

Hunger: Girls Bite Back, Wanting to Fulfill Their Appetites

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Girls' bodies are commodities in today's cultural landscape. This is evident when turning on the television and viewing programming such as *16 and Pregnant* and *American Idol*, among many others, in addition to the commercials that run in between. Girls flounce about, generally scantily clad, and viewers consume them. Significant sub-genres in the pornography industry are devoted to young women in pigtails and schoolgirl outfits who are "barely legal," and here there is no pretense about the purpose of the girl's body. I am reminded of the words of John Lennon and Paul McCartney: "She was just seventeen/ and you know what I mean/ The way she looked was way beyond compare." This 1964 hit stands out because then, as now, the audience did, in fact, know what the Beatles meant: there's something inexplicably sexy and desirable about a teenaged girl. It is especially problematic that society hungers for the bodies of adolescent girls, but the girls themselves are not encouraged to have their own appetites. It is at the intersection of society's simultaneous hunger for girls and insistence that they not have their own hunger alongside ambivalent expressions about appetite from girls themselves where girls are able to find resistance and agency.

Examination of young adult novels illustrates the cultural script that young girls should not be hungry for either food or sex. This is especially significant since YA literature is a "genre that portrays and is consumed by a young and primarily female readership," so girls are seeing themselves on the page and learning, to some extent, how they are supposed to behave (Younger 1). As Roberta Trites and Beth Younger¹ discuss, young adult novels often portray the young women's sexuality as a menacing and overwhelmingly negative component of their lives. For young girls, "sexual desire is often viewed as a primitive, taboo drive that must be regulated," and the pregnancy problem genre is widespread (Younger 2).² Additionally, girls are not typically portrayed as having notable appetites for food. Quite to the contrary, a girl on the pages is more likely to have an eating disorder than to take pleasure in food. I have chosen to examine the types of hunger found in "Real Women Have Curves" and *The Hunger Games* trilogy in order to compare the portrayal of girls and their various appetites in popular Chicana and Anglo-American YA literature. I connect the significance of hunger to the girls' sense of agency and reclamation of their bodies and explore similarities in appetites for food and for sex.

Agency can be found when marshaling one's appetites. Both protagonists, Ana and Katniss, find power during intermittent moments of rebellion against the dominant

¹ in *Disturbing the Universe and Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in YA Literature*, respectively

² The pregnancy problem novel depicts young women becoming pregnant the first time she has intercourse; pregnancy is a punishment for sex in these typically sex-negative, didactic novels.

culture's expectations of them. (Ana is expected to walk a line of assimilation between dominant culture and her Chicana home life while Katniss has to survive several Hunger Games and their aftermaths.) These moments of rebellion exist at the intersection of society's appetite for young girls and the appetites of the girls themselves. An apt symbol for this interstitial tension is the *vagina dentata*, a liminal, border-crossing symbol for both mouth and vagina. The *vagina dentata* is a widespread, obscure, and fearsome motif primarily from American Indian folklore in which a man is unable to have intercourse with a woman due to her toothed vagina (Leach 1152). This symbol shows men's widespread "fear that in intercourse with women they may be castrated, that they may be laughed at, that they may die. The woman's power must therefore be neutralized by 'pulling the teeth' from her vagina or by killing her first and then remaking her as a nonthreatening, procreative partner" (Raitt 418). Society tends to fear women and women's sexuality, and yet is simultaneously obsessed with what it fears. Many men are drawn to women's sexual organs, but they have longstanding trepidation of those very organs. Most women are conditioned not to discuss their appetites forthrightly, and adolescent girls, who are on the outskirts of human sexuality since they are recently developed, are deemed even more desirable but even less able to take ownership of their appetites. Thus, I argue the necessity of a more empowering iteration of the archetype of the hungry, toothed vagina that represents a woman with her own sexual drives and appetites.

Reframing the symbol of the *vagina dentata* is one way to understand and to embrace the liminal connections between different types of female hunger and avenues of resistance for young women because it connotes hunger for both food and sex. In this chapter, I will utilize the *vagina dentata* as an overarching metaphor for the resistance of the young female protagonists of "Real Women Have Curves" and *The Hunger Games* because it illustrates how girls can "bite back" and gain agency. I will begin by examining the relationship between power and generic conventions in both texts, and then I will discuss the function of class in both. Following that, I will explore hunger as a trope. I will contrast society's hunger for young female bodies in the texts with the girls' agency. Then, I will inquire into the relationship between food, bodies, and sexuality in both texts by delving in-depth into the types of hunger apparent in "Real Women Have Curves" and *The Hunger Games*.

Power and (Dis)enfranchisement

Recent YA literary texts show hungry young women utilizing their bodies in various ways to achieve their goals. Somewhere in between children's and young adult literature³ is Josefina López's 1990 play, "Real Women Have Curves (RWHC)," which is

³ Regarding YA literature, as Perry Nodelman asserts in *The Hidden Adult*, most scholars are hard-pressed to define children's literature—Nodelman himself finally concedes that a pragmatic working definition of the genre is any book found on the child reader list of a publishing house (146). Another more ambiguous definition of young adult

listed by one publisher for the “undergraduate/scholarly” audience, an audience that exists in the borderlands between young adult and adult literature. The play features a Chicana high school senior’s struggle to take charge of her identity: Ana is a bright student who is forced to work in a sewing factory one summer while saving money for university. She and her mother, who also works in the factory, clash over the role of women, sex, and tradition as Ana struggles to express her creativity and her ambition. López co-wrote the screenplay for the 2002 HBO independent movie of the same name, though I will focus here on reading the play that centers on the coming of age of Ana, the protagonist.

