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MA THESIS

*A fiatalkori tehetetlenség leküzdése: Primrose Everdeen
halálának narratológiai szerepe Az Éhezők Viadala
trilógiában*

*Overcoming Adolescent Powerlessness: The
Narratological Function of Primrose Everdeen's Death in
The Hunger Games Trilogy*

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By my signature below, I pledge and certify that my ELTE M.A. thesis, entitled “Overcoming Adolescent Powerlessness: The Narratological Function of Primrose Everdeen’s Death in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy” is entirely my own work. That is to say, the framing ideas are substantially my own and I have faithfully and exactly cited all the sources I have used, whether from conversations, books, letters, and other media, including the Internet. If this pledge is found to be false, I realize that I will be subject to penalties up to and including the forfeiture of the degree earned by my thesis.

Réka Kökény, 15 April, 2024

Abstract

As researchers outline, young adult dystopian fiction is a genre of resistance as it features adolescent protagonists struggling to overcome powerlessness, whether in a political sense, through self-determination, or through acknowledging the finality of death. *The Hunger Games* trilogy, one of the most impactful pieces of adolescent dystopian literature from the early 2000s, is no exception as it features protagonist Katniss Everdeen struggling to reclaim her agency under an oppressive political regime. Often criticized as overly violent, the series has a high proportion of on-page character deaths, none as tragic as the death of Primrose Everdeen at the end of the narrative. Although scholars largely neglect to study the function of her character, Prim has a significant role to play in life as well as in death.

This thesis argues that Primrose Everdeen's death is inevitable as it serves a significant narrative purpose in Katniss's reclamation of power. This tragedy frees her personal agency and thus allows her to reclaim her political agency and fulfill her role as hero. Losing her sister forces Katniss to face the finality of death and enables her to process unresolved grief. Relying on Roberta Seelinger Trites's research into depictions of death and power relations in adolescent literature as well as Michel Foucault's work on the modalities of power, the thesis provides an overview of Katniss's shifting agencies over the course of the trilogy, and the political and personal implications of Prim's death. In addition to a short analysis of Prim as the symbolic representation of childhood in Panem, the current research also touches on the inevitability of Prim's death and the curious role of Buttercup, the family's cat in Katniss's final resolution of grief.

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Introduction

The success of Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy cannot be understated. Since its publication between 2008 and 2010, this young adult dystopian series has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide, and has seen four movie adaptations as well as the addition of a prequel novel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (Italie). The popularity of the trilogy has been compared to that of the Harry Potter franchise (Springen), and its success paved the way for numerous young adult dystopias released in the early 2010s. The trilogy follows sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen as she is forced to compete in the deadly Hunger Games established by the oppressive government of Panem. As the series progresses, Katniss joins the rebel forces fighting against the tyrannical Capitol, and becomes the face of the resistance, leading people to freedom in the conclusion of the story. A masterful blend of social commentary and engaging storytelling, *The Hunger Games* is not only popular among its intended audience: because of its complex philosophical message and sharp political criticism, academics in various fields have been analyzing it for over a decade now.

Despite the scholarly attention that *The Hunger Games* has garnered, researchers have largely neglected to study Primrose Everdeen's character and the impact she has on the plot and Katniss's actions. This paper intends to remedy this oversight by exploring the importance Prim's character and her eventual death hold in the trilogy, especially in the context of its genre. Young adult literature contains themes pertinent to the life situation of its target audience, among them power struggles and death as disempowerment, both of which are relevant in the case of *The Hunger Games* as well. Connecting Prim's character with the depiction of a constant power struggle, the current research asks the questions: what purpose does Primrose Everdeen's death serve in *The Hunger Games* when it comes to power relations? What is the significance of her death for Katniss's adolescent maturation and for the country's fate?

Prim's character is especially important because while she gets little on-page time, she plays a crucial role in triggering the events of the narrative and thus shaping the course of the rebellion. Before the plot of *The Hunger Games* even begins, Katniss becomes Prim's de facto parent after their father's death and their mother's subsequent mental breakdown. On the brink of starvation, she is driven not by self-preservation, but by a singular desire to prevent Prim from being put in a community home. Her actions are guided by a protective instinct so deeply rooted that Katniss essentially dedicates her life to protecting Prim at all costs, including self-sacrifice. One such instance, volunteering to take her sister's place in the Games, becomes the first step in the rebellion that not only reshapes the country's future but costs Prim's life as well. The same protective instinct repeatedly puts Katniss in a position where her agency is severely limited by her desire to keep Prim safe. In *The Hunger Games*, Panem's political system forces Katniss to consciously moderate her behavior in the Games to fit Capitol expectations lest she bring danger to Prim. In *Catching Fire*, President Snow keeps Katniss in line by threatening Prim, and President Coin employs the same manipulative technique in *Mockingjay*. This establishes a power imbalance between the two sisters wherein Prim is reliant on Katniss's care, and Katniss willingly gives up her freedom to protect Prim's.

Interestingly, Prim functions not only as Katniss's main motivating force but also as the protagonist's foil. She is the innocent younger sister whose burdens must be eased by the protective older sister. Katniss's comparisons highlight their contrasting personalities: the soft-spoken, sweet Prim loved by everyone, and the cold, prickly Katniss who people only appreciate for her hunting skills. Katniss's impulsive, rash decisions are balanced out by Prim's calm, pragmatic nature. Further distinctions are drawn as readers see the wilderness allocated as Katniss's area, and the domestic sphere as Prim's territory. The narrative positions Prim as someone weak who needs to be provided for, a status that slowly changes over the trilogy as Prim matures alongside her sister

and takes on more responsibilities as a healer. In her internal monologue, Katniss repeatedly voices a desire to be more like her sister. The clear contrast between the sisters allows readers to understand Katniss better and shows Prim as a potential influence on Katniss's character development.

Despite, or maybe specifically because of her youthful innocence, Prim is doomed by the narrative from the very first lines of the book, meaning that her death is not only inevitable, but it also serves an important narrative purpose. Ensuring her younger sister's safety is Katniss's main objective from the first page, yet whatever she does, she is incapable of saving Prim, who dies at the end of *Mockingjay*. Her death is shocking for the audience as well, as it seems to come out of nowhere. Fans of the trilogy deem it an unnecessary and cruel character death, and draw into question the whole plot: what was the point of Katniss's suffering, her trials and tribulations, if her single most important goal, keeping Prim alive, was never realized? Yet, a close reading of the books shows that her death is frequently foreshadowed, proving that throughout the story Katniss is simply delaying the inevitable, and Prim is never meant to survive the conclusion of the trilogy. This only reinforces the fact that Prim has an important role to play not only in life but also in death.

This thesis argues that Prim's death is not only inevitable but also has a significant narratological purpose: it is crucial to the complete liberation of Katniss's agency, serving as the final relief from powerlessness. Without Prim's demise, Katniss would never be able to take a stand against tyranny, shed her parental role, and process the grief and trauma she had suffered. Relying on Roberta Seelinger Trites's research into power relations in adolescent literature and Michel Foucault's work on the modalities of power, the thesis aims to provide an overview of Katniss's shifting agencies within the trilogy as well as the political and personal implications of Prim's

death. The research also touches on the inevitability of Prim's death, and the curious role of Buttercup, the family's cat in Katniss's final resolution of grief.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapter I contains a literature review of the genre of young adult dystopias, including the discussion of power and death as central themes in these novels. Relying on the work of Michel Foucault in power structures, this section also provides an overview of the different modalities of power at play in *The Hunger Games*. Chapter II focuses on the effects of panopticism and conflicting agencies in the trilogy, arguing that Prim has to die so Katniss can regain full agency and recognize President Coin's ulterior motives. After an exploration of how the two warring agencies shift within Katniss over the course of the trilogy, this part also details the inevitability of Prim's death and its symbolic connotations. Lastly, chapter III analyzes the adolescent acknowledgement of death and the repression of grief and trauma, arguing that Prim's demise allows Katniss to recognize death as the ultimate powerlessness and fully process the pain she has suffered. In addition, this section includes a discussion of Buttercup and the role he plays in Katniss's procession of grief at the end of *Mockingjay*.

I. Literature Review: The Adolescent Struggle for Power

I.1. Depictions of Power and Powerlessness in Young Adult Literature

The Hunger Games trilogy may have triggered a new wave of young adult dystopias in the 2010s and brought attention to the genre, but it is far from the first of its kind. The dystopian novel emerged at the turn of the twentieth century as a subgenre of science fiction spurred on by political unrests and global anxieties, and gained strength and popularity throughout the decades (Claeys 107). H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* is considered to be one of the earliest examples of Western dystopian fiction, published in 1895, but Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or George Orwell's *1984* have similarly cemented themselves as influential classics. Jones argues that the terrors of the twentieth century, "war, violence, disease, famine, depression, debt, etc." created the ideal environment for the development of the genre (225). In general, dystopian fiction is understood to be set in the future as a means to criticize present social and political structures, and can serve as a warning to readers (Connors "I Try" 139, Alexander and Black 210, Lee and Alexander 389). Although literature specifically targeting adolescent readers only emerged in the mid-twentieth century, it is often cited to have the same function. Connors claims that young adult novels encourage social and political participation by highlighting current issues ("I Try" 139), and Jones notes that dystopian novels aimed at adolescent audiences have proved to be effective because both genres are "inherently literatures of resistance" (225). Popular examples such as James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* trilogy and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* series position their protagonists in a dystopian community where they become leaders of an adolescent resistance after recognizing the oppression of the governing body, fighting to regain control of their destinies.

In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Trites argues that power and powerlessness are central themes of young adult literature. She points out that adolescence is a time of seeking power, both in the world and in one's self (1), and thus young

adult literature tends to foreground adolescent characters who are trying to understand their own power in various ways (Trites 8). In accordance, Lee and Alexander claim that the emphasis on agency and choice-as-agency is pivotal in adolescent fiction due to the impending decisions this age demographic has to make (391), while Jones states that young adults are an especially fitting target audience for genres that depict the same sense of disempowerment and oppression they experience, such as dystopian fiction (225).

