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RENDERING THE UNTHINKABLE:  
(UN)KNOWABLE ANIMALITY, COMPULSORY RECOVERY,  
AND HETEROSEXUALIZED TRAUMA IN *THE HUNGER GAMES*

BY

JENNIFER POLISH

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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**THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

## Abstract

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Jennifer Polish

Adviser: Professor Carrie Hintz

Dystopian fiction is expected to reflect deeply on the interactions between identities, bodies, and state control. Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games Trilogy* is no exception. The disturbing trilogy situated animality, disability, and trauma (both of non-humans and of humans) as being firmly controlled by the power of the state (the Capitol). Through its portrayal of hunting and genetic manipulation, the trilogy constructed a state-created animality which refused definitive labeling and insisted upon facing animal subjectivity while simultaneously disregarding the needs and desires of those considered to be non-human. Similarly, the state held sway over both the creation and elimination of disability: by deliberately inflicting tremendous impairments upon adolescents and then forcing them to re-cover their disabilities, the Capitol constructed a country in which the compulsory re-covery of disability reinforced the dominance of able-bodiedness. These concepts of animality and disability merged intimately in the arena of trauma, in which heteronormative gender expectations and heterosexual reproduction were positioned as a "cure" to human trauma while the traumas of non-humans remained non-centralized and were generally deemed unimportant. In the arenas of animality, disability, and trauma, then, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* both reinforced dominant cultural assumptions and radically unsettled those same assumptions. Violently oppressive norms that were rendered the only way to think were reinforced by the series' portrayals of hunted animality, compulsory recovery, and

heterosexualized trauma recovery. However, these existed alongside radical subversions such as becomings with mutations, resilience without “cures”, and non-human and non-recoverable traumas. The Hunger Games Trilogy, then, can be read as a tremendous enemy *and* asset to readers who wish to disidentify with dominant cultural assumptions about animality, disability, and trauma of all kinds.

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**Rendering the Unthinkable:  
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and Heterosexualized Trauma in *The Hunger Games***

**Introduction**

Dystopian fiction is expected to reflect deeply on the interactions between identities, bodies, and state control. Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games Trilogy* is no exception.<sup>1</sup> The disturbing trilogy situated animality, disability, and trauma (both of non-humans and of humans) as being firmly controlled by the power of the state (the Capitol). Through its portrayal of hunting and genetic manipulation, the trilogy constructed a state-created animality which refused definitive labeling and insisted upon facing animal subjectivity while simultaneously disregarding the needs and desires of those considered to be non-human. Similarly, the state held sway over both the creation and elimination of disability: by deliberately inflicting tremendous impairments upon adolescents and then forcing them to re-cover their disabilities, the Capitol constructed a country in which the compulsory re-recovery of disability reinforced the dominance of able-bodiedness. These concepts of animality and disability merged intimately in the arena of trauma, in which heteronormative gender expectations and heterosexual reproduction were positioned as a "cure" to human trauma while the traumas of non-humans remained non-centralized and were deemed unimportant.

Precisely because of this tendency to render those considered non-human as less important than those considered human, this thesis will begin its investigation of state power in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* with a discussion of state formation and non-state resistance to

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<sup>1</sup> The *Hunger Games Trilogy* chronicles the struggles of a teenage young woman, Katniss Everdeen, in her experiences of the Capitol's violent oppression, which features an annual Hunger Games competition that pitted twenty-four adolescents (called tributes) against each other in dangerous arenas. These youth either fought each other to the death (with one survivor) or faced certain death and/or torture at the hands of the Capitol.



dominant conceptions of who is rendered *animal*. In cases such as Katniss's becoming animal (specially, becoming muttation) after her sister's death, the narrative structure of the series reinforced this resistance to simultaneous state control of and disregard for non-human bodies. As discussed in Chapter One, not only could humans *become with* non-humans through intimate forms of knowing, but non-humans could *become with* humans in ways that forced readers to acknowledge non-human subjectivity. Muttations (animals genetically altered by the Capitol) forced this kind of acknowledgement when they resiliently persisted and took deliberate actions against the Capitol's express orders. However, Katniss's *becoming with* these muttations bore no apparent relationship to her lack of hesitation to shoot most non-humans she encountered through the eye. Katniss, as well the Capitol, rendered even the most resilient and resistant non-human animals as *killable*, leaving the humans who slaughtered them guiltless of murder. In a similar way, the Capitol rendered human adolescents as unkillable through the Hunger Games themselves, forcing hunter Katniss to simultaneously perform the role of the hunted and the hunter. The contradictions and ambiguities of the identities of human and non-human, hunter and hunted, forced readers to face the unfixed unknowability of animal and human identities.

Ambiguity was heavily featured as a component of disability, as well, and this will be the focus of Chapter Two. Instead of portraying "disability" as a fixed, constant identity, The Hunger Games Trilogy treated disability as a highly temporal, context-based aspect of bodily existence. The state consistently inflicted impairments onto tributes' bodies, but subsequently forced their reliance on temporary "cures" that would make them able-bodied enough to die in an entertaining bloodbath rather than in a slow, "boring" deterioration of health. This state-regulated set of "cures," manifested as gifts from sponsors during the Games and as "miraculous" Capitol medicines afterwards, forced most district residents to embrace compulsory recovery as the only

way their children would live to experience another morning. The state exercised almost supreme control over the access to and use of compulsory recovery. Certain characters resisted this, like Haymitch and Chaff (and even Katniss when she fought state-enforced starvation and learned how to hear again without medicine), whereas most others were subsumed by this individualized “healing” of disability and debility which forcibly rendered people as able-bodied or passing as such.

Passing as able-bodied or as emotionally functional after experiencing extreme trauma was a key theme of the series and will be one focal point of Chapter Three. Both the state and the narrative structure of the trilogy forced most major characters to perform heteronormative gender roles and/or heterosexual reproduction in order to be rendered as “cured” of their trauma. Characters that resisted this model, like Johanna and Haymitch, were rendered as unrecoverable and were dropped out of the narrative. Similarly dropped out of the narrative were the plethora of non-human animals who endured extreme trauma at the hands of both the state and the narrative. While respecting these creatures’ subjectivities involves acknowledging the uncertainty with which we must approach their experiences and articulations of trauma, non-human creatures expressed trauma frequently in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. Such mutation- and cat-trauma experiences mark important sites of resistance to the assumption that only humans experience trauma, and will be explored in depth in the third chapter.

Throughout these chapters, it will become clear that non-state actors – many of which were non-human actors – had the capacity to and often did radically resist state control of animality, disability, and trauma. However, the narrative itself often quashed this resistance. In setting out to assuage American anxieties about resilience in the face of disabilities and extreme trauma, the narrative dismissed important characters as never fully “healed” when they resisted

the compulsory recovery and/or heterosexual “cures” for trauma that Peeta (for example) was portrayed as embracing. Positive identification with disability and trauma through communal interdependence – portrayed as fleetingly possible through Katniss’s bond with Johanna and Haymitch and Chaff’s resistance to re-covering their disabilities and trauma – were also dropped out of the narrative.

Rendered as not interesting enough to readers to merit mention in the series’ conclusion and epilogue, these potential examples of radical resistance to both state control and narrative thrust were stymied (though, of course, not eliminated) by the series’ ending. This ending also failed to address important questions regarding the fates of non-human animals – what of mutations’ and other creatures’ lives when the arenas were destroyed after the rebellion? – and in so doing, reinforced the Capitol’s lack of concern for beings rendered non-human.

By examining both state control and resistance to this control, each chapter offers a microcosm of the coexisting contradictions offered by *The Hunger Games Trilogy*: the overall narrative structure at once reifies and cracks open the bodily norms and expectations set forth by the state power it portrays. *The Hunger Games Trilogy* thus holds precisely the kind of power that the late José Esteban Muñoz invoked when he wrote that:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message...and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus disidentification is a step further than cracking open a code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (cited in “Radicalizing Fantasy and the Power of Disidentification”).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandrina of *Black Girl Dangerous* performed an excellent application of Muñoz’s powerful ideas to *The Hunger Games Trilogy* and *Harry Potter* series (reading both Katniss Everdeen and Hermione Granger as young

Applying this radical analysis of ostensibly conservative texts to both animal studies and disability and trauma studies in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, the following chapters explore the nuanced possibilities of disidentification that persist despite state and narrative regulation of bodies and beings throughout the series.

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women of color) in the piece “Radicalizing Fantasy and the Power of Disidentification.” Those interested in Muñoz’s work and the radical potentials of children’s and young adult literature would do well to read this apt analysis.

## Chapter 1

### Fire-Mutts and the Performance of Animality in *The Hunger Games*

At its every moment, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* Trilogy forces readers to ask, can one *become with* the non-human animals<sup>3</sup> one hunts? Positioned as creatures with unclear species-being who are constantly hunted but perform the role of the hunter, both Katniss Everdeen and the muttations who hunt and haunt her nightmares truly *become with* each other. By entering into a conversation with Donna Haraway, Carol J. Adams, and others about the ethics and meanings of hunting, I explore who or what might haunt the nightmares of muttations. What might mutt subjectivity look and feel like, and what do Katniss's multiple identities as human, animal, monster, and mutation mean for what we know of hybrid and nonhuman creatures' species-beings and personhoods? If Katniss *becomes with* the creatures she hunts, do muttations, too, *become with* their prey? What might this reciprocal relationship mean for the future of readers' understandings of various nonhuman personhoods? Which persons are hunted in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy? Can humans ever *become with* animals we hunt?

By exploring these questions and deploying analyses influenced by scholars like Haraway and Adams, I find that Katniss's species-being asserts that those performing the role of human can *become with* those performing nonhumanity that we hunt as long as we are ourselves also hunted. However, the important question is not with whom humans can become, but with whom *nonhumans* can become. Through the subjectivity and personhood ascribed by the narrative structure of Collins's trilogy, I find that muttations can both become with those they hunt and resist those they are hunted by.

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<sup>3</sup> David Wood has written that “[a]nimal, in other words, is one of the ways we say “Other” (133). In spite of this, I persist in using the terminology here because, while I have no interest in Othering non-humans, homogenizing them, or claiming humanity as separate from animality, the texts I am working with draw significant distinctions between humans and those considered Other-than-human, so the use of “non-human animal” marks the most coherent way to discuss my texts.

The ways that different types of animals become with each other form a critical foundation for The Hunger Games Trilogy. The series is rife with a multiplicity of social, natural, technological, and psychological morphologies of animality and humanity. As Sharon King has highlighted, deliberate mutations to hybrid creatures and an “increasingly arbitrary moral separation between humans and animals” create the muddy “backdrop” for the dystopian trilogy (108). Through portrayals of humans, nonhuman animals, and mutations (genetically altered animals) with intermixed and unstable identities, the distinctions between humans, nonhumans, and mutations are constantly shifting. These non-identity identities then serve to unsettle definitions of “humanization” as promoting positive empathy and “animalization” as promoting demeaning inferiority. Central to this discourse is that of who is rendered murderable and murder-able and who is rendered merely killable.

According to Donna Haraway, who is rendered killable in a given society shapes and is shaped by who can be killed en masse. This killing is often committed by the state; as Achille Mbembe and Libby Meintjes argued, the state controls the necropolitics of who may die and when. When the state controls the taking of life systematically, distinctions must be drawn between being killed and being murdered. Haraway distinguished murder from killing when she wrote that genocide and other such horrors such as industrial factory-farming result when nonhuman animals and certain groups of humans are rendered able to be killed without their killer being called a murderer (*When Species Meet* 78). As Haraway elaborated, capitol punishment in the United States is another example of this permission to kill without being widely considered guilty of murder (78).

This is a particularly apt example here: the state (the Capitol, shall we say) has *carte blanche* to kill without being accused of murder. The death of murderable creatures renders the

killer a murderer, while the death of merely killable creatures does not bring the killer any new identity. The converse is true, as well: killable creatures are not ascribed subjectivity enough to be considered murder-able (or able-to-murder, because murder is associated with intent, and creatures without subjectivity cannot form the intent beyond instinct needed to commit murder).

Katniss, thus, was often not considered murderable but was ascribed enough subjectivity to be murder-able. Katniss's position as performing the extreme roles of both hunter and hunted simultaneously throughout the narrative both reflected and distorted who was killable and who was not in Panem. Her killing of nonhuman animals was never considered murder because the nonhumans that hunter Katniss shot were considered killable, but her own position as not murderable but murder-able threw into question the meaning of clearly defined categories.

As a hunter who provided food for her family, Katniss killed nonhumans daily for years before she was reaped as a tribute in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games. Perhaps ironically and perhaps fittingly, she and Gale were such effective hunters because they *knew* nonhuman animals. As hunters of nonhumans, Gale and Katniss were arguably skilled at it precisely because it was so easy for her to become with her prey through an intimate form of knowing. Knowing nonhumans ironically enabled their hunting: Katniss and Gale, through their killing of nonhumans, *became with* their prey. Spending so much time in the woods as a predator, Katniss developed a deep knowledge of and trust in her prey and potential prey animals.

Katniss's trust in prey persisted through her killing of nonhumans. After shooting an unknown animal in the Quarter Quell simply "for a closer look" (she subsequently decided it was edible), Katniss noticed that its "muzzle is wet. Like an animal that's been drinking from a stream" (CF 289). She used this observation to secure herself and her thirsty allies in the knowledge that there was water close by, knowing that if whom she came to call a tree rat could

find water, so could they. However, the humans needed a prosthetic – a spile – to help them tap into the water-bearing tree trunks, whereas the tree rat had “sharp front teeth” to help access water (294). Animality reigned superior here.

Katniss respected the superiority of the senses, instincts, and responses of some nonhumans. During the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss relied on rabbits, deer, and a wild dog pack running from Gamemaker-generated fire, “trust[ing] their sense of direction because their instincts are sharper than mine” (*HG* 172). Both knowing and respecting their animality on its own term, Katniss was able to (eventually) escape the fire. Even while acknowledging that she did not quite have nonhuman senses, however, Katniss had quite animalistic interactions with the world: when describing her distress about being blown deaf in her left ear, she wrote of herself as “pawing” at her ear, eager for hearing to return because without it, she felt lost in the forest (228).

Though eager to acknowledge areas in which nonhumans have superiority, Katniss also did not hesitate to share intimate comparisons between herself and animals: Gale said she climbed trees like a squirrel, for example (*HG* 182). She and Gale at one point (while in the forest, of course) “turn[ed their] heads in the same direction, like a pair of dogs catching a scent on the wind” (*M* 127). Katniss embraced this animality in her narration, often describing herself in particular and tributes more generally as animals.

Despite this embrace, most nonhumans were rendered killable for Katniss, and she actively separated herself and her actions from those of nonhumans by stating that humans were not “natural predators” (*HG* 155). This distance was also evidenced by her conversation with Gale about the differences between killing humans and nonhumans. When saying good bye to Gale after being reaped as a tribute in her first Games, Katniss was told by her friend and hunting partner, “Katniss, it’s [the Games] just hunting. You’re the best hunter I know” (40). Katniss



responded by telling Gale that “[i]t’s not just hunting. They’re armed. They think... [they’re] people” (40). Here, the killing of animals was framed as non-murder incomparable to the killing of humans. Though she outwardly asserted that the nonhumans she hunted did not think, in contrast to humans, she acknowledged in her inner narration that “[t]he awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different [than hunting] at all” (40).

Later in the series, however, Katniss acknowledged that human people are animals who are ultimately reducible to killable objects. Her experience in the Games affirmed this: killing nonhumans and humans was “[a]mazingly similar in the execution,” she wrote, but “[e]ntirely different in the aftermath” (243). Katniss’s trauma (discussed in Chapter Three) largely came from her distinguishing line between humans and nonhumans: weeks in the arenas left her feeling that Gale could not understand “the aftermath of killing a person... they never leave you” (*M* 69). Hunting and being hunted by humans gave her immense trauma, whereas years of hunting nonhumans gave her no nightmares that she wrote about. This might lead one to believe that Katniss had a firm, definitive line between humans and nonhumans, but both her narration and her own bodily journey indicate that this was not the case.

Katniss understood her own body as having animalistic instincts that allowed her – perhaps ironically and perhaps perfectly – to “shoot an animal in almost complete darkness and still take it down with one arrow” (*CF* 6). Haraway could have been writing of Katniss when she wrote, “outside Eden, eating means also killing, directly or indirectly, and killing well is an obligation akin to eating well” (296). It was this Haraway-esque intimate understanding of animality – and humans’ own place in an animal cycle of death and survival – that allowed Katniss to intimately know animals in order to both begrudgingly bond with Buttercup (discussed below) and hunt enough to keep her and Gale’s families alive. This knowledge was

undoubtedly one of the reasons that Katniss so strictly trained herself to always shoot her prey once through the eyes: this respectfully minimized pain and suffering for the animal while also maintaining the most useable meat for her family.