As Ana emerges into a more authentic selfhood during her last year of high school, the last year under her parents’ roof, she finds herself in almost perpetual conflict with various apparatuses of power. The presence of these apparatuses of power merits further discussion since power is a central motif of this play. In “RWHC,” Ana’s mother, Carmen, continually attempts to regulate Ana’s subversive voice and her new generational independence, which clearly threatens Carmen’s traditional paradigm and her old-world Mexican universe. “RWHC” is an interesting blend of bildungsroman and Entwicklungsroman⁴ since the majority of the play centers on a disenfranchised Ana railing against her mother’s traditionalism, her family’s lack of signifying power in U.S. dominant cultural economy, and ubiquitous societal demands for all women to maintain the rail-thin perfect female body. During the last scene, Ana finds community with some of the women, but it is only in the postscript to the play where Ana becomes enfranchised into the adult world by moving to New York alone, working, and attending university. Ana’s enfranchisement feels “unfinished”— it is not acted out on the page or the stage; it is merely mentioned in a few lines of voiceover reflection from an older Ana after the final scene— which leaves this play as categorizable as both bildungsroman and Entwicklungsroman.

Similarly to “RWHC,” The Hunger Games series is also a blend of bildungsroman and Entwicklungsroman in which struggles for power are central. In these dystopian novels, Katniss, the teenage protagonist, lives in a post-apocalyptic North America in which one overfed district, the Capitol, governs the outlying districts, which are in varying states of poverty and starvation. The Capitol exerts its control over the districts by forcing them to send randomly selected children to fight to the death in an arena

literature, a subset of children’s literature for the older teenaged audience, is any literature that is about teenagers or is read by teenagers

⁴ In postmodern YA fiction, the individual character is both comprised by institutional forces and compromised by them. In *Disturbing the Universe* Trites maintains that there are Foucauldian above/below matrices of power at work in the development of the *Entwicklungsroman* genre, which she takes great care to define as a subgenre of bildungsroman, the classic coming-of-age tale. Trites asserts that the *Entwicklungsroman*, the novel of growth or development over a truncated period of time that does not culminate in the adolescent’s enfranchisement into the adult world, would not have developed if adolescents did not possess a threatening power that adults felt the need to regulate.

during annual Hunger Games.⁵ Trites's interpretation of the importance of Foucauldian above/below matrices of power at work in the development of the Entwicklungsroman genre is once again central; President Snow is terrified of Katniss's power, of which even she is unaware. Unknowingly, she begins becoming the symbol of a revolution as she volunteers to take her beloved sister's place in the Hunger Games. Snow's authoritarian apparatus of power is brutal and seemingly omnipotent, yet it can be unhinged by one determined young woman.

Also similarly to "RWHC," Katniss is not enfranchised into the adult world until the brief epilogue of the last book, which takes place several years in the future when Katniss is uneasily married with children. Both young women are community activists and rabble-rousers, and it is worth noting that each character preserves her rebel outsider status throughout the entire text, but the authors wrap up the loose ends and provide a more socially acceptable existence at the end. In this sense, the authors remove the teeth from the *vaginas dentatas* of their protagonists only in the last few pages of the texts. Ana goes to university, and Katniss marries Peeta and has children. Perhaps López consciously counteracted Latina traditional house doctrine by sending her female protagonist to pursue her education whereas Collins did not have this additional ethnic expectation to address. Race and ethnicity are not connected to socioeconomic struggles in *The Hunger Games* series in the way that they are in "RWHC." Collins mentions that the inhabitants of District 11 have darker skin than those of other districts, but the descriptions of Katniss's family and most of the main characters fit descriptions of Anglo-Americans. Race in *The Hunger Games* is therefore treated from a dominant culture perspective while minority ethnic experience is at the center of "RWHC." Class is a motivating and limiting factor for both young women as both of them strive for better lives available to those in higher classes. Ana's reality mirrors the real lives of many Chicana young people while Katniss's is a hodgepodge of myth, gladiator-era Rome, and a futuristic imaginary dystopia. In that sense, "RWHC" seems more directly applicable as a political piece. Oppression of Chicanas is an actual component of the real world, whereas oppression by the Capitol in *The Hunger Games* requires analysis to sort out its applicability in our world.

Hunger as a Trope

Working-class people are often forced to maintain a vigilant focus on food in order to assure their survival. Food and the characters' relationship to it are central to both "RWHC" and *The Hunger Games*, although the starvation present in "RWHC" is self-imposed rather than levied by the government. "RWHC" offers readers and viewers of the play the opportunity to delve into whichever aspect most intrigues them; I have chosen to investigate further the axis of gender and, in particular, the function of hunger

⁵ The actual hunger of unwilling participants of these "games" is used to pit teenagers against one another to create entertainment for the audience of the Capitol. The "games" are viewed as far less entertaining to starving members of the outlying districts as they watch their own young people killed for sport.

as a trope for the female characters. Three types of hunger are predominant in the play: hunger for food, for sex, and for knowledge/self-expression. Investigating the relationship among these three types of hunger lends insight into the complexity of the character of Ana and, by extension, the lives of many 'New Mestizas' in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.⁶ Appetites are driving forces in *The Hunger Games* also, where three types of hunger are predominant: hunger for food and survival, for love and sex, and for justice.

Society's Hunger for Young Female Bodies: Commodification and Agency

In "RWHC," Rosali and Ana exist on opposite ends of the continuum of abject Chicana bodies: Ana exhibits self-pride in her larger body while Rosali pines to fit into the size 7 dresses that the factory makes for Bloomingdales. Ana eats and Rosali doesn't, though we know by the growling stomach of the latter character that she experiences intense hunger, despite her protestations that drinking eight glasses of water a day helps her not feel hungry (32). Rosali's desire for a socially acceptable, thin body outweighs her desire to eat. The character's anorexia doesn't appear to be deeply shocking either to the other women in the play or to the viewer. Carmen even asks Rosali for the details of her secret diet so that she can try it to lose weight as well. A woman starving herself to achieve a perfect body is status quo since, according to Maggie Helwig, "we have normalized anorexia and bulimia, even turned them into an industry" (199). However, this is not, Helwig continues, "just a problem of proportion. This is the nightmare of consumerism acted out in women's bodies" (199). Women want to consume food to nourish their bodies, but they are discouraged from doing so; instead, they are encouraged to spend copious amounts of money on perfect clothing and beauty products for their, ideally, shrinking bodies. This covert commodification of Ana's body in "RWHC," which is marked as larger than desirable and as ethnic, is similar to the overt commodification of Katniss's body. Designers do not literally attempt to inscribe Ana's body as the designers do in *The Hunger Games*, but she feels the inscription of designers who make clothes for size 2 women, along with the inscription of her mother's projected self-hatred.

