

A Study of the Function of the Love Triangle in the *Hunger Games*-trilogy

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Abstract

This bachelor's thesis aims to explain why the love triangle that appears in the dystopian *Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins has a function within the work and so does not take away any of the feminist power that the protagonist of the book, Katniss Everdeen, possesses. The love triangle works to explore the themes of adolescent love, games and is a metaphor for the various societies in the book. In the theme of adolescent love, the internal motivators and the external motivators as to whom Katniss should pick differ. Sexuality is also explored through these characters. The theme of games is looked at through the male leads competing for the love of the protagonist, as well as the governments exploitation of the protagonist's emotions to play to their advantage. Lastly, the male leads become representations of both the rebellion and the Capitol as well as representations of different types of members of the rebellion.

Tämän työn tarkoitus on tutkia ja selittää Suzanne Collinssin *Nälkäpeli* (eng. *The Hunger Games*) trilogiassa kuvatun kolmiodraaman temaattista ja metaforista funktiota kirjailijan dystopisessa tekstissä. Narratiivi ei kyseenalaista päähenkilöä (Katniss Everdeen) feministisenä hahmona. Kuvattu kolmiodraama tukee tekstin temaattisia аспекteja, kuten nuoren henkilön rakkautta ja pelaamisen teemaa, sekä toimii metaforana yhteiskunnan eri osa-alueille. Katniss -hahmon sisäiset ja ulkoiset syyt parinvalintaan vaihtelevat ja kolmiodraamassa tutkitaan myös seksuaalisuutta. Peli -teema esiintyy mieshahmojen keskinäisessä kilpailussa, sekä siinä kuinka diktaattori hyväksikäyttää päähenkilön tunteita. Metaforana mieshahmot toimivat kapinoiden, heidän vaihtelevien identiteettiensä sekä diktatuurin kuvaajina.

Introduction

The dystopian genre has for some time been one of the most popular genres in the young adult section (Robin) of the bookstore and is one of the most successful areas of publishing in general (Patterson). Books in the dystopian genre are usually set in the future with a society that may seemingly be perfect, but are tightly controlled by some kind of political power which dehumanises the population within. The Books make a criticism of our society though the example in the book is extreme (ReadWriteThink). According to Moira Young the genre is not only appealing to young adults because it parallels with their chaotic, strictly controlled school life, but because the stories are like myths and fairy tales with heroes going on a journey and growing in the progress (Young).

Like many other genres in YA fiction, and fiction in general, the dystopian genre also makes use of love triangles, Kezia Lubanszky, in an article, even states that it may be a “prerequisite” in YA fiction. Kaleah Wolf notes in her thesis on dystopian fiction how a common core with all the books she is analysing is a love triangle. Further proof of the plot device being so popular is that Goodreads has lists of books with love triangles listed by different genres as well as simply having a list called “books with love triangles” and “books without love triangles”. Despite love triangles being an extremely old feature of literature which can be found in books like *Wuthering Heights*, *Little Women*, and *Twelfth Night*, one of the first series to start this trend within YA fiction is the *Twilight*-saga (Strickland).

The Hunger Games is a dystopian YA trilogy by the American novelist Suzanne Collins. The trilogy is made up of the titles *The Hunger Games*, *Catching fire* and *Mockingjay*. The books recount the story of the female protagonist and first person narrator Katniss Everdeen who has taken the place of her sister within “The Hunger Games”: a game created by president Snow where a young male and a female contestant from each of the twelve districts of the nation of Panem must fight to the death with only one victor remaining. Katniss goes to the games with Peeta Mellark

who is a baker's boy and someone she had encountered with only a few times before in her life. The other male interest in her life is her long time best friend and hunting partner Gale Hawthorne whose father perished in the same mining accident as hers. The love triangle within the books is created between these three characters. In the first book, she goes to the Hunger Games and return victorious with Peeta, with whom she staged a "star-crossed lovers" type setup to allow for two victors. In the second book a rebellion is beginning to stir as a consequence to Katniss making the Capitol look weak. She is threatened by the president who creates Quarter Quell named Hunger Games, this time for the previous victors. Katniss, aided by some other players, destroys the dome of the arena and is whisked away by the rebellion. The third book recounts the war that has begun.