Scholars such as Carol J. Adams, however, would assert that no level of respect can mitigate a hunter's last acts towards the hunted: killing and eating their flesh. Adams incisively criticized the idea that it is possible to kill – or, she might say, murder – nonhuman animals in a “respectful” manner (“Ecofeminism” 137). She insightfully highlighted the fact the even hunts that are said to be “relational” still promote ontologies of animal bodies as edible (138). Adams suggested that true “reciprocity involves a mutual or cooperative interchange of favors or privileges. What does the animal who dies receive in this exchange?” (138). Nonhumans perhaps received a quick death from Katniss's straight shooting, but this is hardly the kind of favor or privilege that Adams desires. Katniss's shooting of animals through their eyes might mitigate pain before death, but it did not mitigate the fact of death.

Katniss was easily able to justify her hunting in her mind, given that she and her family were close to death when she began hunting. She and her family were themselves rendered helpless prey of the Capitol's intentional efforts to keep districts starving.<sup>4</sup> The state-enforced starvation arguably forced the slaughter of nonhumans for human consumption in the same way that the arena forced tributes to slaughter one another. The Gamemakers might have killed them if they refused, just as starvation might have killed district residents who did not eat meat.

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<sup>4</sup> Adams addressed the potential dismissal of the ethical urgency of vegetarianism and veganism in the face of starvation when she wrote, “[h]ow could I discuss food choices when so many people needed any food whatsoever?.. In silencing myself I adhered to that foundational text of meat, the relative unimportance of vegetarianism. By my own silencing, I endorsed the dominant discourse that I was seeking to deconstruct. It is past time for us to consider the sexual politics of meat for they are not separate from other pressing issues of our time” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 18). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Two, the state in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy had a policy of systematically starving its human population, and this oppression was therefore intimately connected to human relationships with non-humans in terms of hunting. As Adams astutely argued, the politics of meat cannot be divorced from “other pressing issues” like human starvation.

However, the narrative glorified moments of tribute unity – moments in which they refused to kill each other – but also glorified Katniss’s survivalist resiliency in her destruction of nonhuman life. Human life was thus placed above nonhuman life, by both characters and narrative.

Despite the narrative’s ambiguities about nonhuman-human identities and its demonstration of hybrid subjectivity, the trilogy ultimately did not challenge the assumption that nonhuman bodies are edible (and thus, killable). As Adams cautioned, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* ultimately upheld the destructive absolution of responsibility of the hunter: the gritty, survivalist human hunter must always survive, and the nonhuman animals must die for their sake. What’s more, as Adams argued, relational hunters like Gale and Katniss were not held “really responsible for willing the [hunted] animal’s death... the hunt itself requires it” (“Ecofeminism” 139). Here, Haraway and Adams seem to agree on the principle of making killable: in the hunt, nonhuman animals are made killable. Katniss routinely treated nonhumans as killable throughout the series. However, she simultaneously asserted herself as a mutation animal, complicating views of nonhumans as strictly “other.”

This complexity of beliefs and lived realities was reflected in Katniss’s often contradictory attitude towards the nonhumans she interacted with. Katniss proved that, despite her professed cavalier attitude toward animals of no “actual value” (eg. Buttercup), she harbored a distaste for nonhuman suffering even as she rendered their bodies as edible (*M* 14).<sup>5</sup> She and Gale both had voices and gentle touches reserved for wounded animals that they were about to kill (*CF* 391). Meant both to mislead the animal into calm and to comfort the animal, Katniss and

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<sup>5</sup> According to Adams, this pragmatic assessment of non-human ‘usefulness’ takes place in a highly gendered plane. As Katniss assumed her father’s hunting role, literally shrouding herself in him through the use of his jacket, bow and arrow, she reified patriarchal understandings of non-human bodies: “Meat’s recognizable message includes association with the male role; its meaning recurs within a fixed gender system; the coherence it achieves as a meaningful item of food arises from patriarchal attitudes including the idea that the end justifies the means, that the objectification of other beings is a necessary part of life, and that violence can and should be masked” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 14). Interestingly, this cold logic toward animal lives is the same thinking that tributes were encouraged to inhabit during the Games on pains of death.

Gale seemed comfortable and natural playing multiple, conflicting roles in their relationships with nonhumans. Interestingly, readers only ever witness Katniss and Gale approaching other humans as they might a wounded animal, but given Katniss's references to it in her narrative, they both have clearly had experiences approaching wounded nonhumans gently.

Perhaps in those moments – when Gale's traps hurt but did not kill or when Katniss did not shoot an animal cleanly through the eye – Gale and Katniss occupied the ambivalent, uncertain space of valuing the nonhumans as richly complex beings while taking the nonhumans' lives to survive their own. Comforting and calming at the moment of death – even if the death will be at their hands – Katniss seemed uncomfortable with animal suffering, in the same way that the tribute Cato's agonizing, long death so deeply disturbed her even after he proved himself to be a formidably brutal opponent in the Games.

As the Games changed her, Katniss seemed to become more, not less, sensitive to the suffering of those potential Others whom she hunted). She demonstrated her ability to identify with an Other in District Two when she beseeched everyone for peace after Gale, treating District Two Capitol supporters as prey, entrapped them in a similar type of deadly human-aimed snare that would soon kill Prim.

The death of Prim resulted from Gale's use of his intimate knowing of animality applied to humans. Gale's ability to become with animals, to respond, react, and feel as they do, resulted in his uncanny ability to design deadly traps and snares. The ease with which he applied this animal knowing to create the trap that killed – or murdered? – Prim forced him away from Katniss as she became with animality in a way that he hadn't: through physical transformation.

As Valerie Estelle Frankel has written, Katniss had in a sense become animal in her acceptance of the role of the Mockingjay before Prim's death. At the moment of and soon after

Prim's death, Katniss was forced to become animal, or muttation. Katniss felt her own animality distinctly in muttation form after being burned so horribly that she needed skin grafts and genetic alterations to help her survive. Indeed, after her injury, she acknowledged that she had become what she had been denying throughout Peeta's recovery: a muttation, specifically a "fire-mutt" (*M* 368).

In becoming a muttation, Katniss became what she had been beseeched to do many times throughout the series: animal. The Capitol had forced her to become prey (to be discussed below), and she performed animality cleverly enough to survive two ordeals in the arena. After living through both of her Games, the rebellion also forced Katniss's animality onto her: similarly to the Capitol's desire to dress her up and mold her into what they wanted to see, the rebel leaders reduced Katniss to their (disposable) Mockingjay.

Interestingly, Katniss performed the requested animality with skill only when she was allowed to be her instinctive, reactive self<sup>6</sup>: fightingly protective, both a human and animal quality. These traits are human in the gendered roles of both mother and father that Katniss assumed always for Prim and in the arena for Rue, and they are human in their subverted gendered meaning when Katniss assumed the role of protector for her ostensible lover, Peeta. However, this protectiveness is animal in its instinctive roots for Katniss, in its manifestation in fighting to survive. Was Katniss, then, closest to becoming the Mockingjay – becoming animal – when she was allowed to exist in the state that came most naturally to her: a hybrid state of humanity and animality? This begs the question again, as to whether Katniss's becoming a fire-mutt cannot be seen as the completion of her synthesis between performing and becoming

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida asserted that the fundamental distinction philosophers have historically made between nonhumans and humans is that "the animal is deprived of language. Or, more precisely, of response, of a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction" (32). Reactions are thus associated with animality, and responses are associated with humanity. When analyzed in terms of performativity, however, even what is performed as 'mere' reaction can be understood as a complex response.

animality and humanity rather than a physical transformation that sacrificed who she “really” was.

Katniss really was muttation by the end of the series even though muttations generally were described as such sources of trauma, pain, and terror throughout the series. In each place throughout the narrative in which Katniss explained to or reminded readers of what muttations were, she described them as “genetically altered animals [used] as weapons” constructed by the Capitol (*HG* 42). Significantly, Peeta later warned Katniss that the rebels had also “turned [her] into a weapon that could be instrumental in the destruction of humanity,” intimately connecting her fate to muttations (discussed in depth below) (*M* 113). Their fates became even more connected because after Katniss’s usefulness to the rebellion had expired, the rebel leader Coin tried to have Katniss killed, treating her like a disposable muttation. In Katniss’s own explanations of other muttations’ histories, she also always made a point to say that after their usefulness to the Capitol was diminished or destroyed, the muttations were either “abandoned to die” or actively killed by the Capitol (*HG* 43; 186).

This utter disregard for the muttations (and sometimes, for Katniss) as beings with full subjecthood was perpetuated by both the Capitol and the rebel government that arose after the Capitol was overthrown. During its reign, the Capitol converted past Games arenas into museums: presumably, the muttations and other animals were not present in these morbid tourist attractions. Where did they go? Were muttations created specifically for each new arena habitat, taken from other (laboratory) environments and forcibly adapted to arenas? Or were they bred in arenas as organic animals and then forcibly mutated into muttations soon before the Games? Again, where did they go – what was their fate? – after each Games? Presumably, they were killed, their ‘purpose’ having been fulfilled. The rebels, too, presumably destroyed any

mutations – not to mention other animals – that survived, in any case: with the complete destruction of all arenas, the mutations’ and other animals’ habitats were destroyed.

The unconcern for the subjectivities and lives of creatures in the arenas united human children and adolescents, organic animals, and mutations. All became the playthings of Gamemakers and respective governmental powers. This tightly controlled disposability of created life may seem foreign to readers, who may assume that mutations were almost science fiction-esque, allegorical figures. This distance between story and reality – achieved in a great deal of young adult fiction dealing with animals and hybrids as metaphors for human relations<sup>7</sup> – did not actually exist in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, however.

To the contrary, the sheer sophistication of technology required to create these new species – especially those with qualities read as human – are certainly not beyond the pale of current human innovation. Mutations were not an abstract part of a futuristic dystopian society that is reflective of, but not the same as, our own society. Haraway would be quick to highlight the fact that it is terrifyingly not uncommon for states to deploy genetic manipulations such as selective breeding in order to create a new species designed for inflicting state terror on populations. Beyond this use, however, these new hybrid creatures are of disturbingly little concern to the state.

With eerie and perhaps not coincidental similarity to the wolf-mutts deployed against tributes in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, the United States government is no stranger to using dogs bred to attack and terrorize detainees in Iraq (*When Species Meet* 62). Haraway asked, appropriately, “where were the animal rights outcries on this one?” (63). In a similar vein, during apartheid rule in South Africa, “in quasi-secret experiments, scientists in the service of the white state imported

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<sup>7</sup> According to Burke and Copenhaver, in most children’s literature that includes animal protagonists, “[t]he intellect and emotional distance that the animals’ role-playing allows children and their mentoring adults” to grapple with human issues such as racism indirectly (212).

northern gray wolves from North American with the intent of breeding an attack dog with a wolf's smarts, stamina, and sense of smell to track down 'insurgents' in the harsh border areas" (36-7). Existing for humans only as manifestations of a racist security state, tens of thousands of wolf-dog canid hybrids were "[b]oth epidemiologically and genetically categorically 'impure,'" and were forced to "enter the cultural category of the disposable 'homeless,' or in ecological terms 'nicheless'" (37). The state-created creatures were often killed – murdered? – and left to die (37).

Similarly nicheless after their use in the Games and protecting the Capitol, the fate of muttations was not reckoned into Collins's overwhelmingly heteronormative epilogue of *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. As with other experimentally created and/or used animals of whom humans generally do not recognize face<sup>8</sup>, the question with muttations truly is, "[w]hat happens if the working animals are significant others with whom we are in consequential relationship in an irreducible world of embodied and lived partial differences, rather than the Other across the gulf from the One?" (*When Species Meet* 72). What happens, indeed? Does Katniss's becoming mutation at the end of *Mockingjay* force the human recognition of nonhuman faces of the creatures who, aside from Katniss's nightmares, readers are aware of only in murderous capacities and never again?

Rarely were muttations even remotely described as creatures with their own species being, their own lives outside of torturing human tributes. That they were themselves forced players in the Capitol's Games and also led unfree lives was never mentioned nor questioned explicitly. Muttations' unfree status was alluded to, however, in Peeta's "hijacking" by the Capitol: by using trackerjacker venom to cause Peeta extreme pain and to hallucinate so that he

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<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Levinas understood the moral accountability that one being holds over another as that creature having "face." According to Levinas, if a nonhuman animal has no face to humans, then that animal can be abused as desired by humans without the burden of a sense of moral harm being done.



developed explosively murderous tendencies towards Katniss, the Capitol presumably did not sting him physically each time. Trackerjacker venom was injected into Peeta, firmly placing trackerjackers into a confinement and/or laboratory of some sort, where they presumably were anesthetized and, if they could not replenish their own venom supply, probably killed.

Significantly, the torture the venom put Peeta through had a specific goal: to literally reprogram his body and brain to hate (and even want to kill) Katniss.

Before Peeta's torture, Katniss wondered and worried about how mutations themselves may have been programmed against her and Peeta. When the two noticed human-like eyes in the wolf-mutts that attacked them at the end of the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss wondered fearfully,

“[w]hat about their brains? Have they been programmed to hate our faces particularly because we have survived and they were so callously murdered? And the ones we actually killed... do they believe they're avenging their own deaths?” (334).

The possibility of mixing human and mutt subjectivities was not foreign to Katniss, perhaps foreshadowing her own melding of human and mutation. Whether being tortured and programmed by the Capitol or whether their bodies were being forced to torture and program Peeta, mutations seemed to be disposable workers to the Capitol, called to retreat never when they were getting killed by tributes or rebels, but only when the Gamemakers were satisfied that their audiences had had enough human bloodshed for the time being.

Might mutations be not so dissimilar from the non-mutated, nonhuman animals that populate the series? Further, might they not be terribly dissimilar from human tributes in the arenas, or, indeed, from the District populations in Panem? The districts were all but bred into obedience by the Capitol, in a similar manner to how the mutations were bred to attack tributes and rebels. Genetic or social, these compulsions towards obedience crushed the creatures living

in Panem for years. Despite this, however, Katniss's portrayal of the Seam makes it clear throughout the series that even when not directly participating in uprisings against the Capitol, residents of District Twelve were capable of resisting its body and soul crushing power with immense resiliency (Madge's passing on of the mockingjay pin to Katniss, represented by trading at the Hobb, and Gale's rants against the Capitol). Even while performing obedience, then, residents of District Twelve can and did resist the Capitol's reign, even when the need to be obedient had been all but bred into them. Muttations, too, certainly performed obedience for the most part, torturing and executing tributes and rebels with agonizing expertise.

However, muttations – like humans – also resisted their Capitol breeding to target tributes, rebels, and Katniss specifically. Even many muttations' mere existence constituted resistance to Capitol control. When she first wrote about the mockingjays, she described them as “something of a slap in the face to the Capitol” (*HG* 42). Created from the mating of mutation jabberjays and mockingbirds, mockingjays were a “whole new species that could replicate both bird whistles and human melodies”: that could, in essence, perform both humanity and animality (43). Even though jabberjays had been “abandoned to die off in the wild,” they “didn't,” demonstrating the same survivalism that Collins glorified in human hunters (43).

Were such instances of mutt resistance examples of performing humanity? Perhaps not: resilience is not the sole domain of human beings. Further, when mutts did perform humanity visibly, this was regarded as horrendously terrifying. Katniss mused that “the true atrocities, the most frightening [aspects of muttations], incorporate a perverse psychological twist designed to terrify the[ir] victim. The sight of the wolf mutts with the dead tributes' eyes. The sound of the jabberjays replicating Prim's screams. The smell of Snow's roses mixed with the victims' blood” (*M* 311). These instances of muttations performing some aspect of humanity were most terrifying

perhaps because, as Margit Shildrick has argued, monsters are most terrifying when they cannot be separated from the self.