Along the same lines, in *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo asserts that eating disorders aren't anomalous but are continuous with the experience of being female in this culture; she sees women using eating disorders as an attempt to create a body that will speak for the self in a meaningful and powerful way. Helwig furthers this line of thinking: "To be skeletally, horribly thin makes one strong statement. It says, I am hungry. What I have been given is not sufficient, not real, not true, not acceptable. I am starving. To reject food, whether by refusing it or by vomiting it back, says simply, I will not consume. I will not participate, This is not real" (201). Rosali can be seen as rejecting her surroundings to some extent; she is poor, she toils endlessly, and she never

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa coined this term in *Borderlands* to envision her ideal of a Chicana identity that is innovative and that pushes boundaries, encompassing multiple identities while excluding none of them

gets ahead. Perhaps she starves herself away from the Latina body ideal, which is more accepting of larger hips and thighs, in order to meld with a more upwardly mobile Anglo “American Dream.”⁷ Although studies show that Latina/o culture can be more accepting of having curves and being “thick” or “buen cuerpo,” Latinas have similar occurrences of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction as their Anglo peers, a phenomenon which is clearly reflected in this play (Schooler). As Maria Figueroa puts it: “To become beautiful one must conform to the systematic formation of beauty, which historically in Western culture has been a ‘normative’ white beauty” (266). Though thickness has historically been valued by Latino/as ‘normative,’ white beauty standards are inescapable. New Mestizas, like Ana, living in the borderlands of Anglo mainstream culture and Mexican traditionalism face unique challenges when crafting an identity that will serve them.

Even though she doesn’t have an eating disorder, Ana also speaks powerfully through her body. Susie Orbach discusses the phenomenon of women speaking through their bodies, noting that food and body-image issues are “the language of women’s inner experience,” and she argues that “food is a metaphor through which women speak of their inner experiences. Until we have a real voice in the body politic, individual women are likely to use their bodies as their mouthpieces to express the forbidden and secluded feelings we carry inside” (qtd. in Heller and Moran 26). A scene illustrating Ana’s use of her body as a mouthpiece occurs when Ana’s mother asks her, yet again, “Why don’t you lose weight? Last time you lost weight you were so thin and beautifuller,” Ana responds that she likes herself the way she is (74). The other women chime in that Ana is pretty as she is, but Carmen will not drop the subject, insisting that her daughter needs to make herself as attractive as possible in order to catch a husband. Ana replies, “I do want to lose weight. But part of me doesn’t because my weight says to everyone, ‘Fuck you!’... It says, ‘How dare you try to define me and tell me what I have to be and look like!’ So I keep it on. I don’t want to be a sex object” (74). For Ana, her body speaks. Her weight speaks. When she is silenced by school, work, parents, and society, she fights back from below, daring to disturb the universe, as Trites would say. Indeed, Ana’s universe is more disturbed by a larger body than is Rosali’s by a diminishing body because Ana’s refusal to attempt to have the right sized body, and by extension a husband, children, and a happy American life, is a conscious rebellion against everything that she is supposed to want to attain. Josefina López addressed this very issue when discussing the film *Real Women Have Curves*, though the same treatment applies to her play:

Films have the positive power to inspire and transform people, but they also have the ability to make little children believe that there is something wrong with them because they are not the right color and little girls to believe they are not the right size and should do whatever it takes to be thin and beautiful ‘so you can be loved,’ as the song goes. (7)

⁷ c.f. Deborah Schooler’s 2008 article, “Real Women Have Curves: A Longitudinal Investigation of TV and the Body Image Development of Latina Adolescents”

Ana is railing against this message and claiming agency in her own life.

Ana appears to be more self-possessed than Rosali. Though Ana is still in the process of self-discovery, she is not necessarily searching “for reality, for the irreducible need that lies beyond all imaginary satisfactions,” which is what Rosali is doing with her self-imposed starvation (Helwig 200). As much as Bordo and others reject Cartesian dualism and the equation of women with body and men with mind, these associations are engrained in Western society. Therefore, it is women with eating disorders who embody the “monster,” by acting out “the equation of food and sin, who deny hunger and yet embody endless, unfulfilled appetite” (Helwig 202). Good girls aren’t supposed to be hungry, but still they must eat.

Overtly, Katniss does not fixate on her body in the manner that Ana from “RWHC” does. Katniss is a tomboy with an athletic, semi-starved body, whereas Ana has a curvier body. The covert message here seems to be that thin, white, bodies are standard and desirable; therefore, they necessitate little commentary. On the other hand, non-white, larger bodies demand commentary in a society where they are not accepted as normative. Although Katniss’s body is not described in detail, the bodies of others are traded as commodities. Sexual appetites have an uglier side in Panem, and it is the well-off citizens who have the means to exploit the bodies of the poor. Cray, the head Peacekeeper in District 12, regularly has dozens of starving women line up outside his house hoping to be paid to have sex with him. He is described as salivating over these women, driving home the link between sexuality and food. Katniss reflects that if she had been older when her father died, she would have probably been one of these sad, hungry women trying to feed her family. Instead, she learns to hunt, and she is able to be a predator instead of prey. In this way, she is able to reclaim some of her agency as a lower-class female and to invert gender roles by becoming a hunter-provider. Finnick, another Hunger Games champion, is forced by President Snow to sell his body to wealthy citizens in the Capitol. He describes his sexual slavery in terms of the “strange sexual appetites” of the people who are eager to devour him (MJ 170). Katniss’s pure, intimate encounters with Peeta stand in stark contrast to these exchanges that treat the body as a commodity to be bought, used, and discarded.

