

WHO PLAYS THE HUNGER GAMES: ARTEMIS OR PERSEPHONE? THE MYTH OF PERSEPHONE IN SUZANNE COLLINS'S TRILOGY *THE HUNGER GAMES*

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ABSTRACT: This study focuses on Persephone myth as reflected in the popular trilogy *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The novelist uses the frame of this myth, with its implicit motifs of descent to the underworld and abuse, in order to reveal the anxieties of an adolescent girl, Katniss Everdeen, in her search for an authentic identity. The aim of this study is to show that Suzanne Collins also makes use of Artemis myth in her trilogy, but her eventual insistence on Persephone myth in her narrative reveals that the novelist's purpose goes beyond the depiction of private experience of coming of age inherent in this myth, extending its function to issues related to the discovery of a social identity. The most important reason for using the mythemes of the popular myth of Persephone in her work is to represent the anxieties about societal collapse, expressed by the novelist through the images of *panem et circens*, hunger and predatory behaviour of eating and being eaten, which is characteristic to contemporary world. The mechanism of the cyclical death and rebirth, integral to the myth, contributes to the creation and validation of some social customs and beliefs. Therefore, Katniss Everdeen's journey and her traumatic experience could be read as an attempt to transmit the fears of anarchic existence, the anxieties concerning politics of authority and power, but, at the same time, the hope in the emergence of a new social identity which would be built on some newly acquired and acknowledged values, such as hunger for justice, compassion and nourishment.

Keywords: Artemis myth, Persephone myth, Hunger Games, descent to the underworld, power, social identity

AÇLIK OYUNLARINI KİM OYNUYOR: ARTEMİS Mİ PERSEFONİ Mİ? SUZANNE COLLINS'İN ÜÇLEMESİNDE PERSEFONİ MITİ

ÖZ: Bu çalışma Suzanne Collins'in *Açlık Oyunları* adlı eserinde yansıtılan Persefoni mitini incelemektedir. Yazar yer altına iniş ve suistimal gibi dolaylı motifleriyle birlikte bu miti, ergenlik döneminde genç bir kız olan Katniss Everdeen'in özgün kimlik arayışı sürecindeki endişelerini yansıtmak amacıyla kullanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Suzanne Collins'in üçlemesinde Artemis mitinin kullanımını göstermenin yanı sıra Collins'in anlatısında Persefoni miti ısrarının yazarın amacının ergenlik çağındaki özel deneyimi aktarmanın ötesine geçerek sosyal kimlik keşfi olduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Yazarın çalışmasında popüler Persefoni

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mitinde yer alan mitbirimleri kullanmasındaki en önemli neden çağdaş dünyanın karakteristik özelliği olan sosyal çöküşle ilgili endişelerini, açlık, yeme ve yenilme gibi yırtıcı davranışları içeren panem et circenses imgeleri vasıtasıyla yansıtmaya imkanı bulabilmesidir. Mitin içerisinde barındırdığı döngüsel ölüm ve yeniden doğuş mekanizması bir takım sosyal gelenek ve inanışların var olmasına ve geçerlilik kazanmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Katniss Everdeen'in yolculuğu ve travmatik deneyimi, anarşik varoluşun korkularını, otorite ve gücün politikasına ilişkin endişeleri aktarmanın yanı sıra adalet, merhamet, beslenme ve düzen gibi yeni edinilen değerler üzerine inşa edilen bir sosyal kimliğin ortaya çıkışı olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Artemis miti, Persefoni miti, Açlık Oyunları, yer altına iniş, güç, sosyal kimlik.

1. Introduction

In the world of modern science, with the growth of Western rationalization and disenchantment, one might imagine that myth has become obsolete. However, the rapid technological advancement could not annihilate what Levi-Strauss considers as universal 'structures of the mind' and, instead of seeing the end of the era of myth, we witness a continuity of mythic universalism that proves once again the myth's extraordinary ability to accommodate itself to the perpetually shifting conditions. Since the matter contained in mythic images is inherited, it becomes the texture for some new concepts that would be delivered through the structure of myth. Myth becomes reactivated by the imagination of a writer, but it renews itself each time "*through losses, through mythemes originating in other myths*"¹, revealing once again a fundamental and symbolic situation which has validity in society in which this myth re-emerges. In this respect, Eva Kushner considers that "*in order to renew itself for new audiences the myth must adopt a new code and new code-breakers*"²

Though we no longer live in a world of tribal consciousness, the global interdependence continues to manifest itself, since economic crises, environmental accidents, natural disasters or political turmoil produce similar communal anxieties related to the insecurity of our world. Therefore, the myths that re-emerge in the present day communities would necessarily correspond to the new codes of signification, and be capable to respond to these newly rising natural, social, and political anxieties and insecurities.

Myth's autogenerative capacity could be observed especially in the case of Persephone myth, a myth truly able to regulate and transform itself,

¹ Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, Translated by Margaret Sankey and Judith Hatten, Bumbana Publications, Brisbane, 1999, p. 303.

² Eva Kushner, *Living Prism: Itineraries in Comparative Literature*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2001, p. 303.

absorbing new signifieds and ever creating new signifiers by each retelling. If each myth implies a mythical scenario, a narrative which incorporates various “mythemes”³, the general scheme should assume the quality of a “story”⁴. This famous myth’s classical version stresses such mythemes as the victimization of Persephone, her abduction and rape by Hades, her being tricked into eating the seeds of pomegranate, her eventual salvation by her mother, Demeter, and Persephone’s return from her symbolic death as a transformed deity.

Eva Kushner claims that “*if myths indeed are structures, they are not dependent upon one culture, one epoch, one specific narrative version, but have the ability to recombine elements of form and meaning through the very process of transformation*”⁵. The Persephone myth, which is reactivated by the imaginative minds of the last decades, includes some elements of divergence from the original myth, but preserves concomitantly some familiar mythemes. Contemporary writers rediscover the literary potential of Persephone myth, while re-contextualizing the original scenario in their narratives in order to meet the expectations of the new era and new culture.