Similarly to *Twilight*, the modern love triangle plot device always consists of a female character and two male characters, one of whom the female protagonist must choose, creating more of an angle shape than an actual triangle. General characteristics of the various characters within the genre consist of a childhood friend who is the 'nice guy' who has possibly been holding a torch for the female protagonist for a longer time, and the other is the 'new guy' who is more of a 'bad boy' and mysterious and thus interesting to the female protagonist. The two male characters are not friends and compete over who will 'get the girl'.

With the trope being as popular as it is, one may begin to wonder whether there are ethical implications to be considered with any subliminal messages that the still growing readership may be receiving from their love triangle filled possibly uncritical reading. Lubansky as well as Wren in both of their essays reject the love triangle trope as a whole on the grounds that there is no empowerment in having the female lead being automatically forced to choose between two pre-set male characters, rather than having more characters or not having to choose between them in the first place. On *The Hunger Games*, Ari Mattes writes: "She's a warrior, a freedom fighter, a hero for the exploited and abused ... but really she just needed to pick the right man." Again, implying that despite all the accomplishments that a female character

may have in a book, they are all outshined by the satisfaction the reader gets when the protagonist finally decides which male character she should to choose.

The love triangle within the books has been somewhat controversial to the point of theorising whether or not Collins was forced to add the love triangle, possibly for monetary purposes, rather than it being her own choice. Possibly the best source for this theory being an interview with the editor of the books, Kate Egan, found on the blog of Sarah Laurence, where she is quoted as saying “As an editor, I help her develop the characters. For example, I asked her for more of the Peeta-Katniss-Gale love triangle.” Part of controversy is that Katniss as a character is generally hailed as a feminist icon in articles like *Hunger Games' Katniss Everdeen: a pissed off hero, and pure feminist catnip* by Urwin in the ‘Evening Standard’ or *Why Katniss is a Feminist Character (And It's Not Because She Wields a Bow and Beats Boys Up)* by Stark on ‘Tor.com’. The articles explain how she is a great example or a less stereotypically charged “strong” female character within YA literature and, thus there is a concern that a love triangle may undermine and weaken her value as a well-developed female character. Balaka Basu in her book *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers* does not see the love triangle in *The Hunger Games* trilogy as disempowering, but rather as a “productive source of tension”, that the male protagonists represent different aspects of the revolution, and that the subplot does advance the main plot as well despite deeming the conclusion as a “cop-out” (ch7). Barry Strauss describes in his essay that the different characters are representatives of rebel society rather than seeing the love triangle as something disturbing.

This thesis looks at the construction of the love triangle within *The Hunger Games* trilogy to see what sort of patterns emerge within the genre in terms of plot development and treatment of characters. I argue that the love triangle has both metaphorical and thematic function as a plot device and thus is not redundant.

1. The Functions of the Love Triangle

2.1 Thematic Function I- Portrayal of Growing Up

The Hunger Games Trilogy is young adult fiction, and thus like many other a story in deals with issues relating to growing up in the circumstances one has been set up in. Therefore, the readership may use the literature they read to find answers to the questions they have in relation to becoming an adult. In this vein, what other subject may be as elusive and confusing to a young reader than romantic love? Throughout the trilogy, Katniss grows up from a sixteen-year-old girl volunteering to take her sisters place in the hunger games to an eighteen-year-old rebel, and later a mother as seen in the prologue at the end. Such a curve in character growth realistically would affect all facets of life, and consequentially is arguably something that is seen in the narrative of the love triangle too. Katniss, like all teenagers, must interpret and understand herself and her sexuality and this is one way the love triangle aids in visualising her development in this quest.

2.1.1 Love internally motivated

The classic different types of love taught to many children at school are Agape- godly/perfect love, Philia- brotherly/friendly love, and Eros- romantic/sexual love. Discarding agape from the group, being able to tell the difference between even the latter of the two ways can be difficult, and this is a problem that Katniss must face. Her feelings towards her family, her mother and Prim, are clear, but Gale's family has become dear to her as well, and with Peeta now in the picture she must clarify to herself what she wants from these different relationships herself. The love triangle helps the reader see what internally motivates Katniss.

