

Dressed for the Part: An Analysis of Clothing in Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* Trilogy

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Summary

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy presents a dystopia in which young people from less privileged socio-economic districts are sacrificed in murderous "games" in order to reinforce state power. Katniss Everdeen emerges from this context of oppression as the leader of a rebellion against centralised state domination. The series seems to flout well-established conventions of heroic fantasy, in which, traditionally, a male hero develops towards psychological maturity as he combats a social threat, apparently without concern for his appearance. By contrast, the *Hunger Games* trilogy places great emphasis on clothing, with the central protagonist undergoing several makeovers, each designed to customise her appearance for particular ideological purposes. In this article I explore this theme, which may be interpreted as too frivolous for heroic narrative, via a close gendered reading of the presentation of clothing in the text. I argue that the costumes worn by Katniss Everdeen on various occasions, demonstrating high degrees of glamour, are an index, not of her frivolity, but of the control exerted over her by the state of Panem. Katniss is not, in fact, a heroic rebel who forges her own path against a hostile social order; her choices are constrained by political exigencies, and allow her only a limited degree of agency.

Opsomming

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogie bied 'n distopie aan waarin jongmense van minder bevoorregte sosio-ekonomiese distrikte opgeoffer word in moorddadige "spele" met die oog daarop om staatsmag te bevorder. Katniss Everdeen verskyn uit hierdie konteks van onderdrukking as die leier van 'n rebellie teen gesentraliseerde staatsdominerende. Die reeks blyk goed-gevestigde konvensies van heroïese fantasie te verontsaam, waarin, tradisioneel, 'n manlike held tot psigologiese volwassenheid ontwikkel soos wat hy 'n sosiale bedreiging beveg, oënskynlik sonder kommer oor sy voorkoms. Hierteenoor plaas die *Hunger Games* trilogie groot klem op kleding waar die hoofkarakter verskeie kosmetiese veranderinge ondergaan, elk daarop gemik om haar voorkoms aan te pas vir spesifieke ideologiese doeleindes. In hierdie artikel ondersoek ek hierdie tema, wat geïnterpreteer kan word as te oppervlakkig vir heroïese narratief, deur middel van 'n gefokusde gender-analise van die aanbieding van kleding in die teks. Ek argumenteer dat die kledingstukke wat Katniss Everdeen op verskeie geleenthede dra, wat hoë grade van styl demonstreer, 'n indeks is, nie

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van haar oppervlakkigheid nie, maar van die beheer wat die staat van Panem oor haar uitoefen. Katniss is inderdaad nie 'n heroïese rebel wat vir die rol aangetrek is nie: sy is 'n politieke simbool wat wys na 'n meer konserwatiewe visie van haar "heroïese" rol as wat dit op die oog af voorkom.

Introduction

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy, the most popular young adult (YA) title of 2012 at more than 27 million sales (Roback 2013), presents a dystopian fantasy world in which children from under-resourced communities are sacrificed in murderous "games" in order to reinforce the power of the state. Against this backdrop a young girl, Katniss Everdeen, emerges as the figurehead of a heroic rebellion against government oppression. The narrative traces how Katniss adapts to her new identity as a player in the deadly Games, and develops, in parallel, a subversive new identity as a revolutionary.

A panel discussion in 2015 at the New York Public Library found that dystopia is much more popular among teen readers than other forms of speculative fiction (Gilmore 2015), perhaps playing into a general social disaffection among adolescent readers. Katniss, like the text in which she appears, is massively popular among readers. Her popularity may be ascribed to three features: first, the love triangle between Katniss and her two suitors, Peeta and Gale; second, her championing of the underdogs in Panem; and third, the elaborate fashion makeovers she experiences. *The Hunger Games* follows a common pattern in YA fantasy by tracing an adolescent protagonist's growth to maturity in response to a social threat. But it diverges from this pattern in two significant ways. First, while many heroes of YA fantasy are boys, Collins participates in a growing trend towards the literary empowerment of girls by choosing Katniss Everdeen as her central protagonist and hero-in-the-making.¹ Second, the text lingers over apparently unheroic feminine matters such as clothing. Collins's focus on clothing may seem superficial when compared to the tradition of male literary heroism, which does not usually dwell on the hero's wardrobe. This may be as a sop to the interests of adolescent girls, who are the most likely readers of the trilogy and may be assumed to be interested in fashion. But a close gendered reading of selected costumes reveals that there is more at

1. This pattern is also seen in other works of YA (young adolescent) fantasy, such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (2007a, 2007b, 2007c), which focuses on the heroic quest and empowerment of the heroine, Lyra Belacqua; Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* cycle, where two volumes (*The Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu*) centre on the education and developing powers of a young woman; Diana Wynne Jones's two novels, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *The Game*, to mention only a few examples.

stake. When they are explored closely, Katniss's costumes yield a plethora of meanings. They are not only an indulgence of girlish fondness for self-adornment, but, being forced on her, they become, in Foucauldian terms, technologies for the creation and subordination of bodies.² The costumes all refer to fire, alluding to Katniss's revolutionary potential, but the fact that she is coerced into them compromises her agency and militates against the trilogy's being seen unproblematically as an example of feminist heroic fantasy.