According to Gilbert Durand, the wealth of meaning of a myth and also its potential to extend beyond the “*linearity of the signifier*”, in Levi-Strauss’s terms, emerge from the fact that “*signifier subsists as a symbol*”⁶. The capacity of myth to transform beyond the initial scenario comes, as Durand considers, from “*the symbolic – or rather, the archetypal – level based on the isotopy of symbols within structural constellations*”⁷. In the process of its transformation, Persephone myth would preserve some of its mythemes of the original scenario, such as the split between mother and the heroine, the descent to the underworld, the confrontation with Thanatos, the encounter with Eros, the penetration of her body, and the interdiction on eating of pomegranate seeds.

The interest in this myth in the present day culture is visible from the frequency this scenario assumes in the post-feminist retellings. Alison Horbury, in her important work *Post-feminist Impasses in Popular Heroine*

³ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, Basic Books, New-York, 1974, p. 211.

⁴ Daniel Henri Pageaux, *Literatura generala si comparata*, Translated by Lidia Bodea, Polirom, Iasi, 2000.

⁵ Eva Kushner, *Living Prism: Itineraries in Comparative Literature*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2001, p. 303.

⁶ Gilbert Durand, *Figuri mitice si chipuri ale operei: De la mitocritica la mitanaliza*, Nemira, Bucuresti, 1998, p. 343.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

Television: The Persephone Complex, attempts to find an answer to the emergence of the necessity of retelling of this myth in our historical moment, and also tries to disclose the significances which are gained in the process of various revisions of this myth in this new context. Insisting on the fact that the code of signification of the Persephone myth is definitely determined by the era in which this story is told, Horbury argues that the Persephone myth is produced “at a particular convergence in debates over women in media cultures – as they are entwined in the narratives of heroine television – that reach an impasse in the context of post-feminism and are thus sublimated into a narrative structure capable of negotiating this impasse”⁸.

In her endeavour to explain the rise of this myth, Horbury also raises the questions related to Persephone’s essence, such as “consent, agency, and desire in her initiation/rape, the role of the paternal function in the structure of feminine development, and the mother’s impact on her daughter’s experience”⁹, concluding that this scenario mostly exposes “a type of crisis over epistemology, over how to read the story of female experience, development, and identity”¹⁰.

Far from arguing with Alison Horbury, in this study we attempt to reveal once again the plasticity of myth in general, and of the myth of Persephone in particular. Our approach to Suzanne Collins’s trilogy *The Hunger Games* as a possible retelling of Persephone myth aims to reveal how this myth, which is most frequently read as a debate over female sexualisation, could possibly accommodate within its own symbolism more social concerns, such as shifting of politics of authority and power, the prohibition on eating, the emergence of a new social identity, and the hunger for justice, nourishment and compassion, which are necessary to stabilize the social relations within a community.

2. Who Is the Preferred Goddess: Artemis or Persephone?

Suzanne Collins’s trilogy *The Hunger Games* reimagines Persephone myth in an attempt to respond to the rising need for creating a meaning in an age of political instability, social crisis, war and hunger. Chiara Bottici claims that the rise of a myth emerges from “a symbolic mediation of reality, but must also coagulate and produce significance”¹¹. We consider the literary

⁸ Alison Hobury, *Post-feminist Impasses in Popular Heroine Television: The Persephone Complex*, Palgrave Macmillan, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2015, pp. 7-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹¹ Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, p. 224.

shaping of Persephone myth not only as a random representation of the social imaginary: Collins's Persephone clearly delivers a determination to act, a determination that should affect and perhaps change the political and the social impasse of the present society.

The dilemma concerning the ways to action is conveyed in the novel by the rich mythical saturation with symbols, which renders confusion between Artemis and Persephone typologies. The trilogy's main protagonist's journey is frequently read as a metaphor of transformation, from Katniss's concern with her individual identity to her awareness of the political and social identity. Katniss Everdeen's transformative ability is powerfully suggested at the beginning of the series by her resemblance to Artemis, which is named by Jean Bolen as the "*Goddess of the Hunt and Moon, Competitor and Sister*"¹². The vivid association with Artemis is made through the protagonist's skills of using bow and arrows while hunting, the Virginal Goddess who shuns her femininity by her habit of wearing trousers and boots and also by the way she thwarts any romantic insinuations of her friend Gale, concerning a possible life together with their children. Katniss's identity as a huntress is essential, as she is able, together with Gale, to provide for their families, thus building a sense of security and life-sustenance in highly unsettling world of Panem. This androgynous she-warrior identity emerges as this young girl coming-of-age is forced by the circumstances to develop her hunting and gathering skills in order to provide a decent nutrition for her sister and mother. But the more she explores the wilderness for survival, the more she develops within herself some abilities that strengthen her body, a good knowledge of plants and berries, and most importantly, the habit of crossing some fences or boundaries, qualities that will shape her future identity.

A typical symbolism related to Artemis archetype is relevant in the connection Katniss develops to nature. In fact, nature is a part of her identity, powerfully reflected by the significance of her name. Katniss is surprised to discover the essence of her name one day in the woods, while observing some plants around her: "*Tall with leaves like arrowheads. (...) I knelt down in the water, my fingers digging into the soft mud, and I pulled up handfuls of the roots. (...) "Katniss", I said aloud. It is the plant I was named for*"¹³. Katniss is the name of a plant, Sagittaria, which with its arrowheads might suggest a natural-born Archer/Artemis, the she-warrior. It also signifies

¹² Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddess in Everywoman: Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives*, Harper Collins Publishers Inc., New York, 2004.

¹³ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 52.

edible underwater tubers, which resemble potatoes, and indicates Katniss's capacity to nurture. The nurturer Kore/Persephone emerges powerfully, as Katniss, after discovering the plant, is amazed to notice: "*That night, we feasted on fish and katniss roots until we were all, for the first time in months, full*"¹⁴. But the description of this plant reveals a tripartite significance, since it "blossoms with three white petals"¹⁵. The third possible implication of the protagonist's name could be completed by her family's name, Everdeen, again related to wilderness, suggesting the healing capacities that are developed by her mother and her sister. Embodying Goddess Hecate's principles of using nature in order to save or heal, Katniss learns to operate with natural remedies, although she admits that "[k]illing things is much easier than [healing]"¹⁶.