What does it mean to have power? Weber considers it “the possibility of imposing one’s will upon the behavior of other persons,” while Foucault claims that power is “that which represses,” and it “is everywhere [...] because it comes from everywhere” (qtd. in Trites 4). Drawing on these and other theories, Trites creates a definition of power specifically fit for the context of adolescent literature. For her, “power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them in these books” (7). Young adult novels, therefore, portray powerless adolescents who carve out a place for themselves within strictly defined social structures (7).

Trites attributes the prevalent portrayal of power struggles in adolescent literature to the circumstances surrounding its birth. As she outlines, the genre reached its present form during the postmodern era, and the influence of the movement is clearly traceable, for instance, in the way that these novels reflect the general preoccupation with social institutions and their role in constructing individuals (16). Adolescent novels thus “self-consciously explore the individual’s power in relation to the institutions that comprise her or his existence” (Trites 18). Combined with the characteristics of dystopian fiction, which tends to critique these existing social institutions, young adult dystopia has become a rather unique genre.

Lois Lowry's *The Giver* is among the most well-known examples of young adult dystopia and illustrates the adolescent power struggle well. Published in 1993 and adapted into film in 2014, it is one of the most controversial pieces of American literature in recent history. While it has received numerous awards and become a staple in American middle school curricula, it has also remained among the most banned books for the past three decades (Blatt). The plot follows twelve-year-old Jonas who lives in a society where order is preserved through Sameness as memories of pain and suffering have been removed from people's minds, along with color, climate, and terrain. Career paths and marriage partners are assigned to each individual, and people obey the rules of the Community without objections. Sexual desire is also repressed from a young age, using a mandatory pill. After Jonas is chosen to be the Receiver of Memory, he begins to learn about life before Sameness and struggles to feel at home in a society that seems to have deprived him of so much. His distrust turns into hatred when he finds out that leaders of the Community, among them his own father, have been killing underdeveloped babies and the elderly under the name of 'releasing them from the Community.' Determined to save a child he has grown to love, Jonas decides to flee the Community and simultaneously return the memories to the people to show them the error of their ways.

Lowry's novel is also ideal for an analysis of the adolescent search for power. In *The Giver*, Jonas becomes aware of his powerlessness through acquiring knowledge in the form of memories and emotions. The more he understands about the world before Sameness, the more unjust his Community seems, and he resents the passivity exhibited by everyone around him. He begins to feel unsettled by his lack of agency and is relieved that as a Receiver of Memory, he is permitted to lie, giving him the tool to question authority. His sexual awakening forms another key part of the adolescent narrative. Citing Foucault, Trites draws a parallel between the presence of repression/power dynamics in society's regulation of sexuality and the depiction of these forces in

adolescent literature (16). She also points out that exploring sexuality marks the transition from childhood to adolescence (Trites 84). The repression of Jonas's sexuality is thus another tool of disempowerment in the hands of the Community. However, while they can repress his desires through medicine, they have no control over his encounter with death, and it is this shock that ultimately turns Jonas against his Community. Having received the memories from before, he understands death more clearly than other Community members, and faced with the cruelty and inevitability of it, death is revealed as the ultimate threat of vulnerability and disempowerment for the adolescent protagonist.

I.2. Death and Disempowerment

As Trites outlines, understanding death is a rite of passage equal to experiencing sexuality in adolescence (117), and “the defining factor that distinguishes [adolescent literature] both from children's and adult literature” (118). Although children's books also feature themes of death and grief, these portray death as part of a cycle, while for adolescents, death becomes a threat of finality. Understanding death marks a point of maturation for young adults, as it renders them “both powerless in [their] fear of death and empowered by acknowledging its power” (Trites 119). According to Moffat and May, children's literature has always included accounts of death, but due to the world wars, there came a “purging of death” in the twentieth century, and depictions only returned to these narratives around the 1970s (439-40). Coincidentally, adolescent literature had consolidated itself as a separate genre by this point in time (Trites 9). The widespread presence of death in numerous subgenres of these novels suggests that it is highly appealing to its audience, and narratives set in alternate worlds such as fantasy, dystopian, and apocalyptic fiction are especially rife with death (Moffat and May 440).

How does death in adolescent literature differ from depictions in children's stories? Trites outlines three key factors. First, while child readers are protected by indirect narration, for young

adults, “death occurs onstage” (120). This direct confrontation is necessary for understanding death’s power and adolescents’ resulting powerlessness. Secondly, “death is untimely, violent, and unnecessary,” meaning that adolescent novels not only depict elderly characters dying of natural causes, they also show young people passing away due to illness, accidents, or physical violence (120). Lastly, death in young adult literature represents a “tragic loss of innocence” that forces protagonists to accept their mortality as a vulnerability, and in the knowledge, overcome this powerlessness (121). As they learn about the world and their own place in it, adolescents become more familiar with the concepts of agent and subject, thus they begin to better understand the relationship between life and death as well (123). In *Little Women*, Jo March’s initial fear of death transforms into an acceptance of mortality after the death of her sister, Beth. Holden Caulfield has a similar journey of maturation in *The Catcher in the Rye* as he struggles to come to terms with his brother’s death. The resulting understanding of death allows adolescents to differentiate “between acting and being acted upon, [...] between agency and passivity,” and they can apply the theories learned in literature to their own lives (Trites 123-4).

The Hunger Games is no exception to these rules, in that as a young adult dystopia, it heavily features on-page death in each installment of the series. These deaths are almost exclusively untimely and violent as the yearly Hunger Games require twenty-four children under eighteen to fight to the death. Here, tributes not only see death up close but in the spirit of ‘kill or be killed,’ they must also be the cause of death if they want to survive. For Katniss, who has been hunting animals for the majority of her life, killing game and killing a person is “amazingly similar in the execution, [...] entirely different in the aftermath” (*THG* 284). It comes as no surprise that every victor that readers meet throughout the trilogy struggles with symptoms of PTSD due to the murders they had to commit as teenagers to stay alive in the Games. As Tan argues, Panem turns teenage years into “a time of perpetual threat” that essentially transforms children into valuable

assets that can provide for their families in the place of adults (“Burn” 56). This means that childhood is sacrificed at the altar of family survival, simultaneously granting power to adolescents and taking it away.

Moffat and May also draw a connection between death and power relations when they argue that the threat of death is a tool of control employed by the government of Panem (442). This refers not only to systemic punishments through physical torment but also to personal threats. During the events of *Catching Fire*, for example, President Snow attempts to keep Katniss in line by threatening Prim, and he later bombs her home district as retaliation. As scholars point out, however, citizens of Panem often manage to use tools of control to their advantage and subvert the Capitol’s power (Wezner 155, Connors “I Was” 86-7). Thus “death becomes a bargaining chip” in Katniss’s hands when she threatens to commit suicide with Peeta at the end of the first book: her willingness to die and refusal to play the Capitol’s game by killing Peeta is a certain assertion of power, an attempt to manipulate the system and carve out some semblance of control (Moffat and May 448). In this way, Katniss has acknowledged her powerlessness against her own death and has simultaneously taken power back by refusing passivity against the Capitol.

At the same time, Katniss cannot fully accept her vulnerability against death until Prim’s demise. While Katniss has known death her whole life and also kills numerous people throughout the trilogy, Prim’s death is still an extraordinary loss for her. As the most important person in Katniss’s life, protecting Prim is her main motivation from the very start of the narrative, and precisely because of her repeated attempts to save Prim’s life, Katniss is under the impression that she has the power to re-write her sister’s eventual fate. It is thus the ultimate loss of innocence when, despite her best intentions, Prim falls victim to the rebellion in *Mockingjay*. As later sections of the thesis will explore, her death frees Katniss from powerlessness in part by forcing her to face this vulnerability.

I.3. Modalities of Power in *The Hunger Games*

Along with most young adult dystopias, *The Hunger Games* depicts the fight for agency in a largely political context and explores the finer details of power struggles within this frame. Analyzing the ways in which the Capitol controls the districts not only illustrates the degree to which Katniss's agency is limited but also explains the futility of her fight to save Prim. Building on Foucault's modalities of power and subsequent research by Fendler as well as Macaluso and McKenzie, this section first outlines the different modalities of power, then illustrates them through examples from *The Hunger Games*, and finally concludes with a short passage on the power exerted over Katniss by her sister, Prim.

According to Fendler, Foucault has identified four modalities of power in society (44). The most well-known is sovereign power, which stands for authorities controlling people's lives through laws or other means of domination (44). Disciplinary power, explored in Foucault's work in panopticism, means the control people exert on themselves based on a desire to conform to societal rules (44). This modality of power is exercised through the surveillance mechanism of the gaze that institutes constant awareness in its subjects, rendering continuous monitoring unnecessary; it is enough to simply establish "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201). The third modality is pastoral, where those with power provide care and services to those without, thus making them dependent on the powerful (45-6). Lastly, bio-power is exercised through controlling population and demographics (Fendler 47).

The government of Panem exercises power over its citizens through all four modalities. Sovereign power, which "rests on the threat and/or enactment of brutal and public punishment," manifests itself through President Snow and his oppressive regime (Macaluso and McKenzie 106). In addition to the implementation of the Hunger Games as collective punishment, readers also see

the use of public whippings and executions to entice fear in citizens, and Avox servants, traitors of the system with their tongues cut out, who function as “both a deterrent and a punishment for a perceived crime” (Wezner 151). As Macaluso and McKenzie point out, Katniss’s narration of these displays of sovereign power is so casual that it appears that “this threat is so ubiquitous that it warrants no explication or reflection” (109). Combined with the threats of punishment, constant surveillance enables the development of self-discipline in citizens and grants the Capitol disciplinary power over them. This modality provides the most substantial form of control for the government.

In *Panopticism*, Foucault compares the policies of a government battling a plague outbreak with Bentham’s model of the Panopticon, and the surveillance tactics he describes have clear correspondences with those of the Capitol. To ensure that “inspection functions ceaselessly” (195), Panem employs Peacekeepers, surveillance cameras, and paid informants, which has allowed them to keep the districts in line for decades. There is a “system of permanent registration” that serves as a “great review of the living and the dead” in the form of the yearly reaping ceremony (196). Travel bans and electric fences surrounding the districts allow any and all movements to be supervised, which makes Panem an “enclosed, segmented space” (197). As Foucault points out, each person is “perfectly individualized and constantly visible,” an alienation that ensures that order is maintained and no community of dissenters can form (200). In addition, citizens are deliberately not educated about different districts as information on other communities would encourage compassion and cooperation. This manufactured division is the Capitol’s way of preventing a rebellion, but it also serves to maximize production because work remains the citizens’ only focus (201). The districts provide the Capitol with food, equipment, and other resources, and the breakdown of this system is visible during the events of *Catching Fire* when supplies are delayed or halted entirely at the start of the rebellion.