A major theme that love is associated with is pain. The book itself through Gale begins to discuss whether or not pain could be a part of what Katniss associates love with. In chapter fourteen of the *Mockingjay* Katniss kisses Gale because she is in pain from feeling lonely (231). Peeta is not going to come back to her and Gale is there. A similar instance has happened before in the chapter eight of *Catching Fire*. Gale is being whipped for poaching and Katniss comes in to stop it from continuing. While his wounds are being tended to Katniss stays to comfort him. "“I'm sorry,” I

whisper, I lean forward and kiss him.” (*Catching Fire* 144) Katniss saying sorry means that she feels guilt which she is trying to alleviate by kissing Gale. Katniss does the same to Peeta in chapter 24 when he tells her that there would be nobody that would miss him if he dies in the games. Katniss insists that she would and kisses him as proof (425). Though she does end up feeling something in the kiss, the act of kissing itself is motivated by Peeta looking upset and thus once again motivated at least partially by pain. The book also flips the theme of love and pain by Katniss trying to use love to soothe other people’s pain as well. Gale tells Katniss in chapter nine of the *Mockingjay* that she is attracted to pain and that is why she kissed him (*Mockingjay* 152) and again when Peeta has been retrieved that he has no chance if Peeta does not heal because he cannot compete with Peeta’s pain (230). In both cases however, Katniss could be said to share his pain as feeling like she is partially responsible for it, and so the base motivation ends up being that she is soothing her own pain at the same time. This is obviously not necessarily a good thing, but it does show a growth in realisation, especially as in the end of *Mockingjay* Katniss talks about bonding with Peeta over “comforting” each other (453).

Katniss has also noticed their similarity in temperament by the end between her and Gale: “*What I need to survive is not Gale’s fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have Plenty of that myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring.*” (*Mockingjay* 453). Katniss recognises how she and Gale are not dissimilar and that she could have gone down the same route, but that she does not want to and that she needs a change. The idea of both Gale and Katniss being fire also brings to mind the sentence “a love like ours could burn down a city”, many variants of which have at least been used in the shows like *Poirot* and *Victoria*, of which this sentence may also be a criticism, as in their case bonding over a mutual hatred could have done just that. At the same time her goal as well as Gale’s differed completely. Katniss was wholly driven by the need to survive and protect her family as seen by her decision not to run away when the Quarter Quell was announced: “We run. They die.” (*Catching Fire* 216). When the possibility of rebellion was given to him, Gale was immediately looking at the larger picture rather than his family (122). What ultimately differed between Gale and Katniss were their goals.

2.1.2 Love externally motivated

In addition to internal motivation, the love triangle can show side by side the external motivators.

For neither one of the male love interests does Katniss start in a place of attraction and so the context surrounding their meeting is important. Through the context can be seen how what she associates each character and how this has an effect on her emotions towards them. The beginning of the book makes it clear that Katniss does have some sorts of feelings towards Gale: *“In the woods waits the only person with whom I can be myself. Gale” (The Hunger Games 7)*

and

“Gale won’t have any trouble finding a wife. He’s good looking, he’s strong enough to handle the working in the mines, and he can hunt. You can tell but the way girls whisper about him when he walks by in school that they want him. It makes me jealous, but not the reason people would think. Good hunting partners are hard to find (12).

The scene occurs before the reaping, and Katniss has just before elaborated her relationship with Gale. This could be a case of the unreliable narrator and that Katniss does have romantic feelings for Gale. Another option is that Katniss associates Gale’s presence with the rush she gets being free in the woods, a positive association he would not get did he not hunt. Throughout the games, Gale is also mentioned as one of the people at home who will be scrutinising over, and worrying about what happens. A spin on the image of the man returning home to his family from war (Kirkvik 73). This pushes Gale further into the group of ‘family’ in addition to ‘hunting partner’. Peeta gets a different introduction: *“Peeta and I are not friends.” (The Hunger Games 31)* Peeta and Katniss had met before when Katniss and her family were starving and he gave her bread despite knowing he would be reprimanded for it. Katniss can thus be said to have attributed Peeta towards

surviving despair even before having this feeling be reaffirmed by the mutual survival of the Hunger Games. The Hunger Games being an infinitely more stressful environment than hunting, according to psychologist Wind Goodfriend the outcome was clear from the beginning: "They are both wounded; they could die at any moment. Adrenaline is pumping through them. According to Misattribution of Arousal (which is sometimes called Excitation Transfer), this physiological arousal will be transferred into sexual arousal. Peeta and Katniss will fall in love." Misattribution of Arousal could be grounds to saying that Katniss's feelings for Peeta (and Gale) are not genuine, but it must be said that Katniss initially considered Peeta a rival and a threat in the games, and after that only a means for survival as shown by her shock when she realises Peeta was not faking the romance (*The Hunger Games* 452).

