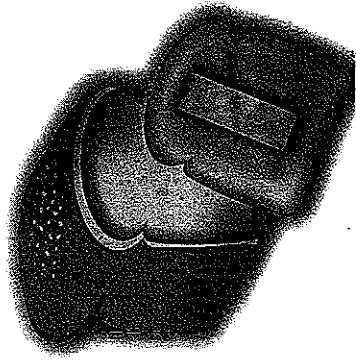


happen to our "envelopes" if we kept pushing them without ceasing. What if the ethos of *Survivor* and *American Idol* were taken to its logical extreme? What if our obsession with tattoos and "extreme sports" kept burgeoning? What if entertainment became the whole point of life, and the appetite for excitement swept away all of the limits formerly enforced by our battered moral sensibilities?

It's unlikely that the lust for entertainment Collins satirizes will ever arrive at the "final word" of terror and torture she so effectively dramatizes. Rather, she's engaging in the kind of exaggeration typical of dystopias: fictional works that take a negative cultural trend and imagine a future or an alternative world in which that trend dominates every aspect of life. But this very quality of exaggeration can be an aid to philosophical reflection. Just as an adept impersonator can throw a politician's or celebrity's features and mannerisms into sharp relief through artfully exaggerated caricature, dystopic fiction can give us a clearer view of certain aspects of the human condition by exaggerating them and dramatizing their possible distortions. In particular, the exaggerations of the Hunger Games highlight the place of the imaginative faculty that enables human beings to produce various forms of art, if we may use that word somewhat broadly (as befits a chapter in a book on philosophy and popular culture) to cover popular entertainment as well as so-called high art.

Philosophers, ancient and modern, have had a lot to say about art and its relation to human life and culture. By showing us a world where art, in however debased a form, has become the chief means of social and political control, the Hunger Games also helps us to reflect on its place in human life. We see its frightening power for both defacing our humanity in the hands of the Capitol and enhancing it in the hands of an artist-hero like Peeta.



"THE FINAL WORD ON ENTERTAINMENT"

Mimetic and Monstrous
Art in the Hunger Games

Brian McDonald

During what Katniss Everdeen calls "the worst [hours] of my life," she is overwhelmed by the dying screams and whimpering moans of Cato as he's torn apart in an exquisitely slow-motion death by the mutations, grotesque mixtures of different animals who, in a final hellacious touch, wear the facial features of the tributes who were killed earlier in the contest. "Why don't they just kill him?" she cries out to Peeta Mellark, who simply replies, "You know why." And she does. "From the Gamemakers' point of view this is the final word in entertainment."¹

This flippantly despairing sentence announces one of the key themes of Suzanne Collins's trilogy, the Hunger Games. The trilogy is, among other things, a cautionary tale about the dark side of entertainment. In a popular culture that glibly celebrates "pushing the envelope," Collins imagines what might

"The Right Shade for Sunlight on Fur"

For most of our history, human beings have believed that true art not only entertains but also improves those who contemplate it. Most classical descriptions of the purpose of art include some variations on the phrase "to delight and instruct," with the term *instruct* carrying clear moral implications. What makes the dramatic pageantry of the arena such a horrifying "final word in entertainment," however, is that its grotesque "delights" are wholly divorced from any kind of "instruction." According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE), productions that entertain without elevating the soul are mere "spectacle," and although spectacle is one element in the dramatic arts, he thought it was the lowest, least important, and most dispensable element.²

Aristotle's book on drama, the *Poetics*, is a good place to begin reflecting on the theme of art and entertainment in the Hunger Games, because his view of art as imitation, or *mimesis*, holds the key to understanding the difference between two uses of art in Panem: the horrific, though beautifully designed, spectacle of the Capitol and the "natural" art created by Peeta. For Aristotle, all of the arts—visual, performing, literary, and dramatic—are forms of mimesis.³ Whether it's a play or a painting, an epic or a statue, art is always imagination's attempt to represent something in a fictional form that exists in the real world. Art, according to Aristotle, is the highest testimony to the fact that human beings are "the most imitative of living creatures." All of the arts flow from or appeal to that "instinct for imitation."⁴ The appeal of artistic mimesis is so intense that "objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity, such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies."⁵ To Aristotle's list we might add the painful and grotesque events of the Hunger Games, which would be horrifying in real life but don't spoil our "delight" in reading Collins's novels.