Yet, if one pays heed to chosen rather than genetic performativity and hybrid agency, muttations managed to also develop and maintain their own sense of self, separate from the Capitol and their potential victims. The narrative made it clear until the last mutation attack of the series that the muttations were at the Capitol's beck and call, attacking ruthlessly when signaled to, and leaving immediately when called off. However, in the muttations' proverbial last stand, the reptilian muttations that Katniss and her team faced in the Capitol itself – like the district rebels – threw off their Capitol constraints and attacked the Capitol itself. After watching the reptilian muttations rip off the heads of Capitol peacekeepers, Katniss observed, “[a]pparently, having a Capitol pedigree is as useless here as it was in 13” (309). Here, the reptilian muttations resisted their breeding – to kill and to retreat at the Capitol's command – and asserted their own agency over whom and when to kill. Just as Peeta – and eventually Katniss – desired to retain their humanity and refused to be reduced to a piece in the Capitol's Games, the reptilian muttations here refused the Capitol's breeding and took a bite (literally) out of the Capitol itself.

Right before these muttations killed the Peacekeepers, by decapitating them, the mutts were mistaken for Peacekeepers themselves, because they were “about the size of a full-grown human” and were advancing on two upright legs (*M* 309). They were, in essence, performing humanity well enough to momentarily fool Katniss about their identities. Cato and Enobaria – tributes in the 74<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, respectively – both also destroyed other children's necks in killing them (Enobaria by ripping their throat with her teeth and Cato by breaking a tribute's neck with his bare hands). It is worth mentioning that Katniss also killed the tribute who

killed Rue by shooting him in the neck. ‘Aiming for the throat,’ so to speak, was not unfamiliar to human tributes and thus the brutality that accompanies the extra brute force that these mutations exerted in decapitating Capitol soldiers was perhaps – frighteningly – less non-human than one might guess at first blush. In the context of the Games, decapitating may well be within the realm of performing humanity, indeed.

Significantly, not long after Katniss shudderingly called the mutations that just slaughtered one of her closest friends (Finnick) “monsters,” she declared that “I no longer feel any allegiance to these monsters called human beings, despite being one myself” (*M* 377). Katniss thus existed both as a “fire-mutt” and as a monster called a human being (352). Her embrace of the simultaneity of her seemingly contradictory identities as both monster and human signaled that the ‘sacrifice’ discussed above was complete: humanity in a “pure” state became a foreign, monstrous entity, taken over by Haraway’s cyborgs who tightly intertwine humanity, animality, and technology. Writing about monstrosity generally, Shildrick argued that monstrosity is not bodily excess or imperfection, but “improper being” (40). The monstrosity of mutations is safe so long as mutts remained Shildrick’s “absolute other” (38). Katniss, however, entered the territory of danger when she dissolved the separation between herself and mutations, humanity and monsters. As Shildrick noted, becoming with monsters encourages both “denial *and* recognition, disgust *and* empathy, exclusion *and* identification” (40, emphasis in original). Katniss certainly felt these contradictory feelings towards both mutations and humanity, both creatures being (slightly) different kinds of monstrosity.

If Katniss – indeed, all humans – was/were both human and monster, fire-mutt and mockingjay, predator and prey, then the very narrative structure of the series profoundly challenged the dually speciesist and ableist assumptions about the meanings of performed

animality and outer silence. Katniss's trauma-induced outer non-verbality will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter Three: for now, her performance and becoming of animality will greatly assist in shedding light on the immense gaps between performativity and being, boundaries and undecidability. Katniss was, as King has asserted, herself a monster, both based on her own statements about humans being monsters and on her own declarations about having become at last what hijacked Peeta had accused her of being: a muttation. Her own monstrosity offered insight into the mind of a muttation.

Written entirely from Katniss's perspective, *The Hunger Games Trilogy's* narrative structure gave muttations – or, at least, one muttation – face, as readers cannot but confront the ethical force of the series's narrator. Being herself a human muttation, Katniss's writing of *The Hunger Games Trilogy* accomplished precisely that which Katniss herself seemed to reject throughout most her narration: it offered a place from which the reader can easily empathize with or even *become with* a muttation.

As Katniss began to self-identify as a fire-mutt, her identity became wrapped in and warped by the utter pain of muttation existence. Katniss wrote: “[I was] transformed into something new...A fire-mutt knows only a single sensation: agony. No sight, no sound, no feeling except the unrelenting burning of flesh” (348). Are we, here, getting an insight into pain induced into multiple animals by their becoming muttations? Or are we meant to believe that Katniss's experience of becoming muttation was unique?

Here, Katniss's words – “[a] fire-mutt knows...” – were not merely meant to indicate her own personal current state of existence, but that of any fire-mutt. She did not write that she knew agony as a fire-mutt, but that a fire-mutt – as in, a fire-mutt in general – knew agony. Perhaps this is treading dangerously on the generalization of “the animal” that Derrida so stringently

cautioned against, but it was certainly a move beyond what Katniss had acknowledged of muttations prior to becoming one.<sup>9</sup>

Further, Katniss did not write that a fire-mutt feels, but that a fire-mutt knows. She ascribed knowledge – generally the domain of humanness – not to a ‘natural’ animal, but to a human-animal muttation. Knowledge of agony as the single sensation that she was capable of experiencing in her first moments as a fire-mutt did not merely imply, but powerfully asserted, a muttation’s ability to profoundly suffer. This suffering, according to Peter Singer, ascribes subjecthood to the sufferer. In her transformed status as a “creature as unquenchable as the sun,” Katniss has perhaps attained a new level of becoming with animals (*M* 348). Having been able to know, to a large degree, some ‘naturally’ born animals prior to and throughout the Games, Katniss has now learned to know and become with muttations, creatures for whom she had previously expressed no feeling beyond nightmarish fear. In becoming such, Katniss introduced the readers to muttation subjecthood, rather than persisting in understanding – or not understanding – the animals-turned-weapons as only objects.

These “objects” had previously been firmly rendered as killable, though not murder-able. The act of making animals killable was firmly established in the series before readers even learned of the Hunger Games, however. In her first page of narration, Katniss described how she had tried to drown Buttercup, a cat whom her little sister Prim wanted to keep as a pet, years before (*HG* 3). Thinking of him as nothing more than “another mouth to feed,” Katniss firmly established Buttercup as a killable creature, sparing him only because Prim begged and wept (3). Yet Katniss quickly developed an understanding with Buttercup. She learned that he was an adept hunter, and over this, cat hunter and human hunter entered an uneasy but stable

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida asserted that reducing categories to humans versus “the [nonhuman] animal,” reduces all the vast diversity of creatures not classified as “human” to a demeaned existence under one homogenized label.

relationship: Katniss would feed Buttercup entrails from her hunts, and he would refrain from hissing at her (4). Katniss wrote that “[t]his is the closest [she and Buttercup] will ever come to love,” but it seems that this mutual understanding is one profound form of love (4).

In recognizing Buttercup’s capacity as an autonomous individual to care for himself accompanied by her recognition of what he enjoys (entrails), Katniss entered into a Haraway-esque companion species relationship with the cat she professed to hate. In this refusal to engage in a paternalistic, condescending and unconditional flood of affection towards Buttercup, Katniss came to know the cat in a way that Prim perhaps never did, despite the fact that Prim did risk her life to save Buttercup from a bombing in *Mockingjay*. This development into a knowing relationship – to know someone, that someone must have face – rendered Buttercup unkillable for Katniss, who by *Mockingjay* was able to bond deeply with the cat. Katniss wrote poignantly about “wail[ing]” with Buttercup after Prim’s death (*M* 386). She said of their newfound bond, “[w]e both ended up crying again, only this time we comfort each other” (386). Their mutual identification placed them both in an interstitial position between humanity and animality.

Katniss was here crossing lines she had previously established as uncrossable with Buttercup. Their understanding of each other had undeniably reached a new level, but the question is, in their shared grief, was Buttercup performing humanity, or was Katniss performing animality? Perhaps a more effective question would not be phrased in binaristic possibilities: perhaps one could more fruitfully ask, where did Katniss and Buttercup meet that made both of their griefs accessible to the other? Perhaps they were meeting in the space where Katniss finished the series: in an interstitial, indeterminate space in which human and mutation, human monster and human animal, can exist in Haraway’s “pleasurably tight coupling” (*Simians*,

*Cyborg, and Women* 152). It is possible that Katniss's close identification with Buttercup's grief – a humanizing emotion – may not have been possible without her own forced animalization.

This animalization, organically achieved by Katniss's pre-reaping hunting and subsequently forced on her by both the Capitol and the rebels, was an essential component of the Capitol's control over the districts through the Games. The Capitol liked the tributes to be human enough to suffer, but not human enough for Games' viewers to bear guilt at inflicting the suffering. Suffering, according to Singer, is not just the ability to experience physical pain, but the ability to anticipate it and, in so doing, experience psychological duress. This capacity, Singer argued, grants those who possess it the right to avoid such suffering. When verbal and written language is privileged as the mode of communication, it is easy to dismiss this suffering and to justify a hierarchy of human dominance over nonhuman 'inferiority.' This also dehumanizes - animalizes - the many humans who cannot and do not communicate verbally (this will be discussed further in Chapter Three). If a creature is not rendered as human, the one doing the rendering will, according to Singer, dismiss the creature's ability to suffer (and in so doing, cause suffering).

The Games provided literal arenas for transforming human children and adolescents as nonhumans supposedly incapable of suffering. The Capitol's treatment of tributes rendered them as unmurderable animals: their violent deaths would not be judged as murders because their lives were expendable. In the Capitol's calculations, not only could district tributes not suffer (or at least, not enough to give state citizens pause), but they could not be murdered. Through the Hunger Games, the Capitol ensured that. The state constructed a scenario in which something worse than destroying individual children occurred: through the Games (and their mandated viewership), the Capitol made children killable. In so doing, the Capitol accomplished what is, to



Haraway, “the definition of genocide” (*When Species Meet* 78). The language of the Games – not only the physical predator-prey relationships children were forced into – turned child and adolescent tributes into killable, other-than-human animals. “[K]ill so many animals,” Haraway wrote, and “call it sacrifice. Do the same for people, and they lose their humanity” (78). In positioning children as something akin to animal sacrifices – suspending for a moment the gravity of the dismissal of nonhuman faces – the Capitol put at stake the very species-being of all of those involved in the Games.

Indeed, tributes were both highly animalized and highly humanized by the Capitol before and during the Games. Animalization is generally deployed against nonhumans to promote supposed human superiority; animalization is also a common strategy of the stripping of human subjectivity involved in racism, ableism, heterosexism, and classism (Wolfe 8). The meanings of animalization and humanization, however, are radically altered when animal and human identities are considered performance. The Games elicited both human and animal performances from tributes.<sup>10</sup>

Humans performing animality in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* deeply unseated strict definitional boundaries between humans and nonhumans. Rue, the youngest tribute in the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, was consistently described as having birdlike or otherwise animal-like features: indeed, she was described as though she were a bird. Rue performed animality not only through her hopping between trees as if in flight, but through her quiet, loyal trust in Katniss, her ability to identify plants that Katniss could not, and her effortless ability to identify and communicate

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<sup>10</sup> Karen Barad has bemoaned the fact that when humans assess performativity and the self-awareness required to perform something, we generally only imagine humans as being capable of performance. Indeed, Judith Butler’s development of performativity in the context of gender ironically limits itself to humans: I say this is ironic because, indeed, performativity as articulated by Butler is interested in dramatically unsettling the very meanings of gender and sex. Can this not be extended to unsettle the very meanings of human and nonhuman? Certainly it can. Barad encouraged us to think of humanity and animality, like womanhood and manhood, as being created by performance (“Posthumanist Performativity” 801).

with the mockingjays in the arena through song. Rue also reminded Katniss of her little sister Prim, which endeared Katniss to the younger girl: significantly, Katniss also described Prim as a bird before meeting Rue (HG 16).

Due to Rue's connection with Prim in Katniss's mind, it is worth noting that Prim cared for nonhuman animals in ways that no other character throughout the series did. When others (notably Katniss) thought of nonhuman animals only in terms of their stock utility of providing milk or meat yield, Prim thought of some of them as individuals and intimate companions (both in her goat Lady and in her cat Buttercup). Rue, similarly, shared a connection to animals that Katniss saw as a vulnerability. Like the nonhumans that Katniss so easily and routinely shot through the eyes, Rue was easily – defenselessly – speared by a bigger, stronger human who had trapped her as Katniss and Gale trapped the nonhumans they hunted. Rue's performance of animality thus both drew Katniss to her and caused her death: Rue's identification with animals made her at once a sympathetic, likeable character and a highly vulnerable one.

Similarly, Foxface – Katniss's name for the girl tribute from District Five – displayed animalistic qualities throughout the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. Katniss not only portrayed her as being physically similar to a fox, but as intellectually and strategically similar to (a human stereotype of) one, as well: choosing not to fight outright, but to use her wits to steal bits of food from other tributes, Foxface earned Katniss's deep respect. Foxface's performance of animality, like Rue's, ultimately killed her when she scavenged and ate the poisoned berries that Peeta, unknowingly, collected for himself and Katniss. Regardless, or perhaps because of, her death, however, Katniss came to respect Foxface, and even to regard her animal-identified strategies with minor affection.

These performances of simple, non-aggressive animality contrasted heavily with the other forms of animality created in the arenas. Tributes in the arena were forced to assume predator and prey relationships: the performance of animality, in other words, became a condition of their survival. Their own identities – as individual human beings and as children – became less important and less certain as tributes inhabited roles thrust upon them by the Capitol.

However, in the lead-up to entering the arena, the tributes were both hyper-humanized and de-humanized. The tributes' district origins were cast off as inferior and animalistic and were both stripped from the tributes and upheld. This was accomplished by the district-oriented costumes they were made to wear, which Katniss noted made most tributes, especially in the Quarter Quell, look ridiculous. By treating the tributes' bodies as malleable, objectified, inferior objects, the Capitol animalized the tributes while at the same time making them over to become Capitol beauties in the very model of the Capitol's idea of gorgeous, superior humanity.

The tributes were stripped of any physical vestiges of 'animality.' The tributes were dehumanized in the sense that their district origins were stripped from them – a huge aspect of their human culture – in favor of making them into Capitol dolls. As Valerie Frankel has noted, tributes' prep teams' emphases on removing all of their bodily hair was tantamount to removing their “objectionable ‘Third-World’ origins. Only [Katniss's] hairstyle gets to stay (though team members don't say ‘exotic primitive craftsmanship,’ they're likely thinking it)” (51). In this way, hair removal is dehumanizing because it is being used to separate some humans from others, enforcing high class, Capitol standards of beauty that the tributes' lives depended on (their looks could get them sponsorship in the arena).

Both calling attention to and eliminating that which makes tributes physically different than Capitol citizens places tributes in an intermediate space between superior, strong humanity and a ridiculous kind of imitative futility. (As Gale noted, the tributes were made fancy for a massive slaughter [*M* 53].) In another way, however, this ‘beautification’ process served to de-animalize tributes in that it raised them to the Capitol’s definitions of what it means to be human. After stripping her of her body hair, Flavius of Katniss’s prep team exclaimed happily, “[y]ou almost look like a human being now!” (*HG* 62). The tributes’ makeovers are tantamount to reinforcing the idea that the districts populations are humans of lesser pedigree who were perhaps closer to animals than to humans.

Certainly, the eager consumption of the Hunger Games by Capitol audiences suggested that the populace did not register district children as fully human. Katniss acknowledged this de-humanization necessary to the enjoyment of the Games when she wondered before the Quarter Quell, “maybe [Capitol citizens] know too much about the victors... to forget we’re human beings” (*CF* 205). Making over the tributes reinforced this Capitol superiority by taking tributes’ own home spaces and appearances away from them. However, given the assumption that districts were inferior (animal) and the Capitol was superior (human) to make over the tributes to suit the Capitol’s palate was to raise them up to a physical level of humanity that they could not achieve in their districts. The Capitol thus simultaneously stripped tributes of their humanity and gave their definition of humanity to them by waxing off of all their body hair.

To be human in the Capitol is to erase one’s own features and paint on or surgically add new features. These features may be nonhuman features (such as the cat whiskers so popular in the Capitol), but to Capitol citizens, the nonhumanity of their added features simply served to underscore the humanity of those with the time and money to decorate themselves as such. The

performance of animality was thus a humanizing quality in the Capitol. Animalistic behavior, too – the Capitol citizens all eagerly participating in preying on district children through the consumption of the Games – was upheld as superior, human behavior. It is significant to note that in the starving districts, these kinds of bodily transformations and behaviors were viewed as extravagant and grotesque in the face – literally – of the brutality of the Games and the hunger of most of Panem's population. Performance, thus, was interpreted differently by different people: when Capitol citizens donned cat whiskers, they may interpret their performance as one of high class humanity, whereas in the districts, this was interpreted as a physical manifestation of internal animalization.

