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Catching the Fire Within: A Kristevan Exploration of Womanhood in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

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Abstract

The Hunger Games Trilogy (2008-2010) is a dystopian, Young Adult trilogy with many female characters, making it appropriate for studying womanhood. To inspect womanhood, the psychoanalytic framework of Kristeva, which contains concepts such as the symbolic, the chora, abjection, cathartic sublimation, and revolt, is employed. The argument of this study is twofold. The first fold argues that the selected female characters except the main character (Prim, Katniss's mother, Madge, Rue, Effie Trinket, Octavia, Venia, and president Coin) deploy either the semiotic or the chora unevenly, making them unbalanced. The second fold argues that Katniss achieves an interplay of the symbolic and the chora by continuously personifying symbolic roles and then revolting against them. The revolt is possible by directing the power of her abjection towards the symbolic. This abjection is channeled by the touch of the chora. Katniss's revolts make the symbolic orders abject her, but the power of her abjected status makes her destroy these symbolic structures. In the end, the abject inside of her is accepted by being captured in art and metaphors.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation, Indigenous Knowledge, Oral Poetry and Performance Translation, Sociolinguistic Function and Tonal Semantics, Yoruba Literature

1. Introduction

1.1. General Overview

The Hunger Games Trilogy is famously a Young Adult, dystopian work of literature, highly embedded in popular culture. There are various bedrocks against which to analyze this trilogy, and given the cast of female characters, a female-centric outlook could prove to be rewarding. To do that, we need first to look into where the trilogy came from and the contextual environment surrounding it to understand how it justifies the need for a gendered analysis.

To begin with, *The Hunger Games* Trilogy is fixed in the scene of Young Adult Fiction (YA Fiction). Young Adult Fiction and science fiction have been described by Mary DuMont as "literature of ideas", a fertile ground for

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growing notions and scenarios otherwise unthought-of especially in regards to gender and its attributions (1993, 11). Such genres are usually ripe for gender representations that are expressive and unbounded. Linda Forrest notes, "fantasy is one area of young adult literature that offers a rich source of gender-fair fiction. It is popular with both male and female adolescents, and has traditionally been a genre in which women escape the standard cultural roles" (1993, 38).

Another reason for the high potential of *The Hunger Games* for gender-related studies is its dystopian nature. Dystopia as one of the forms of fantasy or science fiction genre, is even more prone to having multiple manifestations of gender and consequently womanhood, owing to the extremities it necessitates. Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry note that "no one feels more under surveillance than the average teenager" (2003, 9). This extant sense of unfairness is only heightened by extreme circumstances around our teenage protagonist in Young Adult dystopian fiction and brings about different expressions of her gender. Apart from the extremities that lead to different expressions, Christina Kimsey remarks "the dystopian genre in general may allow for more variation in typical character roles regardless of gender, since the societies included in most of the books are much different than reality" (2011, 13).

To understand how gender, overall, is presented in the trilogy, we need to go over the events of the story briefly. The first book introduces our main characters. Katniss is a hunter and the breadwinner of the family, while Peeta is the sensitive, quiet son of the baker. Katniss volunteers for the hunger games in lieu of her sister, prim. Katniss and Peeta head to the Capitol. Effie Trinket oversees the operation, while the prep team prepare Katniss for the television. Katniss and Peeta eventually go to the arena, where Katniss exhibits high survival instincts. There, Katniss meets Rue, an agile girl, who she tries to take care of until Rue falls to her death. Katniss shows rebellion towards the Capitol as early as book one, when she threatens to commit suicide instead of killing Peeta. The rebellious trend continues in book two, and the president as a way of combating the social unrest, sends Katniss and Peeta back to the arena, where Katniss is saved by District 13, and Peeta is taken by the Capitol. District 13, with President Coin as their leader, poses Katniss as their rebel icon, but Katniss fights against their manufactured ideas. Peeta is saved, and at the end Katniss decides to kill the president Coin and imprison the president of the Capitol to end the cycle of oppression.

High protective tendencies, survival skills, and practical abilities like hunting give Katniss a more masculine slant, whereas Peeta shows qualities such as being artistic and empathetic, which grant him traits traditionally thought as feminine. Julia Koncurat draws upon this distinction; she comments, "despite being female, Katniss Everdeen is a largely masculine character" (2024, 53). However, Peeta is the opposite, and his "motherly behavior can be seen during the games when he takes care of Katniss" (2024, 57). The inversion of femininity and masculinity, calls to mind the gender fluidity common in many YA fictions, which is mostly a product of third wave feminism.

The third-wave feminism that took off in the 1990s produced more radical representations of gender roles in literature. According to Mulungsenla Jamir, "women were no longer represented through the socially constructed gender norms but as having an identity of their own" (2022, 16). *The Hunger Games* Trilogy (2008-2010)[i], which

is a combination of young adult fiction and dystopian fiction, and the most popular at that, was written in the wake of this third wave. The Trilogy chiefly executes features of third-wave feminism with the challenging of traditional gender norms. As Allice Pillet points out, "this can be linked to its relation with the third-wave feminism, insisting on the plurality of women's experience and identity: race, class, but also the fluidity of gender roles, and the importance of the media" (2021, 20).

While the fluidity of gender roles inspires positive views of femininity in the series, critics have found problems concerning this particular depiction of gender. For one, they argue that the gender fluidity is only an invention of the apocalyptic nature of the world and not a free expression of gender. Jordan Kraemer and Shira Lander are among such critics. They argue that "Collins's disruption of the category "gender" is an essential feature of its particular form of "dystopian apocalypticism" rather than a reflection of its uniquely postmodern American social context" (2015, 166). This is why despite the fluidity, a devaluation of and a negative view of traditional femininity is still present. This phenomenon is precisely what happens at the start of *The Hunger Games* Trilogy. China Rae Newman notes that femininity in Panem is either evil or weak (2016, 50).

Some critics, moreover, have also argued that the world of Panem creates an illusion of post-feminism. Andrea Ruthevan comments:

> Arguably, the consumerist, individualistic, competitive and apparently apolitical Capitol of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* Trilogy calls attention to the ways in which postfeminist rhetoric surrounding women's alleged liberation through capitalist consumption, competitive individualism and heteronormative desirability, can be read as a contemporary dystopia. (2017, 49)

As such, according to the critics above, the novel portrays gender fluidity as an illusion and depicts individualism as a deceptive form of post-feminism. If that is so, what does that say about womanhood in the trilogy? Should we dismiss the disruption of the gender hierarchy altogether? Is a negative view of femininity and a fake individualism at play? This article takes the more optimistic approach to explain how *The Hunger Games* Trilogy is like a journey, from the facade of post-feminism to a more accurate representation of womanhood, from the devaluation of traditional femininity to its acceptance, and from the segregation of masculinity and femininity to their mashing.

1.2. Literature Review

We aim to showcase this journey through the psychoanalytic theory of Kristeva. Much has been said about womanhood in *The Hunger Games*, but few have attempted to peel back the layers of femininity by the assistance of psychoanalysis. To name some, "Ambiguity, Ambivalence and Extravagance in *The Hunger Games*", by Kelly Oliver, is a helpful article that does employ some of Kristeva's concepts, namely revolt, and delves into the psyche of Katniss and how it emboldens her. However, it does not connect her to other characters and other concepts of Kristeva. Furthermore, "Katniss's Corrosive Queerness in *the Hunger Games* Trilogy", by Ellen Rigsby and Lisa

Manter, also deals with some of Kristeva's concepts, such as the abject and the symbolic, to illustrate the rebirth of Katniss, but its focus is more so on the last events of the trilogy, while this study depicts the journey and its intricate psychological upheavals. This study takes a broad overview of each concept in each character and the interplay of them together.