Producing Docile Bodies

In the world of Panem, where the action of the *Hunger Games* trilogy takes place, the state is obsessed with producing docile bodies. Foucault defines the docile body as "a body that can be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1995: 136) – a formulation in which all the verbs are in the passive voice, reinforcing the subject's position as agentless addressee of power-mechanisms. This is achieved by reserving food and resources for the citizens of the Capitol, while rationing them parsimoniously to the twelve districts, so that citizens of outlying areas are nearly all on the point of starvation. The *Hunger Games* events function as an elaborate signifying system in which the rulers remind the Districts that they retain the power of life and death via control of food and resources. Adolescent participants in the Games are called "tributes", which means "money given by one country or ruler to another, especially in return for protection or for not being attacked" (Hornby *et al* 2005: 1638). A number of political concepts coalesce here: notions of children as the wealth of a community; the idea of sacrificing two children in order to ensure the safety of the district evokes the sacramental trope of the scapegoat; and, above all, there is the ruling trope of the Capitol's control over the twelve (possibly thirteen) districts of Panem. Two tributes are drawn from each district by means of a lottery system called "Reaping". The twenty-four tributes are placed in a sealed arena and forced to fight until only one remains alive. As a citizen of District Twelve (the mining district) and as a tribute in the *Hunger Games*, Katniss is a target of the Capitol's strategies for controlling bodies. To that extent, she functions as a typical citizen of Panem, whose body is regulated and made to function in preordained ways according to systems of control. In the remainder of my article, I will explore how Katniss's costumes enable the

2. Joanne Entwistle astutely sums up Foucault's contribution to historical studies of modernity as follows: "Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980) argues that the institutions and disciplines of modernity were centrally concerned with the control and manipulation of bodies and his work therefore provides for a historical account that renders visible the body in social life" (in Welters and Lillethun 2007: 95).

state to manipulate her embodied identity at the same time as she develops a limited degree of agency through her growing understanding of the political games in which she is entangled.

Katniss's clothing signals her entrapment in power inequalities, especially those of gender and class, and also serves as a continual reminder of her mortality, fragility and dependence on state systems. It is necessary at this point to recall that I am not exploring real lived experiences of dress, but only their textual representations, as well as the film versions of Katniss's clothing. Katniss is passively dressed for the parts that have been written for her by the Gamesmakers and President Snow. The costumes dictate and limit her behaviour in pre-defined ways, specifically in "fashioning" her for a sexualised male gaze, and simultaneously reinforcing her doomed status.

Clothing, Dress and Fashion

The concepts of clothing, dress and fashion, which are central to my analysis, tend to appear together in theoretical texts, so it is worthwhile to define them at the outset. According to the *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* (2015a), clothing is simply "the things that people wear to cover their bodies and that are usually made from cloth", while "dress" is "a particular kind of clothing" (2015b) and "fashion" is "a popular way of dressing at a particular time or among a particular group of people" (*Merriam-Webster* 2015c). These definitions provide conceptual starting points for an analysis of the way clothes create wearers – a causal chain that has been noted by several theorists. Jennifer Craik provides one of the best accounts of the social function of clothing when she writes:

Codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, the space occupied by bodies and constituted by bodily actions. In other words, clothes construct a personal habitus.

"Habitus" refers to specialised techniques and ingrained knowledges which enable people to negotiate the different departments of existence.

(1994: 4, emphasis added)

Craik borrows the term "habitus" from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who coined the term to refer to "socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking". For Bourdieu, "habitus" is "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them" (in Navarro 2006: 16). In other words, "habitus" refers to habits of acting and thinking that have arisen in response to social forces and pressures. Later Craik redefines its meaning as: "simultaneously a set of habits and a space inhabited, as a way of being in

the world” and she explains that “the habitus occupied by the body imposes expectations, conventions and skills as being essential for operating in specific technically organised environments” (1994: 4). The regulation of the construction of the self through clothing practices is common to all post-industrial societies (for example, by imposing uniforms for certain activities), but it is not experienced equally by both genders. Women’s identities are interwoven with corporeality in particularly intense ways; for this reason, they are the primary economic and discursive targets of the clothing and fashion industries. It is fruitful, then, to explore how women are depicted in the history and theory of fashion. Two features will be explored in my argument: first, the symbolic association between women and clothing; and second, the gendered divide between skirts and trousers.