Although this young girl of 16 is still in her quest to discover who she truly is, the nature is central in all possible identities she might assume. Coming of age implies a space for seeking one's purpose in life and Katniss feels most comfortable to develop her inner-self and her qualities while in the woods. In the forest, Katniss and Gale discover a favourable land to develop their skills, but at the same time, it becomes a stage for their free speech, where they can criticize the government or fantasize about revolt or a possible escape. Clarissa Ann Baker claims that for these two young people "*the woods provide symbolic sustenance for political subversion*"¹⁷. Only in the forest they are allowed to express their anger and revolt, and it becomes a political arena where they assert their dignity. Katniss acknowledges that her "*hunting in the woods surrounding District 12 violates at least a dozen laws and is punishable by death*"¹⁸. Her custom of breaking the law emerges initially from her desire to sustain and nurture, but risking imprisonment or even death while stepping over the electric fence that surrounds their district implies mostly her urge to subvert the government's domination and attain a sense of autonomy, which is essential for her assertion of her Self.

Her rebellious nature develops gradually, as she witnesses Capitol's oppressiveness in the way it restricts the food supplies, leaving the people of Panem perpetually on the verge of starvation. The food insecurity is a means

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹⁷ Carissa Ann Baker, "Outside the Seam. The Construction of and Relationship to Panem's Nature." *Space and Place in Hunger Games*, Edited by Deidre Anne Evans, Garriott Whitney, Elaine Jones. McFarland, Jefferson, North Carolina, 2014, p. 202.

¹⁸ Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 9.

of political control and the strategy of divide and rule provides docility and order. The ‘reaping’ ritual that takes place in Panem strengthens the sovereign control of the Capitol, but especially Hunger Games deploys, as Michel Foucault claims, “before the eyes of the spectators an effect of terror as intense as it is discontinuous, irregular and always above its own laws”¹⁹.

The circus, which is implicit in the significance of Panem’s name and which relies on the Roman model of *Panem et Circenses*, reveals the mechanism of power to affirm its status-quo by delivering bread and entertainment in order to keep the population’s docility. The structural violence, which is called by Johan Galtung as “the indirect violence built into repressive social orders creating enormous differences between potential and actual self-realization”²⁰ (1975, 173), creates a form of domination through the signs of punishment that emerge prior to the existence of crime.

Dominated by this fear of punishment, Katniss’s rebellious nature is now suppressed by her, and her self-silencing is delivered in her interior monologue: “Eventually I understood [that revolt] would only lead us to more trouble. So I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts”²¹. As a result of the frequent exposure to the visual evidence of Capitol’s authority through abuse, Katniss reduces those qualities within herself, which are mostly characteristic to the fighter Artemis, when she refuses to act publicly.

Since every myth which emerges in a community enables some mechanisms of cultural identification through the symbolic relation to reality, it might be surprising that Suzanne Collins chooses to diminish in her protagonist the she-warrior aspects which are characteristic to Artemis myth. However, we see the novelist’s intention to use myth as a kind of public-sphere discourse which critiques the newly rising ideological fascination with Amazonian-like, glamorous heroines in the present-day popular culture. The novelist raises the awareness of the reader that this youth-oriented pop culture’s appeal to violence and military symbolism may lead, as Siobhan McEvoy-Levy claims, to the dangerous construction of young citizens’ identity, which would emerge as a result of the identification with these glamorous androgynous fighters. McEvoy-Levy insists that “*The Hunger*

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage, New York, 1979, p. 130.

²⁰ Johan Galtung, *Peace: Research, Education, Action: Essays in Peace Research*, Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, Vol. 1, 1975, p. 173.

²¹ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 6.

Games aims to stir this kind of consciousness"²². By challenging the ideological construction of military myths that encourage the display of virtuous war, Suzanne Collins tries to re-construct the meanings of peace through the rise of a new myth that produces significance in a world where people are hungry for heroes who are primarily caregivers.

3. The Rise of Persephone myth

The literary reshaping of Persephone myth in Suzanne Collins's trilogy is definitely not a random representation of the social imaginary. Her fiction tries to give voice to some recurrent needs that emerge as mythemes in the discourse of a given society as well as to express various visions of identity related to a community. Though we understand the choice of the novelist to change the mythical scenario from Artemis to Persephone, one would still question whether Collins's intention is to suggest a shift from an identity of action and revolt to an identity of submissiveness and abuse, as these are the most widespread mythemes related to Persephone. Our purpose is to reveal the ways in which Suzanne Collins uses the symbolic situation characteristic to Persephone myth in order to prove its plasticity and also to expose the ways this myth adopts a new code of signification which has validity for the society that resurges this myth.

The Hunger Games trilogy might be considered as a repository of the social imaginary that could also include some aspects of a political imagination. It is well known that myths cannot be reduced to symbols; they do not only present a fundamental situation. Chiara Bottici, while speaking of political myths, claims that "[t]hey also contain a determination to act, and this determination can affect the specifically political conditions of a given society"²³. Our task is to reveal how this myth of Persephone, conventionally associated with passivity, contains this determination to act and also to stress that the code of determination to act changes its significance in a society which is in search for a new social identity.

The fusion of Artemis and Persephone took place once through the production of myths of a community that sought a vision of identity, which stressed a quality which is seen by Kerenyi as the 'elemental virginity'. Kerenyi claims that "*Artemis proves to be identical with the original*

²² Siobhan, McEvoy-Levy, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures: Reading the Politics of Peacebuilding from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, p. 185.

²³ Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, p. 224.

Demeter and thus with Persephone"²⁴. For Roland Barthes, myth is in a way, an ideological device that "can reach everything, corrupt everything"²⁵. This fusion could be an example of a rise of a myth in a certain milieu, as a public-sphere discourse, which conceals or distorts a reality in order to suit some ideological purposes.

