official wants to locate a specific citizen at any time, that official need only consult that citizen's schedule to determine that citizen's location. The printed schedules also seem to function as some sort of bar code which can identify and distinguish between individual citizens. When Katniss and the other citizens of District 13 retreat to the District's bomb shelters, Katniss must "wave [her] schedule in front of a scanner so that [she's] accounted for" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 139-40). In each case, the schedules which are printed on citizens' arms can be used to keep track of the location and relative activities of District 13's citizens.

Second, the schedules ensure that all citizens will spend all of their time engaged in a prescribed activity. From waking up in the morning to turning out the lights at night, the citizens engage in activities which the government wants them to engage in.

Third, the activities in which the citizens engage allow President Coin's government to monitor each citizen's ability to perform that particular activity. When Katniss wants to travel to the Capitol and fight, Boggs dismisses her plea on the grounds that she hasn't completed any of the training sessions which have been on her schedule. Because she hasn't completed the government's prescribed training, the government doesn't trust her to perform well in combat (Collins, *Mockingjay* 233-4). Whether or not Katniss actually has the ability to perform well in combat is irrelevant. She has not satisfied the government's officials' demands, and therefore is not fit for active duty.

Fourth, the schedules train the citizens to act as elements of a cohesive unit rather than simply a collection of individuals. By allowing the schedules to dictate when, where, and how to spend each minute in the day, citizens implicitly accept the control which the government asserts over their lives. Rather than making their own choices, citizens allow the government to make many of their decisions for them. The military training which many citizens receive emphasizes this control which the government exercises over its citizens' lives. When Katniss tries to convince Boggs to let her fight in the Capitol, Boggs refuses and argues that Katniss "[doesn't] know the first thing about executing orders" (Collins,

*Mockingjay* 234). In order to be accepted into District 13's military and be sent to fight in the Capitol, Katniss must pass a simulation specifically designed to test her ability to follow orders (Collins, *Mockingjay* 249). Only after Katniss demonstrates her ability to follow orders do President Coin and Boggs allow her to deploy.

The above characteristics combine to form a system in which President Coin's government trains its citizens to help her achieve her own goals. The strict schedules which the government imposes on the citizens accustom them to following the government's orders, and the trial which concludes Katniss' military training allows the State to account for her development on the path which the State has set out for her. If Katniss accepts the prescribed regimen and completes her training, then she becomes a fully functioning member of the State's machine.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault calls such citizens "docile" (136). According to Foucault, docile citizens are citizens which "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" in order to benefit the State (136). In District 13, citizens are subjected to the government's revolutionary ideology by participating in the schedules which the government prescribes. Exercising complete control over the citizens' time and activities allows President Coin's government to gain a degree of control over the citizens' lives and transform the citizens from autonomous individuals into extensions of the State. The activities in which the citizens engage train them in skills which the government has

specifically prescribed because citizens who wield those skills will benefit the State in one way or another. Before participating in President Coin's program, refugees from other Districts have different skill sets which have benefitted them in the past. After participating in President Coin's program, those refugees have been trained to benefit President Coin's revolutionary ideology and have been given skills specifically prescribed to advance President Coin's purpose.

Although both Snow and Con monitor their citizens and punish those who do not live according to their respective government's rules, the penal devices at work in the two governments are different. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault argues that governments have gradually shifted their focus of punishment and oppression from the criminal's body to his "soul" (16). Foucault distinguishes between penal institutions which are meant to display the power of the sovereign and penal institutions which are meant to correct and train a society's criminals (130). Foucault labels each of these penal methods a "technology of power" (130). The former focuses on the criminal's body while punishing the criminal in the same way that Snow punishes criminals, and the latter focuses on the criminal's mind while training the criminal in the same way that Coin trains the minds of her citizens. The goal of each method, however, is to make citizens conform to the wills of those who punish or discipline them.

Both Snow and Snow try to use Katniss, willingly or unwillingly, as part of their government media in support of their own agendas. In the early part of the series, Snow uses Katniss as a symbol of his power through her participation in



the Hunger Games and, in the final book of the series, President Coin wants Katniss as spokesperson in propaganda features to highlight opposition to Snow's government's brutality and promote the rebel cause.

Katniss's role as in support of Snow's governmental organization and power begins at the outset of her participation in the games. Because President Snow requires the districts' citizens to watch various stages of the Games on television, each citizen in Panem will see each Tribute several times in the days leading up to the Games as well as during the Games themselves. This exposure gives President Snow and his government the opportunity to fashion each Tribute into an image which Snow can then display before the entire country. In many case, these images reinforce the roles which the districts are supposed to play in President Snow's economic plan. During the Opening Ceremonies for each Games, the Tributes are literally paraded around the Capitol's streets dressed in a costume which "suggests [their] district's principal industry" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 66). Because Katniss is from District 12, she assumes that she and Peeta "will be in some kind of coal miner's getup" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 66).

After the Opening Ceremonies, the Tributes must participate in a public interview which the government televises across Panem. This interview provides President Snow's government with another opportunity to flaunt the Tributes in front of the districts. As with the reaping and the recap of the Games, the government requires citizens to watch the interviews. Instead of choosing the

clothes that she will wear, Katniss' stylist is charged with creating an image of Katniss to show to Panem. Katniss may approve of the image which her stylist creates for her, but the image is still created for her rather than by her. During each of the pre-Games events, Katniss must present an image of herself which someone else has constructed for her. Rather than letting the district's citizens see her for what she is, Katniss must let the district's citizens see her as what someone else imagines or wants her to be.

