

Run, Run as Fast as You can: “The Boy with the Bread” in *The Hunger Games*

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Abstract This paper explores the role of bread and the figure of the baker in *The Hunger Games*, the first novel in the Suzanne Collins trilogy. A selective survey of the history of bread and its significance in Western culture is intertwined with close analysis of Collins’ representation of bread and the character of Peeta, “the boy with the bread”. For centuries, bread occupied a unique position in the European collective consciousness, often meaning the difference between life and death. This acute awareness of the dangers of starvation and the redemption offered by bread has largely retreated in the modern world. However, the enduring representation of bread and the baker figure in literature for children and young people hints at the persistence of this folk consciousness. In Western culture, bread retains its status as a site of power struggle, emblematic of freedom from want and oppression, and, through Christianity, freedom from death itself. The aims of this paper then are, firstly, to position Collins’ use of bread symbolism within a sociohistorical and literary context, and, secondly, to establish a critical understanding of the baker in general, and Peeta in particular, as a highly significant literary character.

Key words young adult literature; *The Hunger Games*; folklore; food in fiction

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“Look what I shot.” Gale holds up a loaf of bread with an arrow stuck in it, and I laugh. It’s real bakery bread, not the flat, dense loaves we make from our grain rations. I take it in my hands, pull out the arrow, and hold the puncture in

the crust to my nose, inhaling the fragrance that makes my mouth flood with saliva. Fine bread like this is for special occasions. (Collins 8)

This paper explores the role of bread and the figure of the baker in *The Hunger Games*, the first novel in the Suzanne Collins trilogy. A selective survey of the history of bread and its significance in Western culture is intertwined with close analysis of Collins' representation of bread and the character of Peeta, "the boy with the bread". Piero Camporesi, in his study *Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe*, describes bread as "a polyvalent object on which life, death and dreams depend" (17). Roy Porter argues that when, in Europe, "The spectre of mass starvation began to retreat; the centrality of food, and bread, to popular consciousness began to wane" (in Camporesi 14). However, the enduring role of bread and the baker figure in literature for children and young people hints at the persistence of this folk consciousness: as Susan Honeyman points out, food remains "one of the primary vehicles of struggle and control in child culture" ("Gastronomic Utopias" 47). In Western culture, bread retains its status as a site of power struggle, emblematic of freedom from want and oppression, and, through Christianity, freedom from death itself. The aims of this paper then are, firstly, to position Collins' use of bread symbolism within a sociohistorical and literary context, and, secondly, to establish a critical understanding of the baker in general, and Peeta in particular, as a highly significant literary character.

In the essay "Gender Rolls: Bread and Resistance in the 'Hunger Games' Trilogy," Meghan Gilbert-Hickey discusses the role bread plays in the novels as a potent political symbol, signifying the subversion of both authority and gender roles. She points out the frequent collocation of bread and incidents of political subversion, and argues that bread, as represented by Collins, "is not just a foodstuff; it is not merely, depending on its makeup, a cue for social norms. Rather, it is a mode of strategic deception, a way to rouse support, a shorthand for rebellion." (98) However, bread as "just a foodstuff" has a complex history, as does the baker who produces it. In *The Hunger Games*, providing bread is depicted as an act of love and charity on the one hand, while on the other hand, a lack of access to bread entails competition and violence, hinting towards bestiality and cannibalism. These themes have been associated with bread throughout its history as a staple food and primary unit of trade. The constant association of bread with Peeta — "the boy with the bread" — reflects the central role of the baker in allowing and ensuring access to bread, while also suggesting the vulnerability (and ultimately, edibility) of this character.

Let Them Eat Cake: Bread and Society

Inasmuch as the name of Collins' dystopian America — Panem — can be seen as a clear reference to Juvenal's *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses), as noted by Bill Clemente (21), it signifies the extent to which "America... is seen as the new Rome" (Brantlinger 36) in terms of a society that is seen as being in its final stages of decadence and decay, on the brink of cataclysmic upheaval. In *The Hunger Games*, Panem's leaders redistribute resources from poor to rich, emphasising food poverty as calculated and unnatural. In discussing the lack of an economic safety net for Katniss, Mark Fisher describes the economic and political conditions of Panem (as portrayed in the recent film adaptation of the novel) as follows:

To be in the dominant class is...to achieve a certain liberation from precariousness; for the poor, meanwhile, life is harried, fugitive, a perpetual state of anxiety. Yet precariousness here is not a natural state which the rich are fortunate enough to rise above; on the contrary, precariousness is deliberately imposed on the poor as a means of controlling and subduing them. (27)