From the earliest periods of Western history, women have been associated with clothing, usually in terms that associate them with dangerous frivolity. The early church father, Tertullian, writes at length on the necessity for women to dress in a way that befits their role as the bringers of sin into the world. He declares: “Female habit carries with it a twofold idea – dress and ornament. By ‘dress’ we mean what they call ‘womanly gracing’; by ‘ornament’, what is suitable should be called ‘womanly *disgracing*’. The former is accounted to consist in gold, silver, and gems, and garments; the latter in care of the hair, and of the skin, and of those parts of the body that attract the eye. Against the one we lay the charge of ambition, against the other of prostitution” (in Clack 1999: 52-53, original emphasis). Significantly, Tertullian does not see any reason to pronounce on how men should dress. He rationalises that, since a woman (Eve) brought sin into the world, all women are “the devil’s gateway” (Clack 1999: 50) and therefore need to be kept under control. Tertullian associates women with dangerous frivolity, a superficial fondness for what he calls “ornament”, and he stereotypes women as the cause of male sinfulness. Tertullian’s views may appear out of date today, but the general thrust of his argument is that women are naturally drawn to frivolous ornamentation and require guidance from men to curb this tendency. Traces of these views are visible in the contemporary tendency to blame women for being sexually abused if they wear “provocative” clothing. On a more academic note, Elizabeth Wilson notes women’s dual role as “both fashionable and the subordinate gender”, a situation which results in “fashionable dress and the beautification of the self [being] perceived as expressions of subordination” (2003: 13).³

Given this background, it is not surprising that Katniss courts criticism for her supposed preoccupation with clothing. In fact, though, Tertullian’s belief that women’s concern with clothes is frivolous and superficial, is

3. Elizabeth Wilson (2003), Christopher Breward (1995) and Thorstein Veblen (1899), although less misogynistic than Tertullian, have updated Tertullian’s ideas by commenting on the division between men’s and women’s experiences of dress, clothing and fashion.

misogynistic, ignoring the fact that clothing is used to frame identities for particular contexts among men as well as women. For example, in fantasy literature, as illustrious a hero as Lord Aragorn in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* appears for his coronation carefully attired: he is "clad in black mail girt with silver, and he wore a long mantle of pure white clasped at the throat with a great jewel of green that shone from afar; but his head was bare save for a star upon his forehead bound by a slender fillet of silver" (Tolkien 1969: 1002). Aragorn's clothing is a combination of elements that signify aspects of his identity: the "jewel of green" and the "star upon his forehead" are signs of his Elf lineage and link to the Elves via Arwen, the Elf princess. The text does not say whether Aragorn chooses his own coronation costume or dons pre-selected clothing, but certainly the costume is appropriate in connoting simplicity and purity, while yet remaining sufficiently dignified for a king. But nobody criticises Aragorn for frivolity or vanity for his concern with dressing appropriately for the occasion. Katniss, similarly, wears special costumes for the Tributes' Parade, for her television interview, and as the Mockingjay when she heads a revolt against the Capitol, but the connotations of her presentation are significantly different. While both Aragorn and Katniss are costumed for public appearances, Aragorn is portrayed as "a character conscious of his destiny and determined to fulfil it" (Ford and Reid 2009: 71) while Katniss is seen as exhibiting "emphasized femininity" (Woloshyn, Taber and Lane 2013: 150).

The most obvious gendered split in Western dress is the divide between trousers for men and skirts for women. Colleen R. Callahan and Jo B. Paoletti demonstrate that this divide, which appears natural, is actually the product of a specific epoch: it was only instituted as a clothing norm in the nineteenth century and is by no means universal (in Welters and Lillethun 2007). R.W. Connell aptly points out that "There is a logic to paradoxes such as gross exaggeration of difference by social practices of dress They are part of a continuing effort to sustain the social definition of gender" (1987: 81). The trousers/skirts divide has a number of consequences. In many cases, women's skirts confine the steps to the width of the garment, while trousers offer more mobility to their wearers. Trousers for women are coded, and often marketed, as "unisex", but, as Valerie Steele points out: "Truly unisex clothing does not exist" (Kidwell and Steele 1989: 8): a woman who wears trousers is "dressing like a man". Although jeans may appear universal, a woman in trousers is crossing this gender divide and recalls Caroline Evans's observation that gender instability is typical of contemporary fashion trends (in Welters and Lillethun 2007: 112).