The first-person narration of the trilogy allows readers to see the effects of disciplinary power more directly. As a teenager in Panem, Katniss has lived her life under constant surveillance and thus internalized the gaze. Her reasonable fear of being constantly watched is most noticeable during the Games where Katniss is keenly aware that her actions reflect a certain image of her, so she decides to manipulate the gaze by putting on different masks depending on her goals. Determined to survive, Katniss decides to project the image of a strong girl lest other tributes mark her as an easy target. She also wants to hide her rebellious streak in the Capitol by playing the role of a compliant tribute because she fears that her actions might have dire consequences for Prim. In addition to using death as a bargaining chip, manipulating the gaze is another example of subverting Capitol control, and Katniss excels at it. This is further illustrated after she enters the arena, a construction that Wezner calls a “small-scale panopticon” where Gamemakers and citizens can follow the tributes minute by minute with the help of cameras and tracking devices (149). The panopticon symbolism is most evident in the Quarter Quell arena’s clock-like structure, with the Cornucopia placed in the middle and the arena divided into twelve equal slices, representing the Capitol’s power over the twelve districts (Wezner 149). Katniss’s internal monologue in the Games frequently reflects her awareness of the viewers, and she moderates her actions accordingly: “The minute I hit the ground, I’m guaranteed a close-up. [...] So as I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me” (*THG* 191).

The threat of constant surveillance does not end after Katniss is released from the arena, in fact, her awareness of the gaze only heightens. During the Victory Tour, Katniss starts to suspect that the Capitol has placed cameras in the forest where she and Gale hunt, and she fears that listening devices are hidden on the train that transports them around Panem and in her own home. Even in the relative safety of District Thirteen, she cannot forget that images of her might be seen by President Snow. The panoptic structure of Panem thus exerts disciplinary power over citizens

as the threat of the ever-present gaze forces them to relinquish their agency in the name of survival. At the same time, Katniss and others can regain some control by projecting a false image, and this negotiation of powers remains a constant throughout the trilogy, reinforcing the transactional nature of power.

In addition, Wezner identified the use of media as a tool of disciplinary control in Panem. As the central government, the Capitol has sole control of the airwaves, and the only programs available for viewing are what they televise. Broadcasting the Games is an added layer of control as it “transform[s] punishment into spectacle” thus ensuring that it is not only the children who suffer, but every citizen watching simultaneously undergoes torture, which maximizes the impact of the Games and promotes discipline among the districts (Wezner 150). During the later stages of the Games, school is often canceled so children can watch the broadcast at home, and although districts struggle with frequent power outages, the Capitol provides uninterrupted electrical power during mandatory screenings of the Hunger Games and important government messages. This serves to underscore the power that controlling the media grants the Capitol, and explains why District Thirteen wants to hijack government broadcast channels in *Mockingjay*: according to Wezner, both sides of the revolution are aware that “controlling this medium of communication means control over reality” (153). The media and its power over the people also allow readers to recognize parallel patterns in control tactics used by the Capitol and the leaders of District Thirteen. The underground resistance resembles the tyrannical government not only in its desire to control the airways, but also in the implementation of strict rules, mandated schedules, an electronic surveillance system, and guards; as such, they turn out to be “a more effective and deadly panopticon than the Capitol” (Wezner 151). Appointing President Coin as a new ruler after the rebellion would effectively mean the reinstatement of a tyrannical government, which Katniss only realizes after Prim’s death sheds light on the manipulative practices of District Thirteen.

Although sovereign power and disciplinary power are the main tools of control utilized by the Capitol, Macaluso and McKenzie point out that the other two modalities also appear in the trilogy. The Capitol exercises pastoral power by posing as a parent figure keeping the districts safe from outside threats, and making them dependent on the government for food supplies and transportation (114). Bio-power manifests through the Capitol's management of the genetic make-up of Panem, and the allocation of resources and industries (113). In addition, objectifying tributes through language is also a kind of bio-power, and children reaped for the Games are often referred to by their district number instead of their name (Macaluso and McKenzie 113). This reinforces their replaceability and takes away their humanity, further stripping them of power.

A citizen of District Twelve, Katniss's agency is limited not only by her government, but also by her self-imposed role as Prim's protector. At eleven years old, Katniss took on the task of feeding her family through illegal hunting and gathering, and her everyday actions are often guided by a protective instinct as Prim's parental figure. From defying Capitol laws to hunt outside of the fence through volunteering to face certain death in the Hunger Games, Katniss repeatedly puts herself in harm's way to save her sister. As the only person Katniss is certain she loves, Prim holds an unintentional and unknowing power over her sister, a kind of reverse pastoral power where Prim is dependent on Katniss and yet she is the dominant one. Thus Katniss has to be mindful of her actions not only for fear of Capitol retribution but also for fear of bringing harm to her sister. The tension between these two distinct limitations on Katniss's agency becomes most intriguing when she begins defying the Capitol. The resulting back-and-forth between her agency as a citizen and her agency as a sister will be discussed in detail in the upcoming section of the thesis.

To sum up, young adult dystopias depict the same struggle for power that adolescents experience as a sign of maturation, allowing them to interrogate these difficult emotions. As they gradually become aware of their powerlessness as children, adolescents begin to challenge the

authorities that hold power over them and attempt to redefine themselves as agents of their fate. Dystopian fiction is especially fitting for inspecting the social and political institutions that control adolescents' lives as the genre centers around the critique of these structures. As researchers have pointed out, *The Hunger Games* contains portrayals of all four modalities of power identified by Foucault, thus it provides a thorough look at the disempowerment of its protagonist.

In addition to portraying ways to assert control, young adult dystopias also encourage the awareness and acceptance of powerlessness, and a crucial step in this process is understanding death as a final destination in the metaphorical journey that is life. On-page depictions of violent, untimely deaths that mark a loss of innocence for protagonists clearly separate adolescent novels from children's and adult literature. This is especially true for *The Hunger Games* where death is a substantial part of the narrative, but it is Prim's death specifically that marks the final turning point for Katniss. The connection between death and power thus informs the core arguments of the current thesis and contributes to answering the research questions posed in the Introduction.

II. Conflicting Agencies and Political Motives

This chapter of the thesis argues that Primrose Everdeen's death, however painful for Katniss, is crucial for the narrative arc as it contributes to the protagonist's final liberation from powerlessness. It removes Prim as a limitation on Katniss's personal agency, allowing her to regain full control of her actions and freedom to resist political oppression. The circumstances of Prim's death also expose President Coin's ulterior motives which enables Katniss to see the real intentions of the District Thirteen rebels. Consequently, Prim becomes a symbolic sacrifice in the fight against a system that routinely objectifies and exploits children, marking a shift in generational attitudes. Her death reinforces that the children of Panem are at the mercy of the government, vulnerable to the political machinations and power plays of adults. Thus, even when they should be safest, the odds are never truly in their favor.

II.1. Katniss's Shifting Agencies

As mentioned in chapter I, there are two distinct limitations acting on Katniss's agency. On the one hand, the different modalities of power wielded by the Capitol disempower Katniss as an adolescent in Panem. On the other hand, her self-imposed role as Prim's parent and protector similarly restricts her freedom to act. Although she gains more and more agency of the first kind as the series unfolds, she cannot resist political oppression as long as she has Prim to consider. As a result, Prim's death is the turning point that frees Katniss's personal agency and subsequently allows her to reclaim her political agency as well. To see the full progression of these conflicting agencies struggling for dominance within Katniss, it is worth investigating the key points of contention throughout the plot. At the start, Katniss has the simple goal of saving Prim, and she does not seriously consider resisting Capitol oppression until she is faced with the myriad ways in which the system exploits its people. Accordingly, her fight to regain full agency also begins slowly

and gains momentum alongside the swelling rebellion, finally coming to a crescendo with Prim's death in *Mockingjay*.

Readers only get a few glimpses into Katniss's everyday life in District Twelve, but these are sufficient to give an insight into the hunger and poverty citizens have to endure. As a parentified child, Katniss has learned to put aside her own needs for the sake of providing food for her small family. One way of doing this is signing up for tesserae which grants her measly food rations in exchange for having her name entered additional times into the reaping. This practice illustrates the pastoral power of the Capitol: they pose as providers who graciously feed citizens in need, yet fail to address the root cause of the problem. While it gives adolescents a false sense of empowerment to provide for their families, the Capitol is simply exploiting their desperation. Tan claims that the availability of tesserae increases the value of adolescents in society, but it simultaneously strips them of their childhood as well ("Burn" 56). In addition, this system forces poor children in particular to increase their chances of being chosen, turning the reaping into what McEvoy-Levy calls "a poverty draft" (189), and causes a rift between those who can afford to eat without tesserae and those who cannot. Even teenaged Katniss and Gale recognize that it is "a way to plant hatred" between citizens, but they are not equipped to counter this manifestation of the Capitol's power (*THG* 16). The tesserae system is revealed to be even more insidious because according to Katniss, the rations alone cannot properly feed her family and she has to resort to hunting and gathering illegally to provide nutritious meals. The circumstances thus force Katniss to expose herself to more danger for the sake of protecting Prim.

Macaluso and McKenzie use the example of illegal hunting to argue that the Capitol's control is not absolute as there exist 'gaps in the fence' that allow citizens to seize momentary power (104). Although the activity is punishable by death, Katniss's urge to provide food for her family makes her disregard the threat. Sneaking into the woods thus joins other examples of subverting Capitol

power, among them the use of death as a bargaining chip discussed in chapter I.2. However, it should be noted that the circumstances are quite different as Katniss is keenly aware of lax law enforcement in District Twelve: crossing the fence poses no real danger of Capitol retribution until the events of *Catching Fire*. Since power outages in the district are the rule rather than the exception, the fence is normally not live with electricity, and Peacekeepers are downright supportive of illegal activities in the district as they, too, rely on fresh game caught by Katniss and Gale to supplement their food rations. The inattention of the Capitol thus allows citizens significant freedom from control and gives them a false sense of security. In this sense, although Katniss obtains power by disregarding the rules, she is not yet consciously reclaiming her agency as her intentions are less about opposing the Capitol and more about providing for Prim.