Moreover, "Postfeminist Re-essentialism in *The Hunger Games* and The Selection Trilogies", an article by Heather Brown, the book chapter "Gender and Apocalypticism in Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games Trilogy" by Kraemer and Lander, "Gender Performance in Dystopian Literature", a thesis by Newman, and "The Submissive, the Angel, and the Mad Woman in District 12", an article by Kirstie Linstrom, all argue for a negative depiction of femininity in the series. This study deviates from all these studies, by proving the gradual gender fluidity and the deciding power of femininity in turning the events of the story.

The deception of gender fluidity and post-feminism in the trilogy keeps the characters subservient. However, Kristeva's concepts, due to their transformative nature, enable the characters to break out of that encasement. Kristeva's map of the psyche connects the inner workings of the mind to the outward expectations from society which include gender as well. Gender is internalized as much as it is externalized, and Kristeva shows us the intricacies of the psyche concerning it. The symbolic, the semiotic chora, abjection, cathartic sublimation, and revolt are Kristeva's concepts that will be analyzed in this study in regard to their relation to womanhood.

1.3. Theoretical Background

Kristeva's theory starts with linguistics and what she calls "the signifying process" (1984, 21). It describes "the ways in which bodily drives and energy are expressed, literally discharged through our use of language" (McAfee 2004, 14). This expression of drives makes language dynamic, and this dynamism is not limited to language only but also relates to the subject itself since "linguistic changes constitute changes in the status of the subject" (Kristeva 1984, 15). This is how linguistics gets related to subjectivity. There are two modes of signifying process: Symbolic and semiotic. In the use of language, humans either opt to make their meaning as clear as possible, which is the symbolic mode of language, or they let "some feeling, desire, or unconscious drive" guide their expression of language, which is the semiotic mode of language (McAfee 2004, 16). For the most part, the symbolic is what gives the subject structure, meaning, and identity, and the semiotic is what infuses the subject with energy and sensitivity.

Going from infancy to adulthood means dispensing of babbling language of impulses (the semiotic language) and gaining clarity with speech (symbolic language). This movement also means inhibiting the impulses and whims of childhood. According to Kristeva, what sparks this process is the presence of the father (Kristeva 1977, 31). In infancy, the child is in close vicinity to the mother, hence why the semiotic is closer to the maternal. However, the father serves as a restraining figure for these impulses and sets the process of language acquisition in motion (Kristeva 1977, 31). Thus, the symbolic is heavily tied to the father and the masculine.

The semiotic mode of language creates a space that is called the semiotic chora (McAfee 2004, 19). In Kristeva's words, "the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a

chora (Kristeva 1984, 25). In other words, the chora is a space, wholly inarticulate, comprised of drives and physical sensations. She goes on to call this space "a non-expressive totality" (Kristeva 1984, 25), meaning that it escapes language and articulation. Moreover, the chora is "full of movement" and continuously regulated (Kristeva 1984, 25). This means that it doesn't have a passive existence; there is an emphasis on its generative quality, as Noëlle McAfee notes, "Kristeva wants to see the chora as capable of generating (not just receiving) energy – the energy which helps fuel the signifying process" (McAfee 2004, 20). It, therefore, has the ability to reform and transform, but it also has the ability to disrupt and destruct, because it is comprised of drives, and drives are "always already ambiguous, simultaneously assimilating and destructive" (Kristeva 1984, 27). When the child is in this space, surrounded by the drives, the maternal body is the only thing that connects it to the outer world. the chora is "not governed by law, but by a kind of organization for which Kristeva tells us that the maternal body is the model" (Sjoholm 2004, 16). On the other hand, the destructive side of the chora, the one that wants to tore meaning apart, is close to another one of Kristeva's concepts, which is abjection.

In the theory of development by Kristeva, as the subject gets more conscious of herself, one thing that helps her move to the symbolic is abjection, "the state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself" (McAfee 2004, 45). It means forcefully casting aside some attribute that was once a part of oneself. The first thing that gets abjected is the mother; the child needs to let go of the maternal to be able to set foot in the world of the symbolic (McAfee 2004, 47). However, what is abjected does not stay outside of oneself and does not entirely disappear from the consciousness (McAfee 2004, 45). It threatens to disrupt the orders of the symbolic at any time, by imposing itself forcefully on it (McAfee 2004, 46).

Abjection also happens on a societal level where society abjects the person or idea that is a threat to its symbolic order (McAfee 2004, 49). This study examines how abjection both on a psychological level and societal level happens in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy and leads the main character to revolt. Revolt in one of its meanings can mean revolution, which is one of the main themes of *The Hunger Games*. However, according to Kristeva, a psychological revolt is needed for a political one to be possible. In McAfee's words, "Kristeva has spent much of her life calling for a revolution – not so much a political one as a cultural and psychological one. Ultimately, Kristeva believes, such revolutions are the only ones that might have any lasting political effects" (2004, 112). Hence, a successful revolt against the symbolic order of the outside world should and will happen initially in the psyche: "Kristeva points to the fundamental necessity of psychological revolt – revolt against identity, homogenization, the spectacle, and the law" (McAfee 2004, 118). By psychological revolt, Kristeva means the revolt of semiotic chora against the symbolic space of the mind (McAfee 2004, 106).

Because in the state of the chora the child is completely connected to the mother and the drives, and the chora has the ability to generate, it is associated with that maternal space, and therefore, what is known to us as traditional femininity. However, as McAfee points out women are not essentially the chora, and men are not essentially the symbolic because, according to Kristeva, the subject is always in process (McAfee 2004, 90). This emphasis on the subject in process by Kristeva and McAfee reveals that it is troubling to attribute traditional feminine features

to all women. Kristeva's theory invites us to celebrate sexual differences and womanhood in all contexts of life and all shapes and forms. She states, "I have the deep conviction that every person has a very particular sexuality" (Kristeva 1984, 24). However, there have been traits that were traditionally thought of as more feminine, such as empathy and materiality. We can celebrate those traits while not attributing them to all women. This, according to Maria Margaroni, "will allow us to recapture elements of female experience that have been forgotten" (2005, 96). These traits were used to look down on women in history, so reclaiming them can be newly empowering.

1.4. Methodology

There is a vast array of different female characters in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy: Prim, Katniss's mother, Madge, Rue, Effie Trinket, Octavia, Venia, and president Coin. Depending on their upbringing and the society they inhabit, they manifest different parts of Kristeva's theory. Inhabitants of District 12 exhibit more of the chora by virtue of their more physical, primitive lifestyle, whereas the inhabitants of the Capitol and District 13 are different externalizations of the symbolic. If there is an excessive use of either, these characters stay in their respective cocoon of femininity and masculinity, and hence, fail in one way or another in truly actualizing themselves. The mashing up of masculine and feminine or the symbolic and semiotic doesn't truly come to reality in these characters. This study argues that an interplay of the semiotic and the symbolic is needed to make powerful revolts possible, and the main character of *The Hunger Games* Trilogy is the one who comes closest to it. In order to showcase the journey toward this interplay, this study's argument is divided into two folds. The first fold unravels the levels of the dominance of the symbolic and semiotic on the psyche of the female characters other than the protagonist. Each woman character in the Trilogy relies on the semiotic and symbolic to different degrees. Even though each person goes through the whole process and has each stage within their psyche, we can see how each woman represses the semiotic chora unevenly which manifests in them representing semiotic chora or the symbolic emblematically.