The repetition of the scenario of a fragile and beautiful young girl who performs a descent to the underworld as a result of an abduction and abuse and undergoes a symbolic/real death and rebirth is easily recognizable in *The Hunger Games*. Suzanne Collins delineates the mytheme of Persephone's victimization, delivered through the imagery of 'reaping' in Panem, which is a form of abduction of youths by the immanent power of Capitol. The symbolic penetration of the heroine's body is delivered as a kind of rape by the institutions of power. It is strengthened in the novel through the children's brutal expulsion from the familial environment for The Games, an infernal experience which ends the childhood and might be connected to adult formation. This moment of formation is of essential importance, since, as Golban mentions, it represents

“(...) the culmination of the developmental process [in which] identity acquired, which is an experience that includes the realization of the self, and, along with it, of various other aspects such as a sense of who one is, gender distinction, family and professional perspectives, social and inter-human status and role, modes of thinking, communication and behaviour, personal discernment and assimilation of views, beliefs and values, and an acceptance of life as continuity and sameness.”²⁶

In fact, the Persephone myth in Suzanne Collins's trilogy *The Hunger Games* could be read as a metaphor for the formation of an individual, but also for the formation of a communal identity. In this respect, Suzan Shau Ming Tan speaks of "politics of maturation" which is enacted in *The Hunger Games*, where the adult formation emerges as a result of binary opposition between victimized child and silent adult (2014, 84). The expulsion of the tribute from the community as a scapegoat might be interpreted in terms of a mythical crossing of the threshold, which is characteristic of descent to the underworld mytheme. This descent enforces the image of death, and in the

²⁴ Carl Kerényi, "Kore," *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, Translated by Richard F.C. Hull, Pantheon Books, 1969, p. 178.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, New York, 1991, p. 132.

²⁶ Petru Golban, *A History of the Bildungsroman: From Ancient Beginnings to Romanticism*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018, p. 18.

world of Panem “*the word tribute is pretty much synonymous with the word corpse*”²⁷

In a surprising manner, Collins makes use of the conventional image of Persephone’s ‘elemental virginity’, understood in terms of loss of innocence through the imagery of bleeding and blends it with the Romantic evocation of the innocent child. The result of the reworking of this motif emerges as a new vision of loss of innocence; the bleeding loses its initial meaning of the loss of virginity and gains new connotation of the loss of innocence through the way children are bleeding and slaughtered in The Games, where “the child emerges as vulnerable both to danger and to becoming *dangerous*”²⁸. The coming of age that leads to the formation of one’s identity is shaped as a result of frequent exposure to such traumatic acts of bleeding. The mechanism of The Games, which is set on abusing the vulnerable children, allows only one possibility of maturation, as the one who would survive and thus, grow into adulthood, would also be the traumatized victor with the established kill-or-being-killed vision of life. The novelist stresses the danger of such identity formation, which emerges as a result of adult disempowerment and the violence of Panem. The inevitable formation of communal identity results from the parents that are unable to care or protect their children, like Katniss’s mother, or her friend, Madge’s parents that are constantly absent from this world, with “*fierce headaches that force [Madge’s mother] to stay in bed for days*”²⁹; the other alternative is revealed by Haymitch, Katniss’s mentor, who serves as an example of maturation of a victor, a helpless drunkard who experiences a perpetual hell by being forced to train some kids and then constantly watch them die.

The essence of Persephone myth consists in its ability to reveal the possibility of descending to the Underworld and find there one’s strength and wisdom by connecting with deeper parts of oneself and discovering a new identity, which would be solid enough in order to allow us to adjust ourselves to new conditions of life by using this newly discovered potential and to emerge to the Upperworld with dignity. Carol S. Pearson speaks of what might be the most appealing in Persephone archetype: “*Persephone’s ease in moving back and forth between the worlds and the seasons can be a*

²⁷ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 22.

²⁸ Susan Shau Ming Tan, “The Making of the Citizens and the Politics of Maturation.” *Space and Place in Hunger Games*, Edited by Deidre Anne Evans, Garriott Whitney, Elaine Jones. McFarland, 2014, p. 87.

²⁹ Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 107.

*model for our gaining ease in shifting between multiple roles and adjusting to new life stages that require different things from us*³⁰.

Suzanne Collins explores the possibility provided by Persephone myth as a goddess of transformation. Considering the danger of both individual and communal identity formation in the present community, the novelist creates an alternative to this identity by moulding her protagonist Katniss upon some of the mythemes of Persephone myth. Easily recognizable motifs of the hunger and the prohibition on eating are revealed through the shortage of bread in Panem; the ritual of 'reaping' which has an agrarian connotation, when combined with the imagery of innocent children who are harvested, reproduces a new significance, as it refers to the tributes who are deprived of any personhood in Panem. The only identity marker is expressed through the shape of each of the districts' bread; the name Panem itself, which signifies bread, indicates that people of Panem are reduced to represent foodstuff that should be devoured by the gargantuan bellies of the Capitol elite.

In Suzanne Collins's trilogy bread starts gradually to change its system of signification through the repetition and familiarity with the motifs of myth, as the young girl Kore, who is harvested/abducted by Hades, changes her identity and emerges as Persephone, the Goddess of corn and grain, but what is mostly significant is that she becomes an active agent who is able to nourish the entire community. Through a symbolic death she arises as a transformed deity. However, this transformation does not occur suddenly. It is a slow and gradual process which is not acknowledged by Katniss at the beginning. From hunger for bread, in a world where people "*know to be hungry, but not told how to handle what provisions we have*"³¹, Katniss slips through the electric fence of the Capitol. This act of survival is one of the first reworking of the mythical image of Persephone's crossing some forbidden thresholds while seeking to save her own self, and is conveyed in Collins's trilogy through the image of Katniss's exploring some gaps in the fence, sensing at the same time that these gaps might be some indices of weaknesses in the authority in the Capitol. The metaphor of the fence/threshold delivers the newly gained wisdom of the protagonist that in Capitol power is never absolute and the people of Panem, if creative enough, might also develop capacity to exercise power. This hold of power is not acknowledged by Katniss yet. She expresses her revolt against the disciplinary power in Panem, instinctively, as a caregiver, when she

³⁰ Carol Pearson, *Persephone Rising: Awakening the Heroine Within*, Part III (Persephone), USA: HarperCollins, 2015, p. 190 (epub).

³¹ Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay*, Scholastic, London, 2010, p. 40.

volunteers instead of her sister Prim. It is her first explicit exercise of power made publicly against the rules in Panem, but it is done at the enormous price, as she endangers her own life by becoming a tribute. The agency that she exerts in front of all people makes the citizens of District 12 connect with her in a surprising manner. She shows them that although they are all subdued by disciplinary regime, there is still a possibility to revolt. Katniss narrates this moment as following: “*So instead of acknowledging applause, I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone. All of this is wrong*”³².