Collins's representation of trousers and skirts in the *Hunger Games* trilogy demonstrates all the resonances of gendered meaning that I have just mentioned. The division between these items of clothing is immediately transgressed in the first chapter of the text, when Katniss is introduced to the reader on a typical morning as she dresses for a day in the woods: "I ... slide

into my hunting boots. Supple leather that has moulded to my feet. I pull on trousers, a shirt, tuck my long dark braid up into a cap, and grab my forage bag” (Collins 2008: 4). In her first-person narrative, these clothes are presented as “practical” and suitable for hunting, eliding the fact that they are powerfully gendered. Katniss hunts to provide food for her mother and young sister so that they do not starve in the under-resourced District Twelve. To fulfil this responsibility, she takes over her late father’s bow and knife, symbolically taking over the masculine function of providing food for the family. Her clothes both reflect and help to create this identity. They also foreshadow the masculine leadership role she will adopt as the *Hunger Games* unfolds into an uprising against the Capitol. Katniss is not, however, a proactive leader in the traditional male mould (such as Aragorn becomes in the third book of *The Lord of The Rings*): rather, she is a reluctant figurehead around whom the oppressed citizens of the Districts rally their discontent, indicating her divergence from traditional masculine ideas of leadership. Another signifier of masculinity is the fact that Katniss wears a cap over her braid, hiding one of the most obvious signs of femininity: her long hair. Raymond Firth confidently asserts that “a woman’s long hair is the symbol of her femininity in general” (2011: 268). The donning of trousers and a cap over the braid indicates that Katniss’s hunting gear is not androgynous, but masculine. These meanings are replicated in the costumes used for the 2012 film of *The Hunger Games* (dir. Gary Ross), where Katniss’ hunting outfit echoes Gale’s as it foregrounds a variety of masculine attributes: it offers toughness, protection, speed of movement and camouflage, as well as showcasing athletic prowess.



Katniss and Gale, dressed alike, meet in the woods

(<http://www.myhungergames.com/you-can-buy-katniss-everdeens-district-12-boots>, 18 May 2014)

Once Katniss has been selected as a tribute, her social role changes dramatically and her appearance must be transformed accordingly. Now she, like the other tributes, is a celebrity, and the young sacrifices' images are broadcast across Panem: they have become cogs in a propaganda machine which sells the *Hunger Games* to the citizens in order to reinforce state power. Katniss remains a hunter from District Twelve while sustaining a dual celebrity role, both as a tribute and as an emerging leader of the rebellion. It comes as no surprise, in the wake of Judith Butler's notions of gender as performative, that Katniss's emerging multiple identities are realised through performance. Social and political pressures force her to perform various roles, none of which is freely chosen. Even her revolutionary role is foisted upon her. Bearing this in mind, I will now examine the transformation of Katniss's appearance, followed by an examination of her key outfits, namely the "girl on fire" unitard, the interview dress, the wedding dresses and the mockingjay outfit.

Extreme Contrivance

Katniss's makeover, transforming her from a hunter from District Twelve into a glamorous celebrity, is carried out by a "prep team". These citizens of the Capitol appear contrived and artificial, contrasting vividly with Katniss, whose natural-coloured hunting outfit is designed to blend in with the woods. Venia is a woman with "aqua hair and gold tattoos above her eyebrows" (Collins 2008: 74); Flavius has "orange corkscrew locks" and "purple lipstick" (Collins 2008: 75) and Octavia's "entire body has been dyed a pale shade of pea green" (Collins 2008: 75). The male clothing designer, Cinna, who may be a nod to consensus reality where most fashion designers are men, is the least decorated member of the team, with only his gold eyelids as tokens of cosmetic intervention. The team's Latin-sounding names and elaborate bodily decorations evoke the trilogy's primary intertext – stereotypical perceptions of Roman decadence towards the end of the Empire.⁴ The extremity of their bodily decoration, by analogy with that of the decadent Romans, subtly prefigures the downfall of the Capitol.

By contrast with Katniss, all the members of the prep team sport extensive body decoration. This reflects their socio-political context. District Twelve is the mining district, deliberately impoverished, but, as signalled by Katniss's hunting outfit, closer to nature. The Capitol is better resourced, but also more contrived and artificial, and is in the habit of treating the bodies of citizens as commodities that can be moulded, modified, packaged and sold.

4. It is often assumed that Roman society declined into decadence, exactly like the inhabitants of Collins's Capitol, but this assumption has been challenged by recent scholarship on conditions in the empire (Ross 2014).

The name of Katniss's manager, Effie Trinket, reveals the superfluousness, not of the woman herself, but of her role in coaching Katniss to become a decorative item, like a trinket. Effie's lessons do not consist of self-defence, but in walking in high heels and teaching her to "say a hundred banal phrases starting with a smile, while smiling or ending with a smile" (Collins 2008: 139-140). The inauthenticity of the fake smiles, like the artificiality of Effie's pink wig (Collins 2008: 21), only reinforces the contrivance of her stereotypically "feminine" obsession with appearance.

Contemporary Western society perceives colouring the skin with make-up and tattoos as the prerogative of women and a marker of femininity (Craik 1994: 157). Accordingly, Katniss's prep team are all coded as "feminine", even though Flavius and Cinna are male. Katniss's position in relation to norms of gender performance is ambivalent: her hunting role makes her more masculine than the prep team, but she is also presented as feminine because of her association with nature. The fact that both affinity with nature and excessive body decoration are coded as "weak" and "feminine" emphasises that hegemonic femininity is multivalent, yet consistently positioned as inferior. Neither the natural Katniss nor the contrived prep team enjoy access to social or political power, although, as the next section will show, Katniss at least commands attention when dressed for the occasion.