The second fold looks at the process it takes for the protagonist to master the symbolic and the semiotic, which involves her going through abjection, revolt, and cathartic sublimation. Kristeva describes abjection as anything that "disturbs identity, system, order" (1982, 4). She gives the example of anything that reminds us of death because death is a place where meaning ceases to be. In other words, "death is the major abjection for us as we cannot put it into language" (Carson 2020, 51). Katniss runs from this abjection of death by keeping her hold on the symbolic world stronger, which involves incorporating roles and identities such as the protector, the tribute, and so on. But each time she understands the defects of the symbolic world by the help of her connection to the chora. This allows her to break free of the symbolic, transgressions that are shown as instances of revolt throughout the story, culminating in killing President Coin (Collins 2010, 166). These acts of revolution establish her as a threat to society, which lead her to be shunned or abjected from society itself. In the end, it is the cathartic influence of art and images that lets her overcome the abject within and outside.

2. Representation of Symbolic and Semiotic Chora in the *Hunger Games* Trilogy

To focus on the representation of the chora and the symbolic in Prim, Katniss's mother, Madge, Rue, Effie Trinket, Octavia, Venia, and president Coin, we need to divide them, by their usage, into chora-centric and symbolic-centric categories. These female characters are heavily influenced by the region they are from, and since District 12, the Capitol, and District 13 are the most emphasized regions in the Trilogy, we take women representatives of each of these regions and analyze how they incorporate the chora or symbolic qualities. This helps us understand that 12 and the districts are chora-heavy, while Capitol and 13 are more symbolic. Then, we will enumerate the positive impacts of the chora. The first positive effect is how it can get implemented alongside the symbolic for the chora-centric characters, and the second effect is how, as a positive force, the chora impels Katniss towards care and therefore becoming the symbol of the rebellion or the mockingjay. The aim of doing such analysis is to redeem the chora, which is tightly bound to perceptions of femininity, and in doing so, prove the worth and strength of femininity in the Trilogy. However, it should be emphasized that neither the chora nor the symbolic alone are enough; too much reliance on either can lead to preposterous outcomes.

2.1. Tracing Kristevan Symbolic Order in the Capitol Women

Sara Beardsworth refers to culture's repressive role regarding nature or the semiotic. She explains what happens when the symbolic overpowers the semiotic: "Where culture, conceived of as upheld and organized by the prohibiting, paternal function, represses nature (the semiotic), nature becomes dead, brute nature or mute inner nature" (2005, 71). As such, total compliance with the symbolic law can take the form of senseless brutality and dead inner world. The representative female characters of the Capitol include Effie Trinket and two of the members of Katniss's prep team, Octavia and Venia, who all share a sense of Capitol shallowness, which is a testimony to their lack of soul or dead inner world. In Effie's case, it translates into her shallow pragmatism and internalized social norms. Hyper punctuality and managerial obsession point to the need to be always moving in a symbolic world, reaching surface-level goals without really stopping to think of the deeper implications. To illustrate, in one part of the series it is said that, "just then, Effie Trinket arrives in a pumpkin orange wig to remind everyone, 'We're on a schedule!'" (Collins 2009, 32).

This way of theatrical talking is common with the characters from the Capitol including Effie, and it points to their manipulation of language and appearance for their benefit. Vivienne Muller remarks how "in *The Hunger Games* texts, language and theatricality play a significant part in the process of eliding the real and of promoting the simulated" (2012, 55). Such is evident in Effie's most used phrase, "may the odds be ever in your favor!", which perpetuates the notion that hunger games are just games and entertainment, eluding the fact that children get slaughtered in these games. Tony McKenna comments on how the superficiality of the Capitol characters doesn't cover something deeper but is all that there is to them:

> The representatives of the Capitol, for instance, have an air of unreality, not simply because they are people who frequently appear donned in pantomime masks. More often than not, you

> experience the disquieting sensation that the masks – rather than disguise a given content, namely the face underneath – in fact cover nothing whatsoever. (2015, 156)

This is a confirmation of their lack of inner world or disconnect from the chora. McKenna continues by saying that such "externality provides, simultaneously, the absolute essence" (2015, 156). This lack of interiority is so poignant upon Katniss first meeting her prep team that she comments, "I know I should be embarrassed, but they're so unlike people that I'm no more self-conscious than if a trio of oddly colored birds were pecking around my feet" (Collins 2008, 49-50). The prep team has so egregiously altered their appearance and is so shallow in their behavior that Katniss, a citizen of District 12, hardly looks at them as human. Such is that "as Capitol citizens alter their bodies, they too are dehumanized" (Tan 2013, 66). The stylists and Effie gradually become sympathetic to Katniss which implies a touch of the chora, but that chora is not strong enough for them to revolt against the symbolic of the Capitol.

2.2. Tracing Kristevan Chora in the District 12 Women

Moving on to the female representatives of the districts, and especially District 12, it is obvious that "when it comes to the depiction of the districts, Collins takes the very opposite approach. She is at pains to show that here content pervades every aspect of the people's lives" (McKenna 2015, 156). This rendition of the districts flows into the female characters as well, among which are Katniss's mother, Prim, Madge, and Rue. If we call to mind the distinction between stabilizing and destabilizing chora, we understand that Katniss's mother's chora is more destabilizing, while characters such as Prim, Madge, and Rue fall under the category of stabilizing chora. Below are some reasons these characters are more chora-centric and their brands of the chora.

Firstly, Katniss's mother is the prime example of the overflow of the chora which equates "overflow of emotion, disruption, and even trauma" (Carson 2020, 36). After Katniss's father's death she, in Katniss's words, "was locked in some dark world of sadness, but at the time, all I knew was that I had lost not only a father, but a mother as well" (Collins 2008, 23). The implication is that Katniss's mother was as unreachable as her deceased father. The excess of semiotic chora equates to psychosis; in McAfee's words, "someone who is governed exclusively by semiotic charges is psychotic, thoroughly out of touch with meaning and identity" (2004, 105). Although it is not clear if Katniss's mother went through a period of complete psychosis, it is clear that she lost her grasp on reality, identity, and meaning, the chief elements of the symbolic order.

One such loss of identity and reality is demonstrated by her refusal to get a job in her time of grieving; a job being a big indication of having a secure role and identity. Instead, she would "sit propped up in a chair or, more often, huddled under the blankets on her bed, eyes fixed on some point in the distance" (Collins 2008, 23). This signals a complete swerve into the world of emotion and trauma; the semiotic void of the symbolic. Susan Tan describes the lack of identity in the adults in Katniss's life, of which her mother was the most severe case, as this: "The adults of Katniss's world might be termed prisoners of a "mute Symbolic"—stunted into silence by their society—without voice, recognition, and through them, true identity" (2013, 57-58).

Secondly, Prim, Madge, and Rue's stabilizing chora makes up positive traits such as constructiveness and generative-ness instead of disruption and destruction. Such is found in the more artistic bend of these characters. Prim has a knack for "playing the flute" (Collins 2009, 32), Rue sings (Collins 2008, 165), and Madge plays piano (Collins 2009, 64). These characters also exude feelings of innocence, which moreover connects them to the chora. The chora is innocent compared to the symbolic because it has not yet learned language to announce its desires; therefore, everything is from pure drive flow, with nothing filtered through language. Kristie Linstrom comments, "Prim, is portrayed as the sweet, innocent, little girl in town that most of the community loves" (2014, 6). And upon first meeting Rue, it is stated that "her vulnerability reminds Katniss of the innocence of her own sister, Prim" (Thomas 2019, 43). Hence, we understand that these characters are more chora-centric.