Katniss first becomes aware of Peeta's ability to reproduce natural objects with "minute fidelity" at the camouflage station while they are training for the 74th Hunger Games. "Peeta genuinely seems to enjoy this station," she tells us.⁶ This should come as no surprise, given the love of mimesis that Aristotle believes is natural to human beings. Katniss and the trainer at the station marvel at Peeta's talent for weaving artful designs from mud, clay, berry juices, vines, and leaves. Katniss is especially struck by a design that he has created on his arm: "The alternating patterns of light and dark suggest sunlight falling through leaves in the woods. I wonder how he knows this, since I doubt he's ever been beyond the fence. Has he been able to pick this up from just that scraggly old apple tree in his backyard?"⁷

Peeta has been able to capture something that Katniss understands only due to her years of experience hunting and gathering in the woods. Could Peeta really have learned so much about the play of shadows from observing just one "scraggly old apple tree in his backyard"? Aristotle wouldn't doubt for a moment that a talented artist like Peeta could accomplish that feat. Indeed, he believed that it was the function of artistic mimesis to disclose universal features of nature, such as the way sunlight in general appears as it falls through leaves, through the contemplation of particular phenomena, such as the sunlight that falls through the leaves of Peeta's backyard apple tree.

Just how intense and powerful artistic mimesis can be is shown in a remarkable passage from the second book in the trilogy, *Catching Fire*, in which Peeta describes the "minute fidelity" of the artist in order to ease the dying moments of the morphling from District 6, who has intervened to save Katniss in the Quarter Quell and as a result has suffered a mortal wound. In baffled but awe-filled tones, Katniss reports Peeta's words:

When he begins to speak in a soft voice, it seems almost nonsensical, but the words aren't for me. "With my paint box at home, I can make every color imaginable. Pink. As pale as a baby's skin. Or as deep as rhubarb. Green like spring grass. Blue that shimmers like ice on water."

The morphling stares into Peeta's eyes, hanging on to his words.

"One time, I spent three days mixing paint until I found the right shade for sunlight on white fur. You see, I kept thinking it was yellow, but it was much more than that. Layers of all sorts of color. One by one," says Peeta.⁸

As Peeta's words show, mimesis is not mere mimicry, a jabberjay's mindless echoes of human sound. His mixing and reduplicating has involved him in a profound act of learning what color he's trying to reproduce. Peeta's words explain exactly why Aristotle associates the delights of artistic mimesis with the delight of learning.⁹ Peeta's intense contemplation of a certain color is almost a form of communion with it, a learning so deep it comes from the inside out and not the outside in. After three days of mixing, he can reproduce the color because it has taken possession of his heart and his soul.

So powerful is the ecstasy of mimesis that Peeta is able to communicate it to the dying morphling, who is herself an artist. His artistic empathy causes him to see that beneath her bodily agony, beneath the layers of drug addiction and despair, at the deepest strata of her being is one who loves beauty and longs to reproduce it through artistic mimesis. He releases that deeply hidden being so that it may rise to the surface. The morphling's death agonies seem to dissolve in peace as her final act is to trace with her fingers the outline of "what I think might be a flower" on Peeta's cheek.¹⁰ Art has almost redeemed her death.

The elevating and procreative aspect of artistic mimesis provides the major redemptive note of the Hunger Games, but it couldn't stand in starker contrast with the Capitol's under-standing and practice of art.