The way in which the Tributes present themselves in these public appearances is important. Before each public appearance, the Tributes meet with personal stylists who shape the bodies and minds of the Tributes in a certain way. Sometimes the image which the stylist creates is designed to benefit the Tribute, but more often the image is designed to benefit President Snow's government.

In effect, the government uses the parade during the Opening Ceremonies as an excuse to turn Katniss' body into a commodity. Instead of allowing her to present herself as she sees fit, the government forces her to present herself in a way which reinforces the connection between her district's citizens and its industry. According to tradition, the Tributes become an embodiment of their home district's industry during the parade. By having one of District 12's citizens embody the abstract idea of coal and mining coal, the government reinforces the idea that District 12's citizens and coal mining belong together. By requiring the districts' citizens to watch the Opening Ceremonies on television, the

government ensures that each citizen will see that reinforcing image. In other words, Katniss stops being a citizen of Panem and starts being a symbol which the government uses to reinforce their system. In the parade, Snow's government treats Katniss as a tool which reinforces its ideology rather than as a human being. By assigning Katniss a stylist to craft a specific image for her, the government invests an amount of time and energy into turning her into a unit of propaganda. The government then receives the benefits of its investment during the parade, when it displays its piece of propaganda before all of Panem.

Unfortunately for Katniss, President Snow's government isn't the only government which tries to manipulate her image. Similar to President Snow, President Coin's interest in Katniss is in her potential worth as a piece of propaganda rather than as a citizen of the districts. After rescuing Katniss from the arena in the Quarter Quell, President Coin's government in District 13 attempts to mold Katniss' image to fit their own agenda. Rather than simply allowing Katniss to be alive in her district, President Coin uses Katniss as the face of the rebellion against President Snow. As Plutarch tells Katniss, "[President Coin] had to save [Katniss] because [she's] the mockingjay... while [she lives], the revolution lives" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 386). The important idea, of course, is that President Coin "had to" do what she did. Given Katniss' role in the previous year's Games, Katniss was in a position to fill a role in President Coin's plan which very few other citizens were capable of filling. President Coin realized that potential and removed Katniss from the arena because of it.

The government's attempts to turn Katniss into an object it can use to support own agenda continue in a different way when she is in the arena. Instead of altering her appearance in the arena, the Gamemakers force Katniss to alter her actions. When Katniss first enters the arena in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, she tries to separate herself from the rest of the Tributes by running into the woods (Collins, *Hunger Games* 141). Because Katniss spent a lot of time in the woods surrounding District 12, she has developed survival skills specially suited for conditions like the arena's forest. The Gamemakers, however, do not allow Katniss to pass too much time alone in the woods. During the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, the Gamemakers create a wall of fire (Collins, *Hunger Games* 172) and declare a "feast" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 274) which force Katniss to interact with the other Tributes. During the Quarter Quell, the Gamemakers design the entire arena so that the Tributes will constantly be forced to move and interact (Collins, *Catching Fire* 326).

The methods that the Capitol uses to try to keep that situation in place often render the citizens of the districts as something other than human. Through the Games, the government suggests that the citizens of the districts are inherently powerless to resist the government's agenda. Through the events leading up to the Games, the government turns the Tributes into symbols which support the government's agenda. By requiring each citizen to watch the Games and the events leading up to the Games on television, the government ensures that each citizen continually confronts the government's power and ideological

reinforcement so that the citizens eventually believe that the status quo is both right and natural.

Once Katniss accepts the worth that Snow and Coin have assigned to her, she begins to realize that she has a small degree of power in each relationship. Katniss may not be able to completely resist Snow's or Coin's efforts to use her, but she is sometimes able to affect both the methods that each President uses and the outcome of those methods. As such, Katniss is able to manage a degree of dissent from within the political systems that operate on her. Within that degree of dissent, Katniss finds ways to struggle against the Presidents' oppression by accepting the oppressive methods and recasting them to fit a different agenda. Even though she accepts the Presidents' oppressive methods, she constantly struggles to assert her individuality by forcing her oppressors to meet her own demands as conditions for accepting their methods. All of Katniss' struggles are tempered by her desire for non-violent dissent and a compassion for her enemies which she derives from an awareness of the different cultures that operate within her world.

Katniss does not develop this struggle for her identity alone. Fittingly, Katniss receives a prompt from Peeta as she struggles with what she will do when she is in the arena. Before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Peeta tells Katniss that he wants to "die as [himself]" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 141). Peeta knows that Snow uses the Games to erase the Tributes' personal identity and reinforce the control which Snow holds over the districts. He recognizes that Snow wants to "turn

[Peeta] into some kind of monster” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 141) and then use that image to justify his own authority. Instead of worrying about how to stay alive in the arena, Peeta worries about how to maintain his identity as a citizen of the districts and a baker’s son rather than “some kind of monster,” which Snow wants him to be.

## Chapter 4: Katniss' Decisions

Through the early parts of the *Hunger Games* series, Katniss operates within systems run by presidents which try to use her to achieve their own goals. Those presidents, Snow and Coin, use various methods to try to control Katniss' decisions so that she passively accepts the roles that they want her to play. While Katniss operates within those systems, Snow and Coin try to use her as a symbol which promotes their own agenda rather than Katniss'. As long as Katniss remains within a system which tries to control her decisions in that way, the actions that she makes are often determined by the government which controls that system rather than by Katniss herself. In order to remove herself from the systems which promote the presidents' agendas rather than her own, Katniss must learn to base her actions on her own decisions rather than anyone else's.