The chora-centric characters are also more in tune with their emotions and more nurturing and empathetic, which are maternal traits directly tied to the chora. To Plato, the chora was the space that birthed the sensible world. He, thus, gave the chora a maternal quality (Plato 1888, 177). Following Plato, Kristeva calls the chora "nourishing and maternal" (1984, 26). Examples of such traits in these chora-centric characters are as follows. Prim is unable to hunt and wants to heal the animals instead (Collins 2008, 29). Madge says goodbye to Katniss and gifts her the mockingjay pin and kisses her on the cheek (Collins 2008, 32), the effect of which is so potent that Katniss starts considering Madge as her friend from this time forward. Rue helps Katniss in evading her enemies (Collins 2008, 144), despite being rivals, and heals Katniss's stings when they form an alliance (Collins 2008, 156). And lastly, Katniss's mother heals people of 12 before her malady (Collins 2008, 9). What all these examples have in common is the sense of caring and nourishment that ties them strongly to the chora.

While many people will dismiss this type of the chora as weak femininity, the development of these characters in the Trilogy hints towards a more affirmative outlook, which will be elaborated later. But opposite to the warmth apparent in these characters, there is a rigid vapidity that will be discussed in the women of District 13.

2.3. Tracing Kristevan Symbolic Order in the District 13 Women

While Katniss becomes the face of the revolution and collaborates with 13 in doing so, she soon realizes that 13 is simply another form of the oppressive symbolic order that intends to once again use her as a pawn. While 13 is a far cry from the affectations and spectacle of the Capitol, it, nevertheless, upholds a rigid symbolic order of ruthless efficacy and rule-abiding. Sara Peterson observes, "while the citizens the Capitol live in luxury and complacency, the citizens of District 13 are taught from an early age that they have to fight to survive and are forced to live under controlled circumstances" (2011, 4-5). Strictness of rules is also observed by Christina Van Dyke: "In District 13, the citizens unthinkingly participate in the political system because of deeply ingrained habits formed through their continual obedience to the myriad rules and regulations imposed by President Coin" (2012, 261).

Such controlled way of living is another way of deadening the inner world that leads citizens of 13 to extreme frugality and restraint, which in turn leads to the dismissal of any kind of art and color, and hence, the chora. The

chora is the infused life and energy; the lack of it, therefore, entails a lack of personal autonomy, which is reminiscent of that of the Capitol, even though they each reached this end by different means. Van Dyke comments on this similarity saying, "both have the same outcome: a lack of genuine autonomy that leaves the citizens with only those outlets for self-expression that are approved and tightly controlled by their governments" (2012, 262).

The main woman representation of District 13 is President Coin who, just like her district, is colorless. We come to realize that she is very close to what McAfee, reading Kristeva, describes as loss of the chora in some people. McAfee maintains: "[The psyche] loses the life-enhancing force that the chora brings to subjectivity. The self becomes more of an automaton than a human being. The less touch people have with semiotic forces, the less able they are to thrive, change, and live" (2004, 106). The loss of the force of the chora is so glaring in President Coin that Katniss describes her eyes as: "They're very pale, as if almost all the color has been sucked out of them" (Collins 2010, 14). The lack of psychic energy is also very apparent in her behavior. Even during a crisis, "the President doesn't seem alarmed, only somewhat perplexed, by this turn in events" (Collins 2010, 111), and "Coin stays as impassive as ever, watching me, unimpressed" (Collins 2010, 36). The lack of revolt of the psyche, which leads to the inability to change, brings to mind when President Coin gave the idea to uphold another hunger games even after the dismantlement of the last system (Collins 2010, 283).

The rigidity, efficacy, and the inability to change also manifest in the child bombing scheme in *Mockingjay*. Knowing it is being televised, President Coin devised a plan to bomb Capitol children, send their own medics to the rescue, and bomb them as well, so that the citizens of Capitol, thinking Snow did it, would turn against him. This manipulation of media resembles the tactics of the Capitol itself, signaling a lack of change. Lindsey Averill observes how the lack of change leads Katniss to kill Coin because nothing has changed: "President Snow is no longer a threat to anyone, having been captured and relieved of power, but now President Coin presents the greatest danger to the children of Panem. So Katniss kills her" (2012, 175). She explains how this act of revolt stems from "ethics of care" which, as will be established, is ignited from her connection to the chora, something the symbolic-centered characters find trouble accessing, which causes their unfortunate fate. Katniss's revolt is possible by depending on the chora-centric characters. Katniss incorporates the chora in her thoughts and feelings, and thus, develops traits such as empathy and community that help her move people in the revolution. This brings us to the next section that would discuss the positive implementation of the chora.

2.4. Usage of the Chora alongside a Symbolic Role

As posited before, there are some critics who consider the series to be devaluing femininity. Newman, for instance, comments on how the characters are divided into having effective masculinity or ineffective femininity (2016, 54). She says, "this micro-categorization of the characters based on gender splits even the culture of the Capitol into a superior masculine and an inferior feminine" (2016, 55). She deduces that even the positive and well-meaning feminine characters such as Prim, Rue, and Katniss's mother are passive and dependent on more masculine characters (Newman 2016, 57). Linstrom has a similar outlook on the representation of femininity; she comments, "Prim is the innocent angel in the household; and their mother portrays a mad woman that cannot cope with reality"

(2014, 1-2). However, it would be erroneous to dismiss the femininity of these characters as passive, dependent, and ineffective. The chora is only ineffective when it is being used alone, but it shines when it is harnessed by the symbolic expressions in the real world. As Margaroni says, "the chora and the semiotic disposition articulating and articulated through it can only be experienced within the symbolic" (2005, 84). By channeling their chora through symbolic means, these characters achieve an active role in their society which renders them anything but ineffective.

Starting with Katniss's mother, critics have chimed in on their criticisms of her "melancholy and weak temperament" (Mitchell 2012, 130), her "daintiness" and "maternal defection" (DeaVault 2012, 192-193), and her inability to care for her daughters (Lem and Hassel 2012, 123). What these critics overlook is that although her malady did stop her temporarily from accessing the symbolic, she gradually comes to herself, starts healing people again, and develops a healer identity, which signifies her present grip on the symbolic (Astrom 2018, 4).

Similarly, Prim grows into a role and a stable identity by going from relative passivity to occupying a more active role. She actively gives Katniss advice and comfort, reversing their role of care-giver and care-receiver. As such, "instead of allowing Katniss to take care of her, Prim now takes on the role of nurturer" (Linstrom 2014, 7). When Katniss confides in her about Peeta being taken by the Capitol, Prim attentively listens, "now Prim turns her attention to me. Pulling me closer, brushing the hair back behind my ears with her fingers" and tells Katniss a harsh reality that no one has told her (Collins 2010, 119). She says the Capitol won't kill Peeta because they want to break Katniss (Collins 2010, 120). Her solace speaks of a good understanding and acceptance of the symbolic order, uncharacteristic of her earlier naïve portrayal. She actively changes Katniss's perception of things in this and many other scenes, going against the passive feminine stereotype.

Prim of the past is described as being "scared of her own shadow" (Collins 2008, 140); nevertheless, she occupies the role of the healer, first being an assistant to her mother, and then working at the hospital alongside her. Katniss comments on her development: "She's grown quite a bit, too; we're practically the same height now, but that isn't what makes her seem so much older" (Collins 2009, 126). In the end, Prim is killed while going to the rescue of bombed children. Linstrom observes that "true to the role of nurturing mother, Prim is willing to put herself in danger to help a child" (2014, 8). But while Linstrom believes Prim died without outgrowing her childish innocence, we deduce that she held on to her symbolic role of a healer until the end and acquired a development of the symbolic alongside her chora which spoke of her active femininity.