"We Could Really Make You Something Special"

If Peeta represents the regenerating power of artistic mimesis, the Capitol represents the monstrosity of art when it declares war on the principle of mimesis. Peeta's intense and respectful devotion to the "natures of things" drives him to spend three days working to perfectly reproduce a color, but the artists and technicians of the Capitol approach the natural world as fodder to be set upon and remade into ever more grotesque and unnatural combinations. Unlike Peeta's sunlight on white fur, "all the colors [in the Capitol] seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes."¹¹ The insult to nature may seem relatively harmless when Capitol dwellers decorate their own bodies beyond recognition, but it takes a far more sinister form in the urge to desecrate and defile the bodies of others without restraint. The science that produces the mutations—and especially the grotesque human-animal hybrids—is a particularly horrific example of this defilement. Almost as sinister is the decorative preparation of the tributes' bodies for their *American Idol*-like interviews prior to their dismemberment and destruction in the arena.

The perversions of Capitol art are displayed in its trivial details as well as in its horrific consequences, as we see in Katniss's reaction to her prep team in *Catching Fire*:

Flavius tilts up my chin and sighs. "It's a shame Cinna said no alterations on you."

"Yes, we could really make you something special," says Octavia. . . .

Do what? Blow my lips up like President Snow? Tattoo my breasts? Dye my skin magenta and implant gems in it? Cut decorative patterns in my face? Give me curved talons? Or cat's whiskers. I saw all these things and more on the people in the Capitol. Do they really have no idea how freakish they look to the rest of us?¹²

Katniss's term *freakish* seems to express her gut intuition that there's something wrong with altering beyond recognition what nature has given you. She understands that to "make you something special" really means to unmake what you already are—and she finds this idea revolting. One's identity isn't something that should be reinvented over and over again, even on the level of appearance. For Katniss, one's looks shouldn't be fodder for remaking, any more than one's body devoured in the arena should be fodder for entertainment.

The freakish aesthetic of the aptly named Remake Center matches the horrible ethic of the arena. What goes on in the Remake Center is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Peeta's creative mimesis. Borrowing from the philosopher, sociologist, and cultural critic Phillip Rieff (1922–2006), we could call it *de-creation*, a term he used to characterize the driving impulse he detected behind much modern and postmodern art and literature.

In Rieff's analysis, many modern artists, sculptors, and literary figures are driven by a thirst for originality that takes the form of violating the moral and religious norms that have traditionally governed human societies. To Rieff, these artistic transgressions are as "freakish" as the distortions of the Remake Center and the arena of the Hunger Games are to Katniss. Rieff cited as one of many examples the *Piss Christ* of Andres Serrano, a photograph of a crucifix suspended in a glass of urine. This "fusion [of the highest] with the lowest"

represents both a violation of the sacred and a dishonoring of the body, according to Rieff, as it sends the message that "Christ is in you and so you are piss."¹³

It is perhaps significant that Rieff thundered out his denunciations of contemporary culture not from a right-wing fundamentalist citadel but rather from the heart of the modern academy, where his books such as *Freud: The Mind of a Moralist* earned him renown as one of the most provocative and profound students of the impact of Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) psychoanalytic theories on modern culture. From his perch atop the academic tree, Rieff argued in his final work, *My Life among the Deadworks*, that what makes a culture a culture is its belief in the "commanding truths" it holds to be sacred. The urge of our contemporary culture to dedicate its art to subversive and "freakish" desecration of those norms caused Rieff to declare it an anticulture and its art and literature de-creation: "Every true culture expresses and celebrates the power of re-creation [in other words, Aristotle's mimesis]. The great artists of [contemporary civilization] are artists of de-creation. The pleasure in our lives of affirming creation is inverted into perversities of destruction, pleased in the pain of suffering and death."¹⁴

It's striking how Rieff's last sentence sums up perfectly the Capitol's approach to life and art. Peeta's pleasure in "affirming creation" through artistic mimesis is "inverted into perversities of destruction" by the Capitol's artists and technicians. Furthermore, there seems to be a direct link between the freakish makeovers of the Capitol and the grotesque cruelties of the arena, suggesting a connection between the abandonment of aesthetic mimesis and the abandonment of ethical limits.