Although Katniss begins her life within one oppressive regime and then moves into another, she does learn how to base her actions on her own decisions. As a means to that end, Katniss first learns how to disagree with an authority which tries to control her decisions. She learns how to disagree with oppressive authority while under Snow's regime and then develops that ability more thoroughly while under Coin's. As she develops that ability, Katniss receives help from many sources, including a platform from Snow himself and emotional support from her friends and other citizens living in the districts. When she fully realizes her ability to act on her own decisions, Katniss uses that ability

to make a decision which alters the political direction of her country and prevents a future which she desperately wants to avoid.

The influence which Snow's and Coin's governments try to exert on Katniss throughout the series repeatedly challenges Katniss' ability to base her actions on her own decisions. Instead of allowing Katniss to develop in ways that she determines for herself, Snow and Coin repeatedly try to force Katniss to develop in ways in which they want her to develop. This tension between what Katniss wants to do and what other people want her to do comes out very clearly in the preparation she undergoes for her interview before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games. While trying to prepare Katniss for that interview, Haymitch tries to dictate Katniss' personality to her. Trying to act on Haymitch's advice, Katniss tries to be intentionally "cocky," "witty," "funny," "sexy," and "mysterious" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 118). After the failed prep session, Katniss remarks that she is "no one at all" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 118).

The problem is that although Katniss seems to have a hand in making her own decision by determining which role to play during her interview, her decision is being made on Snow's terms. Only in Snow's system and only as a means to Snow's own ends must Katniss choose which role to play. At this point, Katniss is still operating under Snow's control even though she seems to be making her own decision. No matter which decision Katniss makes regarding which role to play, she will be basing that choice on Snow's demand that she choose a role in the first place. Any choice that she makes will indirectly support Snow's system



because she will also implicitly accept Snow's terms, which directly support Snow's system.

From the beginning of the series, Katniss spends significant amounts of time and energy trying to assert herself on other peoples' terms. Until this point, most of her attempts to act on her own decisions have backfired because those decisions often indirectly support Snow's system rather than undermine it. This is because Snow often forces Katniss to choose between options which support Snow's agenda in different ways. Before being chosen as a Tribute for the Games, Katniss purposely engaged in illegal activities like hunting in the woods and trading in District 12's black market. Although that choice dissents against Snow's policies, it also gives Snow reason to send Thread to District 12 to restore Snow's control over it. When Prim is chosen during the reaping, Katniss chooses to take her place in the Games. Although that choice undermines the feeling of helplessness Snow tries to foster in District 12, that choice still supports Snow's system because it continues the tradition of sending Tributes to the Games. Katniss' decision to treat Peeta as a love interest during the 74<sup>th</sup> Games generates interest in the Games for the audience in the Capitol; in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta receive some food as a gift after sharing a romantic moment (302).

The first decision Katniss makes which has lasting effects and undermines Snow's power is her decision to threaten suicide at the end of the 74<sup>th</sup> Games (Collins, *Hunger Games* 344). Most of the decisions she has made up to this

point have happened on Snow's terms and thus have been indirectly controlled by him. Katniss' decision to threaten suicide, however, is made on terms that Snow has not set for her. Snow's terms, according to Katniss, are that a single Tribute win each Games and that each Games has a single victor (Collins, *Hunger Games* 344). By threatening to commit suicide with Peeta, Katniss rejects Snow's terms, in which the 74<sup>th</sup> Games will have a single victor, and imposes her own terms, in which the 74<sup>th</sup> Games will have either two victors or zero victors. This action, replacing Snow's terms with her own, is what ultimately incites the rebellion.

Although Katniss' early struggles do not help her move outside of the systems she struggles against, those struggles are not completely useless. Those early attempts to assert herself and her own decisions cause citizens living in the districts to begin to question the validity of her struggle. Although her early attempts to act on her own decisions are not particularly fruitful, they prepare the way for Katniss' mature decisions by helping her stay alive until her ability to make her own decisions matures. In order for Katniss to successfully overcome Snow, she needs the districts to rebel against him. As long as Katniss functions as an individual citizen, Snow can easily eliminate her and the threat she represents. If Katniss functions as a symbol of dissent, however, Snow cannot kill her because doing so "would only add fuel to the flames" of the dissent growing in the districts (Collins, *Catching Fire* 23).

Ironically, Snow himself provides the means for Katniss to incite the districts' rebellion. One of Snow's most important methods of disseminating his propaganda is his television broadcast. As part of his program surrounding the Games, Snow requires each citizen to watch the Games and the events leading up to the Games. By requiring each citizen to watch the Games and the events leading up to the Games, Snow displays many of Katniss' minor dissents in front of the entire country. In the same way that Snow's government forces the districts' citizens to participate in the Games by watching them on television, it forces the districts' citizens to participate in Katniss' dissent by watching that dissent on television. While watching the Games, the districts' citizens learn that Snow is a powerful and vengeful president and that any attempt to revolt against him will lead to bloodshed. While watching Katniss' dissent, the districts' citizens learn that dissent against Snow's government is not only possible, but that dissent may actually be the course of action which the citizens of the districts prefer. Each time Panem's citizens see one of Katniss' acts of dissent, they respond favorably. After Katniss volunteers for Prim at the reaping before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, the citizens of District 12 engage in "the boldest form of dissent they can manage" by refusing to applaud Katniss' new role as Tribute (Collins, *Hunger Games* 24). When Katniss covers Prim's body in flowers, the citizens of District 11 break tradition by sending Katniss a gift while she's in the arena.