Context can also be looked at from the point of view of what others want. People have an opinion on the partner one chooses. In *The Hunger Games* this is treated with whom the Capitol and the Rebellion say Katniss she must be with. This compares to having parents or relatives point out who the ideal partner should be, and leads to the question of has one chosen a partner simply because they should not be with them. Peeta is the one enforced on Katniss by the Capitol, and thus Gale is the 'forbidden fruit' (*Catching Fire* 34). This idea parallels well especially because she associates him with the rebellion and so Katniss rebelling with Gale gets a double meaning, though she never gets to complete the action in either sense.

In a great number of books with romance the female is completely dependent on the male character. An example of such a book is *Twilight* where the female protagonist almost commits suicide when her lover leaves. This is something that is addressed in the book, as Katniss too is dependent on Peeta for survival especially in the first Hunger Games. She is dependent on Gale too for taking care of her family, and he is the one who helped her improve her hunting skills so that her family may live. The difference is between what happens here in comparison to other books is most noticeably made in the third book when Katniss retorts to herself that she does not (386). Thus, a difference is made between working together with someone and completely not being able to live without someone.

2.1.3 Developing sexuality.

A theory proposed by Whitney Elaine Jones in *Masculinity in "Katniss and Her Boys: Male Readers, the Love Triangle and Identity Formation"* is that the love triangle represents Katniss's sexual growth as she explores her feminine and masculine side. Masculinity is represented by Gale and femininity by Peeta. Whilst this is a theory that would support the thesis, it is a sexist theory with the problem of essentialism.

The main issue in the theory is the fact that Katniss's own masculine traits are not classified in the study beyond being a more fleshed out character. Katniss is hailed in articles like *The Guardian's Why the Hunger Games' Katniss is a Great Role Model* as a non-traditional yet much more realistic representation of womanhood and femininity, yet immediately when one of the male characters breaks a male stereotype he is cast as the beacon of femininity rather than a part of a possible repertoire of complex and versatile characters. A better characterisation is made by Woloshyn et. Al where Gale is a representation of hegemonic masculinity, Peeta of marginalised masculinity and Katniss of "a complex amalgamation of the two that also draws somewhat on emphasized femininity" (Woloshyn et al. 150)

2.2 Thematic Function II- Love Woven Into Games

The title of the books is *Hunger Games*, and unsurprisingly the theme of games is a very prominent aspect within the books. Thus, love tying into this theme is not a big leap to make for an interpretation. The love triangle links into this by becoming a game itself. The readers play the game of "who will she choose" as well as do many of the many of the characters within the books. The love triangle becomes a representation of the game of romantic love.

2.2.1 Love as a Game

The love triangle is a game in that Peeta and Gale are both competing for Katniss's attention, but love and who Katniss should be attached to is also used as part of the political game between the Capitol, rebellion and Katniss, though Katniss does not play the game out of feeling like the male characters, but out of a need for freedom. Thus, love is thrust into the realm of not being something wholly driven by feeling, but also by tactical positioning and reasoning.

In the case of the boys, the theme of love as a game is enhanced by the fact that with two people fighting for the love of the protagonist there is an element of competition involved that would not otherwise exist were there only a man and a woman. The rivalry of the male figures is a game of feeling in that both have affection for the same girl and wish to win her affection over the other man and use manipulative elements such as knowing that Katniss responds to pain. There is also the element of cold in the game, as Gale offers to kill Peeta when he has been brainwashed by the Capitol. He is no longer a rival in the sense that he would be pursuing Katniss, but he still engages her feeling as well as he could kill her on the battle field if he is triggered, and thus there is a much more cold and tactical element involved. This tension is what most likely casts the widest net in terms of getting readers as pointed out by Peters: "[B]ecause a substantial part of what makes this series compelling to readers of all ages is this love triangle" (56).