Rue is another chora-centric character who gets killed off, but before she does, we gain an understanding of her subtle assertion on reality. While Rue initially reminds Katniss of Prim on account of her innocence, she is not passive or ineffective. She is described as very capable; she is "clever with plants, climbs swiftly, and has good aim" (Collins 2008, 79), and she receives a high score from the judges during the showcase (Collins 2008, 86). During the games, she has the ability to strategically hide her body and movements, find the right plants for eating, and jump from tree to tree. Although Rue is sacrificed by the narrative, she does not represent the image of a weak femininity.

It is true that these chora-centric characters depend on others but so does everyone in the Trilogy. It is through dependency and community formations that people reach their goals. To illustrate, it is precisely by depending on the chora-centric characters that Katniss incorporates stabilizing chora in her thoughts and feelings and thus develops traits such as empathy and community that help her move people in the revolution. Such dependence is expanded upon in the following section where we discuss the redemptive positive features of the chora on Katniss, the main character.

2.5. Positive Effect of the Chora on Katniss

Characters who affect Katniss by their chora are her father, Prim, Rue, and Madge. All these characters are connected to the chora by three types of real world manifestations: music, corporeality, and love. Singing being an art form, constitutes one of the manifestations of the chora in the symbolic order, seeing as "there is an open gateway to the semiotic through creativity" (Carson 2020, 38). Corporeality is another manifestation since Kristeva describes the chora partly as "physical marks" (1984, 25). Moreover, love as an emotion is strongly connected to the drives and the chora. The symbols for music in the story are the singing birds, named mockingjays, and expressions of physical marks in the story include nature (most significantly flowers) and again mockingjays. All these symbols are interconnected within the choric characters, bound also by love, originating first in Katniss's father. Flowers, mockingjays, and nature are all initially connected to Katniss's father and his memory. The memory of him is always connected to nurturing and caring thoughts that are the residues of the chora left in Katniss. A big chunk of these memories falls into two categories: singing and corporeality.

In the case of singing, Katniss's father used to sing so beautifully that mockingjays stopped to listen (Collins 2008, 36). It is said that "his voice was that beautiful, high and clear and so filled with life it made you want to laugh and cry at the same time" (Collins 2008, 36). In the case of corporeality, it blooms for Katniss, as a connection to nature that is inspired by her father and his memory. This is apparent in the way she is reminded of her father when she is in nature outside of District 12: "I'm determined, for some reason, to get to the lake. Maybe to say good-bye to the place, to my father and the happy times we spent there" (Collins 2009, 94). Singing and nature connect Katniss's father to the chora, and Katniss vicariously accesses the chora through these memories. It is by reaching to these memories many times in the arena that Katniss is able to be reminded of humanity and empathy. Muller notes that "Katniss's memories of her family and her father punctuate her time in the arena and contribute to her growing sense of social and personal justice" (2012, 60).

Another link of her father to the chora is the fact that he was the one who named Katniss after a flower. Muller comments on this saying, "her father is the one who names her Katniss, and gives her the advice about remaining true to her 'self'" (2012, 60). Flowers, being a part of nature, therefore, are a sign of authenticity and unaffectedness. Her father was more responsible for granting such chora to Katniss than her mother was, because he was more connected to stabilizing chora. He was invested in various chora-centric activities, for instance, he sang to Katniss constantly when she was a child even though the lyrics involved around death (Collins 2010, 62). While her mother

was put off by the song, her father believed in the cathartic potential of manifesting death by music. This character and Peeta are proofs in the story of the chora blooming in male characters.

Additionally, there are two chora-centric characters who are also named after flowers: Prim and Rue. This commonality is pointed out by Katniss: "Rue is a small yellow flower that grows in the Meadow. Rue. Primrose. Neither of them could tip the scale at seventy pounds soaking wet" (Collins 2008, 79). Prim is the first living character appearing in the Trilogy that connects Katniss to the chora. Katniss says of her, "how could I leave Prim, who is the only person in the world I'm certain I love?" (Collins 2008, 10). The love she feels for Prim connects her to the chora, making her feel strongly about protecting her; starting first by providing food for her and then by volunteering to take her place as a tribute. Ruthven calls this connection to the chora "ethics of care"; he says, "when Katniss' sister Prim is chosen, Katniss volunteers to take her place, continuing the ethics of care that motivated her to feed her family after her father's death" (2017, 51). The volunteering marks one of the first instances of revolt of Katniss that contributes to her becoming the symbol of rebellion. Ruthven concurs this by saying "Katniss is the first in her district to ever volunteer, and the act is read not only as selfless but also as a direct but subtle challenge to the Capitol's bid to pit residents and districts against each other" (2017, 51).

After Prim, it is Rue in the arena that reinforces the link to the chora, and hence, impels Katniss to become the face of the rebellion or the mockingjay. The mockingjay pin is first given to Katniss by Madge, another chora-centric character. Ebony Thomas is of the opinion that "with this gift, the mayor's daughter confers … some of her own purity and innocence upon Katniss" (2019, 46). While Madge's role is less visible than other chora-centric characters, she is a key character in giving Katniss the pin and further connecting her with the memories of her father, and consequently the chora. However, according to Thomas, Katniss forgets about the pin initially and it is Rue who brings to light the significance of the mockingjay and Katniss's own role with it (2019, 46).

Upon meeting Rue, Katniss is reminded of Prim, consequently linking Rue directly to the chora in her mind. More links are established when learning that Rue is also named after a flower and is reminiscent of a bird in discretion and speed (Collins 2008, 79). These connections to the chora make Katniss care about Rue, and later, when she forms an alliance with her, it is not from a purely strategic standpoint as Ruthven mentions, "she joins with one of the smallest and weakest (but no less intelligent and strategic) tributes, less from a desire to increase her own chances, than from a feeling of affinity and caring" (2017, 52). She starts treating Rue's wounds and gives her the sleeping bag. Katniss caring about Rue becomes a subversive act in itself as Ruthven points out, "through these acts of affection, Katniss generates affect in those around her, and it is the fact that 'Katniss cares' when the Games are engineered specifically to punish tributes and spectators who form bonds of affection- that is most subversive" (2017, 55). Moreover, Rue teaches Katniss about District 11, which familiarizes those people to Katniss and helps her extend her caring to them. Katniss, henceforth, "enters into a consciousness of her capacity for action on behalf of others even across district borders" (2017, 53).

Rue is firmly connected to the prominent symbol of the chora in the series, which is the mockingjay. Katniss, by virtue of her growing affection for Rue, becomes strongly imprinted by this chora. To be precise, Rue's

affiliation with mockingjays is reinforced when the readers and Katniss learn of her sweet four-noted song that the mockingjays repeat (Collins 2008, 165). Along with this song, Rue gifts to Katniss "the very mockingjay represented in the pin that Katniss repeatedly forgets she is wearing" (Thomas 2019, 51). Mockingjay with all its chora-induced weight gets rekindled in Katniss's mind due to, first Rue's song, and then her death, or as Thomas calls it "sacrifice" (2019, 53). According to Thomas, the repeated comparisons of Rue with a bird and her manner of death in a net "seals her textual position as the sacrificial mockingjay" (2019, 53). A sacrifice that was necessary for the conferment of Rue's innocence and the chora to Katniss. She observes that "it is important for Rue to be constructed as both innocent little girl, equated with Prim's purity, and revolutionary bird, provided as a sacrifice. Her innocent life is poured out on behalf of Katniss" (2019, 53), Making Katniss access the chora more easily and willingly.