No matter how citizens of the Capitol interpreted their own attire and that which they forced the tributes into, the work of dehumanization of the tributes was intense. While the “best” games were the “least humane” – but perhaps not the least human – the animalized tribute became the Capitol's favorite spectacle (King 112). Tributes that did not perform brutal animality were least interesting to Capitol citizens (Rue, for example, received no gifts from sponsors). Katniss, even in her apparently human performance of love for Peeta, only did so in order to survive. Even this performance was undergirded by animality: according to Katniss, this survivalism was very animalistic, as she wrote of having a “deep-rooted animal desire for survival” (*CF* 302).

Katniss's decisions throughout the series were based on this instinctive, reactive desire to both survive and protect her family. These kinds of animal instincts in Katniss – persistent even through her performances of humanity – form a strong prelude to her later explicit transformation into a mutation. In this frame, it becomes extremely easy to read *The Hunger Games Trilogy* as a narrative of animality underlying performances of humanity. While on a

cursory inspection, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* ascribed little or no subjectivity to nonhuman animals (who seemed to exist only to serve human ends) or mutations (who seemed to exist only to inflict horrendous fear and suffering on humans), a closer reading reveals immense animal and hybrid subjectivity weaved into Katniss's narrative. Additionally, blurred lines between animals, mutations, and humans – and, perhaps most importantly, an insistence that multiple identities can exist in the same body simultaneously – carried the day in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. Katniss's position as human monster, mutation, and animal not only forces readers to confront a nonhuman, mixed-identified face: it also situates identities as performed roles than permanent statuses. This kind of temporality associated with crippled identities will be the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Compulsory Recovery and Enforced Disability in Panem

What does it mean to be disabled in Panem? What does it mean when one form of disability – debilitating hunger – becomes an enforced and expected norm and thus avoids becoming a disabled identity? What happens to disability as an identity when starvation and other forms of disability and debility are in fact mandated by the state through the enforcement of hunger and the Hunger Games throughout the districts? What new identities and modes of resistance are created when combating the debilitating impacts of hunger is punishable by the state? Collins's trilogy refused to give only a single answer to these questions. Visible disabilities were consistently portrayed as highly temporal, heavily context-dependent and rarely if ever constituting a static identity. People with invisible disabilities, however, were identified as deliberately un-“cured,” with communally crippled identities. People who were Avox or experienced depression, “insanity,” or intellectual disabilities all were classified in these ways. These identities were alternately portrayed as assets or as limitations.

Sarah Lochlann Jain's and Jasbir K. Puar's understandings of “prognosis time” and Lauren Berlant's conception of “slow death” all unsettle conceptions of ‘disability’ as a fixed, static, material identity. Entering into conversation with their analyses, as well as with those of critical disability scholars such as Robert McRuer, I will analyze the ways in which The Hunger Games Trilogy featured a state power which exercised explicit control over creating and defining disability and debility. In The Hunger Games Trilogy, the state actively forced impairments onto nonconsenting persons while rendering many physical impairments normative expectations rather than discrete identities. This has both horrific and radical implications: people suffered terribly, but simultaneously avoided neoliberal identity politics. Perhaps most interestingly,

while on the face of it, Collins condemned the Capitol's control of district bodies, her narrative reified the Capitol's enforcement of compulsory recovery onto abject bodies. Neither narrative nor state power allowed people who experienced temporal and lasting disability or debility the space to normalize interdependence. Instead, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* mandated an individualized 'healing' of disability and debility that forcibly rendered people as able-bodied or passing as such. This positioned people as 'rising above' disability, rather than allowing the persistence of embodied difference and pride in said difference.

Robert McRuer's conception of compulsory able-bodiedness is a particularly productive way to understand social and state constructions of bodies, minds, and health. McRuer writes that systematic compulsory able-bodiedness "repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?" (304). This hierarchicalized understanding of bodies and bodily functionalities asserts that to be disabled – or crippled, as McRuer writes, reappropriating the derogatory term in a similar manner to the reappropriation of the term "queer" – is to be less than. Able-bodiedness is understood as the default, the "natural," the ideal bodily form without regard for the fact that what is considered "able-bodied" is completely dependent upon the constructed environment in which an individual exists. Through compulsory able-bodiedness, crippled bodies are dismissed as being not "preferable" and against "what we all, collectively, are aiming for [able-bodiedness]" (304). Compulsory able-bodiedness disallows critiques from being aimed at constructed environments that are unsuited for different kinds of bodies, minds, and functionalities.

One facet of compulsory able-bodiedness is compulsory recovery. While compulsory able-bodiedness is, like compulsory heterosexuality, assumed to be the norm in all spatial and



temporal frames, compulsory recovery is forced upon crippled bodies and minds during the specific temporal frame that exists after an impairment occurs. Compulsory recovery forces a “cure”<sup>11</sup> (or prostheticization if a “cure” is not available) onto impaired people.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, compulsory recovery re-covers disability, rendering it as invisible or less visible and thus, less threatening to supposed able-bodied superiority.

Refusing to participate in compulsory recovery is refusing to partake in its destructive ontology, which asserts that all impairments, with the right amount of “science,” can and should be “fixed” because bodily and movement differences are inherently inferior to “able-bodied” modes of appearing and moving in the world. In this way, compulsory recovery serves to enforce the hierarchy of able-bodied over disabled and locates the need to re-cover a disability in a specific period of time.

The Hunger Games served as embodiments of the discrete period of time each year during which the Capitol both the forced creation of impairments and the enforcement of compulsory recovery. The Capitol deliberately destroyed the able-bodiedness of district residents consistently through the Hunger Games. The state still managed to enforce able-bodiedness, however, when it mandated the recovery of district tributes immediately after a disabling injury or event occurred. The Capitol located disability firmly in a specific temporal frame – the time immediately after an (often Capitol inflicted) injury or impairment occurred – and mandated debilitated bodies to re-cover their disabilities, identifying them as effectively non-disabled.

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<sup>11</sup> Johnson F. Cheu has argued that “cure is a scientific construction applied to medical impairment, but... disability is a cultural experience and a potential identity, independent of cure” (ii). I hope to maintain the spirit of this critique by the use of quotation marks around the word “cure,” in order to question to value-judgment that is usually associated with the word. If something must be “cured,” no one ought to take pride in that bodily or mental condition; this threatens the liberatory potential in the works of Eli Clare – a disabled, transgender writer and activist – and many others who write radically and beautifully about embracing embodied differences as they are.

<sup>12</sup> Lennard J. Davis has noted the constructed difference between impairment and disability: “Impairment,” he writes, “is the physical fact of lacking an arm or a leg. Disability is the social process that turns the impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access” (12).

Compulsory recovery ensured that the Hunger Games themselves did not prove “boring” to viewers. As Katniss observed, when deaths were not bloody enough – such as the year when the tributes mostly froze to death – the Capitol audiences disapproved. Compulsory recovery was deployed by the Capitol, then, as a means to keep the Games exciting for the Capitol and particularly torturous for the districts: by refusing to give the tributes individual, solitary deaths by injuries they’d received (they would surely die without gifts from sponsors that brought them a temporary restoration of their able-bodiedness), the Capitol made sure the tributes re-covered their disabilities. This way, tributes could continue to play their able-bodied part in keeping the Games “exciting.”

Able-bodied tributes were better to break, according to this logic. The Capitol proved how much it enjoyed destroying able-bodied tributes when it ordered wolf mutations to kill a tribute who literally embodied able-bodied strength with extreme and agonizing slowness. Cato had been given body armor that rendered him as an ultimate figure of able-bodiedness: indeed, Katniss shot him right in the chest with an arrow, and it easily ricocheted away. The Capitol enjoyed bringing him down from this invincible state, reducing him to a “hunk of raw meat” after an entire night of torture (*HG* 340). When Katniss asked why the Capitol didn’t let the wolf mutts just kill Cato, Peeta responded simply, “[y]ou know why” (339). Katniss ultimately dealt the death blow out of empathy; the Capitol had no desire to end his suffering. The most prosthethically able-bodied tribute was the most entertaining for the Capitol audience to watch suffer.

The districts came to actively participate in this death-filled logic, too. By hoping Capitol sponsors would send their tributes pain-, hunger-, and injury-relieving gifts during the Games (and sometimes sending some of their own), the districts helped the Capitol to prostheticize the

tributes into more able-bodied participants in their own deaths. Under the Capitol's regime, these recovery-inducing gifts rose to the status of life-savers – as they were – thus institutionalizing the value of the able-bodied tribute and compulsory recovery in the minds of all of Panem. When Katniss had been severely burned, in her first Games, for example, Haymitch sent her burn medicine that not only soothed, but healed her burns with surprising speed. For Capitol viewers, the medicine enabled Katniss to keep moving through the Games and made the Games more exciting. For district viewers, however, it alleviated her suffering and prolonged her life. Though the district and Capitol viewers had very different reasons to spur injured tributes' healing, the Capitol literally set the board so that all involved were invested, for whatever reason, in this compulsory recovery.

Medicines and other gifts only granted temporary able-bodiedness, however. The return to being rendered able-bodied was highly time-sensitive, lasting only until a new prosthetic (Peeta's medicine) could be gained. Katniss used the able-bodiedness that she'd regained in order to seek a medical means of restoring able-bodiedness to Peeta, clearly establishing a dependence on gifts bestowing reprieves from ailments and injuries. However, while the medicine Katniss retrieved from the feast did indeed save Peeta from blood poisoning and enable him to walk again, he still lost his leg due to a later attack from muttations. The able-bodiedness conferred on him by the Capitol's medicine was thus highly temporary, and only lasted until a new prosthetic could be gained. The temporal nature of recovery was entirely in the control of the Capitol's Gamemakers, who chose when to unleash weapons and creatures that would again disable tributes' bodies.

Yet, extending its control over tributes' bodies after the Games ended, the Capitol ensured that Peeta did not remain overtly impaired for long. While Peeta sported a cane during

his first public reunion with Katniss after the Games, this prosthetic was soon abandoned as he became used to his new artificial leg (*HG* 361). Characterized both before and after having only one bio-leg as very slow and very loud, Peeta's movements did not change once fitted with his prosthetic leg.

The Capitol's technology rendered Peeta's amputation as incidental to his comings, goings, and ability to survive in an even more brutal Games (the Quarter Quell). Peeta did slip on the snow during a public meeting with Katniss before the Quarter Quell, bringing Katniss to comment that "he still isn't entirely in command of his artificial leg" (*CF* 42). However, soon after that, Peeta was able to "[fall] to his knees" to proclaim his love for Katniss in front of the entire population of Panem, apparently without assistance, visible pain, or altered mobility (144). Similarly, as soon as the rules of the Quarter Quell had been announced and Katniss and Peeta discovered that they must return to the arena, they began a new training regimen. This daily workout required both Katniss and Peeta to "run and lift things and stretch our muscles" (184). Katniss did not divulge any problems Peeta might have had with this, only noting that she and Peeta both "excel[led]" during their training (184).

The fact that his movements did not significantly or permanently change – they only changed during the incredibly small temporal space during which he got used to his artificial leg – catered very nicely to the requirements of compulsory recovery. Nancy Hansen and Chris Philo incisively comment that society's harsh judgments and condemnations of impairments are "not only a matter of appearance, for what also comes into play are the differences in how impaired bodies do things... The impression is left that mal- or under-performing impaired bodies should not 'take up space', certainly not places unthinkingly conceived as non-disabled space" (496). Arenas, though they existed to create deadly impairments, were certainly meant to be non-

disabled spaces: as discussed above, the more able-bodiedness tributes could maintain, the more entertaining it was for Capitol residents to watch them kill each other. Peeta's re-covering of his impairment served to hide his disability and render him as a non-threat to able-bodied space.

Katniss also experienced an injury in the arena that she fully expected to never recover from. When she blew up the Careers' resources during her first Games, the explosion blasted Katniss deaf in one ear. She wrote that "[t]he more time passes, the less hopeful I am that this is an injury that will heal" (*HG* 229). However, one of the most interesting and important parts of the book was Katniss's process of learning how to cope with her newfound deafness in one ear.

Though her animality left her feeling even more vulnerable because of her impairment than someone who was not a hunter might feel – she said it made her feel “[b]lind” – she adjusted quite rapidly to her new situation without the help of Capitol technology (*HG*, 228). Within a quarter of an hour after the explosion, Katniss watched the Careers, writing that their actions “puzzles me until I realize: *Of course. They think whoever set off the explosions is dead*” (224, emphasis in original). After Cato killed the boy from District 3 and backed away from his body, Katniss wrote that “I suppose a cannon goes off” (225). Here again, she was compensating for her impairment based on her other senses and on her knowledge of the Games without Capitol “cure” technology. She demonstrated in the arena the ability to succeed and perform ably without the help of any “cure” technology.

Nonetheless, after the Games, her hearing was fully restored by the Capitol. Her ability to thrive with her impairment was excellent, but the Capitol's “cure” technology – given to her when she was unconscious – rendered the impairment as nonexistent. Compulsory recovery not only masked her impairment, but also masked her ability to successfully adjust to having a different kind of body and having to operate differently than she usually did.

Katniss – and Peeta, for that matter – could have developed a positive identity politics based upon their navigations with their impairments, but the Capitol made this impossible. According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, while “[w]hat we call disability is unavoidable,” positive identity politics would have the potential to “reimagine disability as human variation, a form of human biodiversity that we want to recognize and accept, even embrace, in a democratic order” (603). The Capitol – hardly representing a democratic order – ensured with their compulsory “cures” that certain bodily differences would either cease to exist or be rendered invisible.

Any relief from suffering<sup>13</sup> that the Capitol provided to tributes was far from invisible to district populations watching the Games, however. By creating nightmarish scenarios in which tributes’ lives depended upon receiving gifts from sponsors, the Capitol ensured that the districts invested their deepest hopes in a system of compulsory recovery that pushed tributes’ bodies from gift to gift. Each gift re-covered the newly created disability of tributes, quite often literally. The powerful medicinal salves that Haymitch sent to Katniss in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games and her group of allies during the 75<sup>th</sup> Games (for burns and potentially infected scabs, respectively) physically covered their impaired body parts. Of the effects of this medical treatment during the 75<sup>th</sup> Games, Katniss commented that she and her friends looked “monstrous” (*CF* 317).

This monstrousness was instrumental to all of their recoveries, but it also provided them with a form of resistance that was preciously rare in the arena: laughter. Katniss and Finnick, their faces and bodies covered in medicine, agreed to bend over a sleeping Peeta as they woke him up. His resulting shouts spurred what was Katniss’s only belly-laugh in the entire series.

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Wendell has written about the need to acknowledge the ways that pain and suffering play into the lives of disabled people while simultaneously refusing to reduce disabled people to objects of tragedy. She writes, “[w]e must... talk about how to live with the suffering body, with that which cannot be negotiated without pain, and that which cannot be celebrated without ambivalence” (179). I hope that this ambivalence is reflected in this chapter.

Rejoicing in the decrease in pain and return to bodily strength – not the mention the communal bonding – that the medicine gave them, it is no wonder that Katniss and her friends easily embraced the temporal, compulsory recoveries that were part of keeping them alive only so they could kill each other later.

This bonding over their “monstrous” looks, however, precipitated an enormous act of resistance by rebels against the Capitol who subversively utilized gifts and cures that were supposed to bring the specter of able-bodiedness into the arena. The rebels utilized the most highly temporal gift that could be sent: gifts of food were perhaps the most short-lived able-body-restorer.<sup>14</sup> After Katniss and Finnick laughed together, Haymitch sent them bread which Katniss interpreted to mean, “*Be friends with Finnick. You’ll get food*” (CF 317, emphasis in original). This bread, however, meant far more than Katniss knew.

Katniss discovered later that “[t]he bread we received in the arena was code for the time of the rescue [from the arena]. The district where the bread originated indicated the day. Three. The number of rolls the hour. Twenty-four” (CF 385). This gift-giving was not necessary from the perspective of compulsory recovery: the bread was not needed to fill the tributes’ stomachs, as they were securely camped near an abundant source of seafood. Instead, the districts hijacked the Capitol’s gift-giving system of compulsory recovery in order to (literally) explode the Games from the inside. This act of resistance not only shattered the Capitol’s monopoly on recovery from debilitating hunger and other impaired conditions in the Games; it also subverted the very meaning of compulsory recovery to situate recovery as fighting back against the system that had created and defined disability in the first place.

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<sup>14</sup> Food received and eaten can save a life temporarily at one moment, but be thrown up within minutes or passed through the body within mere hours. The renewed vigor and able-bodied recovery that a gift of food brought to tributes was temporary unless they were able to use their brief moments of relief from the agonies of starvation to gain more stable advantages.