The element of love as a game in the love triangle can also be looked at from Katniss's own point of view, where she does not deem to be playing a game at all in the romantic realm between the individual players of the love triangle, but uses it to try gain her freedom in society. Katniss's clearly feelings -based approach to the male protagonists is seen in her appraisal when she overhears Gale suggestion that Katniss will choose whoever she cannot live without:

"There's not the least indication that love, or desire, or even compatibility will sway me. I'll just conduct an unfeeling assessment of what my potential mates can offer me. As if in the end, it will be the

question of if a baker or a hunter will extend my longevity the most.”
(*Mockingjay* 386)

Katniss is not playing a game of ‘who can I gain material gain from’, especially when she is already playing with the regimes for her survival. The tactical side of love is thus rather used between her and the Capitol and the rebellion, which she starts when in the first Hunger Games Katniss agrees to use love as a tool to make her look attractive in the games, and by extension uses it as a method of opposing the Capitol. This game is then played against her when the Capitol traps her into the relationship that she helped create and must now use to keep the Capitol in place as well or have everyone, including Gale, be killed (53). Gale and Peeta are now both pawns. The rebellion continues to play to the star-crossed lovers idea, though now to boost morale for them instead, and thus continues to trap her. As Katniss puts it in the continuation of her pondering over the statement made by Gale: “...every emotion I have has been taken and exploited by the Capitol or the rebels.” (386) Katniss is playing a game to gain freedom of expression and feeling for herself rather than for society. As an extension to this, Katniss only makes an active choice once the war, and thus the games, are over.

Simply in terms of war as a game, the love triangle according to Krikkvik has a softening effect:

The familiar love triangle plot, which plays out between Katniss, Peeta, and Katniss’s best friend Gale, also helps the reader in a similar manner, as this familiar sub-plot makes the traumatizing war story seem less bleak and horrifying. (72)

The love triangle therefore enhances the other game-like elements by making it more accessible to the reader in addition to the individual characters embodying the various aspects of the war as well.

2.2.2 Game Rigged?

An argument against the ethicality of the game could be set. Is the game rigged as there seems to be a false choice for Katniss between having to choose one of the male characters rather than having the freedom to choose one, neither, or someone completely different? Megan Peters writes that Katniss does not make an active choice over her partner as Gale is cast out by default because of the bomb: "In this case, the illusion of choice is not really choice. Katniss does not "choose" either man; her decision is made by default." (56). The book does mention Katniss realising that she does not need "either of them" (*Mockingjay* 386) as Peters notes as well, but arguably she already has made a decision before the very end.

Katniss's statement that she does not need either of the male characters is not redundant. A game is often more exciting the harder it is and the more complicated it gets if the game has already well started (Kramer). This is the case in the game set between the characters in the love triangle. The game between Peeta and Gale has been set well in throughout the first two books from the introduction of the players, the compulsory coupling set by the Capitol as well as with the muddle of Katniss's feelings expressed by kisses in moments of desperation, to Peeta's 180-degree change as his brain is hijacked. None of these problems however have involved the idea that Katniss would not choose either of the two, which is why its impact is that much greater. 'Love will conquer all', but is there love from two parties to begin with? "Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can't survive without" ... I can survive just fine without either of them" (*Mockingjay* 385-384). Because Katniss also knows that she is playing a game with the Capitol and rebellion as well (368), there is an implied clarity from Katniss into the situation and people's intentions within it and the actions her character makes become more legitimate.

Katniss having already decided is visible in her reaction to both male characters in the end. Katniss makes a decision about Gale during the war, and about Peeta when it has ended. When Peeta's mental state becomes compromised Katniss begins to make a true decision over Gale. Katniss notes Gale's growing ruthlessness throughout the war and condemns it as seen by how she reacts to when Gale offers to kill Peeta "But even though I'm furious, the brutality of the offer rattles me[.]" (312)

or when Peeta tells an account of torture he and others had to endure administered by the Capitol: "When I look up I see Gale has taken it differently. His expression says that there are not enough mountains to crush, enough cities to destroy. It promises death." (320-321) By the time his association with the bomb becomes clear, it does nothing more than confirm that he had already gone too far. Similarly, in Peeta's case Katniss does not simply fling her arms around him when he returns, but rather takes part in the rebuilding of District 12 and begins their friendship anew and so spring turns to summer before they start "growing back together" (250-252). The addition of time between the reunion of Katniss and Peeta to them getting together gives a sense that Katniss thought at least a little about whether or not to get with him separately from her decision in regard to Gale. It also means that Katniss did not take Peeta as her partner because of Gale for example to hurt him.