Katniss thus embodies the archetype of the reluctant hero: initially, she hungers not for freedom from oppression but for mere survival (Jones 240). Jones writes that Katniss's "first role as hero evolves throughout the seventy-fourth Hunger Games: from the object of Peeta's hopeless love to bereaved ally of Rue to the desperate girl who refuses to leave the arena without the boy she loves" (239). However, it can also be argued that Katniss's first role is as the protector of her little sister, Prim, and volunteering to take her place at the reaping marks Katniss's first step on her hero's journey. This is reflected in the immediate response of the district crowd as well: they refuse to applaud her bravery, their silence "the boldest form of dissent they can manage" (THG 27). Volunteering for Prim causes a shift in people's attitude towards Katniss, earning their respect and love, which proves that even before she arrives at the Capitol and enters the arena, Katniss is already a symbol of hope.

Volunteering at the reaping also illustrates Katniss's instinctive self-sacrifice. She offers up her own life, the only thing that is truly hers to bargain with, to protect Prim from certain death. As Risko points out: "For her sister, Prim, Katniss sees the potential for at least one more year of life

before the next lottery. For herself, Katniss sees a lifetime – long or short – without her sister” (86). Only after making sure that her sister will remain safe does Katniss consider her chances at surviving the Games, proving that she values her own life significantly less than Prim’s. True to her parental role in the family, Katniss lays out directives for her mother and Prim after the reaping, coaching them to survive without her. She also sets up a safety net of food suppliers with Gale and the neighborhood baker who both promise to take care of Prim after Katniss is gone. As she explains, “People deal with me, but they are genuinely fond of Prim. Maybe there will be enough fondness to keep her alive” (*THG* 43).

As pointed out previously, the panoptic nature of Panem ensures that Katniss subjects herself to the disciplinary power of the Capitol. This is most visible during her first Hunger Games but has important implications throughout the entire trilogy. While preparing for the arena, Katniss consciously alters her behavior to project the image of a compliant tribute because she fears that her actions in the Capitol will have consequences for Prim. Katniss has little regard for what happens to her at this point: “Who cares what they do to me? What really scares me is what they might do to my mother and Prim; how my family might suffer because of my impulsiveness” (*THG* 120). Later on in the arena, Katniss often reminds herself to keep going, put on a brave face, and fight for her sister’s sake who is watching the broadcast at home, which once again highlights that Katniss’s desire to survive is not for her own sake but for Prim’s benefit. Additionally, Katniss is forced to pretend to be in love with Peeta in order to endear the Capitol audience that controls her fate through gifts of food and equipment. Connors states that the different roles Katniss performs eventually lead to the protagonist’s identity confusion (“I Was” 96), which remains relevant throughout the trilogy as adolescent Katniss attempts to navigate the surveillance society of Panem. This can be read as an exaggerated portrayal of the ways social forces shape adolescents’ lives, as outlined by Trites (16). She argues that once adolescents recognize that they are not “self-contained

individuals bound by their identities” but instead “socially constructed subjects,” they begin to interrogate the institutions that frame their existence (Trites 16). Consequently, Katniss’s self-actualization is prevented by the external pressure to mold herself into prescribed roles that guarantee her survival in Panem. Who she is becomes irrelevant in the face of what adults want her to be as they manipulate and exploit her for their own interest.

When Peeta claims he wants to show the Capitol he is “more than just a piece in their Games,” Katniss finds it hard to relate to this determination as she does not have the luxury to defy the Capitol: she has to think about Prim’s safety (*THG* 165). The first instance where she awakens to the cruelty of the Games and the system as a whole is Rue’s death. The young tribute reminds Katniss so strongly of her sister that she conflates the two girls, often mistaking one for the other at first glance. Up until this point, Katniss’s agency has only been restricted by her sisterly obligations, but it can be argued that witnessing the death of Rue, who acts as a kind of proxy for Prim, momentarily clouds Katniss’s judgment and makes her lose self-discipline. Finally understanding Peeta’s words, she feels vindictive towards the Capitol and wants to hold her oppressors accountable. If the Capitol enacts bio-power through the objectification of tributes (Macaluso and McKenzie 113), then adorning Rue’s body with flowers is the rejection of this control through deliberate humanization. The same desire drives Katniss when she decides to force the Capitol’s hand in declaring her and Peeta as a pair of winners. After “a lifetime of watching the Games,” Katniss not only has intimate knowledge of the structure of events before the Games or the workings of the arena, she is also able to predict the actions of the Gamemakers (*THG* 175). Using the pressure of the live broadcast and the knowledge that “they have to have a victor,” Katniss feigns eating poisonous berries to provoke the Gamemakers’ decision to spare them both (*THG* 402). Subverting the panoptic structure, Katniss manages to exploit the gaze for her own

purposes. This momentary power grab comes with serious consequences, however, and returning home reminds Katniss that her actions impact Prim as well.

At the start of *Catching Fire*, after Katniss's actions in the arena are interpreted as an act of rebellion, President Snow threatens to harm Katniss's family if she fails to convince the districts that she attempted suicide for love, not for resistance. Her priorities immediately shift back to protecting Prim, and Katniss once again bows her head to Snow's sovereign power, promising to put out the "spark" she had unknowingly started (*CF* 26). This includes continuing the 'star-crossed lovers' narrative with Peeta, reading out speeches approved by the Capitol, and trying to convince the rest of the districts that she has no desire to rebel against the government. She witnesses the desperation of the crowds, however, and deduces that "there's nothing I could ever do to change this. No show of love, however believable, will turn this tide" (*CF* 82). She remains fearful, though, and continues the charade at Snow's request. Here, the president gives Katniss the illusion of control by demanding that she tame the dissatisfied districts when he knows it is impossible. The real power remains in his hands while he uses Prim as a tool of manipulation, thus taking advantage of Katniss's love for her sister to smother her agency.

It is not until her attempts fail and, as apparent punishment, her close friend Gale is publicly whipped that Katniss recognizes and accepts her powerlessness. After she meets two runaways who inform her about the true extent of the uprising in other districts and the hope she represents for the oppressed, Katniss realizes that her mockingjay pin and disobedience made her "unwittingly the face of the hoped-for rebellion" (*CF* 169). It can be argued that at this point, she makes her peace with being unable to fulfill President Snow's task and decides that if she has no power to calm the districts, she will utilize whatever power she does have to be the symbol of change. She abandons her plan of running away to escape the Capitol's tyranny, and instead vows to remain in the districts "and cause all kinds of trouble" as an act of defiance (*CF* 135). Once Katniss has

awakened to her symbolic power, she is willing to sacrifice herself for the rebel cause knowing that she would be a useful emblem of hope even in death (Jones 242). Thinking of Prim and Rue gives her resolution to fight, which further illustrates this turn in agency: instead of submitting to Capitol control to protect Prim, she is now ready to rebel against oppression for the same goal.

Jones writes that identifying the Capitol as the true enemy allows Katniss to take “her first steps away from ‘reluctant’ and toward ‘hero’” (242). While Katniss has attempted to regain agency multiple times before, she has been unable to truly commit to her decision. What changes is the realization that in her desperation to keep the Capitol from hurting Prim, she failed to see that “they already have” (*CF* 139). Previously, she had been acting in fear of the Capitol, now she is angry and vengeful, determined to seek justice for future generations. Having resolved to fight the Capitol, Katniss is pulled into opposite directions harder than ever before: she is still protective of Prim but she also feels a growing urge to regain agency from Capitol control.

From this point onwards, there are two easily identifiable patterns in Katniss’s actions that illustrate her struggles in negotiating her conflicting agencies. On the one hand, she is more likely to resist the Capitol’s sovereign power when she assumes Prim is safe and unreachable. One instance occurs in *Catching Fire* when she finds solace knowing that Prim can come to no harm with the whole country watching, and proceeds to blow up the arena as an act of rebellion against the Capitol, “the real enemy” (425). Later in *Mockingjay*, before Katniss leaves District Thirteen to kill Snow as a final stand against oppression, she admits to Prim she feels “better, knowing you’re somewhere Snow can’t reach you” (289). On the other hand, whenever Katniss resolves to defy the Capitol and regain agency as a citizen, the thought of Prim is enough to make her reconsider. This is clear when Katniss decides against running away from Panem because of Prim, and when Peeta is trying to convince Katniss not to sacrifice herself. He shows Katniss a picture of Prim which she deems “the perfect weapon” to break her resolve (*CF* 394).

In *Mockingjay*, taking shelter in District Thirteen's underground facilities allows Katniss some reprieve from her conflicting agencies. Prim is safe in Thirteen, but Katniss is now concerned for Peeta who is held captive in the Capitol. Sensing that he is the new puppet used to control her, Katniss continues her careful navigation of tyrannical power structures. She is reluctant to accept the role of rebel leader as she sees no personal gain in it: "Is there any point in doing anything at all? My mother, sister, and Gale's family are finally safe" (*M* 13-4). Like Snow, President Coin tries to control her through ultimatums, but Katniss has already learned to use the Capitol's tactics to her advantage and has no difficulty countering Coin's demands with her own. With Prim's help, Katniss recognizes that she is in a position of power as she has something Coin desperately wants: her face as the symbol of the rebellion, backing the revolutionary efforts of District Thirteen. Refusing to be pushed around, Katniss takes charge of the situation and accepts Coin's terms on the condition that she try to rescue Peeta and grant him amnesty. It is thus important to note that although she becomes the Mockingjay under pressure and without much conviction, Katniss has learned to stand up for herself and is wary of letting another leader exploit her. She refuses to enter another negotiation where she has to sacrifice her agency, therefore she establishes clear boundaries at the start, which threatens Coin's later plans.