Katniss continues to use Snow's own television broadcast when she arrives in District 13. Just as Snow's government did in the Capitol, Coin's

government in District 13 uses the national television broadcast to disseminate its propaganda. The role which Coin wants Katniss to play centers on using her as a symbol to support Coin's rebellion against Snow's government. Rather than having Katniss physically fight for the cause, Coin wants her to rally the rebels through "a series of 'propaganda spots'" which District 13 then broadcasts across Panem (Collins, *Mockingjay* 44). In the first of these "propops", Katniss and some of the other rebels visit a warzone in District 8. During the visit, a group of hovercraft from the Capitol drop bombs on the hospital Katniss and the rebels are visiting. After highlighting the damage the attack has caused and the techniques that the Capitol uses against the districts, Katniss gestures to the fires behind her and declares to the Capitol that "if we burn, you burn with us" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 100).

Predictably, the Capitol televises the attack on the hospital as a piece of propaganda which displays Snow's power and the rebels' weakness. Katniss, on the other hand, uses the exact same footage as a piece of propaganda condemning Snow's government as cruel and violent. Instead of highlighting Snow's power, Katniss highlights his cruel methods and twists his message into a message which condemns him. The smoldering remains of the hospital no longer represent Snow's power, but instead represent his cruelty.

By attaching a different message to the same footage, Katniss turns Snow's own propaganda back against him. As she did when she threatened suicide during the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss rejects Snow's terms and asserts her

own instead. Rather than accepting Snow's interpretation of the bombing, and allowing the audience to accept it as well, she asserts her own interpretation. Instead of allowing Snow to define the terms of the bombing, Katniss turns Snow's message upside down and uses it against him. For Snow, the bombing is a harbinger of what will happen if the rebels do not agree to the the cease-fire. For Katniss, the bombing is an example of Snow's brutality and a harbinger of what will happen if the rebels agree to the cease-fire. As she does at the end of the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss challenges Snow's terms by offering an interpretation which runs contrary to his.

Because of the publicity which Snow's television broadcast provides, Katniss is able to communicate with nearly all of Panem's citizens. All of the struggles Katniss goes through and the minor dissents she stages have an effect on the people around her. As Katniss struggles against Snow's oppression, the people around her notice her dissent and begin to follow her lead, sometimes mimicking her actions surrounding the 74<sup>th</sup> Games. During the Victory Tour, Katniss personally witnesses a popular act of dissent in District 11. When she and Peeta are speaking in front of the district, they diverge from the "scripted reply" to the mayor's speech and speak directly to District 11's citizens. Peeta offers one months' worth of his winnings each year and Katniss explicitly acknowledges the help that she received from both of District 11's Tributes during the 74<sup>th</sup> Games (Collins, *Catching Fire* 59-61). Both Peeta's and Katniss' responses dissent from Snow's plan to keep the districts separate by offering to

construct a bond between Districts 11 and 12. Peeta offers a material bond and Katniss offers an emotional bond. In response to Peeta's and Katniss' dissent, the citizens of District 11 accept Katniss' offer at emotional unity by saluting Katniss in the same way which the citizens of District 12 saluted Katniss after she volunteered for Prim and Katniss saluted Rue in the arena.

Panem's citizens follow Katniss' dissent in part because she has helped them become aware of the political situation. The districts' citizens are probably well aware of their situation as a nation whose government is oppressing and abusing them, but Katniss lets them know that they can do something about that oppression. Katniss' minor dissents, which culminate in her threat of suicide at the end of the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, suggest to the districts' citizens that rebellion is possible under Snow's regime. Snow's grip on the districts is solid, but it is not unbreakable. Dissent, although very dangerous, is possible.

Katniss' influence reaches so far that even citizens living in the Capitol show some brief signs of dissent from Snow's oppression. While these dissenting citizens are not high-ranking government officials, they suggest that Katniss' influence is not limited to the rebels. Even citizens who are directly connected to the Capitol recognize Snow's oppression and question his methods. Peeta's revelation during the interview before that Quarter Quell that Katniss is pregnant "sends accusations of injustice and barbarism and cruelty flying out in every direction" from the member of the audience in the Capitol (Collins, *Catching Fire* 256). Even though Peeta's revelation is not true, it makes

the audience aware of the situation Snow's oppression has put Katniss and Peeta and the rest of the Tributes in. Instead of seeing Katniss as a Tribute who is filling a natural role in a traditional event, the audience sees Katniss as a pregnant mother who will lose an unborn child because of an oppressive system which selects its victims seemingly without regard for their personal circumstances. After Peeta suggests that Katniss is pregnant, even the Capitol's citizens "can't ignore, at least for a moment, how horrific the whole thing is" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 256).

Once Katniss gains the attention of Panem's citizens, she gains some degree of power. She realizes that the things she does while on television affect the people watching her and that the image she projects has an inherent value. Instead of continuing to buy into Snow's system in which she is nothing more than a cog in an economic machine, Katniss begins to realize her potential value and use that value to help herself rather than allow others to use her to help themselves. Rather than passively playing a role which other people assign to her, Katniss begins to play roles she chooses for herself.

Immediately after being rescued from the arena after the Quarter Quell, Katniss must deal with another president who tries to dictate her role to her. President Coin's decision to rescue Katniss from the arena in the Quarter Quell is motivated more by her own needs than by Katniss'. Rather than simply liberating Katniss from Snow's control, Coin wants to use Katniss in a way that supports Coin's own agenda. As the leader of District 13, Coin wants the

districts' rebellion against Snow's government to succeed. Although several districts are currently rebelling against Snow's government, the rebel movement is not united by anything other than a common goal. What Coin wants from Katniss is to turn her into a symbol which Coin believes can unite the rebels. On the ride to District 13 after the Quarter Quell, one of Coin's lieutenants, Plutarch Heavensbee, tells Katniss that the rebels "had to save [her] because [she's] the mockingjay" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 386).