Characters also resisted the Capitol's desire to use compulsory recovery to veil the debilities and impairments that the Capitol inflicted on them on an individual level. While the Capitol generally used their "miracle cures" to cover the devastating effects of their violence on district bodies and minds, victors Haymitch and Chaff resisted the Capitol's ability to erase their own actions. Portrayed as someone who was almost always drunk and hungover, Haymitch maintained a contentious relationship with Katniss throughout the trilogy. For his drunkenness, Katniss wrote early and often of how she "detested" Haymitch (*HG* 56).

It did not occur to Katniss until the second book – until Katniss had experienced the Games herself – that Haymitch needed alcohol to sustain him in ways that Katniss also might. She came to understand why Haymitch was "blotting out the world with drink" (*CF* 46). He refused to handle the trauma the Capitol dealt him in a way that others could not see: he refused to live life cleanly after his subversive victory in the Games. For his refusal to cure himself of the impairments that his drinking both brought on and blotted out, he was figured as a joke in the Capitol. He was ridiculed because he did not compulsively re-cover his pain: it was perhaps then unsurprising that Haymitch was instrumental in the resistance that literally blew up the Quarter Quell.

Similarly, Chaff – Haymitch's friend and fellow victor from three decades before Katniss's Games – refused the technological prosthetic offered him by the Capitol. He lost his hand in his Games, but Katniss wrote, "I guess he didn't take [the artificial limb]" (*CF* 214). Significantly, Chaff's "stump" played a large role in an enormous act of resistance to the Capitol's violence (213). It was Chaff to whom Katniss turned when she wanted to visibly join with fellow tributes in resistance to the Capitol's brutality: "I feel my fingers close around the stump that now completes his arm and hold fast" (257). Chaff extended the link to others, and



those most like Haymitch – “the morphlings” who turned to intravenous drugs to cope with their Games instead of alcohol – joined him and Katniss most quickly (258).

Neither Haymitch nor Chaff were ultimately portrayed as unsuccessful due to their impairments and refusal to participate in compulsory recovery. Haymitch’s drunkenness was feared by both Peeta and Katniss as something that would debilitate him from being an effective mentor. However, he still managed to accomplish something unprecedented: getting not one, but two victors out of not one, but two Games.

While the narrative thus did lip service to the permanent, non-temporal suffering that Haymitch endured, it ultimately framed Haymitch as enormously successful and resilient. In a similar way, Chaff’s one-handedness was not factored into his life or death in the Games. Nor was an impaired limb factored into the life and death of the boy tribute from District Ten in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games. The tribute – about whom nothing else was revealed – was introduced as having “a crippled foot” (*HG* 45). Later, Katniss found out that he survived the first day’s bloodbath at the Cornucopia: he survived until at least the time when Katniss met up with Rue, because Rue said that “the boy from Ten [was still alive], the one with the bad leg” (209).

Collins refused to write off this boy as a sure killing on the bloodiest day of the Games, subtly proving his resiliency. However, no other information was ever given about the boy aside from a vague description of the state of his leg.<sup>15</sup> By defining him only through his impairment, the narrative asserted multiple messages at once: people like Haymitch, Chaff, and the boy from Ten could both succeed on some level and be constrained to being defined in a significant way by their impairments (Haymitch by his alcoholism and the boy by his leg).

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<sup>15</sup> This is similar to, later, the descriptions of young people with intellectual disabilities, which included few if any characteristics other than their differences.

This refusal to use physical impairment as a motif for weakness strongly suggested that impairments did not necessarily render someone as the weakest tribute in the Games. Since everyone was deliberately disabled in some way throughout the Games, the arenas ironically served as an environment in which disability could not exist as a stable, fixed identity. This spared the boy from Ten and Chaff condescending deaths which invoked readers to feel sorry for the “poor crip.”<sup>16</sup>

This strikes a positive note for those wishing to claim impairments and disability as temporally context-dependent and empowered identities. However, the powerful presence of compulsory recovery throughout the text enabled (pun intended) Collins to deny crippled identities to most other characters. In so doing, Collins did not validate lived experiences of people with various bodily and mental experiences and capacities: instead, she situated the overall narrative as asserting a journey of “overcoming” disabilities and associated crippled identities for main characters like Peeta and Katniss. By denying these frequently disabled characters crippled identities, Collins forced her characters to re-cover their disabilities through “overcoming” them. One of the most powerful examples of this compulsory re-covery was the portrayal of Peeta’s journey with his artificial leg.

Peeta’s artificial leg was an artifice, a vehicle through which Collins could reflect on the permanence that violence can render upon bodies. However, she chose to frame this impairment as one that did not actually cause physical consequences or permanent changes for the individual. By writing Peeta into a world in which he was not identified as disabled in any way, but was rather persistently considered a youthful, able-bodied favorite to win the Quarter Quell,

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<sup>16</sup> For discussions about the myriad ways that disability has been woven into narratives of objectifying sympathy in children’s stories, see Hugh McElaney’s work on gender and disability in Louisa May Alcott’s works, Brandy Parris’s work on the construction of sympathy in Reconstruction-era animal stories, and Julia Miele Rodas’s work on disability in Victorian literature and culture. For incisive critiques of scholarly works – admittedly like the ones listed above – that address disability as though it only or mainly exists in western, white-dominated literatures, see Julie Livingston’s work on bodily-impaired miners in Botswana.

Collins elided physical realities of impairments and prostheticization. She did this while neglecting the power of identification with crippled interdependence and community.

Peeta's compulsory recovery did not end with his leg, however. He was also hijacked – tortured with excruciating doses of trackerjacker venom – by Capitol torturers into believing that Katniss was a mutation (as discussed in Chapter One). The hijacking was so successful that it took Peeta a very long time and extremely intensive therapy to be able to refrain from trying to kill Katniss whenever he saw her. Many times, Katniss surrendered any hope that he would ever recover, writing that “[d]ifferent techniques are being tried. There will never truly be a way to cure him” (*M* 224).

Even when Peeta became able to bear being in the same room with Katniss without becoming murderous, Katniss wrote that, far from rendering him mentally impaired, his torture had given Peeta new insight: “[f]inally, he can see me for who I really am. Violent. Distrustful. Manipulative. Deadly” (*M* 232). Katniss understood Peeta's impairment as perhaps bringing out in him what he “should” have become throughout the Games: paranoid, distrustful, and keenly in tune with the most negative attributes in other people.<sup>17</sup> Far from treating his mental impairments as a disability, Katniss recognized it as simply Peeta's new, post-Games and post-capture state.

Collins did not accept what Katniss did, however: that the boy with the bread was gone. Instead, she wrote an ending in which Peeta remained a “dandelion” for Katniss (*M* 388). Not only did Peeta recover enough to lead a life outside of hospital confinement, but he recovered enough to be able to marry and have children with Katniss. Though he still occasionally “clutches the back of a chair and hands on until his flashbacks are over” (388), Peeta ultimately remained the one that comforted Katniss, assuring her that “it will be okay” years after their experiences with the Games (390). The boy with the bread somehow retained the “nobility” he

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<sup>17</sup> This and other forms of trauma will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter Three.

sought to throughout the trilogy, through extensive and devastating torture that chemically altered his brain. These bodily traumas were re-covered by the last few pages of the series.

Katniss, too, had her traumas and disabilities compulsorily re-covered by the narrative arch of the trilogy. Her trauma and disabilities all along were vehicles for conveying the horrors of war, but she was still forced by the narrative to perform the same ending she had been dreading since very early on in the series: marriage and child rearing. In other words, she was forced by the epilogue of *Mockingjay* to cover the disabilities she'd acquired throughout *Games* and rebellion in order to perform an able-bodied, able-minded lifestyle.<sup>18</sup>

This forced recovery was mirrored by the birth of Finnick and Annie's baby after Finnick's brutal death. Katniss described this birth as one of a sparse number of "[s]trange bit[s] of happiness" as Katniss and Peeta constructed a photo/picture book of their dead friends and family (*M* 387). Though Katniss never described Annie as being able to function well without Finnick (to be discussed in the next chapter), the idea of her raising their child alone was portrayed as a comfort because of the performance of able-minded and -bodied health (not to mention heterosexuality) in the act of becoming a mother. Was heterosexual pairing and reproduction being offered here as the "cure" for mental impairments? It seems so.

All of these forced instances of recovery and elision of impairments situated disability and "cures" as individualized instances of resiliency rather than socially constructed and enforced sets of idealizations of the body and mind. In this way, both the Capitol and Collins shared a commitment to enforcing compulsory recovery onto characters who would otherwise be rendered as more substantively impacted by their circumstances.

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<sup>18</sup> As McRuer compellingly argues, compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory able-bodiedness reinforce each other, so it is not surprising that these two endings collided in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*.

However, the violent and oppressive circumstances in the districts of Panem forced another reality of disability to co-exist with and contradict this individualized ideal of compulsory recovery. Starvation across Panem was so common that the disabling impacts of extreme hunger were not even considered disabling by district residents: they were too normal, too expected, to be rendered as an identity-based obstacle. Very early on in the series, when Katniss described her and her family having only consumed boiled water with dried mint leaves for three days, she wrote that she “was shaking so hard I dropped my bundle of baby clothes in a mud puddle. I didn’t pick it up for fear I would keel over and be unable to regain my feet” (*HG* 28). These disabling symptoms of extreme hunger were far from uncommon in District Twelve and in many of the districts generally.

Lauren Berlant’s concept of “slow death” is embodied by the mass starvation in Panem: Berlant writes that “slow death refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (754). Indeed, hunger was such a defining condition for residents in Panem that hunger and its disabling impacts on people became a default mode of existence, such that disability rather than able-bodiedness became a norm in this respect. This was perhaps why tributes were so well fed before the Games: tributes that entered the Games starving would prove less entertaining for the reasons elaborated on above.

The slow death of the citizens of Panem was merely another means through which the Capitol could exert control over its population. Just as compulsory recovery was imposed upon tributes during and after the Games, disabling hunger as a default mode of expected existence was deployed by the Capitol to mold its citizens into obedience. The role of obedience in district hunger surely could not be overrated. Gathering extra food from the meadow or woods, as well

as hunting in those woods, was forbidden and technically punishable by almost deadly beatings in District Twelve (and conditions were worse in District Eleven). Residents attempting to combat hunger – to render themselves more able-bodied – were breaking the law. The Capitol thus exercised a monopoly on recovery: only the Capitol could dispense the means through which individuals and entire populations could heal from disabilities or disabling effects of hunger.

The Capitol thus forced the residents of Panem to be constantly aware – both through their constant hunger and through the Hunger Games – of the fact that they were all “living in prognosis,” as Jain noted (80). She wrote that understanding life in discrete temporal pockets in which one is either disabled or not disabled can be shattered by instead acknowledging oneself to be constantly living in “prognosis time,” which “severs the idea of a time line” of being able-bodied until able-bodiedness is no longer sustained (80). Given that much of the population of Panem constantly lived in starving conditions, and that the Hunger Games disabled and killed their children annually, prognosis time took on a particularly powerful meaning in Panem.

Acknowledging a constant state of prognosis rather than imagining the loss of able-bodiedness as being contained in a discrete moment, according to Puar, “puts pressure on the assumption of an expected life span – a barometer of one’s modernity – and the privilege one has or does not have to presume what one’s life span will be” (166). The Capitol forced most District residents to acknowledge this state of being, thus situating some forms of disability as a constant, underlying, unstated mode of existence. Disability per se could not manifest as a discrete, permanent identity under these conditions, because certain disabling conditions were an accepted part of the environment. With the Capitol holding a monopoly on the means of compulsory

recovery, district residents could gain a great deal from centering itself around a disability politics that squarely blamed the Capitol for creating and enforcing such disabling conditions.

Certain impairments, however, were recognized by Katniss and other district residents as discretely identifying individuals experiencing them as disabled or otherwise different. Avoxes and people who experienced depression, “insanity,” or intellectual disabilities were variously described by Katniss as noble, frustrating, foolish and repulsive. She frequently, however, grouped people with similar experiences together in her narrative. Significantly, all of these kinds of impairments can easily be rendered invisible: as long as certain conditions were met (for an Avox, silence and an unobservant companion, and for someone whom Katniss labels “insane”, a lack of triggers), no one would be aware of the difference of individuals with these identities and experiences. This is distinct from impairments such as Chaff’s arm or the shaking induced by extreme hunger.

Despite, or perhaps because of, their more physically subtle nature, Katniss and others more often grouped people with these kinds of disabilities or impairments together. Avoxes, for example – whose tongues were cut out as punishment by the Capitol – were often described as living, working, and generally associating with each other. Katniss’s Capitol tribute team leader, Effie, commented upon seeing two Avoxes (both of whom Katniss had a history with) together, that it “[l]ooks like they’ve got you a matched set this year” (*CF* 216). By grouping Darius and a young woman Katniss and Gale had failed to save from the woods outside District Twelve years before together in such a way, Effie stripped away their personhood and regarded their mute bodies as a commodity to purchase based on aesthetics (they both had red hair).

Indeed, the Capitol treated them this way, as well. By refusing treatment to Avoxes – surely with all their technology, they could prostheticize them enough to be able to speak if they

chose to – the Capitol maintained their monopoly over “cures.” This further asserted the Capitol’s control over the means to disable someone and then to re-cover a person’s disability. By leaving Avoxes as literally a physical symbol of their power, the Capitol again deployed the infliction of impairments and pain as a weapon of fear and control. By refusing to bring them into the realm of compulsory recovery, the Capitol reminded district residents that they disabled Avoxes and held the power to chose not to re-cover them.

This use of disabled bodies as a message-sending metaphor is far from uncommon, but it was also challenged somewhat within the narrative. When Pollux, an escaped Avox who was on Katniss’s camera crew in *Mockingjay*, was able to guide the rebel team through underground tunnels because he’d been forced to work there for the Capitol for years, being Avox was rendered as an asset. Indeed, when Katniss first met Pollux, she didn’t notice that he was Avox before realized that “the position of his lips, the extra effort he takes to swallow”, but then she understood (*M* 104). With that understanding of his physical condition came an understanding of his position in the rebellion: Katniss wrote, “[t]hey cut out his tongue and he will never speak again. And I no longer have to wonder what made him risk everything to help bring down the Capitol” (104). According to Katniss, the impairment the Capitol inflicted upon him made it clear why he would want to fight back.

However, Katniss portrayed many other potentially invisible disabilities as being debilitating in and of themselves, canceling out the ability of the person experiencing them to resist the Capitol. Katniss’s strongest aversion, perhaps, was to depression, particularly her mother’s depression. She frequently described her mother’s state after Katniss’s father was killed in a mine accident in terms of abandonment: her first description of her depression was writing how she had to struggle to remember how much her mother had loved her father “when all I can



see is the woman who sat by, blank and unreachable, while her children turned to skin and bones” (*HG* 8). Before her first Games, Katniss acknowledged – in response to her mother calling her depression an “illness” that could have been cured with proper medication – that “immobilizing sadness” might be “a sickness, but it’s one we can’t afford” (36). Situating depression squarely into the arena (no pun intended) of economics, Katniss and her mother firmly associated the experience of depression with what their government did not allow them to have.

Though Katniss called depression<sup>19</sup> her mother’s “weakness”, after her experience in the Games, she came to understand her mother’s experiences as understandable and common responses to horrific events (*HG* 53). Just as Katniss understood Haymitch’s drinking better (and even tried it herself) after surviving her first Games, Katniss significantly altered the way she understood the debilitating effects of depression after experiencing the Games for herself. She began to describe her mother’s depression as “something she couldn’t help,” and acknowledged that she needed to stop punishing her for it (*CF* 31). She further began to stop isolating her mother’s experience to just their family.

Instead, she extended her understanding of depression outwards when she realized that Madge’s mother, too, suffered from depression brought on by traumatic circumstances. She wrote of Madge’s mom that she “spends half her life in bed immobilized with terrible pain, shutting out the world. I think of how I never realized that she and my mother shared this

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<sup>19</sup> According to Tom Henthorne, Katniss’s mother suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder rather than depression. My interest in this chapter is not definitive diagnosis, but rather an exploration of various impairments, disabilities, and identities. Ultimately, I believe that individuals have the power to identify their own states of mind, and as far as readers are aware, Katniss’s mother was no more specific than referring a sickness that she couldn’t help. Either depression or PTSD can be interpreted as such. I have tentatively used the label of depression for Katniss’s mother’s symptoms because I recognize her symptoms as similar to my own. This identification with characters is a definitive part of literature, and I assert it here because I believe this identification to be stronger than medical diagnoses.

connection” (196). The connection here was both their depression and their shared loss to the Games (Madge’s mother’s twin and Katniss’s mother’s friend, Maysilee).