As Prim's safety in District Thirteen is guaranteed, Katniss's focus shifts to the desire to kill Snow in retribution. As the head of state and the figurative puppet master who has been toying with Katniss for the past year, he represents the final limitation of her agency. Before she can reach Snow's mansion, however, the unimaginable happens and Prim dies in a bombing, right in front of Katniss. The fallout of this event is manifold. After a conversation with a captive President Snow, Katniss starts to piece together the puzzle that is President Coin and her political motivations. She infers that Coin not only approved thirteen-year-old novice healer Prim's presence at the front lines of the rebellion, she was also responsible for bombing Capitol children. The staggered explosions

were designed to draw in rescuers before the second wave of bombs detonated, claiming a higher number of casualties. This revelation exposes Coin as a potential second Snow, a cruel leader who is willing to sacrifice children to achieve her political goals.

Jones points out that although Coin is Snow's foil in appearance, their responses to dissent are identical: they force Katniss to stay in line for fear of retribution (243). Coin also parallels Snow in her eagerness to manipulate Katniss, especially after she recognizes that Prim is the perfect tool of control through which she can win Katniss's support and obedience. Disguising the hovercrafts as Capitol planes is meant to suggest to Katniss that President Snow is responsible for the death of her sister, putting her firmly on Coin's side. Commander Paylor, an "actual rebel" in Katniss's words (*M* 398), subtly helps her discover the deceit, contrasting her genuine intentions with Coin and Snow's manipulative tendencies. Similar to Jonas's experiences in *The Giver*, learning the truth about Prim's death empowers Katniss to see with clarity and make a well-informed decision about her future. As numerous times before, Katniss seizes power as she subverts the manipulative tactics of her enemies and misleads Coin by supporting her plan for a final, symbolic Hunger Games with the motto: "for Prim" (*M* 417). Unaware of Katniss's shifting allegiance, the president is lulled into a false sense of security as she allows Katniss to carry out Snow's execution. However, having realized that Coin would simply replace Snow as an oppressive figure, Katniss uses her arrow to kill the new leader instead.

Shooting President Coin is Katniss's first independent action, one she is not manipulated or forced into by higher powers, but it is important to note that she can do this only because Prim's safety is not a concern anymore. Unimpeded by her sisterly obligations, Katniss finally embraces the role of rebel leader and regains her agency to stand against political oppression. Thus Prim's death is proved to be crucial not only in empowering Katniss to take control of her actions but also in revealing President Coin as the next tyrant. By killing Coin who has implemented the same

sovereign and disciplinary power structures in District Thirteen that Snow has employed in Panem, Katniss enacts punishment while reclaiming full agency and freeing the country from tyranny.

II.2 The Odds Are Never in Your Favor

Primrose Everdeen's death also carries important symbolism for the future of Panem. Her character can be read as the emblem of all children in Panem, and Katniss's tireless efforts to save her reflect the younger generation's shifting perspective on the value of childhood. In the current political structure, every aspect of life is designed to objectify adolescents, deny them agency of their fate, and turn them into tools of adult survival. As Tan points out, the Capitol turns the young generation into commodities, claiming ownership of their bodies for adult entertainment through the Hunger Games ("Burn" 64). This means that children and adolescents lack real power, and Katniss could never save Prim within the narrative. Her repeated attempts to shield her sister simultaneously illustrate Katniss's refusal to accept powerlessness and highlight that her ability to enact change is limited by the manipulation of adults. The realization that she is only granted the illusion of power is crucial for her to finally recognize the oppressors and obtain true agency. Prim's death thus aims to highlight the futility of Katniss's efforts by revealing the underlying power structures that disempower all adolescents in Panem. It also reflects on the collective vulnerability of children in Panem and urges a new generation to end the cycle of exploitation.

The Hunger Games opens on reaping day, the most dangerous and terrifying time for children around Panem. Established as punishment for rebellion, the Games are intended to entice fear and discipline the districts, and as such, it is the most significant manifestation of sovereign power held by the Capitol (Macaluso and McKenzie 106). As Katniss points out, the Capitol wants to remind citizens of their powerlessness against the central government by sacrificing their children, and they deliberately make the event "humiliating as well as torturous" (*THG* 21). Children grow up watching and fearing the Games, knowing that they, too, will someday reach the age of twelve and

be entered into the reaping. The slogan of the Games, “may the odds be *ever* in your favor” (*THG* 22, emphasis in the original), reinforces the element of luck in the selection process: fickle fortune is the sole deciding factor in their fate. Children only have the power to increase their chances in the reaping by signing up for tesserae, and as “tools of their parents’ survival,” many in the poor districts do (Tan “Burn” 58). Collins’s dystopian world thus fits perfectly into Trites’s framework of novels where powerless children and adolescents struggle to find their place in strictly defined social structures (7). Instead of learning to exist within these confines, however, adolescents in the trilogy must eradicate the system that disempowers them.

As they age, children’s number of entries into the Games increases. Although at Prim’s first reaping she is “about as safe as you can get, since she’s only entered once,” it is this single slip of paper that gets drawn (*THG* 17). As evidenced by the crowd’s displeasure and Katniss’s shock, the chances of being chosen as a twelve-year-old are so slim that it feels particularly unjust, but it also serves as the perfect reminder of children’s defenselessness. The relative safety of the young does not mean complete invulnerability, and it would be foolish to assume that a regime that objectifies and sacrifices children cares remotely about their age. Simultaneously, that Prim is drawn despite her low chances reminds readers that she is nevertheless exposed to the Capitol’s cruelty, and Katniss can never fully shield her from harm in a society where children and adolescents are denied agency of their fate. Rue’s participation in the Games and her close resemblance to Prim drives home this point. For Katniss, the two girls are practically indistinguishable, and Rue’s death can be understood as confirmation that Prim would have been unable to survive the Games (Mitchell 131).

The societal objectification and consequent vulnerability of children is reflected in President Snow’s manipulations as well. As pointed out in chapter I, the threat of death is a powerful control tactic used by the president (Moffat and May 442). He toys with Katniss by exploiting her love for

Prim, using her sister as a tool for his own gains. He not only has the ability to have Prim killed, giving his threats an air of legitimacy, but he also lacks conscience when it comes to the death of hundreds of children. He claims after his surrender in *Mockingjay*: “I’m not above killing children, but I’m not wasteful” (401-2). This admission exposes his cold calculation wherein he considers children valuable only as long as he can exploit them. As the most powerful man in the country, his approach perfectly encapsulates the general attitude towards sacrificing childhood, as does President Coin’s decision to send Prim to the front lines.

Coin’s character is purposefully misleading for Katniss and the readers as she poses the most insidious threat precisely because she does not seem like one. As the leader of the underground rebellion in District Thirteen, she quite literally hides in the shadows and waits for an opportune moment to step in and grab power. The history of her district reveals the same duplicitous nature: during the first uprising seventy-five years ago, District Thirteen was the first to rebel, and “then abandoned the rest of the districts when the tide turned against it” (*M* 403). In *Catching Fire*, Katniss is enraged when she considers the possibility that the people of Thirteen survived the war decades ago but refuse to aid the other districts as the Capitol exploits and kills them. Her initial conviction is that “they’re no better than the Capitol” (*CF* 167), but this rightful sense of injustice is unfortunately quieted when she arrives in the underground city. Afterward, Katniss never stops to consider Coin as a genuine threat until it is too late because she believes President Snow and the Capitol to be her enemies.

As a powerless adolescent who is constantly manipulated by adults, Katniss is unfamiliar with the full extent of the political machinations and power plays that surround her, thus she cannot see through Coin’s deceptive façade. Her singular focus on defeating Snow blinds her to Coin’s secret maneuvers, but reversely, Snow is also preoccupied with crushing Katniss as the enemy of the state. He admits after his defeat: “My failure was being so slow to grasp Coin’s plan. [...] I was

watching you, Mockingjay. And you were watching me. I'm afraid we have both been played for fools" (*M* 403). Prim's death thus reveals Coin's willingness to sacrifice children for her political goals, seizing more power by exploiting the powerless. Katniss's inability to save Prim is thus due not to a lack of skill or willpower, but to the power imbalance between adults and children.

The fact that Prim is endangered the most when she should be safest forms a poignant parallel with the perilous nature of childhood in Panem. As Tan points out, the existence of the Games in Panem erases childhood and forces an untimely maturation as "violence is inscribed in the very act of growing up" ("Burn" 56). Instead of the peaceful, safe upbringing they deserve, children are exposed to a deadly lottery where they must rely on nothing but luck for survival. Prim is chosen at her first reaping when her name is only entered once, and Katniss reflects that "the odds had been entirely in her favor. But it hadn't mattered" (*THG* 24-5). Similarly, although her safety is guaranteed in District Thirteen, Prim still ends up on the front lines of the rebellion, exposed to mortal danger. She is "not yet fourteen, not yet old enough to be granted the title of soldier," but through carelessness or mercilessness, she is allowed to travel to the Capitol (*M* 406). Since the narrative is focalized through Katniss which limits readers' ability to draw unbiased conclusions, it is never settled whether Prim is sent to the front lines or goes voluntarily. Katniss believes that Coin orchestrated the bombing with the intent of killing Prim and thus winning her support, forgetting to account for the fact that the president believed Katniss to be dead at the time of the siege. Regardless if Prim's death is a coincidence or the result of Machiavellian planning, however, Coin's approval to target the children corralled together in front of Snow's mansion exhibits her disregard for the sanctity of youth. This is further underscored by her eagerness to host a final Hunger Games which convinces Katniss of her vileness.

With regard to the complicity of every adult in Panem, Tan argues that the system perpetuates the cycle of child sacrifice by indoctrinating the young with the rightfulness of this practice. She

writes: “If the adult world impresses violence, sacrifice, and objectification onto childhood, if children grow up as tools of their parents’ survival, if children are denied entry into the Symbolic because the adult world denies them voice, then those children will grow into the same adults, who can only sit by and enable as these same ideologies are impressed onto their children” (Tan “Burn” 58). Katniss repeatedly shows her staunch rejection of this design by purposefully humanizing children around her. Volunteering for Prim speaks of a willingness to fight for the defenseless, while decorating Rue’s dead body endows the tribute with humanity, which stands in sharp contrast with the Capitol’s objectification of the young girl. It strengthens the image that both Prim and Rue are emblems of a traditional, Romantic view of childhood thanks to their small bodies, youthful innocence, and proximity to nature (Tan “Worse” 32). Indeed, Katniss does whatever is necessary to save Prim and through her all children of Panem from having to grow into adults who exploit child suffering, and fights to allow them agency over their fate. Refusing to be the cause of unnecessary death, she also rejects the idea of a final Hunger Games as she knows it would set her on the same path as her predecessors. Katniss thus becomes representative of the first generation to recognize the sacredness of childhood, and she enacts social change for the sake of future children. As Tan concludes, “With Coin’s death, the public spectacle of the Hunger Games is truly destroyed, the child’s body no longer a target or means of inscribing law and punishment. And, as the body is freed, Katniss is freed. [...] Katniss is no longer an object or commodity, and while she will always remain a symbol, she is free to simply watch as the world is rebuilt around her – this continuation perhaps the ultimate triumph of ‘the Mockingjay’” (“Burn” 64-5).