Because she has publically challenged Snow several times, Katniss' actions have come to symbolize the districts' dissent against him. Her "stunt" with the berries" in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games and her repeated use of the mockingjay symbol have both stuck in the citizens' minds. Snow himself acknowledges Katniss' potential role in the rebellion when he visits her before her Victory Tour. After telling Katniss about rebellious moods growing in the Districts, Snow declares that Katniss has "provided a spark that... may grow to an inferno that destroys Panem" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 23) and orders her to soothe the Districts' rebellious mood. Coin sees the same potential influence that Katniss has over the rebellion and tries to direct Katniss to fan the flames of the rebellion rather than stifle them. Both Snow and Coin want to use Katniss to achieve their own goals regarding the rebellion. Even though those goals are opposed to each other, Katniss' value to each President lies in the same area.

In order to make sure that Katniss can play her role properly, President Coin tries to treat Katniss in the same way that Snow treats the Games' Tributes.



Rather than allowing Katniss to develop her own image, Coin assigns “a whole team of people to make [Katniss] over, dress [her], write [her] speeches, orchestrate [her] appearances... all [Katniss has] to do is play [her] part” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 10-11).

The problem with Coin’s plan is that Katniss does not immediately want to play the role Coin wants to assign her. Katniss seemingly cannot see the point of being a figure-head in President Coin’s rebellion, and she continually wonders whether playing the role will actually cause anything good to happen. As she ruminates on the consequences of her interactions with Snow’s government, Katniss wonders whether there is “any point in doing anything at all” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 12). The people that she loves are either relatively safe in District 13 or dead, and the guilt of those deaths weighs heavily on her: thinking about “brilliant, enigmatic, lovely Cinna”, whom Katniss believes died because of her, is “too impossibly painful to dwell on” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 12). In this depressed state, Katniss wonders whether “any good [she does could] possibly outweigh the damage” she believes she has caused.

Unlike President Snow, who tries to force Panem’s citizens into certain roles, President Coin needs Katniss to play her role willingly because that’s the kind of system Coin runs. One major difference between President Snow’s government and President Coin’s government is the way in which citizens believe they interact with the government. Under Snow’s government, citizens follow the government’s agenda because they have been trained to and because

government officials will physically abuse them if they do not. Under Coin's government, citizens follow the government's agenda because they believe that the government's program supports their personal agenda. When Katniss asks Plutarch what kind of government will control Panem if the rebellion succeeds, Plutarch responds that the new government will be "a republic" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 83) in which the country's citizens will be able to "elect their own representatives to be their voice in a centralized government" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 84). Forcing Katniss to play the role that Coin wants her to play would have muted Katniss' voice, which is supposed to be the very thing which Coin's rebellion is meant to reinstate. Overtly forcing any citizen to do anything would have aligned Coin with Snow's political methods, which are precisely the methods which Coin supposedly wants to abolish.

Another reason that Coin needs Katniss to agree to be the symbol of the rebellion is that, simply, Katniss is a very poor actor. If Coin tries to force Katniss to play a role she does not want to play, Katniss will probably play that role in a very unconvincing way. Evidence of Katniss' poor acting skills is prevalent throughout the series. While preparing Katniss for her interview before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Haymitch tries to get Katniss to open up to an audience she does not want to open up to. When Haymitch reprimands Katniss for poorly playing the role he wants her to play, Katniss angrily responds that she is "not good at lying" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 117). For a few hours, which Katniss describes as "agonizing", she and Haymitch try to come up with a role Katniss can

convincingly play despite not wanting to play it. After that time, Haymitch gives up without finding such a role. When Katniss decides to play Coin's role, her first duty is to recite a scripted slogan in front of a camera in a studio. Immediately after Katniss performs that duty, Plutarch and the program's other leaders quickly realize that Katniss can not perform under such artificial conditions. When she is forced to be something other than what she thinks she is, Katniss' performances are less than inspiring and, as Haymitch says of Katniss' performance in the studio, "that... is how a revolution dies" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 72).

Katniss eventually agrees to play Coin's role because of her compassion for others. After listening to some of Snow's propaganda in which Peeta calls for a cease-fire, Katniss reflects on what would happen if the rebels allow Snow to retain his power. When she realizes that Snow is still trying to force her and the rest of the districts to comply with his own agenda, Katniss realizes that the economic and social conditions in the districts will remain the same and people close to her will continue to suffer and die if Snow retains his power. As she considers this conclusion, a series of horrible memories runs through Katniss' mind and she recalls "the spear piercing Rue's side in the arena, Gale hanging senseless from the whipping post, the corpse-littered wasteland of [her] home" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 30). These memories, combined with the pain and anger that accompany these memories, cause Katniss to resolve to do what she can to keep Snow from retaining his power.

Although Katniss eventually agrees to follow Coin's plan, she tries to follow that plan on her own terms rather than on Coin's. Instead of simply going with the program and allowing Coin to use her as she sees fit, Katniss tries to retain a degree of control over the situation and reassert herself in the face of the role which she knows Coin wants her to play. She realizes that she has some kind of potential value and she works to use that potential value to help herself. Before Katniss actually agrees to play the role Coin wants her to play, she insists that Coin accept a few conditions. Those conditions include letting Gale and her hunt in the woods outside of District 13 and granting Peeta and the rest of the Tributes immunity after the Snow's government falls. Katniss' requests are significant because they are things which Katniss wants for herself. Katniss requires Coin to pay a price for the ability to use Katniss as a symbol, and the price which Katniss requires Coin to pay allows Katniss to retain some sense of her self while she is being used by Coin. As Katniss tells Gale, they "can be [themselves] again" if they are able to be "above-ground" and "out in the woods" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 36).