Indeed, Rieff feared that the "cruel fictions" of the modern artist might help to prepare for and even create cruel conditions in the real world.¹⁵ He spoke of how "the Artist . . . creates the very world that predicts the future of our real world" and believes that perverse fictions in the twentieth century

have often opened the door to perverse fact.¹⁶ His most controversial and powerful assertion was that Hitler's death camps were part of a Nazi aesthetic of power whose intent was not just to destroy the Jews but to defile and humiliate them, "to so separate them from their sacred selves, to so degrade them that in accepting this second death and its indignities, they were resistless."¹⁷

Regardless of whether Rieff was correct that the cruelties of our age must inevitably foreshadow "cruel realities," the future he saw coming and already partly realized certainly bears a remarkable resemblance to the futuristic horrors imagined by Collins. A sense of the sacred has vanished from the world of the Hunger Games, and with it any sense of an overarching canopy of shared obligations that might bind a social order together by some means other than sheer coercive power. The residents of the districts, like the Jews of Rieff's analysis, are subject to spectacular and colorful degradations that are designed precisely—as the characters themselves realize—to prove to them the power of the Capitol and to paralyze them into a "resistless" state of mind. What Rieff saw developing in the postmodern world, Collins shows as fully realized in Panem: an art that has abandoned mimesis in favor of a monstrous attempt at self-originating and self-referencing power. The motto of art, ethics, and politics becomes "I *can* do it, so I *will* do it." The will to imitate has been replaced by the will to power.

"You Almost Look Like a Real Person"

In Rieff's view, when a culture loses its sense of "commanding truths," the first casualty is a sense of identity, because identity is rooted in permanent and fixed commitments.¹⁸ Our intuitive awareness of this fact allows us to appreciate how ironic it is when, during Katniss's first trip to the Remake Center, Flavius declares, to the laughter of the other members of her prep team, "You almost look like a real person now."¹⁹

By any normal definitions, the only "real person" in the room is Katniss. She alone has a core: a stable identity formed from deep and abiding relationships that define who she is, such as her responsibilities to her sister, Prim, her friendship with Gale Hawthorne, and her memories of her father.²⁰ It is precisely her refusal to subject her identity to constant makeovers that make her real.

But for her makeup team, as for the Capitol as a whole, being a "real human being" lies precisely in freedom from the constraints of identity, whether these constraints take the form of fidelity to relationships that hem us in, Rieff's commanding truths that fence us in with "thou shalt nots," or the classical philosopher's obligation to exercise reason to discover the forms of "the good and the beautiful" and live in conformity with those forms. Katniss compares her prep team to "a trio of oddly colored birds."²¹ It's an apt description, because for Capitol residents, being a real person means a kind of birdlike flight, freed from any kind of gravity—aesthetic, ethical, or relational—an effortless flapping of weightless wings on the way toward the always receding and ever more lurid "final word in entertainment."

Where does this desire to reject a stable identity and its limits come from? Two thinkers, one modern and one ancient, have contributed insights on this question. Ernest Becker (1925–1974), in *The Denial of Death*, described how human beings react against the "givens" of our biological inheritance, acting as though "the body is one's animal fate that has to be struggled against in some ways," an uncomfortable reminder that we're vulnerable creatures who will eventually die.²²

We seek an illusory escape from this awareness through what Becker called the *causa sui* ("cause of himself") project.²³ One longs to be "the father of oneself" in order to escape the feeling of owing one's existence and identity to another.²⁴ Anything that could create the illusion of being one's own maker could also sustain the psychological illusion of immortality, because the

awareness that we are made by and subject to forces over which we have no power is also the reminder that we're going to die. But if we could imagine ourselves freed from the anchor of a given identity, we might feel free, as the song says, to "fly away."

Becker's twentieth-century insight seems remarkably similar to that of the philosopher, church father, and astute psychological observer Augustine of Hippo (354–430). In the second book of his great autobiographical work, *Confessions*, Augustine fretted at length over a childish act of vandalism that he committed long ago with some teenage friends; he was now struggling to understand the motive behind an action that seemed to serve no purpose whatsoever. He concluded that he broke the law for no other reason than the thrill of breaking it, experiencing a rush he calls a "deceptive sense of omnipotence."