It is significant that both people Katniss explicitly described as experiencing immobilizing depression were not just women, but mothers. The only solace Katniss’s mother found was in healing, a highly feminized action (and even in this, she was not allowed to hold a true leadership position as a doctor in District Thirteen). Surely, male characters also experienced trauma and subsequent depression of sorts. Finnick certainly experienced some manifestation of depression and/or acute anxiety, but he, Peeta, and Gale were all still allowed to fight in the Capitol, whereas Johanna – a young woman who’d been tortured by the Capitol – was not.<sup>20</sup> Katniss was only sent into battle to be killed under the orders of President Coin. While Peeta and Gale surely had significant trauma, Peeta was merely able to grasp the back of a chair and let it pass through him, and Gale manifested his trauma in mercilessly blowing up strategic targets. Katniss, however, had to be held through all of her nightmares by Peeta. The feminization of depression throughout *The Hunger Games Trilogy* perpetuated the link McRuer astutely observed between compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, the latter of which involves embodying heteronormative gender expectations.

These expectations manifested themselves not only in Katniss’s portrayals of depression, but in her renderings of people as “insane,” as well. Katniss needed to perform “temporary insanity” extremely well in order to stay alive after the 74<sup>th</sup> Games (*CF 72*). If she could not convince President Snow that she was driven mad by the thought of losing Peeta when she manipulated the Capitol into sparing two victors – as opposed to defying the Capitol outright – she and her family might be able to live. The performance of a temporary insanity that would

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<sup>20</sup> Finnick’s girlfriend and then wife, Annie, also arguably experienced a form of depression, but her specific situation will be discussed in the next chapter, as will Finnick and Johanna’s traumas.

drive a young couple to kill themselves in order to keep the other alive – the rules of the Game, if you wish someone other than yourself to live – drove the entire first two books. Katniss's war with herself over how to convince people of her feminized role, of her irrational, womanly, "mad" love for Peeta constituted much of the plot of these novels.

In this way, the narrative revealed "insanity" as deliberate and/or merely misunderstood performance rather than as a biological state of being. Other characters reinforced this understanding, as well. Called "Nuts" by other victors, Wiress – an elderly tribute in the Quarter Quell – persistently and distressingly repeated "tick tock" to her allies during the Games (*CF* 320). Dismissed by the others as merely being "nuts", no one understood the vital information she was trying to give them until Katniss realized: "Tick, tock. [The arena] is a clock" (325). This information saved all of their lives. When Wiress was finally understood by someone, Katniss noted that she had overcome "the inability to communicate" and subsequently noted that "she's functioning again" (327). Her need to perform the same words over and over again, desperately trying to be understood by someone, Wiress was no longer read as insane, but rather as profoundly clever. Her insight allowed her companions to survive the arena. Her performance of insanity, once understood as a merely different form of communication, was thus rendered smart rather than "nuts." Here again, context defines ability.

In all of the above situations, however, before depression or "insanity" was understood within its broader context, the characters experiencing and/or performing these impairments were written off as "weak" in some way. As mentioned above, Katniss at one point classified her mother's depression as "weakness," and her descriptions of Wiress being "nuts" were accompanied by images of her taking the old woman "by the hand" and leading her where she needed to go as she might lead a child (*CF* 321). In this association with disability and weakness

again arose the feminization of disability. Childish dependency and femininity united in Katniss's descriptions of people experiencing depression or what she deemed insanity: just as she, a child, had to resume her father's role and take care of her ailing mother, Katniss took care of "nuts" old woman Wiress when others would not.

This association between childishness and disabling mental states persisted in Collins's inclusion of two minor characters – so minor, in fact, that they are arguably only plot devices – with intellectual disabilities. Rue – portrayed by Katniss as the most likeable tribute in the 74<sup>th</sup> Games because she seemed to be the most in need of protection – illustrated the Capitol's brutality to Katniss by describing how Peacekeepers in District Eleven had killed someone portrayed as even more in need of protection than she was. Rue described a boy, Martin, who had illegally kept a pair of night vision glasses. Peacekeepers killed him even though, according to Rue, "everyone knew he was no danger. Martin wasn't right in the head. I mean, he still acted like a three-year-old. He just wanted the glasses to play with" (*HG* 204).

This story, meant to tug on readers' heartstrings, neglected to emphasize the fact that Martin was still able to work in the fields with Rue and the others: that's how he had access to the glasses. On a related and similarly unmentioned note, Martin would have recognized an advantage in the arena that Katniss did not: he would have known what the glasses were whereas they'd been useless to her. Environment, again, was shown to determine the way that disability manifests as advantages or disadvantages.

Instead of emphasizing this, the narrative simply utilized his death to illustrate that Peacekeepers could kill "the most innocent of the innocent." Martin was here used as a narrative plot device to illustrate how much harsher District 11 Peacekeepers were than those in Twelve, as Katniss immediately wrote that:

“[h]earing this makes me feel like District Twelve is some sort of safe haven. Of course, people keel over from starvation all the time, but I can’t imagine the Peacekeepers murdering a simpleminded child. There’s a little girl, one of Greasy Sae’s grandkids, who wanders around the Hob. She’s not quite right, but she’s treated as a sort of pet. People toss her scraps and things” (204-5).

The immediate connection that Katniss formed between Martin and Greasy Sae’s grandchild established a sense of communal identity between the two individuals, but it also severely stripped Greasy Sae’s grandchild of her personhood. Katniss wrote that District Twelve was a “safe haven” compared to Eleven, and therefore implied that treating a child like a “pet” was a favorable way to treat her. Indeed, Katniss herself threw this child “scraps” when in *Mockingjay* – the child’s only physical appearance in the series – Katniss let the nameless child keep a ball of yarn (*M* 381).

Associating these two individuals who presumably experience intellectual disabilities together demonstrated that their particular forms of difference had not become a background identity like starvation. Rather, it was something that existed against the norm, and further – like “depression” – that the Capitol had no intention of “fixing.” This lack of interest in “curing” these impairments – being Avox or experiencing depression, “insanity”, or intellectual disabilities – allowed discrete identities to form around these differences in ways that identities did not form around more physically oriented impairments that the Capitol alternately created and compulsorily re-covered.

The Capitol thus maintained the power to pick and choose which impairments to inflict and which of these to define as disabilities through its compulsory recovery of certain impairments. Bodily and mental differences that had been experienced by individuals from birth

or early childhood, however (such as intellectual disabilities and/or a possible predisposition towards depression), weren't compulsorily cured, as they served the Capitol nicely in reminding district residents that the Capitol only paid attention to select citizens. By establishing itself both as a grand inflictor of pain and impairments and as the monopoly holder of the power to control the compulsory recovery of those it hurt, the Capitol forced investment in "cures" that erased embodied differences while normalizing slow death through hunger.

In these ways, disability in Panem acquired many often contradictory meanings. In some instances, it was required by the state, and in others, the state compulsorily "fixed" it to heighten the cultural poignancy and entertainment value of the breaking of able-bodiedness. This compulsory recovery was not only enforced by the state, but by the structural framework of the series, as well. Disabled and injured people were compelled to re-cover their disability, recovering from horrific events in ways that serve to alleviate American anxieties about the capacity of traumatized bodies for recovery.<sup>21</sup> Such traumatic recoveries (and the lack thereof) are the subjects of the next chapter.

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<sup>21</sup> While depression and intellectual disabilities are both treated (no pun intended) in this chapter, I have devoted the whole of Chapter Three to post-traumatic stress disorder, and related invisible disabilities, given its dominant role in The Hunger Games Trilogy.

### Chapter 3

#### The Humanization and Heterosexualization of Trauma and Recovery

How does The Hunger Games Trilogy function as a first-person, fictional trauma narrative? Written by a nonveteran (albeit one with a father who fought in the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam), the dystopian series constructs trauma mostly as a message rather than as an exercise in direct self-healing or memoir storytelling.<sup>22</sup> How, then, was trauma – the most pervasive form of impairment and disability throughout the series – deployed in The Hunger Games Trilogy? Trauma was certainly a devastatingly powerful part of the series, but it - and the events that triggered it - were largely constructed as within the exclusive domain of “the human.” As discussed in Chapter One, weeks of killing some humans was portrayed as devastatingly traumatic, whereas years of killing – murdering – a variety and abundance of non-humans induced no trauma.

Written from Katniss’s perspective, The Hunger Games Trilogy prioritized the trauma of a young human woman, yet Katniss’s interstitial position as both muttation and human begs immensely important questions: what of the trauma of nonhumans? Where is the trauma of those creatures who were both hunters and hunted in the most extreme sense: those animals that were bred and manipulated solely to kill and be killed, the muttations? Where is the trauma of the creatures that Katniss and Gale spent years shooting through the eyes and trapping in deadly snares? How was animality distanced from trauma throughout the narrative? How did non-humans express their traumas, and how did their experiences shape – or fail to shape – the larger narrative? By engaging questions of non-human animal trauma raised by the scholarship of Lynn

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<sup>22</sup> For more about Collins’s life and influences, see her interview with Scholastic magazine. For more about war writing by both veterans and nonveterans, see Kali Tal’s *Worlds of Hurt* in which Tal argued, “[t]he war, to nonveteran writers, is simply a metaphor, a vehicle for their message... The ‘real war’ about which they write is the war of symbols and images” (116). While Tal does not acknowledge the very tangible realness of vicarious trauma on individuals who did not physically fight in war, her point remains a strong one when considering the function of a fantasy war novel as opposed to a historical war novel.

Worsham, James Stanescu, pattrice jones, Barbara Smuts, and Jesse Arsenault, I will examine the devastation of nonhuman trauma in the trilogy and the ways that the narrative largely neglected these vital perspectives. Non-human trauma is written deeply into the pages of *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, though it was not by any means given the same narrative power as human trauma. Only the trauma of humans (or part-humans, in Katniss's case) is directly addressed with gravity.

This trauma manifested itself as a life-altering experience for human beings, but was ultimately rendered as re-coverable through the compulsory recovery of most major characters. This compulsory recovery manifested itself in the compulsory performative of heteronormativity: Collins positioned human post-traumatic stress disorder as an identity-impacting experience that could only be managed through the assertion of heterosexual reproductive and the performance of heteronormative gender roles. In this way, heteronormative reproduction and gender roles were introduced as a compulsory "cure" to re-cover human characters' trauma in much the same way that Capitol technology was used to re-cover different kinds of disabilities. By engaging works on trauma by scholars like Eric Tribunella, I will demonstrate that human characters' performance of heterosexually reproductive roles enabled readers to draw a false sense of comfort from the end of the series.

In response to the ethical urgency of addressing the trauma of non-human characters, I will address non-human trauma before delving into the treatment of human trauma in *The Hunger Games*.<sup>23</sup> While "concern for non-human life is [allegedly] a frivolous interest in the

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<sup>23</sup> Perhaps it is difficult to address trauma in non-humans when so many of our definitions of trauma and our definitions of non-humans contradict each other. Trauma is often understood as "a response to events so overwhelmingly intense that they impair normal emotional or cognitive responses and bring lasting psychological disruption" (Vickroy ix). If this is the case, then can nonhumans be traumatized if we do not believe them to be capable of emotional, cognitive, and psychological responses? Of course, many humans recognize differences and create hierarchies of consciousness to attempt to sort out the vast diversity of non-human lives, but when humans ultimately as situated at the top of this hierarchy, non-human suffering is considered suspect in the dominant



face of the toll that traumatic histories exact on their human subjects,” it is necessary to note that attempting to see face in a diversity of non-human beings does not displace the importance of human face and trauma (Arsenault 1). Rather, addressing the trauma of non-humans “is to allow ourselves to entertain more than one idea of suffering and violence... to acknowledge that we are capable of devoting our attention to more than one site of political struggle simultaneously” (2).

Katniss certainly acknowledged more than one kind of political struggle when she unhesitatingly allied herself with muttations and divorced herself from sympathies with human beings. Despite this cross-species identification, however, Katniss did not – except in the incident of her becoming fire-mutt discussed in Chapter One – extend her extensive reflections on trauma to include the trauma of non-human beings. Given the prominence of muttations and hunting throughout the narrative, however, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* could be a prime space for understanding animal trauma.

Muttations performed what one might imagine was their trauma with ferocity, and Katniss responded in kind. When the mutation monkeys attacked her, Peeta, and Finnick during the Quarter Quell, for example, the monkey mutts leapt down from the trees with immense speed, “[f]angs bared, hackles raised, claws shooting out like switchblades” (*CF* 308-9). Katniss reacted in kind, using her arrows to help her with “targeting eyes and hearts and throats, so that each hit means death” (309). The human trio fought together in triangular formation, Finnick spearing monkeys and Peeta slashing them with his knife.

The reader is meant to recognize that Katniss, Peeta, and Finnick were fighting as a single body for their own lives and to protect each other. Their violent actions were actions of

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ideology. However, non-human subjectivity is as and more diverse than human subjectivity, as discussed in Chapter One. As this non-human subjectivity was explored in depth in Chapter One, I will pause here only to note that extensive non-human suffering – and articulation of that suffering, especially through Katniss – was profound throughout *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. Given the undeniable presence of non-human subjectivity in the series, the absence of a narrative structure designed to explicitly address non-human trauma serves to reify human dominance over non-humans, rendering non-human trauma unreal and/or unimportant.

survival and resulted from the immediate sense of trauma that any of them could be killed at any moment. Their fighting together was portrayed as an asset, and indeed, human cooperation saved Peeta at the end of that scene when a tribute from District Six jumped in and saved his life.

Human trauma was evident in the monkey mutt scene and immediately afterward, when Katniss could not handle the District Six tribute's imminent death and Peeta entered to soothe the trauma of her dying as her life bled out of her.

No such consideration was paid to the probable monkeys' trauma, however. While it was portrayed as self-evident that the whole experience was traumatizing for the human participants the monkey mutts were not treated as traumatized beings fighting together for their own survival (just as the humans were doing). Scholars like Patricia Jones would be quick to highlight the probable trauma that those monkeys had experienced prior to and during the battle. Katniss wrote that "animals in nature don't act like" the monkeys were acting, and sure enough, the monkey mutations had been subjected to genetic alteration and control by the Capitol and therefore had undergone trauma that "natural" monkeys never had (*CF* 309).

Jones would encourage the recognition of this non-human trauma as she did in rooster fighting. Roosters in nature posture towards dominance, but do not tend to fight to the death as they are made to do in cock fights. Their lethal violence in those fights, she argued, is brought on by traumatic treatment by humans. Jones queried and responded:

"Why, then, do fighting roosters fight to the death? This we can only surmise by means of empathic inference from known facts. Fighting roosters are kept in a constant state of sensory deprivation and social frustration, living alone in indoor cages or tethered by one leg to outdoor stakes. Separated from parents and siblings, they do not receive the behavioral instruction doled out by adult hens and roosters to chicks and juveniles.

Isolation also prevents the establishment of normal peer and sexual relationships. Prior to bouts, roosters are often injected with testosterone and/or amphetamines, both of which heighten the fight-flight response... Roosters who have survived previous bouts have learned that they are life-threatening situations” (369).

Similarly, readers – and perhaps, Katniss herself – could only surmise empathically the reasons that normally non-aggressive animals would attack so violently. Not truly knowing what is in other creature’s heads – not knowing for certain what muttations might have nightmares about – is common to imagining the traumas of both humans and non-humans, and accepting this limitation is important in acknowledging the independent selfhood of potential Others. However, as Jones suggested, engaging empathically with the conditions non-humans endure is crucial to at least trying to understand their traumas as we would try to understand other humans’ traumas.

In this case, it is important to ask of the narrative the same sorts of questions raised in Chapter One: under what conditions did muttations live (and die) when not participating in the Games? The Capitol actively destroyed muttations (killing them when they were no longer advantageous) and their fate was apparently dismissed by the rebels (who destroyed the arenas in which non-human muttations and/or other animals might have still lived). Given this, it is not at all far reaching to suggest that muttations – like the roosters Jones discussed – were kept in horrendous conditions during the times that they were not being sent to fight tributes or rebels. Yet these traumatic conditions, implied but not explicitly discussed in the text, were not given priority by the narrative.<sup>24</sup>

Barbara Smuts, however, might argue that the explicit statement by Katniss of non-human trauma is not necessary to conclude that animals have been traumatized. In their own

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<sup>24</sup> Written acknowledgment of non-human trauma can be found when Katniss became fire-mutt and described the agony of her existence as such. This can easily be read as a clue of their treatment and suffering more generally, but this was the only acknowledgment of its kind in the trilogy.

ways, different kinds of non-human animals can and do communicate a variety of complex thoughts and emotions with great eloquence. Smuts referred to this communication as “embodied communication”, and argued that in this communication,

“meaning is mutually constituted, literally embodied as two behaviors (‘the parts’) combine to create something new (‘the whole’). I use the term embodied communication to refer to interactions whose meanings lie more in such emergent properties than in the lower-level, individual actions of the participants” (138).