Katniss' camaraderie with Gale, Peeta, and the other Tributes is part of a larger network of affection which expedites Katniss' emerging ability to base her actions on her own decisions. Despite languishing for years under Snow's control, Katniss eventually develops her ability to base her actions on her own decisions because she does not always struggle alone against her would-be oppressors. Throughout the series, other characters continually encourage her

in her efforts to remove herself from Snow's system and avoid becoming a passive part of Coin's system. Although she is seemingly overwhelmed by Snow in the time leading up to the Quarter Quell, the help that she receives from others allows her some breathing room in which to continue her struggle.

One of Katniss' greatest allies in her personal struggles is Cinna. While most Tributes' stylists prioritize their district's industry over their sense of dignity, Cinna finds a way to highlight District 12's industry while allowing Katniss to keep her dignity as a human being. As Katniss prepares for the costume Cinna has created for the 74<sup>th</sup> Opening Ceremonies, she recalls the outfits of past Tributes from District 12 and remembers that one year the Tributes were "stark naked and covered in black powder to represent coal dust" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 66). Cinna, on the other hand, not only allows Katniss to remain clothed, but also leaves her face "relatively clear of makeup" because Cinna "[wants] the audience to recognize [Katniss] when [she's] in the arena" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 67). Instead of hiding Katniss' identity under layers of color and the shame of being naked, Cinna tries to emphasize that identity while still following the government's orders. After Haymitch gives up on Katniss' interviewing skills, Cinna suggests that Katniss simply "be [herself]" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 121) and offers some advice on how to do that. Instead of allowing Katniss to metaphorically put on a mask which would hide her identity during the interview, Cinna suggests that displaying her real personality would be both beneficial and possible under such conditions.

Cinna's relationship with Katniss is important because Katniss and Cinna come from two different cultures. Because Cinna is a stylist working in the Capitol, Katniss expects Cinna to be "flamboyant, someone older trying desperately to look young" (Collins, *Hunger Games* 64). But, of course, Cinna is none of those things. The first time Katniss and Cinna meet, Katniss is surprised at how "normal" he seems to be. Rather than submitting himself to the "grotesque" alterations most of the Capitol's stylists willingly undergo, Cinna has only lightly lined his eyes with a color which emphasizes the natural color in his eyes (Collins, *Hunger Games* 63). Katniss even "can't help thinking how attractive" Cinna's style looks when compared with the fashions popular in the Capitol. In Cinna, Katniss finds a member of the Capitol's culture which does not fit with her prejudices against that culture. Instead of hating Cinna for what he represents, Katniss develops affection for him because of the things that he does for her.

Katniss extends her network of affection farther than her immediate family and friends because she interacts with people other than her family and friends. She has been to the Capitol and interacted with people from other districts and in doing so has interacted with different cultures and different beliefs. She knows that not everyone who lives in the Capitol acts in the same way that Snow does. In the time that Katniss spends with her prep team, they develop a kind of affection for her in the same way that Katniss develops affection for Cinna. When the prep team visits Katniss' house before the Victory Tour, "they all kiss

Katniss” after their characteristically frenetic greetings (Collins, *Catching Fire* 36). When her prep team finishes remaking her for the Quarter Quell, each of them cries as they leave the room and Venia tells Katniss that the prep team has considered it a “privilege” to work with Katniss in the way that they have (Collins, *Catching Fire* 247). When Katniss’ mother shows the prep team how to pattern Katniss’ hair in a certain way, the members of the team “respond with enthusiasm and then watch, thoroughly engrossed” and are “readily respectful and nice” to Katniss’ mother. Instead of dismissing Katniss’ mother as a citizen of the districts and therefore of a lower class, the prep team accommodates her and willingly learns what she has to offer. Although the prep team may buy into the Capitol’s excesses and destroy Katniss’ image of herself in order to replace it with someone else’s image of her, they have a certain humanity which some other Capitol citizens seem to lack.

While Katniss’ prep team develops some kind of affection for Katniss, she also develops some kind of affection for them. Rather than seeing her prep team as the enemy simply because they work for Snow’s government, Katniss can see that her prep team has very different goals and methods from Snow. While her prep team may implicitly buy into Snow’s plans to turn Katniss into a symbol and exploit the citizens of the districts, Katniss realizes that they are the unfortunate products of the districts’ oppression rather than its cause. When Flavius asks her about her hair before the Victory Tour, Katniss is “grateful that [she] can show [she hasn’t] totally taken them for granted” (Collins, *Catching Fire*

36). When Gale asks Katniss why she cares about her prep team, Katniss says that “they’re not evil or cruel... they’re not even smart” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 53).

Katniss applies a similar perspective to the workers in the Nut. While Gale sees only an opportunity to get revenge for what the Capitol did to District 12, Katniss sees a collection of people who may be similar to her prep team. Instead of cruel masterminds bent on oppressing the districts, the people Gale is willing to kill simply because they work for Snow’s government may be “not evil or cruel... not even smart”, but simply put into a bad situation by Snow’s government. According to Beetee, “the majority of the workers [in the Nut] are citizens from [District] Two”, not from the Capitol (Collins, *Mockingjay* 204). Katniss points out to Gale that he doesn’t know who they workers are or why they are working there: “they may have been coerced... they may be held against their will” and, in fact, “some are [District 13’s] own spies” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 205). The perspective which Katniss’ prep team has given her regarding different characters operating within Snow’s government gives her the ability to see something in the Nut other than an opportunity for revenge. Instead of seeing the upside of scoring a major victory for the rebellion, Katniss sees the downside of killing a lot of potentially innocent people simply because they are in the wrong place at the wrong time.