Their resistance functions as the discovery of a metaphorical gap in the fence of the Panem's authority that they can explore together when they find courage in a model exhibited so boldly by Katniss. This example reveals to the people of District 12 that they can be more than some anonymous docile bodies, and that they have an identity to explore and express. This awareness emerges so unexpectedly that even Katniss is surprised:

*“I don't think of District 12 as a place that cares about me. But a shift occurred since I stepped up to take Prim's place, and now it seems that I have become someone precious. (...) almost every member of the crowd touches the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out to me. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our district (...) It means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love”*³³.

Katniss becomes precious to the citizens because she reminds them that they still have an identity and thus they may all be capable of exerting their agency as individuals. Katniss also reminds everyone that their identity is created within a web of relations, so much like Persephone's example. It is in the network of relationships that a community discovers power and, as Foucault claims, “*power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations*”³⁴. However, District 12 is not ready yet to exert its power, as they watch in admiration, but passively and in silence, Katniss's expulsion from their community towards an outcome which is most probably her death.

Fendler, elaborating on Foucault's concept of power, states that “[w]e cannot ‘blame the system’, nor can we ‘hold individuals accountable’. We cannot wait for a leader to tell us what to do, and we cannot wait for

³² Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scolastic, New York, 2009, p. 24.

³³ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scolastic, New York, 2009, p. 24.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*, Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York, 1978, p. 92.

*someone else to declare us to be emancipated. Instead, we are challenged to see a wide variety of possible power moves, many options, and a whole array of possible consequences*³⁵. Katniss's position from powerlessness to power emerges with some challenges that she encounters during her journey to the underworld and she eventually discovers a variety of options and also consequences that she should assume. Since we consider Persephone's underworld experience as an attempt to discover her true identity by connecting to the deeper parts of herself, we recognize Katniss's descent as an innate quest for personal/social identity, as well as a quest for ways to assert the power which arises as a result of the discovery of this identity. Through the discovery of the deeper parts of herself, Persephone learns, or archetypally speaking, we learn to determine, as Pearson claims, "*whom and what we love – not so much whom or what we want to care for, but what lights us up*"³⁶

Though there are many nuances of love, Persephone discovers especially the meaning of *philia*, *agape* and *eros*. *Philia*, understood primarily as friendship or love between siblings, is reflected in Katniss's case, through her ability to sacrifice for the sake of her sister Prim. But mostly inspiring is Katniss's ability to reveal friendship and natural love of a sibling when she makes her alliance with the rival tribute, a 12-year-old Rue, who somehow reminds Katniss of Prim. A turning point in Katniss's search for her identity represents the way in which she confronts the challenge of Rue's death. Siobhan McEvoy-Levy considers that this moment triggers "*Katniss' anger and the crystallization of an understanding of injustice beyond her own need to survive*"³⁷. What lights Katniss up in this experience of love is the knowledge that to survive is not enough. The underworld experience leads her to the awareness of her capacity to care and nurture, when she treats Rue's body like an identity, unlike all other bodies of the fallen tributes that are collected like pieces of trash by the Capitol's hovercraft. Katniss honours Rue's body with a proper burial by singing her a lullaby and wreathing flowers in her hair. While adorning Rue's body, Katniss returns to Rue the status of a person, and her song, through the connection with nature, heals the split from humanness which was dissolved by the brutality experienced during the Games: "*Deep in the meadow, under the willow / A bed of grass,*

³⁵ Lynn Fendler, *Michel Foucault* (Vol. 22), Continuum, New York, 2010, 197.

³⁶ Carol Pearson, *Persephone Rising: Awakening the Heroine Within*, Part III (Persephone), USA: HarperCollins, 2015, p. 156 (epub).

³⁷ McEvoy-Levy Siobhan, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures: Reading the Politics of Peacebuilding from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, p. 192.

*a soft green pillow / Lay down your head, and close your sleepy eyes / And when again they open, the sun will rise. / Here it's safe, here it's warm / Here the daises guard you from every harm*³⁸.

Katniss resists the disciplinary mode of the Capitol to transform her into a docile body. She discovers that Capitol cannot take away her empathy and compassion, qualities that make her humane, rather than a submissive body. This traumatic underworld experience of confronting death makes Katniss acknowledge the meaning of *agape*, which is charity towards others, or even more, a divine love for humankind that a human is challenged to imitate. This transformation which occurs in Katniss gains a political significance, as she meditates that “*Rue’s death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice they inflict upon us*”³⁹. The display of beauty and compassion of this funeral make the citizens of Panem acknowledge once again the brutality of their daily experiences, as well as their decay into inhumanness. Katniss’s act leads the community, which is primarily hungry for bread, to gain the awareness that people are actually hungry for care and justice. The capacity of the mythical Persephone to shift between multiple roles and, eventually, adjust to new stages of life is relevant in the way in which Katniss’s newly emerging identity inspires the entire community. This metaphor of hunger for care and justice is expressed through a series of uprisings in the districts. District 11, Rue’s homeland, sends Katniss a gift of bread for her compassion. Moreover, she expresses her gratitude to citizens of District 11 with the three-fingered salute, a reminder of their identity, a gesture which is recorded on camera and viewed by all people in Panem. Known as the ‘girl on fire’, Katniss sets a hope for a true fire, as she “*is transformed phoenix-like into the Mockingjay, the symbol of the nascent rebellion*”⁴⁰ in the later stages of her quest.

In the journey Persephone undergoes through the underworld, essential for the formative experience is the wisdom that emerges as a result of her encounter with *eros*. According to Pearson, “*eros refers to sexual and other forms of intimate loving and, according to Plato, provides us with an appreciation of spiritual beauty and truth that can lead to transcendence. Eros is also associated with the life force and helps us choose aliveness in*

³⁸ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, pp. 234-235.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴⁰ McEvoy-Levy Siobhan, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures: Reading the Politics of Peacebuilding from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, p. 192.

*our work, as well as in our personal relationships*⁴¹. Sigmund Freud developed further on eros, associating it with sexuality, drive for life, creativity, and especially personal accomplishment. Moreover, Eros (love deity) is contrasted by Freud with Thanatos (death deity), who is frequently associated with aggression and violence. Persephone myth, however, does not reveal Eros and Thanatos as competing forces, but rather as complementary ones. Pearson elaborates on the positive effects of this fusion, as “*Thanatos (...death instinct) provides us with the ability to die to what we have been so that we might be resurrected to what we need to become, just as Kore dies to being a child and, as Persephone, becomes a wife and a queen*”⁴².