Thus Panem is deliberately organised in such a way as to guarantee food poverty in the districts. Taking the name of a staple food, "Panem" implies nourishment, serving to draw attention to the gulf between the well-fed residents of the Capitol and the impoverished peoples of the districts: the country's name ironically indicates a social responsibility to provide the poor with bread, a terrible reminder that while food is abundant, and quite literally defines the national character, it is withheld. The country's Latin name is also reminiscent of centuries of appeals to an omnipotent and omniscient force — *panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie* (give us this day our daily bread) — to be kept from starvation, a request the Capitol refuses to grant. And while most interpretations of Juvenal, according to Patrick Brantlinger, focus on "the political and cultural irresponsibility of the common man" (rather than the elite) as the main supporters of the gladiatorial spectacle (23), Collins makes it clear that it is the elite who are at fault here.

Positioning Panem as emblematic of social decay implies that the food the nation provides is similarly decayed, tainted and poisonous. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Games*, one of few critical collections of essays relating to the trilogy, Max Despain notes that:

Collins takes advantage of the uniquely civilized quality of bread versus

the foodstuff that can be foraged to represent the way social groups exert more control over their food sources, a control that matches increasing sophistication in their political and cultural power. (72)

Grain is clearly used as a means of social control in *Panem*, most notably through the system of *tessera*. Grain is the price of compliance, a form of compensation for increasing one's odds of being selected to compete in the Games. Katniss tells the reader that "You can opt to add your name more times in exchange for tesserae. Each tessera is worth a meagre year's supply of grain and oil for one person" (15). For the winner of the Games, this perverse system of incentive and reward is taken to its logical conclusion: "All year, the Capitol will show the winning district gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar while the rest of us battle starvation" (22). Bread is seen as a weapon both implicitly and explicitly. In the arena, the stone Thresh uses to kill Clove is described simply as being "about the size of a small loaf of bread" (349): here the association of bread with starvation is elevated to the association of bread with violent murder.

Historically, bread has functioned not just as a marker of political appeasement of the masses, but also as a powerful symbol of socioeconomic status. For example, in early modern Scotland, "social indicators were attached to the types of bread that people ate... The lighter the bread in colour, the better its perceived quality which was directly associated with status" (Nugent & Clark 58). Camporesi's early modern literary sources represent the "tension between the castes" in terms of "the fearful contempt of the eaters of white bread towards the eaters of dark bread or those who went without bread altogether" (35). Until relatively recently in Western history, brown bread carried a "social stigma" (McCance & Widdowson 206). The utopian ideal for the hungry peasantry was thus in part symbolised by "the large, white, good loaf of bread" (Camporesi 119), one that did not need to be mixed with grasses, herbs or other grains:

The hierarchy of breads and their qualities in reality sanctioned social distinctions. Bread represented a status symbol that defined human condition and class according to its particular colour, varying in all shades from black to white (120).

Both the hierarchical nature of bread and its utopian qualities are reproduced in texts for young readers. In Laura Ingalls Wilder's *The Long Winter*, the repeated refrain of "nothing but potatoes and brown bread" (209) amplifies the state of

abjection in which the family find themselves. Similarly, in *The Hunger Games*, the “fine white” bread of the Capitol is frequently contrasted with the “dark ration grain” available in the districts (288).

Differing types (and qualities) of bread are also overtly linked to the distinct modes of production or economic identities of each of the districts:

Peeta empties our bread basket and points out how they have been careful to include types from the districts along with the refined bread of the Capitol. The fish-shaped loaf tinted green with seaweed from District 4. The crescent-moon roll dotted with seeds from District 11. (119)

We can see here that, outside the Capitol, the use of seeds and plants such as seaweed in the production of bread is so commonplace as to have become representative of the individual districts, and the type of industry they are involved in. The differing end products thus represent different styles of adulteration, or in other words, different ways of making bread last longer, representative of what Camporesi describes as “the almost limitless number of surrogates and additives [for bread] proposed by emergency food shortage” (148). As Despain points out, “Each outlying district in Panem forms an identity around not only the products the district is known for but also the ways in which its citizens cope with their lack of food” (70). Bread here exemplifies both strands of identity: the formal economic roles, and the hidden adulterations, the innovative ways of negotiating those roles.