As the embodiment of childhood, Prim’s death also represents a final, symbolic sacrifice at the end of the rebellion. Her misfortunate selection at the reaping launches Katniss on the journey of a reluctant hero and provides the first spark for the uprising that ultimately takes her life. As the indirect trigger of resistance and the driving force behind Katniss’s struggle against oppression,

Prim is essentially the lifeline of the rebellion. Children represent a hopeful vision of the future, and as such, any change that occurs in the present is fueled by the desire to give younger generations a better life. Thinking of a possible future where Prim can realize her dream of becoming a doctor, Katniss says: “Something small and quiet, like a match being struck, lights up the gloom inside me. This is the sort of future a rebellion could bring” (*M* 167). This hope in Katniss is paramount to the success of the resistance (Jones 230), and even though Prim must die before meaningful change can occur, her sacrifice ensures that future generations can come of age without having to rely on favorable odds for survival.

III. Facing Powerlessness and Overcoming Grief

While the previous chapter explored the narrative function of Prim's death as a political necessity, chapter III analyzes it from the perspective of Katniss's character arc, focusing on her internal struggles. The following paragraphs argue that the inevitability of Prim's death not only carries a political message for readers, it also serves as a final point of maturation as it forces Katniss to face her powerlessness against death. Being unable to save her sister despite a series of successful attempts urges Katniss to recognize death as a finality and acknowledge her disempowerment against it. Subsequently, accepting death allows Katniss to start grieving for the people she had lost, and confront the unresolved trauma she had previously repressed to protect her sister. The appearance of Buttercup, the family cat is the final breaking point in Katniss's repression, and their ensuing reconciliation foreshadows a more peaceful, harmonious future for the protagonist.

III.1. Death as the Ultimate Powerlessness

As argued in chapter I, the young adult genre routinely depicts death in an attempt to help adolescents come to terms with their own mortality. While *The Hunger Games* trilogy features an overwhelming number of fatalities, it also positions its protagonist as both a perpetual survivor and a perpetual savior. As Moffat and May describe, Katniss is both a killer and a savior, "an adolescent so profoundly conscious of her own mortality fighting against death" (448). She participates in two Hunger Games, becomes the target of President Snow, and leads the rebellion against the Capitol; she kills people, watches her friends and allies die, yet manages to stay alive. She uses death as a bargaining chip to subvert the Capitol's disciplinary power and rushes head-first into mortal danger to fight for what she believes in. Concurrently, Katniss saves her family from starvation through tesserae and illegal hunting, successfully prevents Prim's death over and over again, and saves Peeta's life in both Games. The willingness to sacrifice herself for those she cares for shows that

she accepts her own death with relative ease, but she fears and grieves the death of her loved ones intensely. Thus Katniss's journey towards acknowledging her powerlessness against death focuses less on accepting her own mortality, and more on coming to terms with the fallibility of her loved ones.

Prim's death fits Trites's tripartite structure as it is a violent, untimely event that occurs on-stage and marks a loss of innocence for the protagonist (120-1). Of all the tragedies that happen in the trilogy, Prim's loss is likely the most shocking and devastating for multiple reasons. Katniss repeatedly refers to her sister as the person she loves most, and as such, Prim has an important role to play in life as well as in death. Saving her is Katniss's first and most important objective, and since the entire narrative is structured around ensuring Prim's safety, readers rightfully expect this goal to be realized at the end. After the sisters suffer through multiple tragedies and remain relatively unscathed, it feels especially cruel to watch Prim die in the last moments of action. In addition, Collins executes a masterful bait-and-switch when she shifts Katniss's – and thus readers' – focus away from Prim in the final novel. Prim's death is further proof that the narrative bears closer resemblance to real-life war than to a fairytale, and as such, tragic losses form an integral part of the story (Lem and Hassel 125). Nevertheless, a number of parallel scenes peppered throughout the series work in tandem to foreshadow the unavoidability of Prim's death. Close analysis of these key moments illustrates that in her desperation to save her sister, Katniss fails to recognize her powerlessness against Prim's inevitable doom and comes to see her sister as above death.

The first book begins with the lines: “When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas of the mattress” (*THG* 3). This haunting image describes a time when Prim has been absent for so long that her body heat has disappeared, erasing every last trace of her presence. Although it depicts a mundane scene, it

can easily be read as a vision of the future where Katniss must live without Prim's constant warmth, leaving readers with a sense of impending doom. This is strengthened by the opening scene of *Mockingjay* when Katniss stands in the ruins of her home and points out: "This is where the bed I shared with my sister, Prim, stood" (3). The destruction of this bed where the sisters slept side by side for comfort and warmth when they were young foreshadows the end of an era, a forced coming of age.

Another ominous moment occurs at the first reaping when, despite her low chances, Prim is chosen to represent her district in the deadly Hunger Games. Katniss rushes through the crowd that parts to let her pass, and she reaches Prim "just as she is about to mount the steps" (*THG* 25). Since hearing one's name at the event is essentially a death sentence, this early scene can be read as Prim getting marked for the grave. The macabre name of the reaping not only references the metaphorical Grim Reaper, but it also equates children to agricultural products ripe for consumption by the Capitol (Macaluso and McKenzie 113). Tributes are also likened to animals, as Katniss later recounts that what the Capitol refers to as the Launch Room, the districts call the Stockyard, "the place animals go before slaughter" (*THG* 168). Although Katniss takes her place in the Games, Prim has already been marked for slaughter, and subsequent attempts at protection are pointless as her future is decided at this moment. A similar scene takes place in *Mockingjay* when the citizens of District Thirteen have to shelter in a bunker from Capitol bombs. When Prim fails to arrive at the assigned living quarters, Katniss starts to panic for her sister's safety and, ignoring official warnings, she abandons the bunker to look for Prim. Running through the crowds, she is "indiscriminately shoving people aside" and shouting Prim's name (*M* 160), who shows up on the stairs and reaches the shelter just in time before the automated doors close. With Katniss's intervention, Prim remains unharmed again, narrowly avoiding death for the time being.

Discussing death and resolution in adolescent literature, Trites explains that constant repetitions within a novel “move the character closer to the narrative’s end and simultaneously delay that movement,” arguing that resolution can only occur once there is variation in this repetition (137). The same idea can be applied here: as Prim’s perpetual savior, Katniss overpowers death again and again, yet fails to recognize the repetitive nature of these incidents. The cyclicity of the plot demands a resolution, signaling to Katniss the fruitlessness of her actions: the same sequence of events will reoccur *ad infinitum* until something breaks the pattern. As Trites establishes, adolescent novels position death as a threat, and structure the narrative as a steady journey towards the fatality (118). Prim’s death serves as this unavoidable destination in Katniss’s coming of age, the final point of separation from childhood. The denial of possible tragedy and a conviction of Prim’s invulnerability sustains Katniss’s powerlessness against death until, at the end of *Mockingjay*, she must face the reality of her sister’s fate. Here, the narrative comes full circle as Collins blends the images of the first reaping with the final moments of Prim’s life:

“First I get a glimpse of the blonde plait down her back. Then, as she yanks off her coat to cover a wailing child, I notice the duck tail formed by her untucked shirt. I have the same reaction I did the day Effie Trinket called her name at the reaping. At least, I must go limp, because I find myself at the base of the flagpole, unable to account for the last few seconds. Then I am pushing through the crowd, just as I did before. Trying to shout her name above the roar. I’m almost there, almost to the barricade, when I think she hears me. Because just for a moment, she catches sight of me, her lips form my name. And that’s when the rest of the parachutes go off.” (391)

The contrast between the two scenes is emotionally jarring as the same action sequence plays out with the exception that this time, Katniss cannot get to Prim fast enough. The repetition of the word

‘almost’ drives home the cruelty of the situation, illustrating the glimmer of hope that Katniss has been clinging to ever since the first reaping: she was ‘almost’ able to save Prim, but not quite.

It is only in hindsight that Katniss finally understands the futility of her actions, and accepts that she was never meant to save Prim. After her body catches fire in the explosion, halfway between life and death Katniss sees herself as the mockingjay she was forced to become: “I am Cinna’s bird, ignited, flying frantically to escape the unescapable. The feathers of flame that grow from my body. Beating my wings only fans the flame. I consume myself, but to no end” (*M* 392). The realization that she has failed to save Prim despite her best efforts devastates Katniss and makes her want to die to follow everyone she has lost. This further illustrates that she has never feared her own death, it is life without Prim that she finds unthinkable (Risko 86). However, without facing her powerlessness against death, Katniss could never overcome it. As Trites has pointed out, the acknowledgment of death empowers adolescents (119), and Katniss’s ignorance only increases its power over her. Prim’s death thus triggers the final acceptance of disempowerment and the completion of Katniss’s journey towards adulthood.

III.2. Processing Unresolved Grief and Trauma

Acknowledging the finality of death also marks the beginning of Katniss’s grieving process. Before the narrative begins, Katniss is already scarred by her father’s death five years prior. As the tragedy triggers a depressive episode for her mother, Katniss has no choice but to repress her own pain and grief to be able to provide for her family. Unable to process the loss of her father, nightmares plague her even in the Hunger Games arena: “I bolt up screaming for my father to run as the mine explodes into a million deadly bolts of light” (*THG* 99). When she is injected with the tracker jacker venom, her brain reproduces images of her father’s death alongside Prim’s, revealing Katniss’s deepest terrors. The yearly school field trips to the mines also pose “an enormous source of anxiety” for Katniss after the explosion (*CF* 5), and she struggles to step into the elevator that

transports her underground, a place she continues to dread even while living in District Thirteen. The bomb threat that forces them to seek shelter on the deepest level of the underground facilities triggers Katniss's fear of suffering the same end as her father: being buried alive.