The "Girl on Fire" Unitard

The *Hunger Games* are preceded by the tributes' parade in front of the President and the Gamesmakers. This event fits Timothy Lubin's definition of a spectacle as "a complex public display (on religious, historical, or social themes) intended to attract attention and arouse curiosity by virtue of its large scale and dramatic features" (2001: 379). The parade is certainly designed to dramatise the difference between the tributes and all the other citizens, some of whom will become financial sponsors of the contestants. The tributes' outfits, likewise, emphasise their ritual separation from the viewers. Each pair of tributes is dressed in clothing that symbolises "your district's principal industry. District 11, agriculture. District 4, fishing. District 3, factories" (Collins 2008: 80). Katniss wears a complex and resonant outfit created by Cinna, who uses black fabric, a body-hugging garment shape, and technological enhancements surreptitiously to subvert the dominant order, in ways that recall Dick Hebdige's now-classic association of style and subculture:

The meaning of subculture ... is always in dispute, and style is the area in which opposing definitions clash with the most force ... this process begins with a crime against the natural order But it ends in the construction of a style ... [which] signals a Refusal.

(1979: 3)

Style (whether of clothing or other aspects of performance) is a complex matter. Hebdige's "Refusal" is a form of rebellion against the socio-political status quo, but also risks being co-opted into the dominant culture. Katniss's costume for the parade reveals how socio-economic axes of differentiation are encoded in clothing. It is based on the miner's masculine trouser suit from District Twelve, but with considerable glamour added, and encodes powerful overtones of refusal:

I'm dressed in what will either be the most sensational or the deadliest costume in the opening ceremonies. I'm in a simple black unitard that covers me from ankle to neck. Shiny leather boots lace up to my knees. But it's the fluttering cape made of streams of orange, yellow and red and the matching headpiece that define this costume. Cinna plans to set them on fire just before our chariot rolls into the streets.

(Collins 2008: 81)

This is not a statement of fashion, but a costume created and worn for a particular occasion. Nevertheless, Cinna uses it in the same manner as Hebdige's definition of "style": as a gesture of refusal of the Capitol's imposed hierarchy of resources. Katniss's outfit resonates with Walter Benjamin's description of fashion as having "a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago: it is a tiger's leap into the past" (in Evans 2003: 34). Lillethun explains this description as a phrase that "links the wild tiger's energy and unpredictability to the modern fashion process" (Welters and Lillethun 2007: 79). The design of the "girl on fire" unitard, like Benjamin's "tiger's leap into the past," looks back in time to Katniss's origin in District Twelve. The black, red, orange and yellow colours of the costume evoke the coal and flame of the mining industry, emphasising that District Twelve is marginal and desperately poor – but still dangerous in its capacity to catch "fire" in rebellion. In this way, the outfit, while apparently conforming to expectations for tributes' parade outfits, actually encodes a "Refusal", in Hebdige's terms, of the system of inequality. Katniss's masculine-looking unitard is a small, but significant, gesture of gender transgression. When she and Peeta, dressed alike and holding hands, ride through the streets of the Capitol, the effect is redolent of sexual and revolutionary energy, symbolised by fire: "In the deepening twilight, the firelight illuminates our faces. We seem to be leaving a trail of fire off the flowing capes" (Collins 2008: 85). The outfit marks Katniss as a citizen of the oppressed mining district; it heralds her future role as a dangerous firebrand; and it hints at her identity as an adolescent, whose burgeoning sexuality provides a route of identification for young adult readers. The multiple identities signified by the unitard give the lie to the idea that clothing is a superficial aspect of identity, revealing how it reflects and shapes the individual's position in the gender and class systems. By dramatically catching fire, Katniss's outfit also alludes to the deadly

mutability that is encoded in the *Hunger Games*, which is, as Deidre Crowley remarks of Alexander McQueen's fashion designs, "a narrative not of the now but of the future" (Evans 2003: 201). Katniss's future will lead her, via the deadly dangers of the Games, to solidarity with Peeta, and to revolutionary acts of sedition which are enabled by the costumes she wears. In transgressing the gendered skirt/trouser binary, the unitard prefigures Katniss and Peeta's future unity and the downfall of the Games along with the Capitol.