Initially, like the virginal Artemis, who refuses to embrace her femininity, Katniss neglects the feminine aspirations, for though attracted by the handsome Gale, she shuns completely any prospects of marriage or giving birth due to the constant threats to children that exist in Panem. The importance of transformation from Artemis to Persephone rests not only in the exercise of power related to her sovereignty. Katniss already learns that survival is not her sole purpose. The underworld experience leads her to the awareness of her capacity to care and nurture, but the most important wisdom she gains is the discovery of her ability to regenerate, by which showing a possible path to social regeneration.

It is important to point out that Persephone attains completion through her union with Hades, not the god of death, but the one who cares for the dead. Together, in their fusion, Persephone and Hades trigger the transformational process that delivers regeneration. The reworking of the scenario of Persephone myth by Suzanne Collins provides some elements of divergence from the original mythemes. Hades, the abductor, a figure of immanent power, can be symbolically understood as the power of Capitol, represented by President Snow, who ruthlessly rapes the bodies of young children in the desire to harness or subdue them. The association between Snow and death is reinforced through the scent of blood that reeks from him that Katniss acknowledges when she confronts him face-to-face for the first time. The persistent odour of blood is cautiously covered by the scent of the rose that he wears in his lapel, and this synaesthesia again strengthens the image of bloodlust he feels for all innocent flowers/children that are forcefully abducted by him.

⁴¹ Carol Pearson, *Persephone Rising: Awakening the Heroine Within*, Part III (Persephone), USA: HarperCollins, 2015, p. 157 (epub).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

The image of Hades is also reactivated in the narrative by re-contextualizing the original scenario through the suggestion that Hades is not necessarily death, but the one who mostly cares for the dead. Suzanne Collins reworks this motif of caring in the figure of Hades, as she binds Eros and Thanatos in order to call for resurrection from death. This awakening from the chain of despair which emerges from the encounter with death is suggested through the image of Peeta, the baker's son, who although a victim himself, possesses the power of delivering hope to Katniss, who was on a verge of death after losing her father. Collins re-imagines Hades in her narrative in order to meet the expectations of a new audience, who is tired of any form of abuse by any authority and becomes mostly hungry for those who are capable to love and care for others. Peeta, Katniss's secret admirer, is diminished in his status by the suggestion of his initial timidity in admitting openly his love for her, and also by the fact that he is another tribute (which signifies 'corpse'), and thus a rival to Katniss in the Games. But it is in this timorousness that he manages to awaken Katniss's hope, when he secretly throws two loaves of burned bread to her to avoid her starvation. The saturation of nurturing symbols is delivered through the imagery of bread that burned into her skin, but she clutches it tighter, "*clinging to life*", or "*heartly bread, filled with raisins and nuts*", which is combined with Peeta's image as "*an enormous kindness*" in order to suggest a possible nourishment through love and care⁴³. This generosity contrasts to violence that is everywhere, even within Peeta's family, where his generosity "*would have surely resulted in beating if discovered*"⁴⁴ (*THG*, 32). In her proximity to death the encounter with Hades functions as a kind of call for a new self, able to regenerate, this hope for spiritual awakening being viewed by Katniss "as if spring had come over night"⁴⁵, admitting somehow the necessity of death for the sake of resurrection as a part of natural cycle⁴⁶. Thanatos, complementing eros, stimulates her drive for life and her creativity, as Katniss timidly meeting Peeta's eyes is inspired to see: "[t]he first dandelion of the year. A bell went off in my head. I thought of the hours spent in the woods with my father and I knew how we were going to survive"⁴⁷.

This 'boy with the bread', Peeta, acquires a greater worth with the passage of time, as he constantly remains that dandelion that reminds

⁴³ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scolastic, New York, 2009, p. 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Katniss that she is not doomed. Unloved and underestimated first by the members of his own family, and later as a tribute in The Games, Peeta seeks his own ways by releasing his creativity in order to discover an exit out of the labyrinth of injustice and violence in Panem. Stemming initially from his highly personal, even individualistic desire to survive the brutality of The Games, Peeta's aspiration outgrows the narrow private concern, as he progressively becomes a symbol of resistance to cruelty that takes place in Panem. In this respect, Scott claims that "*resistance to ideological domination requires a counterideology – a negation – that will effectively provide a general normative form to the host of resistant practices invented in self-defence by any subordinate group*"⁴⁸. Peeta embodies this counter ideology, as he is the first to resist the monstrosity which Capitol ruthlessly forces the tribute to become part of. The alternative provided by Peeta, intended in self-defence initially, leads eventually to love, care and nourishment rather than cruelty and atrocity.

The union between Persephone and Hades triggers the transformational process, as together they learn to adjust to new stages of life. As in the mythical scenario, Katniss and Peeta learn to shift between various roles that the underworld experience provides for them. Relying on his secret love, but also on personal creativity, Peeta produces a new identity for the two of them in The Games, that of star-crossed lovers, an identity that makes them "*unforgettable*"⁴⁹, as they are literally on fire by sustaining the audiences expectations of burning on fire. Together they learn to seek their agency by extending the boundaries of the pre-determined identity, which is beyond the neutral coal miner construction of the Capitol. Although reluctant at first to join Peeta's game, Katniss learns to adjust herself to this experience, especially when the sustenance of life is at stake. During the time the two of them spend in the cave, which can be considered as another symbolic underworld space, she learns to explore the role of star-crossed lovers in order to nurse them both to life. As Katniss meditates, "*[o]ne kiss equals one pot of broth*"⁵⁰, but most importantly, she acknowledges once again that in her willingness to gain strength necessary to continue the fight she discovers one more chink in the fence of the Capitol, since she can act as an agency by manipulating the various modalities of power, in this case some private emotions that are devoured by the consumerist spectators from the Capitol. By apparently subjecting herself to the power of the Capitol, Katniss learns

⁴⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 66.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

to outwit them, and she also senses Haymitch's approval of her ingenuity and her life-sustaining tricks, imagining his words, "*Yes, that's what I'm looking for, sweetheart*"⁵¹.