Her relationship with Peeta notwithstanding, Katniss’s body is continually commodified throughout the novels in a manner that, though exaggerated, highlights the commodification of adolescent female bodies like Ana’s from “RWHC,” along with teenage girls in general. Katniss’s body belongs to the Capitol from the time she is born since it is the Capitol who keeps her and her community poor and hungry. However, their ownership of and ability to brand her body becomes much more clear once Katniss is selected as a tribute in the Hunger Games. At that point, she is assigned to a committee of stylists who follow her throughout the novels, manipulating her body in order to impact various audiences. Cinna, her sympathetic chief stylist, begins her makeover with flair: after years of terrible coal-related costumes for the opening

ceremonies of the Hunger Games, Cinna designs dramatic outfits for Katniss and Peeta which make them look like they are being engulfed by flames, although they also resemble food being cooked. This look makes an impression on the citizens of the Capitol, which means that Katniss and Peeta are in a better position to be sponsored throughout the Games. So begins Katniss's moniker as "the girl who was on fire," which I see as representative of the plight of adolescent girls. The metaphor of fire as a consuming and catalytic force is used throughout the novels: Katniss starts a revolution, but she is unaware that she is doing so. Katniss is on fire, but she does not have consistent agency in that role. The power that she does have is what Lili Wilkinson terms "the power of the Watched, [which] lies in her ability to influence the Watchers" (71). Reminiscent of Trites's explanation of the ubiquity of Foucauldian above-below matrices of power in YA fiction, Katniss wields immense power from her subordinate position as the watched pawn of the Games, but she is consistently unaware of the ramifications of her actions. Fire, like Katniss, and like adolescent girls in general, is a powerful force that is difficult to contain and that lacks focused and willful agency. The Hunger Games critic Renee Curry says that "girls are continuously resisting both patriarchy's constraints as well as the constraints of feminist portrayals of them as victims," but I argue that ignoring the pervasive component of victimization and commodification of girls is dangerous (97). Resistance is present and possible for girls, but their resistance is multivalent and complex as it is found, like the *vagina dentata*, in the interstices of their individual appetites and society's appetite for them.

Although the fire costume is a pivotal part of Katniss's image, Cinna and the stylists help manipulate Katniss's image in several other key scenes as well. For her first on-screen interview with Caesar Flickerman, Katniss is clad in a dress which appears, when she stands and twirls on Cinna's signal, like a shimmery fire. This cements the connection for the audience between the girl on fire from the opening ceremonies and Katniss Everdeen, the tribute who is in need of their support in order to survive. Then, in an even more crucial moment after Katniss returns from the Games, Cinna dresses her like a little girl in a soft pink dress and minimal make-up in order to counteract the damage she has done by defying the Gamemakers to save herself and Peeta. Katniss's "cultural 'value' as young female body remains crucial," as does the importance of the young female body and its concomitant "engagement in or denial of sex," for girls in general (Saxton xi). Cinna understands that Katniss needs to appear like an innocent child for the purpose of convincing President Snow that she did not willfully undermine his Games and his regime. After Katniss behaves shrewdly, it is important to reestablish her status as a child. As Jacqueline Rose asserts, desire and fetishization of the child, wanting to contain the child or remain the child, are emblematic of adults' desire for the child and hope that the child can return our innocence to us (8-9). Even though President Snow is not convinced of Katniss's innocence, he wants her to restore innocence to the Capitol and the districts and to stop the rebellion she is fueling.

Since she is ultimately unsuccessful at stopping the rebellion, Katniss's body is appropriated once again by the rebels as their unifying symbol: the mockingjay. Cinna has a hand in this changing of the guard; he designs one final costume to make Katniss appear like a strong, beautiful bird in flight. Katniss is not completely oblivious to the way outside forces attempt to manipulate her as she thinks about Coin, the leader of the rebellion:

Another force to contend with. Another power player who has decided to use me as a piece in her games, although things never seem to go according to plan. First there were the Gamemakers, making me their star and then scrambling to recover from that handful of poisonous berries. Then President Snow, trying to use me to put out the flames of rebellion, only to have my every move become inflammatory. Next, the rebels ensnaring me in the metal claw that lifted me from the arena, designating me to be their Mockingjay, and then having to recover from the shock that I might not want the wings. And now Coin, with her fistful of precious nukes and her well-oiled machine of a district, finding it's even harder to groom a Mockingjay than to catch one. (MJ 59)

Many critics portray Katniss as someone who is out of touch with herself and clueless about the impact she has on others, but I disagree with this assessment of her. In this same passage, Katniss discusses how she has "an agenda of [her] own," which, at this point, involves ensuring immunity for Peeta and the other Hunger Games participants who have been captured by the Capitol. Although she does not always understand the far-reaching implications of her actions, Katniss has some agency. She is aware of her appetites, and she takes action to care for herself and those she loves. She is cognizant of outside forces attempting to appropriate her, and she finds the resistance she can on a case-by-case basis.

Hunger for Food in Both Texts: A Closer Look

In "RWHC," the text itself is framed by food, and a majority of the scenes begin and/or end with a discussion of food and the reality of the women's hunger. The opening scene depicts Carmen and Ana entering the sewing factory and Carmen placing her lunch on the table before giving Ana money to go to the bakery to buy pan dulce for the seamstresses. Ana doesn't want to run the errand, and her mother responds: "That's good, at least you won't get fatter. . . I only tell you for your own good. Bueno, I'll go get the bread myself, but you better not get any when I bring it" (3). The first lines of the play encapsulate the mother/daughter relationship: Carmen, who is overweight herself, constantly criticizes her daughter's appetite and body. Also in this scene, as in many that follow, a level of humor is present when discussing food and bodies. Here, though, it is the reader who will laugh rather than Ana herself.

The communal aspect of food is highlighted later in the same scene when the other workers enter the factory. As each enters, Carmen informs the worker that she has

brought her famous mole to share. The first seamstress, Pancha, is interested, but the second worker, Rosali, refuses since she is on a diet in her attempt to be a smaller size. Maria Figueroa notes that food functions in the play on both an individual and a collective level:

The connection between food and survival becomes a central motif existing in conjunction with their abject bodies, labor and material production. The act of eating or not eating occurs in the same space as the act of working and sacrificing of the body. Ironically, although the body (of each individual and of the group) seeks to sustain a collective energy for production, food becomes salvation for some, and destruction for others. (276)

Food is Doña Carmen's manifestation of love, social connection, and control, and Ana's battleground in a war for independence. It is Rosali's source of self-destruction: her anorexia is discovered by the audience toward the end of the play.