With this understanding of bodies rather than spoken words as the hosts of communication – and by extension, the communicators of trauma - it becomes clear that in fighting with the monkey mutts, Katniss and her friends engaged in a complex dialogue with the monkeys regarding painful histories of trauma. Survivors of the battle – human and mutation alike – would proceed to the next battle even more traumatized, more hardened, and more prepared to kill creatures that are marked as Other but have been similarly traumatized by a dually-oppressive regime. Seeking to know non-humans as Smuts did requires reading the bodies of animals, human and non-human alike, for communications (such as that of trauma-bearing) which do not require vocal or written articulation.<sup>25</sup>

Without such written articulation, the trauma inflicted by humans onto many non-humans throughout *The Hunger Games Trilogy* is still clear in the bodily performances and communications of non-human animals. When a Gamemaker-produced fire tore through the arena in Katniss’s first Games, Katniss ran – following non-human animals – to get away from

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<sup>25</sup> In her work on war narratives written by modernist women writers, Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick acknowledged the kind of embodied communication of which Smuts encouraged human recognition. In her analysis of Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, Goodspeed-Chadwick wrote about the ways that “the female body of [a] cow speaks its trauma through the excessive flow of bodily water and tears... the cow’s trauma is outside of verbal language and representation” (44-5). However, the cow’s trauma was not analyzed in its own terms: Goodspeed-Chadwick wrote that the narrative “uses the cow as a metaphor for human war experience”, thus forcing the non-human back into a box of representing humans rather than being recognized for their own sake.

the flames, but non-human animals ran to get away from their burning, destroyed homes. After a fleeting thought about their keen instincts, Katniss and the narrative gave no more heed to the plight of the animals who had lost more than a prime tree to hide and sleep in for a few days (let alone the plant life that was destroyed in the fire).

The Capitol was not the only source of trauma for non-human animals, however. Katniss herself inflicted a great deal of trauma on these creatures and thought nothing of it. She called Prim's attempts to hunt "disastrous" because "whenever [Katniss] shot something, she'd get teary and talk about how we might be able to heal it if we got it home soon enough" (*HG* 35). Katniss thus recognized the perspective that non-humans can be mourned, but dismissed it immediately, placing priority on the only way she saw to survive: hunting non-humans.

This hunting undoubtedly traumatized non-humans, and Katniss herself offhandedly acknowledged this when she noted that "[t]he animals here [above District Thirteen] are not nearly suspicious enough" (*M* 53). These animals had largely not been hunted in at least seventy-five years, since the population of District Thirteen went underground, and Katniss saw this lack of trauma as an important weakness to take advantage of. While Katniss intimately shared with District Twelve's non-human animals the experience and fear of being hunted, she expected all non-humans to be suspicious: the animals above Thirteen were not suspicious enough, ie., not as suspicious as they should have been. Despite sharing the feeling of being prey, Katniss uncritically expected all non-humans to be prey and thus to have react as she and Haymitch did after spending time in the arena: with a constant vigilance and traumatized aversion to being approached or touched.

Katniss recognized all too well the "terror and humiliation of being captured and quickly killed or ripped apart while still alive – that is, the humiliation (and indeed, the mortification) of

being taken to be mere meat to feed another animal” (Worsham 64). However, she did not recognize the suspiciousness of animals in District Twelve as being similar to her own reactions to being hunted. The animals outside of District Thirteen did not embody trauma in their communications with her, but the animals in District Twelve did. Instead of using this as a basis to form affinity with the animals as Prim did, Katniss continued to uncritically perpetuate the “fundamentally traumatized relation” between humans and non-humans (Worsham 64).

Even when she was not hunting, Katniss inflicted trauma upon non-humans. She referenced casually the forcibly controlled reproduction of Prim’s goat Lady (even though she was lying to Peacekeepers when she referred to searching for a mate for Lady, it is safe to assume that this lie came to her so quickly because mating off Lady was a reality). She also tried to drown Buttercup when she first met him, and Buttercup subsequently treated Katniss with defensive trauma responses. Even Katniss recognized that Buttercup had probably been traumatized, saying of his hissing at her that “I think he still remembers how I tried to drown him in a bucket” (*HG* 3). Chillingly similar to the Capitol’s torture-by-water (and electric shock) of Katniss’s fellow victor Johanna, Katniss’s attempt to drown Buttercup became a running, dry joke for Katniss throughout the series rather than a truly traumatic event.

Buttercup’s hissing at Katniss was most likely informed by his trauma: his embodied communication suggested that his body bore trauma at her hands. Interestingly, Katniss came to identify with Buttercup after Prim’s death, when another form of trauma overtook the cat: grief. James Stanescu has written that “[m]ourning is always a political act,” and indeed, the portrayal of mourning is also a political act (568). Featuring Katniss and Buttercup wailing together in shared grief over Prim’s death implied strongly that Katniss and the cat were experiencing shared trauma over Prim’s death. Buttercup did not react to Katniss’s verbal proclamation that Prim was

dead, only to her “new sound, part crying, part singing... giving voice to my despair” (*M* 386). Once Katniss had emitted that sound, she wrote that Buttercup “must know that the unthinkable has happened and to survive will require previously unthinkable acts,” such as the two of them bonding (386).

Words did not help Buttercup and Katniss communicate their mutual trauma: rawer actions did, and the embodied communication of shared agony and trauma between the two creatures as they cried together was poignantly tangible. Indeed, the portrayal of Buttercup’s mourning of Prim was political, because it forced recognition that non-humans also grieve the traumatic experience of unexpected loss. Tammy L. Grant described this moment with Buttercup as the moment when Katniss “finally embraces her despair... Their duet is more than just vocal: they are both injured and scarred and missing the one person they each loved most” (96). This description ascribed the complex emotions of love and longing to Buttercup, and in this moment, embodied communication successfully positioned non-human trauma as extremely significant and requiring human attention and recognition. Perhaps in this moment with Buttercup, readers can realize the falseness of the dichotomy Katniss had established between “human feelings” about death and “an animal need to keep [friends] alive” (*M* 313). These emotions feed one another in a variety of bodies, and do not belong to either human or non-human.

Buttercup’s moment of meeting Katniss in the interstitial spaces between non-human animal and human animal, between healing and trauma, begs the question: what became of Buttercup after their wailing session? Indeed, what became of any non-human animals in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*? As discussed in Chapter One, non-humans were disposed of by both the Capitol and the narrative, a concern for their well-being when the arenas were destroyed and districts firebombed not a priority for either narrator or government. The same held true for non-

human trauma: not only was Buttercup's physical presence erased from the story, but so were the myriad ways he might have chosen to cope with Prim's death after grieving with Katniss.

Perhaps his removal from the narrative was his own choice: he might have refused to live in a human dwelling any longer, choosing to instead to take to the woods as he had periodically throughout the series.

Readers do not ultimately know, however, in the same way that humans do not ultimately know the ways that traumas exist in other people (human and non-human alike). There is, however, a distinction between not knowing because the narrative avoids explicitly addressing non-human trauma and not knowing because if the subjectivities of non-human beings are truly respected, we must acknowledge that we cannot know the inner workings of their beings intimately simply because we are not them. It may well be that the only path forward is accepting the human discomfort of simply not knowing – of not being able to dictate – the great diversity of ways that a great diversity of nonhumans experience, express, and cope with trauma.

Indeed, assuming a definite knowledge even of other human experiences of trauma asserts an ownership and invalidation of experiences that are not one's own, opening proverbial doors to individual and cultural appropriation and oppression. Similarly, assuming competent knowledge of nonhuman experiences and articulations of trauma perpetuates violence against these creatures, but so does the failure to consider nonhuman traumas as equally important to human traumas. In *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, readers do not know about non-human trauma perspectives both because the narrative elided them and because when clues were given as to animal trauma, they were not usually centralized as significant in themselves.

The traumas and fates of non-human beings like Buttercup and muttations (other than Katniss and Peeta, who were both mutt and human but passed as human) were not included in



the last few pages of *Mockingjay* or in its epilogue. It is very significant that non-human trauma was not mentioned in the epilogue whereas human trauma was featured so prominently in it. As Mike Cadden argued, the “awkward convention” of the epilogue is not “about the hero or any one character... This structural addition is not really even a structural concern; it’s about the implied reader” (343-4). The implied reader, Cadden suggested, is addressed in epilogues “in order to satisfy what is perceived to linger in the mind of the reader after plot has been resolved” (344). Presumably, then, Collins considered Katniss recovering from her traumas as a wife and mother – which she repeatedly asserted throughout the series that she would never become – to be more important to readers than addressing (even a little bit) the traumas of the myriad non-humans that entered the series and played a defining role in human games.

Human trauma was thus positioned as more important than non-human trauma. The utility of this human trauma in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* rested in the assurance of readers that resiliency can coexist with and even overtake extreme trauma. While the trilogy “offer[ed] a depiction of trauma in which absolute healing [was] not achieved”, it certainly offered a happy ending for Katniss and Peeta, in which their children were portrayed as unquestionably and consistently safe (Markland 89). In *Mockingjay*’s hurried last few pages and in its epilogue, Collins established both that “[t]rauma is a transformative experience, and those who are transformed can never entirely return to a state of previous innocence” (Tal 119). She further established that such trauma can be overcome through the performance of heteronormative roles.

The connection between overcoming trauma and the performance of heteronormative roles is far from an uncommon theme in children’s and young adult literature. Eric Tribunella argued that trauma is utilized in young adult literature to compel the production of

heteronormatively gendered adults in the place of gender-bending or otherwise queer children. This understanding is instrumental to interpreting adult writing about adolescent trauma.

In *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, the adult author certainly portrayed heteronormatively gendered and reproductive adults emerging from traumatic adolescent experiences. However, the heteronormativity in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* was positioned not as a result of trauma, but as a cure to trauma. Following the compulsory recovery of impairments and disabilities discussed in the last chapter, the series' conclusion compulsorily re-covered human characters' traumas by wrapping them in the specter of heterosexual reproduction and the propagation of heteronormative gender roles.<sup>26</sup>

Lacking a romantic male counterpart, women were positioned as perhaps able to survive but unable to live. Johanna, lacking a male romantic partner, ultimately failed in her goal of participating in the overthrow of the Capitol, and Katniss only succeeded because President Coin sent her on the mission after deciding she'd be better off dead. Katniss's mother could never return to District Twelve because of all the trauma she associated with her old home, and Annie Cresta was generally portrayed as only somewhat functional when Finnick was actively present and supporting her. When people of any gender paired off in a straight romance that produced a child, however, their traumas were re-covered, rendering them as functionally cured as long as they were engaged in heterosexual reproduction and/or heteronormative gender roles.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Katherine Broad has written excellently about the forced heteronormativity and political conservatism that was strongly promoted by the romantic choice Katniss was compelled to make at the series' conclusion.

<sup>27</sup> In the midst of all of this gendering of trauma, sexual violence rarely arose as an explicitly acknowledged issue throughout the trilogy. While Katniss addressed an unspoken rule against cannibalism in the arenas, not once was the idea of sexual violence brought into the arenas: except, of course, in the context of the forced relationship between Katniss and Peeta. While his feelings toward Katniss were well-stated, it was abundantly clear that the kisses they shared were usually for the strategic purpose of Katniss trying to survive. This coercion made their public encounters certainly lacking true consent. However, this lack of consent was not addressed explicitly as sexual violence within the narrative. The sexual violence committed against Finnick (and presumably other victors, as well) outside of the arena were discussed, however: Finnick was nonconsensually made to do sex work for big spenders in the Capitol after winning his Games. Katniss pondered whether that would have been her fate, as well, had she not had to maintain the star-crossed lovers story with Peeta. Yet the idea of rape and sexual violence in the

In her analysis of trauma in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, Anah-Jayne Markland argued that Collins, especially in Peeta's case, did not place "emphasis not on curing trauma, but on its creating a new identity and the need to live with its ongoing symptoms" (111).<sup>28</sup> While it is true that Peeta was not portrayed as being "cured" from his trauma per se, the only lasting symptom of his trauma that Katniss reported was his need to once in a while "[clutch] the back of a chair and [hang] on until the flashbacks are over" (*M* 388). He seemed not to share Katniss's nightmares "of mutts and lost children" (388).

These kinds of nightmares marked Katniss's nights since before she was first reaped in the Games (when she would dream of her dead father). Even though Peeta shared these nightmares after their experience in the arena together, he was always portrayed as the one to hold her and wake her from her nightmares rather than the other way around. Both Peeta and Finnick were allowed to endure their trauma nightmares alone: Finnick grabbed at sand to assure himself that his nightmares weren't real upon waking in the arena (*CF* 353), and Peeta's chair clutching was also an individual act associated with masculinized physical hardness.

This physical hardness contrasted deeply with Peeta's painting as a coping mechanism from his first Games, but it became a strong part of his life after his experience being tortured into wanting to kill Katniss by the Capitol. Katniss described Peeta trying to hold on and not kill her during the assault on the Capitol as making his "wrists... [as] hard as metal" with the strain (*M* 313). He also managed to be, despite being in a (literal) minefield of triggers, "the only one still functional enough to get [the rebel team] moving" after one of their team members was

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arenas never came up: the threat of rape and sexual assault were never mentioned, though tributes were often shown to pin each other down violently (Clove almost killed Katniss while on top of her during the 74<sup>th</sup> Games, and though Johanna only attacked Katniss in a similar way during the Quarter Quell to protect her, Katniss and readers did not know that at the time). In the context of such gendered responses to trauma, the non-inclusion of sexual violence is surprising and perhaps dishonest, especially considering the unapologetically graphic nature of the trilogy.

<sup>28</sup> In the same piece, Markland also conducted an interesting and informative analysis of community trauma in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*.

killed on Capitol streets (308). The narrative did not explain how Peeta was able to do this, and even Katniss wondered how he had not snapped, writing that “I don’t know why he’s in control, when he should be flipping out and bashing my brains in” (308). By writing Peeta as able to transcend – by sheer willpower, it seemed – the immensely deep physical conditioning that the Capitol had tortured him with, Collins asserted individual strength as more powerful than biological hindrances. This reflected the ways that she wrote Peeta as transcending his physical impairments throughout *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, but this transcendence did not prevent his leg or his trauma from being compulsorily re-covered by the narrative.

Peeta’s resilience during the assault on the Capitol was both rewarded and reinforced with the feeling of Katniss’s lips on his. Just as he was struggling the hardest, convinced that Katniss’s team should kill him because he would snap and kill them first if they didn’t, Katniss took an impulsive risk and kissed him to try to bring him back to himself. The kiss worked, and Katniss heard what she thought she’d never hear again: Peeta’s voice, soft, telling her he would always stay with her (*M* 314). This explicit example of the compulsory re-recovery of Peeta’s trauma positioned the performance of heterosexuality as a “cure”, or at the very least as a palliative, for even the most extreme manifestations of trauma.

Despite his ability to overcome his trauma with the help of Katniss’s performance of heterosexuality – and it was a performance, because her kiss was an idea, a strategy, rather than an act of passion – Peeta still did demonstrate clear signs of experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. Finnick also communicated his PTSD, though his, like Katniss’s, often manifested in few spoken words (whereas Peeta spoke and painted articulately about the impact of the arena). Both young men, despite or maybe because of the gentleness of their masculinity, were positioned as trauma mentors of sorts to Katniss’s rawness. Peeta held her while she slept and

Finnick taught her how to distract herself with rope-typing and how to let go when she needed to break down. Even though they were softly gendered as masculine, they were both still portrayed as helping a helpless Katniss learn how to cope with her raw emotions. Katniss herself wrote that she needed a “dandelion in the spring” (Peeta) to help her get through life with all of her trauma (*M* 388). This was her explanation for choosing Peeta over Gale, and it was one that led her towards living in the straight relationship that she had been manipulated into – and resisted – from the start.