Katniss in Dresses

In a manner reminiscent of Tertullian's misogynistic response to womanly ornamentation, the *Hunger Games* trilogy also differentiates between different types of clothing on gendered grounds. Functional clothing is depicted as masculine, while decorative garments are perceived as feminine. The gendered divide between trousers for men and skirts for women in consensus society is an example of this division. Citizens of District Twelve, like Katniss, wear worn, often second-hand clothing, which is functional rather than decorative (and hence is more "masculine" than "feminine"). In addition, Katniss's hunting outfit sports more natural colours than the garish, highly-styled Capitol fashions: it combines masculine functionality with feminine references to nature. The citizens of the District routinely wear masculine trouser suits. A dress is mentioned only once, at the annual "reaping" of tributes for the *Hunger Games*, where the mayor's daughter, Madge, is dressed in "an expensive white dress, and her blonde hair is done up with a pink ribbon" (Collins 2008: 14). This small detail links gender difference to resources, implying that where resources are scarce, people stick to the default form of clothing, namely the masculine. Decorative clothes, such as dresses, are feminised and are associated with the monied citizens of the Capitol, like Effie Trinket, whose "scary white grin, pinkish hair and spring green suit" (2008: 21) betoken her complete affectation. Effie uses the technologies of clothing and body decoration in order to craft an official persona of supreme artificiality. Alma Coin also uses her military-style uniforms to construct an identity as the disciplined and efficient leader-in-waiting of Panem. Katniss's costumes for public appearance also craft her identities, but they do so while dictating pre-constructed, ideologically loaded identities.

A dress is, as Malcolm Barnard demonstrates, a powerful, but culturally specific marker of femininity (2014: 9-10). Bearing this in mind, it is significant that, for the pre-Games interview and for her mockingjay role, Katniss removes her signature trousers and bodysuits and appears in dresses. Both dresses are designed by Cinna and they encode ominous and subversive meanings. The dresses are integral parts of Katniss's participation in

the spectacle of the Games. As Lubin (2001) points out, one of the functions of spectacle is to enhance the separation between ordinary citizens and participants in the ritual. Katniss's dresses are designed to demonstrate precisely this by means of exaggerated glamour: her weak, vulnerable youth is emphasised by re-coding her appearance as hyper-feminine.

The Interview Dress

The first dress Katniss wears is her “interview dress”, in which she appears on television discussing her status as a tribute with the talk show host, Caesar Flickerman. Her experience of seeing herself in the dress is narrated in powerfully gendered terms:

The creature standing before me in the full-length mirror has come from another world. Where skin shimmers and eyes flash and apparently they make their clothes from jewels. Because my dress, oh, my dress is entirely covered in reflective precious gems, red and yellow and white with bits of blue that accent the tips of the flame design. The slightest movement gives the impression I am engulfed in tongues of fire.

I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun.

(Collins 2008: 146)

At the beginning of this description, Katniss perceives herself, reflected in the mirror, as a “creature” from “another world”, testifying to the power of clothing to alter perceptions of identity. The shift in Katniss's clothing, from worn hunting trousers and boots to sparkly dresses and high-heeled shoes, signifies a new identity in keeping with the “technically organised environment” (Craik 1994: 4) of the Capitol, which is “another world” for her.



Katniss's interview dress

(<http://www.myhungergames.com/video-the-sound-of-the-hunger-games/katniss-interview-the-hunger-games>. First accessed on 18 May 2014)

The film portrays Katniss's interview dress as a low-cut ball gown in a blood-orange colour. The cut and design of the dress are both designed to show off her feminine body. The transformation from the bland colouring and masculine cut of her hunting outfit, and even the worn blue dress she wears to the Reaping, is similar to Cinderella's transformation, especially as, like Cinderella, Katniss's home is amid the "ashes" of the mining district. Cinderella is a popular fairy tale amongst young girls because of its implied promise that an ordinary girl can be transformed by the flash of a wand into a beauty in a ravishing ball gown. The intertextual resonance between *Cinderella* and the *Hunger Games* trilogy extends to the mention of Katniss's discomfort in high heels (the equivalent of Cinderella's glass slippers). By analogy with the fairy tale, Katniss is a classic downtrodden protagonist who makes good because of her inner worth, which is revealed through a beauty transformation. In this analogy, the makeovers transform Katniss from a skinny, deprived teenage girl into a glamorous celebrity, as though by the operation of a magic wand. It is also possible to argue that Cinderella's transformation into the Prince's wife is a form of palace revolt by the downtrodden classes, enabled by the provision of class-appropriate clothing. It is important to remember that these transformations are commanded and orchestrated by powerful external forces (the President and the Games-makers). Katniss has no choice in her appearance, and by extension, in the identities she is forced to perform. All the glamour of her expensive outfits only accentuates her lack of agency and status as a pawn in the Capitol's designs.

As Katniss progresses throughout the trilogy, though, she develops a limited degree of agency, culminating in her decision to kill Coin instead of President Snow. This process runs in tandem with her growing ability to use her clothing for subversive purposes, as illustrated in the mockingjay outfit. While Cinderella, from the start, wears her ball gown with conscious agency, Katniss's awareness of her own choices emerges more gradually.