Food is a consistent, communal, and more primal motivator in *The Hunger Games* as well since, in District 12, the majority of the population exists at near starvation levels at all times. Some Peacekeepers and higher ranking officials are better fed, but citizens die regularly of starvation, although that is never listed as their official cause of death. Katniss remembers her mother, a healer, diagnosing wasted children with undernourishment and prescribing "what the parents can't give. More food" (CF 80). While she is touring the other districts, Katniss sees that poverty and starvation are rampant in most of them as well. During the Games, she learns that the people from District 11, the agricultural district, are not allowed to eat what they harvest and are subject to brutal enforcement of food restrictions. President Snow keeps the majority of his populace in a state of submission by default since most of them are too malnourished to foment rebellion. As is the case in the world around us, hunger in Panem is not a result of scarcity of food. Rather, hunger mirrors reality as being caused by "differential access to scarce resources and power" (Jenkins et al. 824).⁸ There is enough food for all citizens, but not all citizens have the power to access the food.

A formative experience in Katniss's life involves her near death from starvation and her subsequent hunger for both food and survival after her father is killed in a mine explosion. Her mother suffers from a psychotic break that puts her in a near catatonic trance, and she is completely incapable of caring for or even acknowledging her two young daughters. This type of hunger is more immediate and more desperate than the self-imposed hunger of some of the characters in "RWHC." Katniss, only 11 years old at the time, tries to keep up appearances to avoid having herself and her beloved younger sister sent to a notoriously abusive community home, but she does not have much luck. On one particularly bleak day, after having eaten only boiled water with mint leaves for three days straight, Katniss unsuccessfully attempts to sell some of Prim's old baby

⁸ c.f. "Military Famine, Human Rights, and Child Hunger: A Cross-National Analysis, 1990-2000" by J. Craig Jenkins et al.

clothes for food money. Wandering desperately through town, she then tries to scavenge in the bakery dumpster, but she is driven off by the baker's mean-spirited wife. This could have been the end of the heroine who was destined for greatness if not for the intervention of the boy with the bread. Katniss partially collapses due to hunger and hopelessness when Peeta Mellark emerges from the bakery, a red weal on his cheek, followed by the echoes of a screaming mother chastising him for burning the bread. Peeta throws loaves of hearty bread at Katniss's feet. Katniss grabs the bread and hides it under her father's hunting jacket, "clinging to life" and mindful of Peeta's "enormous kindness" (HG 31). From that point forward, Peeta is consistently linked with bread in Katniss's mind. She continually refers to him as the boy with the bread when she calls him to mind throughout the course of the novels, having thoughts like, "I do not want to lose the boy with the bread" (HG 297). Bread and Peeta, Peeta and bread: Peeta saves Katniss from desperate hunger at a crucial moment in her life.⁹

Peeta gives Katniss the bread of life and the bread of hope. Katniss's pivotal encounter with him leads her to the revelation that she can hunt and gather in the forbidden woods to provide food for her family. After eating the delicious bread for dinner and for breakfast the next day, Katniss goes to school, passes Peeta with a swollen, black eye in the halls, and then later sees him staring at her across the school yard. After breaking eye contact with Peeta, Katniss glances down and sees the first dandelion of the season growing at her feet. She suddenly remembers gathering dandelions and other edible plants with her dad, and that night she and her family eat dandelion salad along with the bread. Katniss recalls: "To this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the dandelion that reminded me that I was not doomed" (HG 32). The next day, Katniss gathers the courage to go under the district's boundary fence and into the woods where she remembers hunting with her father. She finds the bow and arrow he made her and kills a rabbit, the sight of which begins to pull her mother out of her months-long trance. For Katniss's family, "the woods became our savior," but Katniss never loses sight of Peeta, her first savior (HG 51). She feels that she'll never be able to get over owing him for the bread in their childhood (HG 293). Peeta serves as a catalyst to ease Katniss's hunger for food and to trigger her hunger for survival.

Bread is a food laden with significance, both in the *Hunger Games* series and in culture at large. Although it doesn't hold the ethnic marking of mole and other traditional Mexican foods prevalent in "RWHC," bread does maintain cultural and communal connotative values. In addition to its ongoing implication for Katniss and Peeta, bread takes center stage several other times in the novels. In *Catching Fire*, escaping rebels show Katniss a wafer of bread with a mockingjay, her symbol during the Hunger Games and later the symbol of the rebellion, emblazoned on it. This bread shows rebels who is on their side, and it can be eaten in a moment if its discovery would

⁹ Of course, Peeta (pita) is also a type of bread

bring harm to the carrier. During the Hunger Games and the Quarter Quell themselves, bread is used as a meaning-laden gift for the tributes. In the arena, after she allies herself with sweet Rue, attempts to save the younger girl's life, and then sings to her as she dies and covers her with flowers after another tribute kills her, Katniss receives an expensive gift of bread easily identifiable as being a product of District 11, Rue's district, from the impoverished but appreciative citizens there. During the next games, certain numbers of loaves of bread are sent to Katniss's group of tributes as a code to tell them at what time the final rebellion will occur. District 12's tender wedding ritual, which Peeta falsely says he and Katniss have completed in a bid to win their safety, involves the new couple lighting their first fire together in their home, toasting some bread, and sharing it. Additionally, the name of the post-apocalyptic country in which the characters reside is Panem, which the reader later learns, if s/he didn't previously know, is the Latin word for bread. At the end of the series, Plutarch Heavensbee, Head Gamemaker turned rebel leader, explains the metaphor to Katniss: "In the Capitol, all they've known is Panem et Circenses. . . It's a saying from thousands of years ago. . . [that] translates into 'Bread and Circuses.' The writer was saying that in return for full bellies and entertainment, his people had given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power" (MJ 223). Katniss realizes that "that's what the districts are for. To provide the bread and circuses" for the overindulged citizens of the Capitol (MJ 224). The Hunger Games serve as an integral part of the circuses which are needed to distract Panem's citizens from the corruption of its leader.