As indicated, extreme usage of the chora and the symbolic, epitomized by Katniss's mother and President Coin respectively, results in the suffering of the soul and their demise. Heavy usage of the chora and the symbolic, typified by Prim, Rue, Effie, and the prep team, also falls short. Prim and Rue, unaware of the symbolic dynamics of the world, walk to their death; the prep team and Effie are stuck with internalized ideologies of the symbolic that leave them crippled in dealing with crisis. To be precise, Prim and Rue aren't aware of the intricate web of the symbolic world around then due to the innocence cause by being more choric. And Effie and the prep team become plagued by a kind of trauma they cannot compute: In book three, Effie is described by "the vacant look in her eyes" (Collins 2010 279), and the prep team is described as "hunched and defeated" (Collins 2010 281).

Katniss, though, has a good grasp on the symbolic, evidenced by her sticking to role identities demanded of her. She, likewise, comes to appreciate and use the chora by meeting the chora-centric characters who develop her sense of justice and community. By an intermingling of fitting into symbolic roles, and transgressing the symbolic with revolt, she comes to survive. Such is the interplay of the symbolic and the chora that will be studied in the next section.

3. The Choric Revolt of Katniss as the Abject within and Outside in the *Hunger Games* Trilogy

To highlight Katniss's grasp on both the semiotic and the symbolic, we need to look at the second fold of the argument. Throughout the Trilogy, she goes through challenges whereby she needs to act under a specific persona to gain benefits, and essentially play the game of the symbolic. Her trial attests that the symbolic veil is a network of systems of diversions which may be hiding injustices behind. As she learns to break through the veil of the symbolic, she becomes the beloved heroin that people revere. This journey is characterized by her going through internal disturbances that we have named "internal abjection". Katniss has been hooked to the internal abjection, or the idea of death deep within her psyche, since childhood. She runs from the abject by incorporating symbolic roles. The looming specter of death keeps Katniss's hold on the symbolic very fragile. Hence, every time she embodies different archetypes within the symbolic world, she is able to demolish and break out of them. When she comes to realize the defects within the symbolic systems she has inhabited, she revolts via the help of the chora-centric characters. The continuous revolts against the symbolic fortify her status as the abjected subject that the

society tries to constantly subdue. Whilst her internal abjection and the abjected status intensify, she survives by letting the abject get sublimated through music and images and essentially art.

3.1. Internal Abjection: The Fragility of the Symbolic

One of the key points of Katniss's character is her high level of survival instincts. This is manifested in her great hunting skills, but upon closer examination, we find that parallel to a strong desire to survive, is a phobic eschewal of the proximity of death and all that signifies it. Such is her intense fear of wounded bodies; she says, "I got a glimpse of the wound on his thigh, gaping, charred flesh, burned clear down to the bone, before I ran from the house" (Collins 2008, 140). The wounded flesh, signifying death, terrifies her, and she abjects it from herself. She is more phobic of it than her mother or sister because she is closer to the abject inside of her, or that void of being. This happens to the phobic, Thea Harrington explains, because "sometimes the activity of forfeiting the maternal, Kristeva argues, may turn inward, and as a result, forfeit body and ego as repulsive" (1998, 146).

Kristeva explains that the phobic doesn't turn his attention to the object of desire but rather turns within and finds the abject; "the phobic has no other object than the abject" (1982, 6). She expands that, "if the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (1982, 1-2). In other words, when we desire some object in the symbolic world, we move towards meaning and structure. We situate ourselves in the clear borders of the symbolic where things make sense. However, the abject is outside of those borders; it constitutes ideas we cannot make sense of, such as death. The phobic has their focus on these areas that meaning collapses. Such is the close vicinity of the phobic to the abject or that void of being. But the phobic doesn't want to come to contact with the abject, so he creates substitutes for his fear in objects, and what Harrington calls "metaphors", she says, "the founding denial contained in the metaphor of want glosses that void of being, of meaning, that is death." (1998, 147).

Katniss is averse to death; thus, she finds a substitution for her abjection in the symbolic roles she takes on, such as the role of being the provider for her family. This symbolic role helps her to push away death or the abject as much as possible. It serves as a metaphor which Katniss clings onto to stay away from the abject. These roles, like the role of the provider, are justified in Katniss's POV by her metaphorizing them in different wordings, for example referring to herself as a fighter, the head of the family, and protector, etc. The act of providing is a metaphor for her to cover her abject. The role of the provider is traditionally a masculine role and Katniss has replaced the role of her deceased father in being so. However, as Oliver explains, in this case, Katniss is not identifying with an authoritarian symbolic father but a victimized, wounded one. She elaborates, "it is not the father of the law or the authoritarian father with whom they identify … Rather, it is the beaten father and their father's suffering with which they identify" (2014, 683). This identification with the beaten father allows Katniss to concurrently hold on to this fragile symbolic role and stay at the edge of the wider symbolic.

The victimhood of the father gives Katniss a victim-yet-fighter mindset. Oliver states, “the girl as victim of the authoritarian and threatening paternal law can find an alternate ideal in the father as victim. This identification supports the revolt against the paternal authority” (2014, 683). Hence, the provider symbolic role is a metaphor and is flexible in its symbolic caliber; thus, Katniss can incorporate other symbolic roles alongside it. Unlike the symbolic-centric characters discussed earlier, Katniss is not internalizing and incorporating a fixed symbolic identity, but she is alternating between many symbolic roles. She goes from the provider to the tribute to a star-crossed lover to the mockingjay. The reason for her flexible alternations is, first, because she never strongly identified with a symbolic infrastructure; she has been on the edge of revolt ever since she identified with her victimized father. Second, internal abjection keeps her close to the abject or collapse of meaning and these symbolic roles are substitutions and metaphors for her abjection.

3.2. The Choric Revolt: Seizing and Breaking of the Symbolic Roles

All the instances of revolt of Katniss originate directly and spontaneously from her chora or instinctive drives, and as Oliver comments, “it is usually her heart that leads her to defiance, rather than some deep-seated belief in a cause or in rebellion for its own sake” (2014, 678). This points to her direct connection to the chora in these moments.

The first instance of Katniss’s revolt pertains to the selection of Prim for the hunger games, which is when she comes close to her wound or abjection. Prior to that, Katniss was so engrossed in her survivor/provider identity that she rarely revolted against the Capitol; at that time as Tan mentions, “Katniss becomes an ‘indifferent mask,’ guarding and repressing all thoughts and opinions both outside and within the home” (2013, 57). At the event of the reaping, she comes close to the presence of death in the shape of the reaping of her little sister. In that moment, the chora that connects her to Prim overflows, and she is able to revolt by volunteering to take her place. Even though this revolt doesn’t break any rules, it is unprecedented to take action in the world of “mute symbolics” who go with the flow of everything. Ruthven comments on this, saying, “by volunteering to take her sister's place, an act that Katniss regards as a death sentence, she unwittingly performs what will be construed as her first act of heroism and defiance of the Capitol's rules” (2017, 51).