When Katniss initially sees herself as "an alien" in the interview dress, she realises, for the first time, the split in her own identity between being a puppet of the Capitol and a rebel from District Twelve. This split between her class origin and her new function means that, throughout the trilogy, she occupies an inauthentic position. The condition of being an alien in state machinery will haunt her throughout the trilogy until, in a significantly masculine act, she fires an arrow that kills President Coin and brings down the power of the Capitol (Collins 2010: 372). While the costumes Katniss wears as a tribute are engineered according to the Capitol's and Cinna's agendas, she will, finally, use them as technologies of resistance.

For a moment, Katniss buys into stereotypes of frivolous femininity when she sees herself as coextensive with the dress: "I am as radiant as the sun," she says in wonderment, forgetting for the moment that it is the dress that sparkles, and not she herself. The dress serves as Cinderella's fairy

godmother's wand, transforming her into a latter-day version of the Japanese sun goddess Ama Terasu, who is as beautiful as the sun (Cartwright 2012), but for whom, as for Katniss, beauty is a dangerous power to influence popular reception and political fortunes. When she dons the interview dress, and becomes "as radiant as the sun" in her own wondering eyes, Katniss misreads both the dress's agenda for creating her as an icon of sexual attractiveness (as seen in the interview dress used in the film) and Cinna's subversive agenda. Like the "girl on fire" unitard, Katniss's pre-Games interview dress also alludes to fire, so that when she twirls in it, it "engulf[s] me in flames" (2008: 155). This scene has important resonances. First, it demonstrates Cinna's ability to design clothing that is mutable, pointing to fashion's "affinity for transformation" (Evans 2007: 113). Second, the dress shifts its meaning away from the dominant agenda of sexual attractiveness for women, and towards political rebellion, invoking fire as a harbinger of social transformation. Thus, while overtly conforming to the ideal of womanly beauty, Katniss's dress also hints that she embodies a more dangerous energy. Indeed, in the second book in the trilogy, *Catching Fire*, Katniss becomes a firebrand revolutionary and ignites an uprising against the Capitol. Finally, Katniss displays very limited agency in determining any of these meanings: the Capitol requires her to dress in a glamorous outfit for her compulsory pre-Games interview; and the dress is made by a fashion designer who does not let her into his agenda. Thus, while the flames mark Katniss as a dangerous revolutionary, her role is coerced, rather than chosen.

The Wedding Dresses

Later in the trilogy, when President Snow realises that the Capitol's hold on the Districts is weakening, he places Katniss at the centre of a media event in order to gain support. A tissue of lies is woven about Katniss and her fellow tribute, Peeta, being in love and engaged to be married. With the glamour of a prospective wedding in the news, the Capitol's propagandists intend to distract the citizens from the uprising in District Eight and, to this end, the President sends Katniss a crate of wedding dresses. A wedding dress is, arguably, the most iconic symbol of the fashion industry's reliance on compulsory heterosexuality and the ideal of romantic love. Yet Katniss immediately realises that the dresses are designed to strip her of any remaining agency and re-emphasise her role as a pawn in a propaganda machine. She responds to their arrival by breaking the rules and leaving the town for a walk in the forbidden woods (Collins 2009: 133). The dresses are forgotten until Katniss is forced to put them on for a photo shoot. This event is profoundly contrived, and the irony of its being broadcast on national media in the midst of a popular uprising emphasises fashion's inherently conservative nature. Katniss recognises that she is an object in the hands of

the media: "I feel like dough, being kneaded and reshaped again and again" (Collins 2009: 166). Later, the dresses are at the centre of a nightmare:

... I'm dressed in the silk bridal gown, but it's torn and muddy. The long sleeves keep getting caught on thorns and branches as I run through the woods. The pack of mutation tributes draws closer and closer until it overcomes me with hot breath and dripping fangs and I scream myself awake.

(Collins 2009: 167)

The mutations are human beings who have been genetically altered to take on the shape of murderously aggressive giant animals (Collins 2008: 405). The dress and the monsters collude in the dream to kill Katniss, and this is fitting since they are two sides of the same state control. Death is the only outcome of Katniss's manipulation to suit the state's agenda.

The President's engineering of the photo shoot re-emphasises the complicity of the sex/gender binary in maintaining the power hierarchy of Panem. Looked at in this way, the wedding dresses become, not symbols of interpersonal commitment, but signifiers of the Capitol's success in turning Katniss into what Foucault calls a "docile body". (Foucault's 1995: 136) account of how the state can render the body "docile" in order to serve its own agenda, using only verbs in the passive voice, bears striking similarities to the way Katniss's body is manipulated, "kneaded" and "reshaped" in order to fulfil the Capitol's requirements.) In this context, the wedding dresses are not, as in our culture, the apex of feminine glamour, but examples of the state's repertoire of technologies of power for enforcing obedience.