2.3 Metaphorical function- representation of society

The Hunger Games trilogy involves within its plot great political and societal elements from the conflict between a dictatorship and a rebellion against it down to how each group works within and how an individual acts and takes a stance. These facets of societal movements are largely either-or type groupings whereby an individual cannot take a third option or take a neutral stance. Katniss must be with part of the rebels or the Capitol, and once within the group she can swallow their ideologies either whole heartedly or barely at all. These create triangle shaped structures which are trying to shape her life, the first is the great political one where the Capitol is trying to influence her and use as a tool to maintain power while the rebellion is trying to use her influence to gain power over the Capitol. We as readers see everything through Katniss's eyes. These representations of society are reflected within the love triangle.

2.3.1 Two governments.

The first parallel between relationships is that of the Capitol and the rebellion. Katniss's relationship with Peeta is forced by the Capitol. In the second book Katniss

is faced with the question of which part of society to become when she reveals to Gale that an uprising has begun and he decides to become part of it rather than run away with their families, Peeta and Haymitch as Katniss wants to. Gale is enticed by the Rebellion and tries to pull Katniss towards it. When she refuses to he goes as far as to throw capitol made gloves at Katniss's feet implying that she is part of it as she had worn the gloves before, as if the hands will only do the Capitols bidding. She knows she does not want to be pinned by the Capitol, but she does not want to fight it either until Gale is so badly hurt she decides to fight declaring: "I have chosen Gale and the rebellion, and a future with Peeta is the Capitols design, not mine."(147) Thus, between the first two books, Peeta becomes a representation of the Capitol and Gale of the rebellion.

Throughout the first two books Peeta is a representation of no choice. Katniss is thrust into the relationship, uses it to escape certain death only to be caged by it:

I will never have a life with Gale, even if I want to. I will never be allowed to live alone. I will have to be forever in love with Peeta. The Capitol will insist on it. I'll have a few years maybe, because I'm still only sixteen, to stay with my mother and Prim. And then... and then...
(*Catching Fire* 53)

Not only will she lose the choice of whether who to marry or whether to marry, but she will lose her family as well, and so the very reason she fought to keep alive in the first place. Peeta represents false choice, much like the Capitol itself, which is a dictatorship, the people remain a part of because they are unable to fight. Katniss also partakes in the description of her relationship with Peeta as abnormal, when Peeta says so as they finally do something that could be counted as "normal". (195) The abnormality is created by the fact that their relationship is "tainted by the Games" and thus by the Capitol.

Gale is a symbol for the rebellion by being a part of everything she has to live for, that being her family. Gale took care of her family while she was away, and shares with her the freedom of the forests. Gale also represents an opportunity to choose

something when the Capitol declares she cannot choose. He is an option that should not be there. When the Quarter Quell is announced, Gale proposes to leave again to save her life, but this would mean the death of her family, and so the two options are truly closed (216). This is why when the Quarter Quell is announced she can only think of herself and what she can be a part of (211).

In the very end, Katniss decides to become a recluse living in the outskirts of society rather than trying to make it back into society to rebuild it, and so it can be said that Katniss chooses neither. The love triangle reflects this as both boys in their own way become “mutts” or mutations. The Capitol disfigured Peeta to the extent that he is hostile towards Katniss, much like the Capitol when she actively chooses the rebellion. Gale is so consumed by his hatred towards the Capitol and what they have done to his family that he is associated with the creation of a weapon that kills Prim and many other innocent civilians. Both groups have become so disfigured that they are not a choice Katniss can make and to an extent one could say both are dead to her as she talks about “the old Peeta” and can never separate Gale from the bomb that killed her sister. Katniss herself too suffers from PTSD, bearing pain from the Hunger Games as well as the war. She herself declares the need for a fourth option outside of the triangle, a “rebirth instead of destruction” (*Mockingjay* 453). A choice of neither also happens before the end in the second book with the announcement of the Quarter Quell, as there can only be one winner and Katniss decides that should be Peeta. Death is a release from being a part of either party. This also silences any argument there should be that Peeta could not represent the Capitol because of Katniss’s developing attachment to him by then. Peeta’s best chance to live is if she looks like she has decided to comply with the Capitol.