Persephone, a goddess of transformation, is viewed metaphorically as a planted seed that decomposes in order to germinate. Like a plant that sprouts to fruition, it goes through a natural and authentic process of transformation which in its each stage might be pretty scary. This metaphor of the seed in the ground fits very well Katniss' stages of her underworld experience. In order to be optimal, fully authentic, the knowledge of *eros* is essential. So far, Katniss played with the expectations of the consumerist audience regarding her love for Peeta. This manipulative love, which is neither natural nor authentic, contrasts greatly with the genuine feeling of love, which starts to germinate, like the seed planted in the ground, especially during the period in the caves, when the two of them are extremely vulnerable. Instead of competing against each other, they learn to care for each other; instead of being suspicious of her rival, Katniss is challenged to trust him. So new are these feelings which begin to sprout in her bosom that she is shocked to admit that

*"[in] stark contrast to two nights ago, when I felt Peeta was a million miles away, I'm struck by his immediacy now. As we settle in, he pulls my head down to use his arm as a pillow; the other rests protectively over me even when he goes to sleep. No one has held me like this in such a long time. Since my father died and I stopped trusting my mother, no one else's arms have made me feel this safe"*⁵².

This authentic love and care should not be seen as a spontaneous or reckless act of two desperate young people. Peeta has a long history of secret love for Katniss, which emerges into a more mature, genuine love for a person who constantly inspires him to transform and become better. What lights Katniss up and makes her accept the challenges of *eros* is the awareness which is raised by Peeta for the first time in her life. He makes her acknowledge that one's true purpose in life is beyond the narrow desire of survival. Peeta's earlier confesses: "*I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not. (...) Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to ... to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games*"⁵³. His confession triggers her transformation through the recognition that the true survival consists in

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 298-299.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 141-142.

the survival of one's true personhood, or even humaneness. Like in Persephone's encounter with Hades that leads her to the ability to die to what she has been so far, Katniss experiences a similar revelation, as she understands what one needs to become in order to be resurrected. Completely embarrassed of what she was so far, she says: "*I bit my lip feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self*"⁵⁴.

Peeta plants the seed of an idea that will constantly inspire Katniss throughout her entire underworld experience, an idea of exploring nonviolent modes of power, which are released by exceptional integrity and reliance on virtues. This different mind-set acquired by Katniss through the connection with Peeta, allows her to adjust when confronted with life's setbacks or difficulties, and discover the ethical and virtuous self while caring for others. Through her devotion for Rue, Peeta and the people of the Districts, Katniss grows into a symbol, initially of resistance, and later of care, but most importantly she becomes a symbol of hope.

The pomegranate motif, central to Persephone myth, is completely reimaged in Collins's narrative. The repetition that establishes a level of familiarity with myth is provided by the frequent reference to berries in the underworld experience. Collins's use of this motif loses gradually the initial meaning of a passive victim who has been tricked into eating the pomegranate seeds following the abduction. The novelist reloads this motif with new significance, as Katniss frequently relies on nurturing value of berries when she is vulnerable in the arena. She also shares berries with Rue and Peeta to sustain their life. This fresh reworking of the berries as life sustaining force might be also inspired from the myth, as Persephone begins her healing process after being tricked into eating the seeds. These seeds signal a strong drive for life, love and personal fulfilment. Suzanne Collins inverts the significance of this mytheme, as she suggests that her Persephone, Katniss, has acquired sufficient wisdom to become the trickster, since she threatens the Capitol with a double suicide attempt with poisonous berries in order to save Peeta and herself. This manipulative ingenuity stems from Katniss's ethics of care that she gradually acquires during The Games, because, along with Peeta, she understands that killing is wrong. She asserts her strong desire for life and love by tricking the Capitol into believing that they "*were so madly in love [that they] weren't responsible for [their]*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

actions”⁵⁵. This “*girl-driven-crazy-by-love*”⁵⁶ trick with the poisonous berries pulled by Katniss reveals the devastating truth, that the Capitol does not really hold the strings of absolute power. Katniss’ ability to manipulate the audience’s expectations transforms her into a threat to the Capitol’s *status-quo*. From a subdued victim, Collins’s Persephone emerges as an agency, capable of unmasking the inner vulnerability that was produced as a result of President Snow’s food warfare. Katniss’s remark to Snow that “[it] must be very fragile, if a handful of berries can bring it down”⁵⁷ suggests a possible collapse of the entire system, with tremendous results for the entire Panem.

Katniss’s wisdom from now on is to explore both the lethal and nurturing powers of her berries, and to be able to choose between the identities of a she-warrior, as a *Mokingjay*, or the identity implied by more pacifist ideologies that nurture and lead to the regeneration rather than death. The mythical Persephone, involving ritual of transformation, implies a type of personality which is perpetually ready to evolve, to seek, to change, until the true identity is discovered. Katniss, like her mythical counterpart, continues her quest for her true self, especially after she understands that the survival in The Games is not enough. She emerges as a national symbol, embodying a group identity, whose actions and choices become a model for entire community. This ambiguous position confuses Katniss, as she meditates on the political significance that she has acquired, as well as on “*those berries that meant different things to different people. Love for Peeta. Refusal to give in under impossible odds. Defiance of the Capitol’s inhumanity*”⁵⁸.

As a *Mokingjay*, she is made into a symbol of revolution and of rebellion. Plutarch confesses later to Katniss that “We had to save you because you are the *Mokingjay* ...While you live, the revolution lives”⁵⁹. She is initially reluctant to assume the identity of the *Mokingjay*, but eventually gives in and accepts the plan, as she truly hopes that with “[the] bird, the pin, the song, the berries, the dress that burst into flames”⁶⁰ she would contribute to the fight for freedom. However, as in the case of berries, she understands that the spark she represents signifies different things to different people. Katniss’s identity as the *Mokingjay* is a man-made construction, meant to be consumed this time by the people of Panem. Seeing so much violence and

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁵⁷ Collins, Suzanne, *Catching Fire*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay*, Scholastic, London, 2010, p. 89.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

⁶⁰ Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*, Scholastic, New York, 2009, p. 386.

death brought by the rebelliousness in Panem makes Katniss grow aware that “[she] has been dangerous, and continues to be”⁶¹. Instead of leading the citizens of Panem out of hell, she acknowledges that she is used to maintain that hell. She understands that as long as she sustains that social and political identity, she retains the element of danger implied by her persona, as well as by her symbol.