Hunger for Sex in Both Texts

Similarly to their unwritten mandate to deny hunger and desire for food, good girls are supposed to maintain an acceptable level of sexual desirability without ever actually desiring or having sex themselves. Throughout "RWHC," there are numerous instances of the conflation of two types of hunger: for food and for sex. This conflation illustrates the applicability of the *vagina dentata* as guiding motif. For example, in the first scene, while the women talk about whether or not they will partake of Carmen's mole, Ana laughs when her mother starts complaining about her own body. Carmen angrily turns the attention back to Ana's body, grabbing Ana's breasts and proclaiming, "When I was your age I wasn't as fat as you. And look at your chichis . . . They must weigh five pounds each" (7). Ana's large breasts, noticeable symbols of her emerging sexuality, her sexual desirability, and her potential status as a mother, are singled out as exemplars of her too-fat body in another exchange that might cause the audience to chuckle out of discomfort because they identify with the daughter's humiliation. Appetites for food and sexuality are juxtaposed to highlight their similarities.

As explored previously, Ana attempts to enter the signifying economy by inscribing meaning on her body, and this meaning contains her various appetites. Reminiscent of Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One*, Ana has two sets of lips, like the *vagina dentata*, and two corresponding appetites: a horizontal and a vertical one,

although her sexuality in the play is much more understated than in the movie. The film devotes a significant amount of time to Ana's choice to lose her virginity with a classmate who is preparing to leave for college, but in the play it is her older sister, Estela, rather than Ana, who has a romantic interest. During one scene, Estela sees the man she's interested in, nicknamed "Tormento," washing his car outside the shop, and she quickly primps before running outside to try to talk to him. She puts perfume on three different spots on her body in case Tormento comes into physical contact with her, and Ana mocks each step of Estela's beauty ritual. First Estela sprays her wrist in case Tormento hugs her, saying what she's doing in Spanish while Ana translates and mimicks the gesture in front of the other women. Then the elder sister sprays her neck in case she is kissed; finally, she sprays under her skirt "por si se pasa," which means in case he goes under her skirt (9). Ana translates this as "And here in case he . . . you know what" (9). Ana is uncomfortable directly translating this phrase as she did the two previous ones, possibly because she doesn't want to discuss her sister's sexuality in front of this group of women.

Since she is the youngest woman present, Ana is shielded from the older women's uncensored discussion of sex. In one scene, Carmen waits until her daughter has gone outside to the lonchera, the lunch truck, to get them food before bringing out a "dirty book" she says she found in her garage. The book, *Two Hundred Sexual Positions Illustrated*, has one picture of a large woman having sex, and the women express varying levels of shock and disgust at the fact that an overweight woman is photographed nude. Like most women in U.S. society, they are conditioned to be disgusted by larger women's bodies and to believe that big women can't and shouldn't desire sex themselves or be desired by men. When Ana arrives with the food, the women hide the book from her. Pancha says, "We don't want to pervert you" and Carmen objects to Ana seeing the book because she's "too young to be looking at these things" (28). Ana retorts: "Fine. You've seen them once, you've seen it all," which horrifies her mother (28). This begins an open conversation about sex where Ana assures all the women that she knows more than they do about the act, not because she's experienced it but because she reads a lot. Ana challenges the women to ask her any question about sex that they've always wanted answered, and they are all tempted to take her up on it. Rosali finally asks Ana about masturbation, but Carmen ends the Q&A by invoking the father: "¡Híjole! If your Apá [dad] were to hear you...¡Híjole!" (29). Again in this scene, appetites for food and sex are juxtaposed as the women chismean about sex on their lunch break. Interestingly, in this scene, Ana, the young and supposedly sheltered member of the group, becomes the sage on the topic since she has read more about it than the others.

In *The Hunger Games*, bodies are often overtly ignored while sexuality is treated largely as a commodity. Katniss often hungers for love, but she very rarely desires sex. Clearly, a link exists between hunger, the injustice of her life, and Katniss's decision not to marry or to have children. She does not hunger for sexual pleasure in the manner of

many YA protagonists because she is too occupied with survival.¹⁰ In the first pages of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss declares her decision not to have children by musing, “Who would fill those mouths that are always asking for more?” (9). She can barely keep herself, her mother, and her younger sister alive, and she understands that life becomes increasingly difficult the more mouths that are added to a family. She also refuses to send any future children to the Reaping, and since not having children is the only way to ensure this, she vows several times throughout the novels never to have them. Promising not to bring children into an unjust world is one way Katniss is able to exercise agency in a life where agency is not often possible. Katniss is closed off to love while she, at the same time, hungers for love and affection.

Though she hungers for love, Katniss does not kiss a boy for the first time until she kisses Peeta during the Hunger Games. Kissing is the extent of sexual acts detailed since sexuality is largely in shadow in this series. Katniss initiates this first kiss primarily because she is pretending to be deeply in love with him in order to win gifts necessary for survival from sponsors of the Games, but she also leans forward to kiss Peeta to interrupt him from saying his goodbyes to her in case he dies of his infected leg wound. Since it is her first kiss, Katniss is aware that it should have some meaning to her, but all she thinks about is how hot Peeta’s lips are because of his fever. This first moment of affection and physical contact is also linked with Katniss’s and Peeta’s near starvation at this point in the games; immediately after the kiss, a gift of broth arrives. Katniss understands: “Haymitch couldn’t be sending me a clearer message. One kiss equals one pot of broth” (HG 261). Her body is a commodity, and she can choose to engage in physical contact with Peeta to sell the audience the love story in order to feed herself. Katniss has never been in love, though, so her actions are a performance of love she remembers her mother and father displaying. At this point in the novels, she cares about Peeta on some level, but she does not love him romantically.

However, it is Peeta, the boy with the bread, who causes Katniss to feel her first stirrings of sexual hunger. Food and sexuality are linked, which again calls to mind the ravenous, toothed vagina image. The scene begins again with a performance on Katniss’s part: after Peeta sincerely begs her not to die on his behalf, she, “startled by his intensity but recogniz[ing] an excellent opportunity for getting food,” tries to give a good performance so that the sponsors will be moved to send more food to the pair (HG 297). While she is acting, the idea of losing Peeta hits Katniss, and she realizes that she really does care for him and want him with her. The moment shifts for her, and she wants to block the rest of this conversation “from the prying eyes of Panem. Even if it means losing food” (HG 298). She and Peeta are honestly expressing their feelings for one another, and they share the first kiss that they’re both completely cognizant of since this is the first kiss they’ve shared where neither one of them is feverish or freshly injured. Katniss realizes that “this is the first kiss where I actually feel stirring inside my chest.