2.3.2 Active and passive member of the revolution.

Gale and Peeta represent differing approaches to the revolution once they both are a part of it. Gale is an extremely active member, as seen by his rise in ranking as well as his involvement with their artillery. Peeta was a hostage of the Capitol and became extremely wounded. His most active involvement is seen in the end, and even then, not because he volunteered, but because he was assigned by Coin.

Thus, Peeta is a representation of those wounded and forced to fight out of their own will. The love triangle becomes a representation for differing identity as a citizen and a member of a revolution.

A difference between the boys is seen in self-awareness and questioning one's background. Neither character has to decide why he is fighting, but they have to evaluate against whom they are fighting. This is best seen in the self-reflectiveness that happens by the characters. Gale does not have to confront his views and way of seeing things much, as is seen in how he is not willing to understand the complexity behind a Capitol life and how Katniss is able to care for her prep team from the Capitol despite their role in preparing her for the Hunger Games. Though Katniss explains this to him, when the option for burying Capitol members in a mountain appears, he will do it. This shows that Gale still is unwilling to challenge himself and how his background could cause him to be unfairly biased. Especially in this scene Katniss reflects on how the old Peeta would agree with her on how this is wrong. The new Peeta has no choice but to reflect and re-evaluate. Peeta has had his brain hijacked, and so every memory and fact he has held true, has been put under question because they could be false as seen by the game of "real or not real" he plays to find out (*Mockingjay* 316). Due to his state, during the last battle he is so hyperaware of the danger he poses to his unit that he multiple times says that he must be put down as to not cause harm. Peeta, like Katniss sees and has experience over how an individual can be reduced to being a pawn and thus, Peeta is the absolute polar opposite, realising that his history and views do not necessarily correspond with reality.

Another comparison can be made in the moral realm which relates to the expendability of human life. More specifically this relates to the question of is killing a human the same as an animal, or is sacrificing one's self alright for the good of the many. Peeta wants to go in to the first games knowing that if he dies he dies as himself rather than as a part of the games "I want to die as myself"... Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity."(*The Hunger Games* 171), this comes back to haunt him in the last book when he has been brainwashed and so is

no longer himself (*Mockingjay* 208-211). If he is killed or dies now will he die as himself? This links to why Peeta offers to kill himself when he comes out of a manic state (337), and why being able to control one's moment of death in a battle situation is of more significance. If Peeta can dictate when he dies, he can make sure it does not happen in a place where he is not in control and would not die as himself but as a weapon sent by Coin to take out Katniss (310-311). To mention again, Peeta's stance on mass killings is much more negative than Gale's: Katniss remembers that "the old Peeta" would not condone the killing of people trying to claw their way out of a mountain(247). Killing for self-defence in a battle situation is something both male protagonists do, but Gale's stance of killing in war not simply defensive. In addition to his stance on mass killing of the enemy, Gale views killing in war like hunting, as seen by his weapon creations bearing similarity to his hunting traps (216). Gale even offers Katniss to shoot Peeta if she so wishes when Peeta is made a part of their unit by Coin (312). Gale also has the luxury of dying in battle as more of an individual in the battle than Peeta, having not been exploited as overtly. This is also why when he is linked with mass destruction and murder it bears much more weight than Peeta's manic outburst that takes a life, as he has acted with a greater clarity of mind and individuality as well as volunteered to act.

Lastly, Peeta and Gale differ as representations of victims of war. Peeta represents the victim who has had absolutely everything taken away from him and Gale as one who still has much to live for. Gale, by the third book, despite losing his home has his family, a clear identity as well as a purpose in life to fight against the Capitol for freedom from before becoming a part of the rebellion

" There's already been talk in the mines. People who want to fight. Don't you see? It's happening! It's finally happening! If there's an uprising in District eight, why not here? Why not everywhere? This could be it, the thing we've been-" (Catching Fire 122).

This contrasts with Peeta who by then has lost his family as well as his mind, and so his existence. This is partially why Gale's offer to kill Peeta is drastic, as if he is killed there is almost nothing associated with him left besides memories of him in Katniss's mind, since now even his family is dead (*Mockingjay* 10). This leads to the

question of whether a human intrinsically has value. Gale has proven his value to the cause and Peeta has not, thus should he be expendable as a human?