Her symbolic role of being a provider for her family is then converted into the symbolic role of a tribute which Katniss wholly embodies. She is transformed and beautified for the television, and at this time, as Ruthven says, “she is, in this context, emptied of inferiority and is reduced to her image” (2017, 54). While taking the role of designed girl on fire for the interviews, in the arena she is deadly. In both roles, she is seen solely for her image and imprisoned within the construction of the tribute identity. As a tribute, Tan comments, “Katniss lacks the ability to relate to the world outside of the confines of her constructed identity, focused solely on brute survival” (2013, 58). She gets a high score in the talent showcase and in the arena; she thrives by her survival skills. She is all around an entertaining and personified tribute.

The second important instance of revolt happens when she encounters the death of Rue in the arena which again pushes her in contact with her abjection. Essentially, “Rue forces Katniss to acknowledge the limitations of

her constructed identity" (Tan 2013, 58). In that moment, when she is an open wound and connected to the chora of Rue, she starts to sing for her and embroiders her deceased body with flowers to revere her, hence pulling out of the symbolic framework that marked them both as only tributes and competitors in the games. Ruthven notes that at this time, "Katniss is forced into contact with others from outside her district. And, as she finds herself unable to ignore their humanity, Katniss is finally allowed voice, able to hear and be heard" (2017, 51). This sense of community is formed because of the contact with the chora that allowed her to revolt. Later, as she threatens to eat poisoned berries and end the game with no victors, she is again breaking the institution of the games and how they were set. McKenna comments, "the act represents far more than the sentimental culmination of a gushing teenage romance; it also provides an authentic revolutionary gesture which undermines the very structure and forms of the order they have been situated in" (2015, 155). She unwittingly, then, revolts through her authenticity.

After Rue's death, and a moment of mourning, she now integrates the star-crossed lover identity to survive again and win favors from the sponsors. It is worth mentioning that these symbolic roles that she embodies aren't negative per se; she needs them to survive and they give her an edge over the games. It is the amalgamation of the initial symbolic and the subsequent revolt that gives Katniss the overall power. She keeps up the star-crossed lover persona after the games to stay in President Snow's good graces and save her family. Again, the symbolic role has been assimilated as a metaphor for her abjection. Initially, she absorbs this symbolic identity as just that, a symbolic means to survive the Capitol, and in doing so she lets the staged romance between her and Peeta get commodified. But interestingly, as she comes to care for Peeta, the authentic love between them becomes in itself a revolt against the commodified version. McKenna elaborates on this by saying, "the superficial performance – the parody of love – becomes transfigured into its authentic content. As the 74th Games approach their terminal conclusion, Katniss and Peeta come to love one another in reality, thereby reclaiming the authentic substance which the show seeks to appropriate" (2015, 155). The next important revolt then, is this authentic form of love which is what endures until the end of the novel, crystalizing in the forming of a community based on care and the chora.

Following this revolt, she also breaks out of the sole romance spectacle construct of the victor tour when she acknowledges the people of 11, the district of Rue, and the bread they gifted her in the arena. She, thereby, establishes a sense of community based on the chora: "'Thank you for your children.' I raise my chin to address the crowd. 'And thank you all for the bread.'" (Collins 2009, 46), doing exactly what President Snow warned her against.

Later, she agrees to become the mockingjay, again out of the gained sense of community that the connection to the chora rewarded her. However, 13 wants her to be a very manufactured mockingjay; she says, "they have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances--as if that doesn't sound horribly familiar" (Collins 2010, 14). She revolts against this constructed identity by showing the real and spontaneous side of her. For instance, while the 13 wants her to stand aside and read from her speeches, she goes straight into battle and starts shooting the Capitol forces. This real, choric side of her is what really moves people.

Yonah Ringlestein points this out, saying, “the only effective television Katniss does produce is when she is being real, her words are spontaneous and unscripted” (2013, 383).

Her last overarching revolt is when she kills President Coin, marking herself separate from the symbolic government that Coin wanted to implant. Kraemer and Lander Note that “Katniss subverts the entire binary system represented by President Snow on one side and President Coin on the other, creating the possibility for ‘the birth of a new political configuration,’” (2015, 171-172). In this way, she commits to none of the symbolic structures by revolting and questioning both, which is, according to Kristeva, the cure against fundamentalism. Oliver points this out by saying, “it is her noncommittal attitude that makes her sympathetic in a world where commitments lead to fundamentalism on both sides of war” (2014, 677-678).

Rejecting both types of the symbolic makes leeway for the opening up of the space for the abject. All these revolts push Katniss further from the edge of the symbolic and reinforce her position as the abjected subject.

3.3. Abjected Subject: Transgressing the Symbolic

Katniss was already locked in her position as the abjected subject by being from the forgotten District 12. Thomas mentions the exclusion of District 12, saying, “District 12 is also denigrated. This disparaging attitude is made explicit by the effervescent Effie Trinket” (2019, 42). That is when she tells Katniss and Peeta, “I’ve done my best with what I had to work with ... How you’ve both successfully struggled to overcome the barbarism of your district” (Collins 2008, 59). Along with this, Katniss’s hunter identity also positions her as outside of the society as it is deemed illegal by the government. From there, Katniss only buttresses her abjected position with her successive revolts. Initially, she is frustrated by the drawbacks that her abjected position give her, for instance, getting mad at the game makers for not paying attention to her during her showcase. However, gradually she learns that there is power in being the abject, and people, while aghast, find a certain wonder in her. This is commented by Peeta repeatedly as he says, “she has no idea. The effect she can have” (Collins 2008, 73). The power has also been noticed by Cinna. In this regard, Rigsby and Manter note, “Katniss’s skills as hunter and “criminal” and her ability to kill for survival merely associate her with the ‘death drive.’ […] Cinna recognizes this destructive power and harnesses it to create the girl on fire” (2019, 405).

Katniss realizes the power herself as she accepts the mockingjay role. She says, “a new sensation begins to germinate inside me. But it takes until I am standing on a table, waving my final goodbyes to the hoarse chanting of my name, to define it. Power. I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed” (Collins 2010, 48). By being the mockingjay, she transgresses both Capitol and 13, and in doing so gains a kind of power that gives her revolts more impact and opens up space for the abject. Rigsby and Manter expound that Katniss by becoming the mockingjay is bringing forward the force of what is beyond signification (2019, 407). Meanwhile, both the symbolic structures of Capitol and 13 try to subdue her. Snow keeps threatening her, and Coin keeps reminding her, and the people, who is in charge, both plotting her termination. But Katniss keeps using her abjected status to transgress: “The abject is a process of creating a space for the “I” through transgression” (Carson 2020, 50). Katniss keeps making

a space for herself by following her own plan of killing Snow, leading her team to her own ends, and then killing Coin.

However, before killing Coin, she experiences her worst internal abjection, arising from witnessing Prim die. This time, revolt alone isn't enough to help her overcome facing the abject within. She revolts by killing Coin, maximizing her abjected status, but she cannot easily come back to reality or the symbolic. She cannot just embody another symbolic role because, firstly, her original role as the provider is now shattered, and secondly, she has lost a big connection to the chora by losing her sister. Rigsby and Manter note that at this time, "being trapped in melancholia causes Katniss to believe that her participation in the symbolic makes her partly responsible for Prim's death" (2019, 411). She feels that she shares blame in the death of Prim, and hence, she is not only closer than ever to her abjection, but she is one and the same with it as she feels like she herself is the bringer of death and destruction. Linked with the abject within, she finds herself unable to just embody another symbolic role, and now, what saves her is cathartic sublimation.