On a larger scale, Katniss’ interactions with her prep team grant her a perspective on the way ideology can work on people. After realizing that the members of her prep team are the products of the districts’ oppression rather



than its cause, Katniss does not blame her prep team for the oppressive things that they do. After Katniss watches their appreciation for her mother's methods of doing her hair, she realizes that the members of her prep team simply doing what they have been trained to do. She realizes that she does not know "who [she] would be or what [she] would talk about if [she'd] been raised in the Capitol" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 38). After her prep team remakes her before her meeting with Coin in the Capitol, they sit "hunched and defeated" on a bath tub (Collins, *Mockingjay* 367). Rather than rejoicing in the Capitol's defeat and her prep team's misery, Katniss realizes that she is "not the only one whose world has been stripped away" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 367).

Once Katniss develops her ability to base her actions on her own decisions, she must decide what kind of actions she wants to take. As the potential leader of a rebellion, Katniss must project the image which she wants the rest of the rebels to emulate. Katniss' life has been filled with violence, so choosing to continue those violent ways may seem like the natural choice and sometimes that is the choice she makes. When Coin asks the remaining Tributes whether to have a final Games using the children of officials in Snow's government, Katniss gives her consent (Collins, *Mockingjay* 370). When Coin assigns Katniss to kill Snow, Katniss kills Coin instead (Collins, *Mockingjay* 372).

Although Katniss does sometimes perpetuate the violence of Snow's and Coin's methods, those instances are far outnumbered by the times when Katniss tries to stop herself or other from being violent. One thing which all of Katniss'

acts of dissent have in common is that none of them are outwardly violent. In fact, Katniss actually recoils from the idea that her dissent may cause harm to others. When Coin asks her to play the role of mockingjay, Katniss initially recoils from the idea because she believes that every time she “makes a move, it results in suffering and loss” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 12). Even when presented with the ability to directly aid the rebel cause, Katniss hesitates because she does not want to cause unnecessary harm against the rebel citizens.

Katniss’ preference for non-violence applies to more than just her dissent against Snow’s government. At several points in the series, Katniss expresses displeasure over what she believes is unwarranted violence. When Peeta is chosen as her counterpart in the reaping, she expresses displeasure not because of Peeta’s physical talents, but because of the kindness that he showed to her when her family was starving. Her concern is not for the physical challenges he presents, but for the emotional challenges he presents if she needs to kill him. Katniss’ displeasure over her fellow Tribute stems from kindness that Peeta showed to Katniss when her family was starving (Collins, *Hunger Games* 31). Peeta’s kindness at least interferes with Katniss’ instinct for self-preservation, and she doesn’t know whether she can kill this person whom she does not believe deserves to be killed.

Katniss’ preference for non-violent action clearly clashes with Gale’s preference for violent action. When Gale presents his plan for the rebels to create an avalanche on the mountain and kill as many of the workers inside the

Nut as they can, Katniss disagrees with his plan because she “can’t condemn someone to the death he’s suggesting” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 205). Even though the people in the Nut are working for the Capitol, Katniss realizes that killing all of them would result in many unnecessary casualties. After Gale’s plan is approved and carried out, Katniss watches in horror as the Nut collapses in on itself, turning into “a tomb” for the workers trapped inside (Collins, *Mockingjay* 207). Rather than rejoice in District 13’s victory, Katniss’ thoughts go to the dying workers and she imagines “the hell inside the mountain” as it collapses (Collins, *Mockingjay* 207).

Katniss’ non-violent rebellion also separates her from both Snow and Coin. While both leaders are clearly willing to use violent methods to advance their own agenda, Katniss clearly is not. When Snow meets with Katniss in her home in District 12, Katniss thinks to herself that “all [she] was doing was trying to keep Peeta and [herself] alive... any act of rebellion was purely coincidental” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 18). In other words, all she was trying to do was prevent unnecessary violence against people whom she thought did not deserve to die. While Snow and Coin consider people who are threats to their authority to be their enemies, Katniss believes that the person who “starves and tortures and kills us in the arena” is the enemy (Collins, *Catching Fire* 378). Instead of identifying potential political threats as the most serious enemy, Katniss identifies oppression and violence as the most serious enemy. She recognizes the cycle of violence which results from Snow’s and Coin’s violent methods.

Speaking to a worker who crawls out of the demolished Nut, she asks for a peaceful resolution to the incident. When the dying worker asks Katniss for a reason to not shoot her, Katniss responds that she can not give him a legitimate reason other than a plea to break the circle of violence. She says that “it just goes around and around” and the government which is responsible for the violence in the first place “always” benefits (Collins, *Mockingjay* 215).

This is why Katniss does not agree with Gale’s violent methods and, in at least this instance, she is right. Snow’s act of bombing District 8 leads Gale to suggest a similar violent strike against the Nut which leads to the very violence and deaths that Katniss so fervently disapproves. A chilling example of the violent methods employed by both Snow and Coin is the attack on the children who surround Snow’s mansion during the final siege. Prim, of course, dies in the attack. Katniss is very close to the attack when it happens, and she recognizes Gale’s tactics and even his actual bomb designs. When Katniss asks Gale whether it was his tactics and his bombs which killed her sister, Gale can only say “I don’t know” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 367). The violent methods which Snow uses have come come through both Coin and Gale and possibly have killed Katniss’ sister.