One of the most significant signs of Katniss's repressed trauma is her refusal to sing after her father dies. Alongside hunting and gathering in the forest, singing their district's folk songs used to be a joyful pastime for father and daughter, and the memory is too raw, the grief too acute for Katniss to handle. To others, she claims that she finds music a waste of time, but internally, she recognizes that it simply brings up painful memories of her father. The only exception she makes is for Prim: when the girl is very sick, Katniss sings her "the same songs she used to like as a baby" (*THG* 273). Music and singing thus have a double function: they soothe Prim in moments of pain, but cause distress for Katniss due to the memories associated with them. Unable to put herself first when it comes to Prim, Katniss is willing to reopen the scars of her past for the sake of her sister.

The horrors of the Games only exacerbate Katniss's distressed emotional state. As she has never learned to process her pain, she is ill-equipped to handle her trauma now and relies on her previous method of repression. At the start of *Catching Fire*, she is suffering from PTSD and grieving Rue, but returning home to District Twelve provides no relief either. Her nightmares force her to relive the traumatic experience of the Games, which transforms the arena from a physical site into an inescapable reality (Tan "Worse" 34). Ever the protector, Katniss is unwilling to share her pain with her family as she believes that they cannot carry this burden and instead hides information to ease their concerns. The idea that "they'd only become sick with worry" reveals that Katniss is so used to being the strong family member that she dismisses her mother and sister as too weak and delicate to handle hard truths (*CF* 37). In addition, living with Prim means constant reminders of Katniss's dead ally, Rue. While the strong resemblance between the two girls has a

soothing effect on Katniss in the arena, it causes her pain upon her return home. Rue was the reminder of her love for Prim; conversely, Prim now brings forth memories of death and grief.

Katniss's unresolved trauma is also reflected in her dislike of her new home in the Victor's Village. While her family enjoys the new living quarters, Katniss frequently returns to their old home because it reminds her of life before the Games. The house is symbolic of the relative safety and simplicity of Katniss's childhood, of the happy memories with her family before her father's death. Thus Katniss grieves not only for the people she lost, but also for a past version of herself that was unacquainted with death, still possessing a childlike innocence. The symbolism is reinforced by the destruction of the family home in the bombing of District Twelve. The only area that remains intact is the Victor's Village, and with it the new house that Katniss despises. The disappearance of the scene of her youth signals the impossibility of returning to childhood, leaving her no choice but to move forward into adulthood. At the end of the narrative, Katniss dreams of going back to District Twelve and finding her home intact, a dream that "becomes a nightmare in its false hope" since past versions of the safety of home are no longer reachable for the protagonist (Tan "Worse" 35).

Katniss's psychological distress becomes more pronounced at the start of *Mockingjay*, and the line between dreams and reality becomes more obscure, past and present blurring together (Tan "Worse" 35). In addition to the vivid flashbacks and nightmares in *Catching Fire*, she now suffers from headaches, nausea, and frequent panic attacks, which she tries to fight off with mental lists of simple truths when her thoughts become tangled from hallucinations. She voices feelings of survivor's guilt, blaming herself for the death of fellow tributes, District Twelve citizens, and rebels alike, of which she keeps tally through a "personal list of kills that began in the arena and now includes thousands" (*M* 308). She also remains hypervigilant and has exaggerated reactions to triggers, resulting from a combination of trauma and learned behavior due to constant Capitol

surveillance. Ghoshal and Wilkinson point out that all of these symptoms are consistent with PTSD, adding that her mother's depression predisposes Katniss to the disorder (191). Interestingly, after the first Games Katniss recognizes her mother's breakdown as an involuntary trauma response and feels compassion for her, but their relationship remains strained throughout the trilogy, depicting the permanence of a broken trust between mother and daughter.

On the other hand, Katniss begins to share more of her internal struggles with her sister, Prim. Realizing that the young girl has imperceptibly matured into adolescence, Katniss allows herself to occasionally rely on her for emotional support. Prim once again becomes the embodiment of all children in Panem who are robbed of the innocence of childhood: "time and tragedy have forced her to grow too quickly [...] into a young woman who [...] knows our mother can only hear so much" (*M* 38). The vulnerability of adults forces the adolescent sisters to cope with their pain alone to protect their mother, who would ideally be the protector of the family. Katniss's willingness to rely on others signals her inability to carry her burdens alone any longer and marks the beginning of a slow unraveling of learned behaviors.

However, any progress Katniss makes in managing her pain and trauma is lost when Prim falls victim to the bombing, sending the protagonist into a downward spiral. Katniss is badly injured in the explosion and loses consciousness, dreaming that she is a bird struggling to take flight. As Tan argues, this dream is "the only way to process the traumas of her loss and injury," and it marks a final transformation in Katniss's journey: she has lost not only her sister but also her human form ("Worse" 36). The severe burn marks on her body turn her into "a bizarre patchwork quilt of skin" which displays her internal trauma externally, both caused by the explosion that killed Prim (*M* 397). However, the physical disfiguration only serves to confirm Katniss as a survivor once again, especially in light of her dream-self pushing away dream-Prim to send her on to the afterlife (Tan "Worse" 36). Katniss remains in this dream state for days, and her visions blend with reality. This

in-between space where the dead meet the living represents her inability to accept her losses, so much so that Katniss takes refuge in her dreams, clinging to the past where her home and family are intact (Tan “Worse” 36).

After she is revived from the brink of death and brought back to consciousness against her will, Katniss exhibits utter apathy towards everyone. She struggles with hallucinations, hides away in secret corners to avoid people, and tries to come to terms with her new reality without her sister. She does not speak, which her doctors conclude is due to emotional trauma, and her mind is hazy and confused. Directionless save for the promise of killing Snow, Katniss drifts in and out of consciousness, self-medicating on morphling to numb the physical and emotional pain. In her aimless wanderings, she meets President Snow and when he reveals that Coin is responsible for Prim’s death, Katniss finally breaks her silence to voice her disbelief. This new information temporarily ends her lethargy and focuses her attention enough to uncover the truth, a newly-found wrath driving her forward. Just as Katniss is driven by the desire to punish Snow throughout *Mockingjay*, she once again finds strength in the promise of delivering justice and avenging her sister’s death (Frankel 57). Assassinating Coin is not only Katniss’s first independent move, as argued previously, but also her designated final act: unwilling to live without Prim in a world of endless human cruelty, she plans out her suicide.

Murphy explores Katniss’s disillusionment with humanity, reading war stories as allegories for adolescence (207). She argues that while Katniss is born into a violent environment and therefore cannot be held accountable for the start of the ongoing violence in Panem, as an adolescent, she gains awareness of her complicity. Her power might be constructed and limited by adults, but as she comes of age, Katniss becomes part of the violence through her participation in the Games and the rebellion. Although she despises the adult world and feels angry at her exploitation, she also fears her own potential for violence. Murphy argues that Katniss’s emotional

distress after Coin's assassination is caused partly by "a realization of [her] own participation in the violence [she] fear[s]" (207). This is consistent with her rejection of sacrificing childhood as discussed previously in chapter II.2, except after Prim's death, Katniss finds herself incapable of reconciliation with the monster inside and instead chooses to end her own life.

Her repeated suicide attempts are stopped, however, and Katniss is forced into a room, completely alone. Days into her isolation, she begins to sing unexpectedly, and like a dam breaking, old folk songs pour out of her. She marvels at how clearly she remembers the words and melodies that her father had taught her as if no time has passed: the songs from her childhood are preserved in perfect condition, much like the grief of her father's death she had pushed away. Hanlon writes that these songs help "rescue Katniss's humanity," emphasizing that due to the community-building aspect of folk traditions, reconnecting with music helps Katniss reconnect with her loved ones (65-6). Music is reclaimed as an act of healing, and just as she helped Prim recuperate by singing, Katniss now heals her broken self through song. Music symbolizes rebirth and new beginnings throughout the trilogy, as well as a guiding light in the time of darkness (Gant 96), and Katniss singing to herself for weeks in the ruins of her old life perfectly exemplifies this. Prim's death thus acts as the trigger of Katniss's complete breakdown, but also as the end of her emotional repression. This fatality is crucial for the narrative as it results in the literal and figurative burning of Katniss's previous self, allowing her to rise from the ashes of her grief and begin the gradual rebuilding of her life.

III.3. Buttercup as the Tool for Releasing Grief

Although Katniss begins to unearth her repressed trauma when she starts singing again, this is only the initial point of her healing journey as her grief for Prim is still too fresh. Her lethargy continues after she returns to District Twelve, and so does her suicidal ideation. Katniss moves back to the house in the Victor's Village despite the horrible memories it triggers as that is the only

inhabitable place in the district. She spends her days in a catatonic state, barely moving from her seat in the kitchen, eating only because someone supplies her with food. She makes no sound and keeps the lights off as if scared to summon memories of a better time in the house when Prim was alive. She has a nightmare in which she lies in a grave and every dead person she has known throws ashes on her, which illustrates the immense guilt and shame Katniss is buried under. She recognizes that no one is around to stop her from taking her own life, but for reasons unknown even to her, she does not act: “I seem to be waiting for something” (*M* 428). That something turns out to be the appearance of Buttercup, the family cat.

The figure of Buttercup is similar to Prim’s in that he has a significant role to play in the narrative despite his infrequent appearances, but the difference between the two of them is that while Prim functions as Katniss’s foil, Buttercup bears close resemblance to the protagonist. Their relationship is antagonistic from the beginning, Katniss despises the cat who is just “another mouth to feed” in an already poor household, and tries to drown him (*THG* 4). He holds no value for Katniss, unlike the family’s goat who supplies them with milk, but Prim’s affection for the animal saves him. Katniss and Buttercup both love Prim unconditionally and feel fiercely protective of the girl, and this shared goal keeps their interactions relatively civil. They are both hunters as well, which contributes to their begrudging tolerance of one another. This also explains why Katniss lacks her usual gentleness toward animals when it comes to Buttercup: while she has a distaste for nonhuman suffering and treats her prey with respect, she recognizes Buttercup as a fellow hunter who needs no coddling.