Gale, on the outskirts of this enforced relationship, was also portrayed as more capable of handling his trauma than Katniss. Gale shared many of Katniss’s traumas – becoming the major provider for their families after their respective father’s deaths, growing up in the Seam, and being extremely used to the effects of starvation and near starvation while being forced to watch and risk being reaped for the Hunger Games annually. He then was forced to watch his best friend (Katniss) endure the traumas of two arenas, and he was one of the relatively few survivors of the destruction of District Twelve (unlike Katniss, he was present for its destruction).

Yet, despite and perhaps because of all of this trauma, Gale was portrayed as a master war strategist. Prior to the obliteration of District Twelve, Gale’s intimate knowledge of animals – described by Katniss as almost instinctive – was cast as the reason for his excellence with traps and snares. After District Twelve’s destruction, however, Gale was portrayed as a rebel mastermind with the foresight and insight needed to derive strategies to solve wartime problems that no one else knew how to solve. After only thinking for a few hours about a strategic problem that other rebel military officials had been puzzled over for perhaps months, Gale was able to (very violently) solve the rebellion’s biggest strategic difficulty: forcing the end of District Two’s support of the Capitol by causing an avalanche over its most crucial stronghold.

In this way, Gale's trauma at the bombing of District Twelve culled the masculinity he intrinsically possessed, shaping him into a brilliant and brutal strategist. His actions impacted people and events in enormous ways (cracking District Two's "Nut" and thereby uniting the districts against the Capitol, as well as killing Prim and many other children). The traumas the Capitol had inflicted upon him shaped him deeply. In turn, his trauma, manifested in strategic deployments of cold, masculinized, warlike thinking, significantly shaped the course of broader events.

Katniss's trauma, however, was never portrayed as resulting in any form of tangible action that impacted others substantially. Always featured reacting rather than proactively responding, events were manipulated around Katniss such that her being rather than her actions impacted those around her. The actions that she did take – covering Rue with flowers after her death or drawing out the berries for her and Peeta's dual suicide, for example – that moved people were themselves reactive rather than calculated moves against the Capitol. Even killing ascendant President Coin – arguably Katniss's single most change-making reaction, as it brought rise to a new government and an end to the Games that Coin wanted to continue – was portrayed by Katniss herself as an instinctive, spur-of-the-moment decision in which her last-minute thoughts and memories guided her arrow to shoot Coin instead of Snow.

Katniss's trauma did not shape Katniss into a strategist as Gale's trauma shaped him, and other characters acknowledged this blatantly. Gale was hailed as a master strategist for his trauma-based plans that killed so many: in fact, he received a fancy, highly public job in the district he'd killed so many people in as a reward for his strategizing. Conversely, Katniss was put on trial for her one execution and only set free because she was portrayed as "a hopeless, shell-shocked lunatic" (*M* 378). Even in the eyes of others, Katniss continually reacted rather

than responded, feminizing and animalizing her responses to trauma when compared to the proactive, masculinized, strategically effective responses that Gale embodied.

Johanna Mason, too, a victor from District Seven with whom Katniss slowly developed an intimate understanding, was portrayed as unable to independently, consistently, and strategically adapt to trauma as Gale was. Like Haymitch, she used substances (morphling) to help her cope. Though her quick wit and protective charm always seemed to stay in tact, Johanna (unlike Gale) often shared with Katniss a bracelet reading “mentally disoriented” in District Thirteen, suffering as she did from relapses in her trauma after surviving two arenas and being tortured by the Capitol. While she and Katniss together forged the most powerful display of young women bonding as peers throughout the trilogy, this relationship was not positioned by the narrative as enough to get Johanna through her trauma as Katniss’s relationship with Peeta was positioned as enough to get him through his.

Johanna trained with Katniss diligently for the opportunity to fight in the rebel assault on the Capitol, and the two bonded over their mutual disdain for District Thirteen doctors. Doctors – insisting that the young women were “totally safe” when they knew very well that they weren’t and never would be again due to both social conditions and their traumas – could not alleviate their trauma, but according to the narrative, nor could a non-heterosexual relationship (*M* 220). While the two young women explicitly bonded over their traumas, bemoaning the fact that they nor any other victors would ever be the same after the arenas, the narrative did not allow Johanna recovery nor resolution. Without a male anchor, Johanna was unable to overcome her trauma and fight in the Capitol. She failed the final training test, which deliberately activated her worst triggers from the Capitol’s torture. Refusing a heterosexual relationship, Johanna was not written as successfully living with her trauma. Her fate was, like those of the mutations and other non-

human animals, assumed to be of little or no concern to readers and did not factor into the series's end.

In a similar way, Katniss's mother was not given an ending which allowed her to function inside of her trauma. While she was able to continue functioning enough to help establish a hospital in District Four, she maintained the heteronormatively gendered role of feminine healer that Katniss herself rejected. Indeed, as Jennifer Mitchell pointed out, Katniss felt "compelled to actively distance herself from all things overtly female" because of her mother's experiences of depression and trauma (discussed in the previous chapter) (131). Additionally, her mother was portrayed as unable return to District Twelve, even if it meant helping her severely traumatized, only living child get on with her own life. Katniss wrote that District Twelve would be "too painful for her to bear," and given the resolution that other characters were given in the series, it seems likely that Katniss's mother's lack of a heterosexual partner held recovery at arms' length (*M* 380).

Yet another woman portrayed as unable to adapt to trauma on her own was Annie Cresta, a victor from District Four years ago and Finnick's lover. She was portrayed – like Katniss and Johanna in *Mockingjay* – as 'mentally disoriented' more often than not. Continuing historically misogynist associations between women, lack of control, and hysteria, Annie was referred to throughout both *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* as the "mad girl" or the "hysterical young woman" (Horwitz 13). She was even marked by Johanna – who was intimately aware of her own PTSD – as being particularly altered by her trauma. Annie was truly defined throughout the series by the mental differences her trauma caused, in a similar way that Avoxes were defined by the physical differences the Capitol forced upon them.



As a result of this identity, Katniss developed an aversion to Annie. Just as Katniss instinctively tended to want to run from people with physical injuries and scream at people (namely her mother and Peeta) experiencing emotional and/or mental impairments caused by trauma, she was “leery” of Annie, writing that “I’m a little leery about being with Annie since all I really know about her is that Finnick loves her and everybody thinks she’s mad” (*M* 225). A seasoned expert at experiencing trauma responses herself,<sup>29</sup> Katniss did not know how to respond to Annie, calling her “strange” and “unstable” (225). Her internalized aversion to weaknesses perceived societally to be feminine – Peeta’s lack of control after his hijacking, her mother’s immobilizing depression, Annie’s needing Finnick to hold her hand and whisper in her ear – kept her from bonding with Annie or even from taking much of an interest in her aside from her relationship to Finnick.

Katniss was well aware at all times of Annie’s dysfunctionality in a society that was not sensitive to her needs. When Johanna mentioned the screams and she Peeta had heard coming from each others’ cells while being tortured by the Capitol, Annie did “that thing where she covers her ears and exits reality”, beginning to dissociate (*M* 241). Only Finnick’s “murmur[ing] things to Annie until she slowly removes her hands” from her ears brought her back to the present moment (242). These kinds of descriptions dominated readers’ perceptions of Annie, as well as, it seemed, Katniss’s. Even at Annie and Finnick’s wedding, Katniss did not describe her beyond the dress she was wearing. Though Annie was granted one scene where she displayed explicit strength alone (voting no against a new Hunger Games for Capitol children), this was not

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<sup>29</sup> To name just a few examples, Katniss jumped at people’s unexpected or unwelcomed touches; experienced flashbacks if something reminded her of an event in the arena; and narrated her reaction to the news that she would have to go back into the arena for the Quarter Quell as though she had dissociated during that time. Of that incident, she wrote, “I feel my way up the steps to the kitchen and see the glass window in the door has been shattered. Must be why my hand seems to be bleeding” (*CF* 176). Her phrase choices – “must be why my hand seems to be bleeding,” because she hadn’t realized before – indicate that she, like Annie, had momentarily “exited reality,” but Katniss’s manifestation of this was in violence rather than softness.

emphasized by the narrative and certainly did not by itself cancel out the extreme trauma she was identified by throughout the rest of the series. Annie was defined only by her trauma and her anchoring relationship with a man (even in the voting scene, she referenced what Finnick would have wanted).

Given all of this, it might seem strange that Katniss was pleased at the birth of Annie and Finnick's child after Finnick had been killed. Annie was never described as being even remotely capable of taking care of herself: though she may well have been, readers were not entitled to know this and nor, it seemed, did Katniss. Instead, Annie was a more a symbolic figure than a person, an object of intense love and adoration for Finnick and a warning sign to victors and readers alike as to what the horrors of violence can do to a (female) person. Still, Katniss was pleased at the birth of a child to a widowed Annie. Critical readers must ask: how could this birth be one of the few "[s]trange bits of happiness" after the revolution for Katniss when she had spent two books identifying Annie solely by her "hysteria" and inability to care for herself because her trauma was so immense (*M* 387)? Surely if the mere mention of screaming brought Annie to the brink of dissociating, a baby's screaming for food and attention would trigger even more intense responses from Annie. Only with heterosexual reproduction positioned as a palliative "cure" for trauma can this birth bring any joy to anyone who knew or knew of Annie. Like Peeta's, then, the conclusion of Annie's trauma story depended upon the power of a heterosexual relationship.

Unlike characters considered more minor, Peeta and Katniss's stories did not end with the final chapter, however. As mentioned above, Collins wrote an epilogue that featured the safety and innocence of Katniss and Peeta's children. Katniss – having made it explicitly clear throughout the entire series that she never, ever wanted to have children – wrote that she only

agreed to having them after being worn down for “five, ten, fifteen years,” and then it was only because “Peeta wanted them so badly” (*M* 389).<sup>30</sup> After telling the readers that “only Peeta can give me” a good life, Katniss described in the epilogue only her anxieties about telling her children about the reasons for her nightmares when they get older (388). Interestingly, Katniss wrote about no such need to explain Peeta’s artificial leg and both of their extensive scarring to the children, indicating the overwhelming effectiveness of the compulsory re-recovery of their bodies discussed in the previous chapter.

Only heterosexual reproductive can re-cover their traumas, however, and this is precisely what the series’ conclusion was positioned as doing. Peeta – ever the one to be comforting Katniss – assured her throughout their lives that “it will be okay. We have each other” even though her nightmares “won’t ever really go away” (*M* 390). Just as Katniss’s kiss had re-covered Peeta’s trauma in the Capitol, her marrying and having children with him re-covered his trauma throughout life and made him her capable of being a steady source of calmness again. Because she was with Peeta (apparently despite the children she never wanted), Katniss remained capable of continually making “a list in my head of every act of goodness I’ve seen someone do” (390). Through this small token of comfort, “sufficient character happiness [was] offered” while it was made clear that “happiness has to be constructed continuously, maintained rather than just experienced” because of Katniss’s trauma (Cadden 354). This allowed Katniss to survive having children; allowed her to describe nothing about her life after the Games except watching and thinking about her children playing carelessly in the Meadow; allowed her to perform her role in a heterosexually reproductive relationship – wife and mother – that the Capitol had forced her to begin playing on pains of death.

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<sup>30</sup> Katniss being worn down to eventually do what Peeta wants with her body strongly perpetuates rape culture. This might seem surprising, given the role of teenage feminist icon many have associated Katniss with, but it is perhaps unsurprising when considering the gendering of trauma throughout the series.

Indeed, Katniss's motherhood and even her marriage truly seemed like a performance: although the ending was cast as happy, just as the birth of Annie and Finnick's child was cast as happy despite the likelihood that it would be triggering for Annie, it was marked internally with "terror," reluctance, and anxiety for Katniss (*M* 389). Instead of sharing Haymitch's isolated, alcoholic path – something which Peeta violently rejected before the Quarter Quell – Katniss was forced in the epilogue to perform as head of a nuclear family again. This time, she was not forced into this role by the Capitol, but by the narrative's insistence on the binary of choices between no happy recovery without a straight partner and/or children (Johanna, who couldn't go to fight in the Capitol; Katniss's mother, who couldn't return to District Twelve; and Haymitch, who couldn't take care of the geese he tried to raise) or heteronormative recovery (Peeta, Katniss, Annie, all of whom had children, and Gale, who was immensely heteronormatively gendered and was "probably kissing another pair of lips" [*M* 385]).

In these ways, human traumas that were re-covered by heterosexual re-production were cast as at least moderately happy, as good enough to be getting on with. Human traumas that were not accompanied by straight relationships or extremely heteronormative gendering were dropped out of the narrative as incomplete recoveries, leading to either isolation or the failure to achieve goals that others were able to accomplish. The lack of clear resolution and incomplete recoveries of those who refused a heteronormative ending mirrored the narrative's general lack of concern for traumatized non-human beings.

Though the traumas of many of these creatures, such as muttations and Buttercup, were articulated very clearly by their embodied communications, the narrative did not directly address or suture these traumas as they did for those humans with heteronormative endings. In these ways, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* reified the supposed importance of human trauma over non-

human trauma at the same time as it positioned the performance heteronormative sexual and gendered roles as a palliative “cure” for human trauma.

## Conclusion

The power of disidentification within The Hunger Games Trilogy is immense indeed: the text holds within it vast potentialities to render the unthinkable as not only thinkable, but as undeniable. In terms of animality, disability, and trauma, the series does indeed present oppressive state strictures regarding the definitions and constrictions on bodies. Simultaneously, however, the series allows for rich resistance to these strictures in ways that fundamentally challenge some of the most basic (and therefore, some of the most violent) assumptions about animality, disability, and trauma.

Katniss rendered non-human animals killable through her hunting, and this hunter-hunted dichotomy went unchallenged outside of the arenas. Yet at the same time, the very reason that animals became killable to Katniss was that the state was forcing its human citizens to starve: i.e., rendering its human citizens as killable. While the narrative fails to challenge Katniss's hunting in a way that Carol J. Adams undoubtedly would, in its critique of the Capitol's rendering of human children as killable, the narrative does critique power in a way that implicitly challenges the rendering of *any* creatures as killable. In this, the unthinkable can occur: non-human animals can be rendered *murderable*. Katniss *becoming with* mutations thus embodies much more than a painful physical and emotional transformation, as do mutations resistance-laden reproduction against the Capitol's wishes and violence: their bodies became physical sites of the coexisting contradictions between human and non-human. These coexisting contradictions have the potential to destroy hierarchies between different species. Even though the fate of non-human creatures is disregarded as unimportant by the text, such moments of coexistence offer a radical resistance to the rendering of *any* creature as merely killable.

In a similar way, the enforcement of compulsory recovery onto the human citizens of Panem is a surface-level endorsement of the ableist notion that impairments are negative attributes to be avoided at all costs and covered at earliest opportunity. However, the moments of resistance to this model are profound. Whether manifesting in Katniss's persistence in adjusting to her hearing loss without Capitol technology or in Chaff's refusal of a Capitol prosthetic, small moments of radical identification with bodily difference persist throughout the text. This persistence allows readers (if they read as Muñoz suggested) to identify with rendering the unthinkable – that people with impairments and disabilities need not desire “cures” – quite tangibly thinkable.

In a similar way, although on the face of things, the overwhelmingly heteronormative epilogue and series's conclusion steers readers towards the assumption that heteronormativity and heterosexual reproduction are the only effective “cures” for human trauma, other radical possibilities certainly exist throughout the series. Haymitch's insistence on alcohol usage and Johanna's bonding with Katniss while fighting drug addiction and severe PTSD can render the unthinkable thinkable for readers: persistence does not have to mean “recovery,” and resilience does not have to manifest in only one way. Perhaps more unthinkable – or maybe simply unpalatable – is the idea that recovery is not always *possible*. Just as the traumas of non-humans were mostly elided by the text, the notion that human recovery from trauma may simply be unattainable was also elided. United in their rejection from the narrative's overall thrust, unresolved human trauma and largely un-addressed non-human trauma at least *existed* in The Hunger Games Trilogy. This existence makes alternative possibilities *thinkable* for those who lack investments in heteronormative recovery and/or in the assumption that non-humans cannot endure trauma or that such trauma is less important than human trauma.

In the arenas of animality, disability, and trauma, then, The Hunger Games Trilogy both reinforces dominant cultural assumptions and radically unsettles those same assumptions. Violently oppressive norms that are rendered the only way to think are reinforced by the series' portrayals of hunted animality, compulsory recovery, and heterosexualized trauma recovery. However, these exist alongside radical subversions such as becomings with mutations, resilience without "cures", and non-human and non-recoverable traumas. The Hunger Games Trilogy, then, can be read as a tremendous enemy *and* asset to readers who wish to disidentify with dominant cultural assumptions about animality, disability, and trauma of all kinds.



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