These violent methods are the reason Katniss kills Coin in the end. She recognizes the similarity between Coin’s and Snow’s violent governments and decides against trading one oppressive President for another. During the surviving Tributes’ discussion on whether to continue the Games after the rebels

defeat Snow, Katniss recognizes the results of the rebellion. As the formal leader of the rebellion, Coin stands next in line as president of Panem. The future of Panem which Coin suggests immediately after defeating Snow, however, is a future in which Snow's most violent spectacle, the Hunger Games, continues. This institutionalized violence is the very thing which Katniss had hoped to avoid by deposing Snow. Thinking of the violent similarities between Snow's and Coin's governments, Katniss realizes that "nothing has changed," and that "nothing will ever change now" if Coin seizes power (Collins, *Mockingjay* 370). Katniss' decision to kill Coin is her attempt to end the violent methods Panem's presidents use to oppress their citizens and to ensure that such violence does not happen again in the near future.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

While travelling to the Capitol before the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss reminisces about some of the hardships she faced in District 12. Thinking of the hunger that she helped her family overcome, Katniss remembers digging katniss, an edible plant for which she was named, out of a pond near her home. In her mind, Katniss hears her father tell her that “as long as you can find yourself, you’ll never starve” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 52).

This anecdote resonates throughout the series. Panem, the country in which Katniss lives, is governed by presidents who try to influence the decisions their citizens make by dictating certain social and political conditions to them. By influencing their citizens in this way, Presidents Coriolanus Snow and Alma Coin try to stifle their citizens’ ability to base their actions on their own decisions by minimizing the number of decisions that the citizens can make and by controlling the options that the citizens can choose from as they make those decisions. In order to avoid basing her actions on someone else’s decisions, Katniss must continually drive to “find herself” within the presidents’ barrage of propaganda and assert the things that she wants to assert rather than the things that the presidents want her to assert.

As Katniss struggles to assert herself, she receives help from others. Peeta Mellark, Cinna, and her prep team help provide her with the alternative system that she needs to reject Snow's and Coin's systems, while Panem's rebelling citizens provide her with the time that she needs to fully change the

status quo in ways that she believes are right. Without all of that help, Katniss may have lost the struggle against two presidents who try to use her to achieve their personal goals rather than her own.

The personal development Katniss undergoes in Collins' *The Hunger Games* series parallels the development other protagonists undergo in many contemporary young adult novels. In my Review of the Literature, I argued that scholars studying contemporary young adult fiction have identified many novels which feature protagonists who interact with governments which try to manipulate them. Those governments often try to manipulate their citizens by dictating certain social and political conditions to them through laws, education curricula, and other institutions sponsored by the government. In order to effect some kind of change, protagonists in these stories must move outside of the systems supported by their respective governments by gaining access to some combination of history, memory, and culture.

Following a similar path to the one described by scholars working with contemporary young adult fiction, Katniss achieves the change that she thinks is necessary. Although she successfully changes the system in ways that she wants, Katniss' political end is ambiguous. After killing Coin and hopefully ending the cycle of violence which dominates Panem, she does not implement a new form of government. The surviving citizens eventually elect District 8's Commander Paylor as president and elect Plutarch "secretary of communications", but Plutarch cannot guarantee that Panem will not erupt in

violence again in the future. As Plutarch tells Katniss, Panem is now “in that sweet period where everyone agrees that [their] recent horrors should never be repeated... but collective thinking is usually short-lived” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 379). Although Plutarch explicitly supports a republican political system earlier in the series (Collins, *Mockingjay* 83) and we have no reason to believe that has changed his mind, he admits that such a system may not last even if he does successfully implement it.

This uncertainty is certainly troubling. The constant threat of corruption in even the most seemingly incorruptible authority figures demands that citizens living under such authority remain vigilant about the policies implemented and actions taken by their leaders. Those citizens must constantly monitor the social and political conditions which their leaders dictate to them and carefully consider whose agendas those conditions will benefit. If the conditions their leaders dictate advance the leaders' agenda at their citizens' expense, those citizens should consider rejecting conditions that they deem too dangerous and asserting their own conditions in their place.

As such, I urge scholars and other authors to continue paying as much attention as possible to the interactions between the governed and their governors in young adult fiction. Because novels like *The Giver*, *Feed*, and *The Hunger Games* are designed for young readers, they are excellent places to introduce the dangers of oppression and abuse of power to young minds. As those readers become more comfortable and proficient with identifying



oppression in the fiction that they read, they may begin seeing social and political conditions in their own lives which parallel the events that they read about. Such a practice can only lead to greater political awareness in our own world, which may translate into wider and increasingly practical discussions about the way things work in our own societies.

Regarding *The Hunger Games* itself, there is still much work to be done surrounding the methods which both presidents use to try to influence their citizens. I have tried to point out the various ways in which Snow and Coin dictate certain conditions, but I fear I have only scratched the surface on many of the issues I deal with. Scholars will undoubtedly find much more to say about the specific role technology plays in each president's system as well as the merits of replacing a stable tyranny with an unstable republic. These two suggestions seem particularly relevant, given current political conditions both in America and abroad. Recent events such as the NSA's phone records scandal, which came to light in July 2013, and the Arab Spring, which began in 2010, suggest that technology can be used as a tool by our governments and that unstable republics do not always last. Maybe the image of Katniss being forced to retreat to the margins of District 12 after clearing the way for peaceful government in Panem is accurate as well as troubling.

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