Their relationship slowly evolves over the trilogy. As Katniss is thrown into the Hunger Games, she finds solace in the thought that in her absence, Prim can rely on Buttercup for love and protection. In *Catching Fire*, they bond over their shared dislike of the new house in the Victor’s Village, often meeting in the old family home when Katniss goes hunting. In *Mockingjay*, Katniss

risks being reprimanded when she sneaks the cat back to District Thirteen to make her sister happy. Despite their tentative truce, Katniss and Buttercup continue to dislike and distrust each other, likely because of their resemblance. Peeta believes that Katniss and Haymitch cannot stand each other because they are “just alike” (*THG* 303), and Katniss fails to recognize that the same might be true for her and Buttercup.

In addition to their shared connection to Prim and their general prickly personality, they are both self-sufficient survivors. Buttercup not only survives Katniss’s attempt at drowning him, but also the bombing of District Twelve, and later the long journey back to their old home from District Thirteen. When she finds him in the ruins, Katniss remarks: “thousands of people are dead, but he has survived and even looks well fed” (*M* 15). The same description is applicable to Katniss, of course. As King points out, Buttercup is also one of the few non-mutated, non-genetically altered animals in Panem, and as such, he remains true to his nature, much like Katniss (110). He also escapes being controlled or taken advantage of, instead carving out a parallel existence with humans. According to Clarke, Buttercup’s fate and identity are intertwined with Katniss’s (6). In addition to their tenacity, their emotional and physical responses are alike, which Katniss discovers while taunting the cat with a flashlight in *Mockingjay* (Clarke 5). She applies the game as a metaphor for her own situation and recognizes that Snow is playing with her the same way she is playing with Buttercup. The realization, coupled with the visible helplessness of the cat, pushes her to the breaking point.

Due to the fraught relationship between Katniss and Buttercup, the cat’s reappearance brings a surprising turn at the end of the narrative. While Katniss is sentenced to live in District Twelve, Buttercup seeks out the old family home of his own accord, searching for Prim. In her emotionless state, Katniss responds coldly at first but slowly builds up to a frenzy, shouting and throwing things at the cat in an attempt to chase him away. He is exactly the reminder that Katniss had been

avoiding, and his appearance reopens the ache of Prim's loss. Katniss is thus broken out of detachment and begins to sob in earnest as grief overpowers her. She and Buttercup wail together, "part crying, part singing," keeping each other company through the pain (*M* 434). The recurrence of singing is important as Katniss's final healing is once again accompanied by music, a symbol of rebirth (Gant 96). Just as the acknowledgement of death empowers her, embracing the pain of Prim's death enables Katniss to eventually release it.

Buttercup is the only character who feels about Prim the way Katniss does, therefore he is the only one who can truly sympathize with her grief, and the shared trauma of losing Prim brings this unlikely pair together. Clarke emphasizes that since their lives are so closely intertwined, when Katniss recognizes herself in Buttercup, she is able to find a way back to herself at the end of the trilogy (5-6). She further points out that even in death, Prim has the ability to transform reality for those she was close with (8). This is true for Katniss and Buttercup who respond to one another differently in Prim's absence, meaning the only reality in which they can viably get along is the one where she is gone (Clarke 8). Prim's death engenders a close-knit bond between Katniss and Buttercup which enables them to draw strength from each other. Just as Prim had Buttercup as a proxy for Katniss during her time in the Games, now he and Katniss become proxies for Prim in each other's lives: when Katniss wakes from her sleep, she finds the cat guarding her in the night, much like he used to guard Prim.

After Katniss's catatonic state is broken, her grief demands release and she cries for days. She finally reaches out to her mother and they weep together, the first step in mending their broken relationship as well. Katniss begins to find meaning in her life again, and she gradually recovers from Prim's loss. There is a marked shift from the self-blaming narrative of survivor's guilt as well. Instead of carrying the names of her dead as a reminder of her failures, Katniss decides to create a memory book with each person's name, picture, and details from their lives. The pages serve as an

outlet for grief and a promise “to live well to make their deaths count” (*M* 435). Prim’s demise thus forces Katniss to acknowledge death as a finality, and by releasing the grief and pain she had held back for years, she can leave her past self behind and move on to a better future.

Staying true to the young adult genre, the trilogy ends on an optimistic, hopeful note as a way of offering a solution to real-life problems that adolescents face (Jones 230). The oft-criticized ending of *Mockingjay* validates Katniss’s actions by trying to counterbalance the deaths and traumas with the depiction of “a gradual rebuilding of life,” showing that while her decisions and actions may not have been perfect and will have a long-lasting impact on her psyche, Katniss did succeed in bringing about political and social change for future generations (Moffat and May 452). It could also be argued that Prim’s death has a similar effect: although her loss is the proverbial final straw that finally breaks Katniss’s mental and emotional perseverance, she eventually recovers and is able to properly process her grief related not only to Prim’s death but to the loss of every person she has cared for.

Conclusion

In light of the general lack of scholarly research into the narratological function of Primrose Everdeen's character, this thesis set out to explore her role in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Despite being the trigger of the resistance and the motivating force behind protagonist Katniss Everdeen's actions, Prim's death is not only inevitable but strictly necessary for the political resolution of the trilogy and Katniss's character arc. Her demise is key in Katniss's adolescent maturation as well as the political and social change enacted in the plot, both of which serve as fundamental themes of the young adult dystopian genre.

Chapter I introduced the trilogy's genre and the theoretical framework of the thesis. Like other examples of dystopian fiction, *The Hunger Games* extrapolates present social and political anxieties to interrogate them in a futuristic setting. The journey of the adolescent main character reflects literal and metaphorical struggles that readers of the young adult demographic face in their daily lives. As researchers point out, these two genres form an ideal blend as they both concern themselves with a sense of disempowerment and oppression, and interrogate questions of personal and political agency (Jones 225, Lee and Alexander 392).

Relying on the work of Roberta Seelinger Trites, chapter I also outlined the central themes of young adult literature, namely those of power and powerlessness (1). As adolescence is a time of seeking power, characters of the genre reflect readers' anxieties as they embark on their fictional journeys toward adulthood. The power that social institutions hold over people is also important as they constitute one of the main forces that shape adolescent identities (18). The theme of death is frequently featured in the genre both as the exploration of powerlessness and as the ultimate point of maturation for adolescents (Trites 117-9), and this connection informed the core arguments of the thesis. Lastly, chapter I used the theories of Michel Foucault to establish the different modalities of power at play in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. The Capitol is seen yielding all four types of power

over its citizens, controlling their lives through strict partitioning of the country, constant surveillance, the threat of public punishment, a forced dependence on the government, and the objectification of children.

In addition to the government's power over her, Katniss also struggles under the pressure of keeping Prim safe, and chapter II explores the tension between these two priorities warring within the protagonist. Through the evolution of Katniss's shifting attitudes toward political resistance, the chapter argued that Prim's death is crucial for the final liberation of Katniss's personal agency because only this can enable her to regain political agency and end the perpetual cycle of violence and tyranny in Panem. As Jones points out, Katniss begins the trilogy as a reluctant hero and gradually sheds her doubts to become the face of the rebellion and the symbol of hope and change (240). Although Katniss becomes more willing to confront Capitol control as the series progresses, Prim constitutes the ultimate limitation on her agency that stops her from taking a stand against oppression. Prim's death thus resolves Katniss's internal conflict and concludes the constant negotiation of agencies, allowing Katniss to break free of political control and regain power over her fate.

The circumstances of Prim's death also bring to light the true intentions of President Coin, and Katniss assassinates the prospective leader to prevent a second tyranny in Panem, fulfilling her role as a hero and bringing about social and political change for future generations. Chapter II also showed that Prim's character can be read as the representation of childhood in Panem, and her death is the symbolic final sacrifice that grants children a safe future. Katniss's relentless fight for the powerless signals the shift in generational attitudes toward the sanctity of youth, contrasted with adults' willingness toward the objectification and exploitation of children.

Chapter III focused on the narrative function of Prim's death as the final trigger of Katniss's coming of age. Based on Trites's research into death as the ultimate powerlessness, the last chapter

of the thesis highlighted that as the perpetual savior of her sister and a perpetual survivor herself, Katniss comes to regard death as something escapable. Although she accepts her own mortality, she refuses to recognize the possibility of Prim's death, thus maintaining her own powerlessness. Since the acknowledgement of death empowers adolescents (Trites 119), Katniss's denial keeps her in a disempowered position until Prim falls victim to the rebellion.

Prim's demise not only forces Katniss to face death and thus reach the final point of adolescent maturation, but it also enables her to process her unresolved trauma. From the death of their father and Katniss's consequent parentification through the trauma of the Games and the rebellion, Katniss represses her pain and grief to shield Prim. As the series progresses and she faces more horrors, Katniss struggles with symptoms of PTSD such as nightmares, hallucinations, survivor's guilt, and exaggerated reactions to triggers. Prim's death sends her into a downward spiral, and her emotional detachment reaches a peak as she becomes mute and largely unresponsive to the outside world. However, this complete breakdown is necessary for the gradual rebuilding of life that ensues.

After her worst nightmare becomes reality and Katniss loses Prim, she accepts her powerlessness against death and begins to let go of her dead one by one. Singing, a painful reminder of her father, is reclaimed as an act of healing when Katniss begins to sing long-forgotten songs from her childhood, marking the end of emotional repression. Another significant step in releasing grief is connected to her encounter with Prim's beloved cat, Buttercup. Chapter III illustrated that Katniss finds solace in the cat because he is the only character who can sympathize with the pain of losing Prim. Their resemblance and connection to Prim ties their identities and fates together, and Buttercup's appearance is crucial in Katniss's grieving process. Broken out of her catatonic state, Katniss embraces the pain of Prim's death and is able to eventually release it. In the closing pages of the trilogy, she absolves herself of survivor's guilt and begins to heal from the loss of her

friends and loved ones. Thus, Prim's death marks the final stage of maturation in Katniss's adolescent journey towards adulthood which forces her to accept her powerlessness against death and heal from trauma. Having enacted social justice and fulfilled her hero's journey, the protagonist of *The Hunger Games* trilogy is now able to shed her painful past and move on toward a better, hopeful future.

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