The Mockingjay Dress

While the wedding dress photo shoot marks a low point in Katniss's level of agency, Cinna soon finds a new purpose for the outfit. When President Snow announces the third Quarter Quell, which will be a new instance of the Games, with tributes "reaped from the existing pool of victors" (Collins 2009: 172), there is a mandatory television interview with each of them, as in the previous Hunger Games. Katniss wears her silk wedding dress, but Cinna has modified it so that, like her unitard and her previous interview dress, it catches fire. Once it has burned away, Katniss's real costume is exposed:

I'm in a dress the exact design of my wedding dress, only it's the color of coal and made of tiny feathers. Wonderingly, I lift my long, heavy sleeves into the air, and that's when I see myself on the television screen. Clothed in black except for the white patches on my sleeves. Or should I say my wings.
Because Cinna has turned me into a mockingjay.

(2009: 252)

Katniss experiences “wonder” at this transformation, as she did when first dressed in the orange interview dress, but now she is much more aware of the political overtones of her costume. A mockingjay is a hybrid between a jabberjay (a genetically altered bird, programmed to remember and reproduce human conversation) and a mockingbird, which occurs naturally.⁵ The resulting species is half-natural and half-artificial and can reproduce human and bird melodies. Importantly, mockingjays arose in defiance of the original intention of the jabberjays (Collins 2008: 52) and so, by their very existence, rebel against the Capitol’s control. By dressing Katniss in a mockingjay outfit, Cinna accomplishes several goals. First, he brands her as a hybrid, partly state-programmed, but mostly rebellious against the state’s agenda and yet possessing innocence. Second, he predestines her role as a figurehead in the uprising, where she will act as a symbolic rallying point for all those who oppose the Capitol (the third book in the trilogy is tellingly entitled *Mockingjay*); and, finally, he signs his own death warrant, since the costume demonstrates his own resistance to the state and he is summarily executed. The wedding dress’s mutability, similarly to the fiery overtones of Katniss’s “girl on fire” unitard and her interview dress, allude to the propensity of populations considered “docile” to burst into revolutionary uprisings.

The mockingjay outfit and the role it steers Katniss into have powerful gendered resonances. Ostensibly, the white silk wedding dress encodes hyper-femininity, in part through its promise of feminised innocence and purity. But it also offers what Joan Riviere calls a “masquerade” of femininity:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the masquerade. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.
(2000: 137)

It is significant that Riviere sees the need to conceal masculinity as the motive for donning the “mask” of womanliness. All of Katniss’s costumes which I have discussed in this article distance her from the “masculine” hunting clothes in which she feels she belongs. In effect, the wedding dress that transforms into a mockingjay costume allows Katniss to assume false identities, which are forced onto her by the government of Panem for its own goals. But these identities do, in different ways, come true. Katniss

5. The mockingbird is also, intertextually, a symbol of innocence, as in Harper Lee’s iconic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

recognises that Alma Coin will be no less autocratic than Snow, despite her different rhetoric. So, by killing Coin, Katniss ensures that the Capitol will fall and in so doing, she fulfils the goal of the revolution. The final chapter of *Mockingjay* (despite its echoes of *Jane Eyre*'s "Reader, I married him") also confirms that Katniss does marry Peeta. The masquerades of a bride and a revolutionary, ironically, prove authentic, much as Riviere asserts the masquerade of womanliness is as authentic as "true" womanliness. In my view, the fluidity of feminine identity means that Katniss is more suited to a role of mutable heroism than a male hero would be. At the same time, the glamorous costumes that betoken her identity shifts make the trilogy particularly appealing to adolescent girl readers.

Conclusion

The *Hunger Games* trilogy devotes more attention to sartorial matters, such as the costumes donned by its central protagonist, than many other works of YA fantasy.⁶ The meanings that accrue to clothing in this narrative, though, are deeper than mere decoration. Katniss's hunting clothes in District Twelve mark her identity as "masculine", but once she has volunteered as a tribute in the *Hunger Games*, she is powerfully "feminised" by the prep team and by the costumes Cinna designs for her. At the same time, she is stripped of agency, and only regains it in severely limited measure when she chooses to adopt the Mockingjay persona and to spearhead the revolution against the Capitol. The costumes that are forced on Katniss emphasise the power of the state to coerce citizens to adopt certain docile identities, and, in my view, militate against a reading of the trilogy as fully heroic. At the same time, they offer opportunities to consider the many layers of signification that can be discerned in clothing, dress and costumes. In particular, they demonstrate that clothes are powerful markers of ideological affiliation and control.

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6. The *Hunger Games* trilogy may be compared to the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling 1997-2007), where clothing is depicted, much as in consensus society, as mostly informal, with a few instances, such as magical occasions, that warrant particular dress codes.

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