By this phrase he meant that such gratuitous lawbreaking provides the illusion of being as free from the restraints of the moral law as is God, who must be imagined as both creating the moral law and existing outside it. But Augustine went on to say that this attempt to be a god is really only a "perverse and vicious imitation" of the real deity, not only because it's so obviously an illusion but also because the very attempt to be like God tacitly concedes that God is a superior model to be imitated.²⁵

"Oh, That Is a Piece of Bad Luck"

Augustine's view of God aside, his phrase "perverse . . . imitation" could well have been coined to describe the Capitol's interludes and beautifully staged arena combats, for these theatrical productions are a perfectly perverse imitation of Aristotle's idea of tragedy (the main focus of his *Poetics*) as mimesis. To understand what makes them perverse, let's look at the real thing, as defined by Aristotle: "Tragedy, then, is a representation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude . . . and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* [purging] of such emotions."²⁶

By a complete action, Aristotle meant a plot with a recognizable beginning, middle, and end. Elsewhere, he added that the best plots are complex and marked by a dramatic reversal of fortune that is both surprising and yet inevitable, given the prior events.²⁷

Catharsis, or "purging," means that tragedy brings to the surface certain deeply felt emotions of pity (for a suffering character) or fear (that we too might be exposed to misfortune). *Catharsis* is more than an emotional release, however—it's also the main learning experience that comes to us through tragic mimesis. Just as the characters onstage come to recognize the truth about all of the forces that have conspired to deliver them to their fate, so too we in the audience, offstage, come to recognize something universally true about our own human condition since we live in a world whose tragic realities provide the models for tragic mimesis.²⁸

Aristotle's understanding of tragic catharsis explains why the "Peeta and Katniss Show," as narrated and enacted by Peeta, has such a powerful impact on the audience in the interviews with Caesar Flickerman. Peeta incorporates a number of Aristotle's tragic elements within the narrative that he weaves in an attempt to improve his odds (or rather, as we realize later, Katniss's odds) for survival in the arena.

The success of Peeta's heart-melting sincerity confirms Aristotle's belief that effective tragedy depends on an audience's ability to identify with the main character.²⁹ Not only does Peeta do a great warm-up—"play[ing] up the baker's son thing, comparing the tributes to the breads from their districts," and joking about the Capitol showers—he then shifts his tone and wins the crowd's complete sympathy by describing his love for a girl who doesn't return it: "Unrequited love they can relate to." And to bring it all to a climax, he creates a perfect reversal or surprising turn of fortune of the sort Aristotle believed enhanced a complex plot:

"So here's what you do. You win, you go home. She can't turn you down then, eh?" says Caesar encouragingly.

"I don't think it's going to work out. Winning . . . won't help in my case," says Peeta.

"Why ever not?" says Caesar, mystified.

Peeta blushes beet red and stammers out. "Because . . . because . . . she came here with me."³⁰

Peeta manages to be completely sincere while also producing a brilliant bit of theater that gains his audience's sympathy. His "final word" in star-crossed lovers' entertainment will not only win the sponsors he needs to increase his odds of survival but also create the possibility that both he and Katniss may survive—which, of course, they do.

Of course, that he's in the situation in the first place is sick. But let's try to gain a little philosophical distance from the situation and ask, What *precisely* makes it sick? The best analysis I've heard comes from my wife, Sue, who wasn't talking about the Hunger Games but was referring to a troublingly similar reality TV show. "*Survivor* is evil," she announced one morning, "because it's a revival of the Roman Colosseum. People are 'doing each other in' just to entertain a bunch of boobs." That's also a good description of Panem's Hunger Games, another contest patterned on the Colosseum, according to Collins. But Sue then went on to wax a bit philosophical on what she'd just denounced. "If they were only *impersonating* the roles of people who were 'doing each other in' just to win the biggest toys, it would be okay. It might make us stop and think. But when people undermine each other as fodder for entertainment, it's obscene!"

As usual, my wife had it just right. What makes Flickerman's interview show obscene is that the spectators are not watching an *imitation* of tragic action that has the power to make them wiser and better; instead, they are glutting their sense of power by becoming parties to the infliction of tragedy. Naturally, this

vitiates the whole idea of catharsis, because those who want to be entertained at this price couldn't possibly have any serious intention to stop and think. On the contrary, immersion in this form of "entertainment" only makes them *stop* thinking.