¹⁰ According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, if a person is devoted to hunger and thirst (first level), s/he will not be able to progress to the third level dealing with love and belonging.

Warm and curious. This is the first kiss that makes me want another” (HG 298). This is the first time that Katniss hungers for anyone sexually. That night, she curls up inside Peeta’s arms in the cold cave, and she realizes that no one’s arms have made her feel this safe since her father was killed. Shortly thereafter, her hunger pangs intrude on the moment. During the Quarter Quell, after another emotional conversation in which they both try to sacrifice themselves for the other, Katniss kisses Peeta and “feel[s] that thing again;” the thing she felt during her first meaningful kiss with him (CF 352). This time, she realizes that “instead of satisfying me, the kisses have the opposite effect, of making my need greater. I thought I was something of an expert on hunger, but this is an entirely new kind” (CF 352, 3). Katniss learns to hunger for intimacy with Peeta, but needing another person in this way is confusing and unsettling for her. Physical hunger, emotional reassurance, and sexual hunger are integrally linked in Katniss’s life.

Hunger for Knowledge, Self-Expression, and Justice

Since Ana in “RWHC” values her mind and body, her hunger for knowledge and her hunger to express herself through both written and spoken words are driving forces of the narrative. Throughout the play, she hides her notebook and pen behind the toilet after ensconcing herself in the bathroom to journal her innermost thoughts; Ana is forced to hide her creativity and her true self from her mother. She muses: “I’m happy to finally be legal, but I thought things would be different...What I really want to do is write...” (3). Ana doesn’t want to go work at the factory—she only comes out of her bedroom in the opening scene because Carmen practically drags her out of bed by pounding on the wall. Ana thinks it’s an earthquake—panic, disaster—and runs out; admitting temporary defeat, she says, “Then she catches me and I become her prisoner” (3). Ana is a prisoner of her mother, a prisoner of socioeconomic conditions, and a prisoner in her own body. Ana retreats to the toilet to write two other times in the play: once to question why she doesn’t just leave, and once to bemoan the sexist catcalls she receives when going to the store and to release the sadness she feels about running into a young pregnant friend. Her writing is her refuge and her companion, but she is conflicted about keeping it hidden. Similarly, sex and eating are hidden at times throughout the play.

The difficulties Ana faces in finding time and a private space in which to express herself through the written word are an encapsulation of the challenges most women have faced when putting pen to paper, as is extensively documented in Gilbert and Gubar’s famous 1979 study, *Madwoman in the Attic*. They point out that the pen has historically been equated with the penis and ask the question: “Where does such an implicitly or explicitly patriarchal theory of literature leave literary women? If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?” (489). Therein, according to Gilbert and Gubar, lies woman’s anxiety of authorship. Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran follow up on this study with their 2003 text, *Scenes of the Apple*, in which they build on Gilbert and Gubar’s identification of the poisonous apple motif in

Eve's Garden of Eden story and in the Snow White fairy tale as, in H  l  ne Cixous' assessment, "the guiding myth of Western culture, a fable about the subjection of female 'oral pleasure' to the regulation of patriarchal law" (1). The message that appetite is dangerous and that to "shake [words] like apple trees" is both a repetition of Eve's transgression and an unpardonable questioning of cultural law is inescapable for women in Western culture (Cixous qtd. in Heller and Moran 1-2).

In addition to facing cultural opposition to self-expression along the axis of gender, Ana also faces opposition to creativity along the axis of ethnicity. Heller and Moran note that:

The kinds of ideological tensions that we have identified in women's literature—where daughters are caught up in changing beliefs about gender roles— are exacerbated when cultural dislocation is part of the brew. For instance, in ethnic and postcolonial narratives, while women can feel nostalgia for an originary culture threatened by assimilation or colonization, they can also feel alienated from a traditional role for women within the originary culture; such dissatisfaction with traditional gender roles, however, does not mean that they can easily find an alternative substitute in the colonizing or assimilating culture which is obliterating or diluting their cultural heritage. (15)

Ana's attempts to formulate her hybrid identity are evident in the interactions she has with her mother and with her mother's food: she rejects and retreats, but then she feels remorse and she approaches again only to retreat once more. The cycle repeats itself, illustrative of the dynamic Carmen and Ana share. Ana does not want to be a victim of what Carla Trujillo refers to as the "house doctrine." She does not want to marry young, have children, and be trapped within the home cooking and cleaning for them. When her sister confronts Ana with her knowledge that Ana writes in the bathroom, Ana replies: "Come on, Estela. Where else can I write? I come here and all it is, is 'work, work, work' from you and Am  . I go home and then she still wants me to help her cook, and clean..." (43). Though she views domesticity as a potential prison, on the other hand, Ana feels an abiding love for her mother and other family members and a connection to her cultural heritage. The repetition of traditional Mexican food as a motif throughout the play addresses the "tension between a native and a colonizing culture abound[ing] with nostalgic evocations of traditional food, an association strengthened by the role of women (mothers, grandmothers, aunts) in food preparation" (Heller and Moran 7). Ana's mother is consistently linked with traditional food preparation, and Ana consistently loathes and appreciates her simultaneously. Ethnic food does not appear in the same way in *The Hunger Games*, although regional food is significant. Each district is known for its own crops and goods, but the characters do not seem to be linked by cultural traditions involving food in the way that the characters in "RWHC" do.

Ana's hunger to express herself through writing is also interesting to view through the lens of Julia Kristeva's work on role of the abject within the mother-

daughter relationship. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva identifies the mother's body as the first "thing" to be abjected in the infant's process to gain a concept of self, although it (the chora and the realm of semiotics) continually returns by rupturing through the borders of selfhood and phallogocentric language. Per Kristeva, the creation of the subject occurs through the processes of exclusion and violence. The centrality of the mother-daughter dyad in "RWHC" highlights the importance of the mother-daughter dynamic in the creative process: Ana struggles to find words and meaning within the phallic economy while at the same time struggling against the maternal force which she finds smothering and inhibitive of growth. The daughter attempts to spit her mother, the abject, out, and to establish her selfhood, but she finds herself spitting herself out as well since the abject is not an object. Just as Esperanza in *House on Mango Street* famously leaves Mango Street in order to return more whole and able to contribute to her community, so does the reader see Ana grapple with finding her place within her family and her community with the understanding, in the postscript, that Ana eventually leaves to go to university, and subsequently returns to find that her sister has opened up her own boutique for plus-size women.