Uncomfortable in this radical identity into which she was maneuvered, Katniss is looking for ways to escape from it. Her greatest dream is a “*harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature, grounded on a framework of ethics inviting humility as opposed to the infinite, narcissistic greed that fails to recognize any form of mutuality*”⁶². Unable to fulfil it yet, she seeks a way for this identity which would entrap her into a figure of potential threat, a figure of revolution, power and transgression. The mythical Persephone intuitively explores new choices, relying on her creativity and love for the others. Katniss, for the sake of love for others, adjusts to the new challenges of her experience. When she should publicly execute President Snow, a figure of wickedness incarnate, Katniss chooses to kill President Coin, for though she leads the resistance, she uses the same ruthless methods as her predecessor. Katniss understands that President Snow’s threat is already annihilated, whereas President Coin poses greater danger, especially to the children in Panem. Although Katniss’s solution rests on murder, as Lindsey Issov Averill claims, “*she’s not drawing on general principles like “an eye for an eye” or “killers must be killed” – she’s motivated by care instead*”⁶³. By this choice, Katniss also murders her identity related to rebelliousness, allowing a new self to be resurrected to what she should truly become, a person who cares for those in need. Lindsey Issov Averill insists that “*this time she’s caring for all the future Prims and Rues, by trying to ensure that they will live in a world where we no longer “sacrifice children’s lives to settle” our differences*”⁶⁴.

Katniss’s journey to the underworld is both painful and traumatic. No longer holding the revolutionary power, she is looking for ways to heal. Her

⁶¹ Susan Shau Ming Tan, “The Making of the Citizens and the Politics of Maturation,” *Space and Place in Hunger Games*, Edited by Deidre Anne Evans, Garriott Whitney, Elaine Jones. McFarland, 2014, p. 94.

⁶² Cansu Özge Özmen, “Global Disasters and Personal Responses in Ian McEwan’s *Solar*”, *Humanitas*, Vol. 6, Issue 12, 2018, p. 4.

⁶³ Lindsey Issov Averill, “Sometimes the World is Hungry for People Who Care,” *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, Edited by George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud. NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, 2012, p.175.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

final banishment, however, should not be viewed as a form of disempowerment. We retain from Persephone myth that the goddess is a highly mysterious and complex being that embodies both the status of the queen of the Underworld and that of the goddess of spring. Moving back and forth between Underworld and Upperworld she gains experience in shifting between multiple roles in life. Katniss, like Persephone, although devastated by her journey, gains enough wisdom and strength to adjust anew to other stages of life. The most important wisdom she gains is the discovery of her ability to heal, and thus to regenerate, by which showing a possible path to social regeneration, since she still retains the status of symbol of hope in her community. This idea of regeneration is strengthened at the end of Collins's trilogy through the images of green meadows that replaced the massacre site, the ploughed fields, the newly built factories that produce medicine, the re-opening of Peeta's family bakery, etc. The seasonal change is also reinforced by the image of the former arenas transformed into memorials and the new generation of children gaining the knowledge of Hunger Games not in the arena, but in school. As McEvoy-Levy comments, "[e]veryday peace is an ongoing negotiation with war memory and trauma and with anxiety about the future, but there is also hope"⁶⁵. This hope is also provided through the imagery of nourishment, delivered by Peeta's arrival with "a worm loaf of bread" and sharing it with Katniss when she feels mostly vulnerable as a result of war trauma⁶⁶. This image of bread that both nurtures and gives hope, symbolically suggests the beginning of the long but necessary healing process. Katniss's determination to marry a baker rather than a hunter/warrior is influenced by the new moral values of encouragement of peace, compassion and care that she acquired during her journey and she is aware that these values should find validity in their community. A beautiful reworking of the mythical scenario of Persephone emerging after descent as a goddess of corn, nourishing the community, is provided by the imagery of healing power of bread that is shared by Katniss and Peeta.

Although it takes a long journey to persuade Katniss to agree to have children, Peeta is the one who contributes to the healing of this split by his unique example of unconditional love and by his perpetual aspirations to the ideals of peace. He triggers Katniss's ability to be reborn, by giving birth to a new self and to their children, a reminder of Persephone's ritual of transformation, where the process of healing includes her capacity to

⁶⁵ McEvoy-Levy Siobhan, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures: Reading the Politics of Peacebuilding from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2018, p. 200.

⁶⁶ Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay*, Scholastic, London, 2010, p. 434.

integrate to different circumstances. Although Katniss is least comfortable with the idea of giving birth due to possible threats which may still occur in Panem, she is convinced by Peeta that they may deliver the truth about the bloody past to their children to “*make them understand in a way that will make them braver*”⁶⁷.

Peeta’s optimism can be related to their belief in restorative justice that might be implemented in their new community as an alternative to the previous form of retributive justice applied by the Capitol. Seen by Kathleen Daly as a “*justice of care*”⁶⁸, the restorative justice “*focuses on repairing the harm*” through “*dialogue and negotiation*”⁶⁹. Moreover, by withdrawing from political power and violence, they withdraw from retributive justice that constantly punishes an offence, revealing instead a new path for the creation and validation of new customs that mostly rest on the principle of restorative justice, which “*assumes that community members (...) take a more active role*”⁷⁰, essential for the social regeneration.

Conclusion

Suzanne Collins’s trilogy *The Hunger Games* explores the popular myth of Persephone in order to reveal the anxieties of societal collapse which is relevant in the contemporary world. The mechanism of the cyclical death and rebirth, inherent in the myth, contributes to the creation and validation of some new social customs and forms of justice and the extinction of the former ones. Katniss Everdeen’s journey and her traumatic experience through the Underworld could be read as an attempt to transmit the communal fears concerning politics of authority and violence, and, at the same time, the hope in the emergence of a new social identity that would feed the communal hunger for justice by using some newly acquired and acknowledged values, such as compassion, care, love, and nourishment. If myth can be considered crucial for the establishment of a social identity, Collins’ narrative produces different visions of identity, among others the one suggested by Artemis myth. However, the novelist states her explicit choice by supporting the identity revealed by Persephone myth, as it delivers an example of human solidarity, care and love, which goes beyond any social or political divisions of the consumerist capitalism, and sustains the primary nourishing function, associated with private and social regeneration.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁶⁸ Kathleen Daly, “Restorative Justice: The Real Story”, *Punishment & Society*, Vol. 4 Issue 1, 2002, p. 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

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