As readers, we may experience authentic catharsis, because the mimetic power of Collins's novels provides not only page-turning excitement but also the chance to contemplate painful truths about what human beings might be like or what they might have to endure under certain situations. We recognize and feel pity for the layers of tragic misfortune, perhaps most of all because Peeta's strategic performance of his lovesick routine for the cameras requires Katniss to entertain the darkest suspicions of his motives. This may be the perfect tragic situation for readers in an age when the ubiquity of cameras and social media like Facebook has made the question of performance versus authenticity particularly acute.

For the Capitol audience, however, the catharsis is an entirely fake and perverse imitation of the real thing. The audience experiences only the emotions of catharsis and none of the insights. Caesar may cry out, "Oh, that is a piece of bad luck" with "a real edge of pain in his voice," and the audience may produce murmurings and "some agonized cries," but they don't stop and think.³¹ How could they? The crowd is already complicit in assuming the privileges of little gods visiting tragedy upon other human beings. That the spectators feel pain over the fate of those they're helping to destroy simply compounds the evil.

Real catharsis isn't just an emotional discharge, for authentic tragic pity and fear are conducive to gaining wisdom and virtue. In this sense, art exists for life. But the Capitol throws the proper relation between art and life into reverse. The pity felt for the tragic protagonists exists only to increase the audience's enjoyment of the spectacle being performed for it. The remnants of an ethical and humane impulse that cause the spectators to cry out serve only to increase the emotional excitement and hence the entertainment value of the spectacle.

Even ethical impulses become fodder for entertainment. "Life cannot be made over to imitate art except at a cost that is life-destroying," says Rieff—and here we have the confirmation.³²

The "final word in entertainment" is truly "perverse imitation" at its highest—or rather, its lowest.

"It Would Be Best for Everyone If I Were Dead"—Not!

One of the most important elements of tragic mimesis as understood by Aristotle is the recognition scene, in which a character goes from ignorance to knowledge about realities to which he or she has been clueless in the previous dramatic action. As the events of the third book, *Mockingjay*, race to their increasingly violent conclusion, we realize how much of the story's outcome will depend on Katniss recognizing the truth about the events going on outside her as well as the changes going on inside her. Will she recognize that her true enemy is not just President Snow but also Alma Coin? (We see that she does when she aims her executioner's arrow in an unexpected direction.) And, even more important for her happiness in the new world she helps to usher in, will she recognize the extent and the causes of the damage she's suffered on the inside? If so, where might she find the cure?

This last question is key. We witness a very understandable but definitely dark and distressing change of Katniss's character in *Mockingjay* as the urge to kill Snow becomes her dominating drive. It's possible that her vote to continue the Hunger Games means that she has turned into a double of her foes in the Capitol, a supremely tragic irony. Although it's more likely that her vote is simply a strategically motivated ploy, it's certain that the hunter in her has so thoroughly turned her into an avenger that once she recognizes this change in herself, she descends into a suicidal self-hatred.

In her isolated cell after she has killed Coin, she experiences a quasi-recognition that the main victory Coin and Snow have won over her is that she has turned into a monster herself. (I say *quasi*- because she seems to partly hide her recognition of what she has become under a general feeling about humanity. She says, "I no longer feel any allegiance to these monsters called human beings, despise being one myself.")³³ Still, a major reason for her suicidal longings seems to be that like Shakespeare's Othello, she has discovered that she has become the enemy of everything she cares about and that she wishes to execute a death stroke on herself to slay this enemy within.