Ana's hunger for knowledge is foregrounded in the lunch break scene, where the reader may notice several derogatory references to Ana being a "know-it-all": Pancha, after instructing Ana that "a girl shouldn't know so much," calls her "la Miss Know-it-all" (30). Ana rebels forcefully against this notion as well as against being called a girl instead of a woman; she is proud of the knowledge she has gleaned from reading, and she is triumphant in being the well-informed member of the group. Her knowledge does not stop there: at the beginning of the next scene, Ana takes the next step toward being a community activist and rabble-rouser. A radio show playing in the background as the women work features a woman who is abused by her husband, and Carmen makes the comment that she's lucky that her husband doesn't hit her. Ana contradicts her, stating that it should be expected that a husband not hit his wife, and that the woman on the radio should leave her husband. The workers counter that the woman probably loves her husband, and Ana retorts that she's sure the woman does love her husband, but that "we can't allow ourselves to be abused anymore. We have to assert ourselves. We have to realize that we have rights! We have the right to control our bodies. The right to exercise our sexuality. And the right to take control of our destiny. But it all begins when we start saying..." (39). At this point Ana climbs on top of a sewing machine, and López's stage directions state that she "continue[s] preaching" (emphasis added). Ana gives herself the appearance of being on a stage or a platform like a performer or a preacher, and she exhorts the women to say "¡Ya basta! No more! We should learn how to say no! Come on, Amá, say it! Say it!" (39). Pancha responds, adding that Ana "thinks and acts like she knows everything" (40). When one of their own urges change within the community, she is treated in a suspect fashion. Ana again defends herself, saying that she doesn't know everything but she knows a lot because she reads; she is dismayed that the women act like a women's liberation movement did not happen 20 years prior. This comment

evokes Pancha's response that "all those gringas shouting about liberation hasn't done a thing for me," which is reflective of the common critique that second wave feminism focused on Anglo women's rights to the exclusion of consideration of the lives of women of color (41). Pancha snidely asks Ana why she is not in college if she is so smart, and Ana informs her that she is waiting to be eligible for financial aid so that she can go. It is clear that Ana would rather be at university than working a menial job, and that she has aspirations to make something grand of her life.

As Ana hungers for knowledge and self-expression, Katniss hungers for justice under the autocratic President Snow. Once she finds herself an unwitting participant in the Hunger Games themselves, Katniss's indignation about the injustice of her society grows. She is forced to play a dangerous game in order to survive: dress up in various costumes, curry favor with those in the Capitol, and maintain awareness of survival strategies at every turn. She reflects, "All I can think is how unjust the whole thing is, the Hunger Games. Why am I hopping around like some trained dog trying to please people I hate?" (HG 117). Katniss longs to live in a just society, but her insight into the layers of unfairness in her current world evolve as her involvement in the Games deepens. When Katniss is on the Victory Tour after winning the Hunger Games, President Snow threatens her family and everyone she loves because Katniss tricked the Gamemakers in order to escape with both herself and Peeta alive. After living in fear for several weeks, she makes a decision while attending a celebratory banquet. Katniss recognizes, "My appetite has returned with my desire to fight back. After weeks of feeling too worried to eat, I'm famished. 'I want to taste everything in the room,' I tell Peeta" (CF 77). Hunger for food and hunger for justice are physically linked in Katniss's body; once she decides to fight back against President Snow, her body hungers for the food necessary to sustain the fight.

Conclusion

Food, hunger, and bodies are the concrete representations of the complex intertwining of body image, language, gender, ethnic, and socioeconomically motivated oppression, tradition, and culture in both texts. Hunger for food, for sex, and for knowledge/self-expression motivate the women throughout "Real Women Have Curves," but most notably compel Ana along her journey to make peace with her own identity, traditions, and future. Ana is able to take charge of her body and her life; she helps the women around her to accept their bodies as they are and to envision a world where their bodies are welcome. López creates Ana as an almost unachievable paragon: she loves herself as she is, which is an ideal most women within Western culture are unable to attain. She hungers for more knowledge and for self-expression through writing, and her writing earns her a fellowship to NYU and status as a "starving writer" before she comes back home. As Ana manages her appetites, she serves as a Chicana success story if one measures success in equal measures of self-love and achievement of the American dream. In *The Hunger Games* series, Katniss must save the people of

Panem. At her victory party where the gluttony of Capitol citizens is highlighted, Katniss's prep team explains the presence of trays of glasses filled with a clear liquid to induce vomiting so that the people can continue eating for hours. The juxtaposition of scrappy Katniss, who has starved for most of her life, alongside greedy, binging Capitol citizens cements the link between hunger for food and hunger for justice. Interestingly, the slogan that is picked for Katniss in the third book of the series is: "People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!" (MJ 71). Katniss's hunger for justice is known throughout the entire country.

Although both Ana and Katniss are protagonists with intelligence and grit, they each must grapple with authentic representation in a society that is fixated on their outward appearance. They both have to marshal their appetites in order to find moments of agency in an unjust world. The *vagina dentata* serves as a symbol for uniting the young women's sexual hunger and hunger for food, along with their hunger for self-expression and for justice. The authors of both texts model the possibilities of female hunger and female resistance for readers. For the majority of both pieces, the authors convey the idea that overt and covert resistance are possible in the interstices of society's demands for young teens and the teens' own will and desire. Perhaps López and Collins fall short of their ideals by removing the *dentata* from their protagonists in respective epilogues that provide the protagonists with traditional 'happy endings,' or perhaps they are merely pragmatically packaging their characters in a manner that is palatable for publishers and audiences alike. Nonetheless, hunger is an important motif in both texts since it highlights the possibility of resistance at the intersection of society's hunger for the bodies of girls and the girls' individual appetites.

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