3.4. Cathartic Sublimation: Capturing the Abject in Art

Katniss sings multiple times in the Trilogy, and the act is mostly sprung from a desire to relieve some pain and express what cannot be signified, which is the crux of what sublimation is, according to Kristeva. Music is one of the marks of authenticity in the Trilogy and a means to reach the chora. While Katniss used to sing as a child, she stopped after her father's death, which can be attributed to her clinging to the symbolic role of a survivor. During this time, Katniss is just an emptied being who is only worried about her and her family's survival, and she does not really care about the nature of means with which she wants to achieve this goal. But Rue's death propels her to start singing again as it ties her to her lost chora.

According to Harrington, reading Kristeva, "catharsis becomes not simply the action of purging and cleansing but rather the incorporation of the abject in a 'rebirth'" (1998, 152). Therefore, it is not the act of expelling the abject that brings on catharsis but its incorporation. That is why the times that music has the most sublimating effect in the Trilogy are the times that Katniss is closer than ever to her abject, for instance, singing for dying Rue or singing after the death of Prim. But while she finds a way to regain her control on the symbolic after Rue's death, she cannot do so without difficulty after Prim's death.

With Prim's death comes the culmination of Katniss's internal abjection and repulsion towards her own ego. Rigsby and Manter expand on this by saying, "Katniss's own ego enacts the punishment that she thinks she deserves for her role in Snow's and Coin's political systems, first, through her attempts at suicide" (2019, 410). This time she cannot assume another symbolic role because of her revulsion to any form of symbolic and her own role within it. What stops her from the destructive force of abjection, which would result in self-annihilation, and partly brings her back to the symbolic, is music. She suddenly starts singing and "this slide into song moves her toward the symbolic once more" (Rigsby and Manter 2019, 409). By singing, she gives voice to her anguish and signifies what

was unsignifiable and thereby acknowledges the abject. Rigsby and Manter continue that "Katniss's singing speaks to her desire to survive, as she rebirths herself through the mountain songs of her youth" (2019, 409).

While she is immersed in her mourning, immobilized and mute in her house, she hears the sound of a shovel outside and goes out to see Peeta planting a flower; not just any flower but a primrose. Although flowers are the sign of the chora in the story, President Snow exploited the innocence of them by creating manufactured roses that instill fear and trauma in Katniss by their smell alone. Here, Peeta by offering to plant primroses in the memory of Prim, allows a replacement of the signification of the flower to take place, redirecting its meaning to the chora and capturing the lost prim within it. Rigsby and Manter illustrate this by saying, "this act by Peeta gives her a way out of her melancholia by offering her an alternative signified for the signifier rose" (2019, 411). They continue on by saying that, "this uncoupling of the word rose from the discourse of dehumanization that underwrites both Snow's and Coin's political systems acts as a metaphor for the process by which Katniss can return to the world of the living" (2019, 412).

Condensing the memory of Prim within the flower allows for a way for abjection to exist and be allowed to get voiced. The same thing happens with the memorial book with pictures and anecdotes of the dead that Katniss and Peeta make. This not only allows the abjection to get expressed but also opens the way for "communal mourning" (Rigsby and Manter 2019, 413), that ties people together through shared care. They are not afraid to look the wound of the abject, and they let it get signified. This community that exists as the abject itself, in District 12, outside of the brink of the symbolic, allows itself to exist adjacent to abjection instead of evading it. Such is evident by the proximity of their living to the graveyard of the dead; Katniss says, "my children, who don't know they play on a graveyard" (Collins 2010, 173).

4. Conclusion

This study has employed the psychoanalytic theory of Kristeva, containing the concepts of the symbolic, the chora, abjection, revolt, and cathartic sublimation, and revolt on the female characters of *The Hunger Games* Trilogy to shed light on different types of womanhood, reclaim the value of choric femininity, and highlight the journey of the main character towards revolt and peace.

The revaluation of choric femininity in this study will hopefully make us rethink classifying dependence as weak. It must be allowed for the female protagonists of YA dystopian novels to rely on other characters. The influence that interrelationships have should not be dismissed in favor of a faux individualism of a strongly depicted main character that many of these novels have in common. Furthermore, this study has shown that the process of healing from trauma and the fragmented identity resulting from it should not be read as a negative ramification. The trauma leaves Katniss in a state of fragmentation, where she continuously questions many things, such as what her trauma means and if she wants to have children at all. But this continuous questioning and revolt of the psyche is what allows for her autonomy, authenticity, and genuine gender expression without a domineering symbolic.

However, Kristeva's theory runs a risk of essentialism, and it might read as fatalistic to group female characters into "good" femininity and "bad" femininity. What Kristeva emphasizes, and what has been the focus of this study,

was to highlight the importance of using semiotic alongside the symbolic. The revolts of semiotic, which have been scaled up in the series, can be something as small as reading a poem and letting yourself feel. Katniss's struggle, while exaggerated to fit the dystopian nature of series, highlights the special effort it takes to break yourself free of the symbolic shackles.

This study tried more to shed lights on what made Katniss special and fit for the revolution than to condemn other female characters. Her special kind of situation and her own willingness to take advantage of it is what made her special. She was close to the abject, but instead of letting it infest her, she let the voice of stabilizing chora guide her into channelling it towards revolt. The abject is destructive, but it can get redirected towards a productive mean, such as dismantling an oppressive symbolic system. Instead of staying at the edge of the symbolic, never entering into the structure, Katniss ingrained herself with the symbolic and then revolted, making her acts of defiance much more impactful. This study, in a way, was an examination of what makes a woman able to be revolutionarily world-shaking, which is not a singular act but a collective nexus of interactions and impacts.

اشتعال النار الكامنة: استكشافٌ كريستيفيٌ للأنوثة في ثلاثية "مباريات الجوع" لسوزان كولينز

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الملخص

تُعَدّ ثلاثية مبارىات الجوع (2008–2010) عملاً ديستوبياً موجهاً لليافعين، وتزخر بالعديد من الشخصيات النسائية، مما يجعلها مناسبة لدراسة مفهوم الأنوثة. ولتفحّص هذا المفهوم، يُستعان بالإطار التحليلي-النفسي لدى كريستيفا، بما يتضمنه من مفاهيم مثل: الرمزي، الكورا، الاشمئزاز (الابجكشن)، التسامي التطهيري، والتمرّد. وينقسم طرح هذه الدراسة إلى جانبين رئيسين. يرى الجانب الأول أن الشخصيات النسائية المختارة، باستثناء الشخصية الرئيسة (بريم، والدة كاتنيس، مادج، رو، إيفي ترينكِت، أوكتافيا، فينيا، والرئيسة كوين)، تُفعّل المكوّن السيميائي أو الكورا بشكل غير متوازن، الأمر الذي يجعلها غير مستقرة. أمّا الجانب الثاني فيجادل بأن كاتنيس تُحقّق تفاعلاً متبادلاً بين الرمزي والكورا عبر تجسيدها المستمر للأدوار الرمزية ثم التمرّد عليها. ويغدو هذا التمرّد ممكناً من خلال توجيه قوة اشمئزازها نحو الرمزي، وهي قوة تُحرّكها لمسة الكورا. إن تمرّدات كاتنيس تجعل البُنى الرمزية تُقصيها، غير أن قوة وضعها كمُقصاة تمكّنها من تدمير هذه البُنى نفسها. وفي النهاية، يُصار إلى تقبّل ما هو مُقصى داخلها من خلال احتوائه في الفنّ والاستعارات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مبارىات الجوع؛ كريستيفا؛ الرمزي؛ السيميائي؛ الكورا؛ الاشمئزاز (الابجكشن)؛ التمرّد.

Endnotes

[i] The Trilogy includes *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010).

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