Her recovery from this horrible recognition comes from a further recognition: that her cure lies in choosing the artist Peeta rather than her fellow hunter Gale. The elevating and procreative aspect of artistic mimesis, embodied in Peeta, provides the major redemptive note of the trilogy. While Katniss is the hero, Peeta's capacity for art makes him the redeemer. His gift of bread in the first book, *The Hunger Games*, may have saved her physically, but in the end he saves her soul by beautifully fulfilling Gale's prophecy that "Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can't survive without."³⁴

She does indeed pick whom she needs to survive, but in choosing Peeta she seeks the survival and regeneration of her soul, not just her body. The violent streak that Katniss and Gale share doesn't belong to Peeta's nature, at least not in the same sense that it does for them. Although their violence has been provoked by inhuman and terrible actions against them, it was nevertheless *capable* of being provoked. For Katniss to marry Gale would be to resign herself to that fact. For Peeta, however, this violent and avenging spirit has to be induced by the artificial means of tracker jacker poison and brainwashing. His default nature is not the hunter who takes life but the baker and artist who through loving mimesis represents life and enhances it.

Peeta provides the hope that underneath the monstrous distortions of their world there's a deeper, more real stratum that can be recovered through artistic mimesis, the representations of memories in scrapbooks, and, finally, a willingness to continue—and hence believe in—the cycle of life through procreation. Peeta, a master of art, rhetoric, and invention, is the only lifeline Katniss can choose if she wishes to be delivered from the monster she now knows she has become. In the end, the regenerating power of artistic mimesis, seemingly as fragile as the dying morphling's butterfly sketch on Peeta's cheek, has restored to Katniss a fragile hope for a new life in an equally fragile but hopeful new world.

NOTES

1. Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2008), 339.
2. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Burcher (New York: Dover, 1997), 13–14.
3. For examples of how even music can be mimetic, since it imitates our emotions and states of character, see chapter 2, "Somewhere between Hair Ribbons and Rainbows: How Even the Shortest Song Can Change the World."
4. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 95.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2009), 312.
9. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5–6.
10. Collins, *Catching Fire*, 313.
11. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 59.
12. Collins, *Catching Fire*, 48–49.
13. Phillip Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 98.
14. *Ibid.*, 80.
15. Rieff borrowed this term from James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1971), 192. Joyce's (1882–1941) deeply difficult novels, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, have a large vein of comedic but searing blasphemy running through them. Thus, in Rieff's mind, they were destructive of the sacred order that he believed is necessary for the foundation of a viable social order. Rieff took Joyce's made-up word literally, believing that his work was indeed cruel (and destructive) fiction—as is that of many other modern writers and artists who have created "deathworks" to destroy any sense of sacred

authority or an inherent moral order in the world. Joyce used the word in the following stream-of-consciousness sentence: "O, you were excruciated, in honour bound to the cross of your own crucifixion."

16. Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks*, 97.
17. *Ibid.*, 104. By "sacred selves," Rieff was referring to the claim made by both Christianity and Judaism that human beings are made in the image of God, as well as the traditional belief that the Jews were a "chosen nation." By subjecting Jews to a spirit-destroying ritual of physical degradation instead of just killing them, the Nazis were showing that nothing was sacred—except their own power, of course.
18. *Ibid.*, 100.
19. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 62.
20. I'm indebted to George Dunn, an editor of this volume, for this way of characterizing Katniss's identity.
21. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 62.
22. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 44.
23. Becker discussed the *causa sui* project in several places in *The Denial of Death*, the most important being in chapter 3, "The Recasting of Some Basic Psychoanalytic Ideas." There he also acknowledged his debt to fellow cultural critic Norman O. Brown (1913–2002), who discussed the *causa sui* idea in relation to what he called the "Oedipal project." Brown claimed that "the essence of the Oedipal project is becoming God." See Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (New York: Viking Books, 1959), 118.
24. Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 116.
25. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Francis J. Sheed, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 2:32.
26. Stephen Halliwell, ed. *The Poetics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 37.
27. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 18–19.
28. Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 91, emphasized the morally improving and humanizing aspect of tragic catharsis when he wrote, "But the kind of dramatic material required by pity and fear must embody a vulnerability to suffering which can touch an audience's deep sense of common humanity."
29. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 22–23, said that "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortunes of a man like ourselves" (emphasis added).
30. Collins, *The Hunger Games*, 130.
31. *Ibid.*, 133.
32. Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks*, 10.
33. Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2010), 377.
34. *Ibid.*, 329.