2.3.3 Sexism in Setup

A question can be posed in to if this kind of arrangement where boys are representatives for society is sexist. There are two approaches to this argument. The first is that in a heteronormative society the opposite could be done were the main protagonist male leading to an equally sexist approach, and thus a much greater number of potential romantic interests should be introduced of both sexes, to avoid the connotation of either the male, or female sex be made evil and the protagonist should be thus bisexual. Most likely the protagonist is not bisexual for the simple reason that the book might not sell as well. Another approach is that having two males as a reflection of society is an intentional approach to reflect the male dominated society Katniss lives in.

Throughout the games Katniss must take part in a performance of female sexuality to gain the liking of the people for sponsors like kissing Peeta and having Haymitch bribe her with gifts in the game to show as much emotion as possible. Despite Coin being a female leader in the rebellion, a great deal of the leaders are still male. The President of Panem is male, Plutarch, a head game maker and later the right hand of Coin, is male, and Caesar Flickerman, the host of the games, is male. Thus, it is not a great leap to have men as representatives of at least the Capitol. Also, as the love triangle is overtly called ridiculous by Joanna, a victor tribute from the Quarter Quell rescued from the Capitol, in the last book, it may to an extent allude to how people of the same society fight rather than build something together, and thus calls the war something ridiculous as well (257).

The end too may seem disappointing and sexist, yet it need not be so. An article in 'The Conversation' by Ari Mattes critiques the ending for being unsatisfactory. Katniss as a character fought for an entire people, only to be torn apart by her fight now trying to find solace in the arms of a man and taking the very traditional place of

being a mother. In the fifteen years after the war the only accomplishment since her youth we are given is having two children she had difficulty carrying (*Mockingjay* 454). This is a far cry from the valiant image of woman rebirthing from the ashes once again to be one of the greatest and most powerful members of society breaking all the stereotypes and glass ceilings her society has placed against her. Katniss set out to change society, not to conform, so why in the end does it seem like she did? Perhaps rather there are messages hidden within. The first is that the glass ceiling has been broken by Paylor who was voted president after Coin, who technically did the same, and thus Katniss need not contest her. She has done her part and is willing to give her place to someone else, having women working together rather than against each other the way Coin did. A second is that Collins has decided to stick to reality. Political scientist Erica Chenoweth calculated the success of violent and nonviolent attempts to overthrow dictatorial governments to see that a violent uprising has a greater chance of failure than nonviolent ones (Fisher). Simply because there is a revolution, it does not mean that society will completely change overnight. Throughout the very last chapter Katniss calls the new government the Capitol leaving an ominous feeling towards the new one (435-453). Katniss's primary motivation has been to keep her family safe. Since she has lost hers, it should seem natural that she will want to build a new one since the time for fighting is over. Katniss was never a character who set out to change things from the very beginning, but was a character who was whipped into fighting by circumstance and fought to survive, and she has been left deeply scarred as a consequence. We as readers knew from the beginning that Katniss would choose her partner from the two characters she was set up with, and like her, the society also settles down. The opportunities and places for change have been identified, but the time for a complete change has not come yet.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the love triangle is not simply a trope used to gain a larger readership of the book, but also a tool to explore themes of growing up and games as well as is a metaphor for the society of Panem. Katniss explores love in its different manifestations and grows to see change in her own feelings towards people. The love triangle works as an extension to the theme of games, adding to grow tension within the book by the creation of rivalry as well as having Katniss's feeling be a part

of the plan by the capitol and thus be a part of a much bigger game. Lastly the love triangle as a metaphor for society works as Gale and Peeta become symbol for the Capitol and the rebellion in the second book as well as representations of different types of people rebellion from self-reflection to moral basis.

Throughout the research process a relatively small amount of information was to be found on love triangles in literature. Love triangles are mentioned and may get a chapter or two under a larger theme like sexuality in Kirkvik's thesis, but rarely does it stand as its own subject. This seems strange as love triangles have been around for a long time and can even be found in the *Bible* for example in the *Old Testament* in the recount of the life of Jacob. A history of love triangles or an inspection of the phenomenon at large would be of great use to see the trends in history. Articles like that of Wrens in *The Guardian* show that people are noticing an increase in number of love triangles especially in young adults' fiction, yet any compiled academic research seems absent. Perhaps this is due to the possibly quite frivolous nature of the subject, or the currently almost immediate connotations to notoriously bad fiction like *Twilight*.

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