The theme of bread as a subversive gift and a means of enacting social justice continues in the arena, with the offering made to Katniss by the people of District 11 following Rue’s death:

I open the parachute and find a small loaf of bread. It’s not the fine white Capitol stuff. It’s made of dark ration grain and shaped in a crescent. Sprinkled with seeds. I flashback to Peeta’s lesson on the various district breads in the Training Centre. This bread came from District 11. I cautiously lift the still-warm loaf. What must it have cost the people of District 11, who can’t even feed themselves?” (288-289)

The people of District 11 are presented as honourable by virtue of giving food that they can scarce afford for themselves. Moreover, it is a gift that invites punishment, much like Peeta’s original gift of bread to Katniss. As Gilbert-Hickey points out, “The sponsorship of this loaf of bread enables the people of District 11

to say something they cannot safely say with words” (98). This is foreshadowed by Peeta’s gift, but where Peeta’s is an act of charity, District 11’s is an act of solidarity. Whatever the motivation, however, individual gifts of bread do not outweigh the dominant tendency in Panem to place access to food under strict controls.

Bake Me a Cake as Fast as You can: The Dual Function of the Baker

We could consider the character of the baker as equally complex as bread itself: he simultaneously represents both producer and consumer; he too represents “life, death and dreams.” The baker appears in Katniss’ recollections as a charitable figure, perhaps one for whom easy access to food also entails the responsibility to share food with the hungry, despite the potential dangers. We are told that “just throwing me the bread was an enormous kindness that would have surely resulted in a beating if discovered” (38). Peeta is thus presented as a character akin to the charitable baker in other contemporary novels for young people, who see their role in terms of social responsibility as well as making money.¹ Similarly, Peeta’s father also appears in the role of a constant benefactor, showing kindness to Katniss even when she has been selected as an opponent to his son: “He pulls out a white paper package from his jacket pocket and holds it out to me. I open it and find cookies. These are a luxury we can never afford” (45). Indeed, both the charitable baker and the people of District 11 are counterpointed by their opposite, the character who hoards food rather than shares it. This dichotomy can be seen most clearly in the characterisation of Peeta’s mother and father, and can be said to have its basis in folklore traditions. Peeta’s mother is referred to as a “witch” (45) on more than one occasion, the polar opposite of the kindly father, due to her unwillingness to help the hungry children of District 12, even to the extent of refusing scraps, leftovers and rubbish.

The witch-figure appears as the bakery’s malevolent guardian, preventing access to the utopian scene described by Katniss:

When I passed the baker’s, the smell of fresh bread was so overwhelming I felt dizzy. The ovens were in the back, and a golden glow spilled out of the open kitchen door. I stood mesmerized by the heat and the luscious scent. (35)

The enticing image of the bakery, fiercely guarded by the witch, brings to mind Hansel and Gretel’s gingerbread house, which for Bruno Bettelheim, itself represents the mother, with the cannibalistic witch appearing as “a personification

of the destructive aspects of orality” (162). For Lissa Paul, the house itself can represent “the wish to eat and the fear of being eaten” (33). The greed of the children can also be seen as an entirely appropriate response to starvation conditions: Jack Zipes argues that “The killing of the witch is symbolically the realization of the hatred which the peasantry felt for hoarders and oppressors” (38). In *The Hunger Games*, Collins’ conflation of the witch figure with the hoarder who keeps tight control of the provision of bread combines both the psychological aspects of Hansel and Gretel’s witch as outlined by Bettelheim and the political aspects foregrounded by Zipes. There is also a clear link here to the baker as a historical figure. For example, Camporesi refers to attacks on bakeries in early modern Italy, as well as the frequent use of armed guards to protect the produce from the starving poor (106; 101); the bakers themselves were “much hated by the *poverelli* (‘little poor’) and singled out by everyone as profiteers and creators of hunger” (106). He also notes cases where bakers were arrested for poisoning the poor through the use of heavily adulterated flour (84). Similarly, McCance and Widdowson, in their 1955 overview of the history of bread, note that at frequent intervals in history “millers and bakers were generally regarded with great mistrust” (206); they were known for withholding grain, stealing and cheating their customers. In particular, this study references Chaucer’s depiction of the Miller as a representative depiction of this kind of behaviour. This character, “Well versed in stealing corn and trebling dues” (Chaucer 17), seems at first to be a stark contrast to the benevolent Peeta — “the nurturing baker” (Gilbert-Hickey 105), who wants to help Katniss rather than cheat her.

However, there are ways in which Peeta is more subtly aligned with the hoarding society; the comfort he is seen to enjoy by virtue of the baker’s special status regarding access to food is equated with a tacit acceptance of Panem’s value system by Katniss, who initially believes that “there are things you don’t question too much, I guess, when your home always smells like baking bread” (360). This level of comfort is also associated with the strength required to kill in the arena: Katniss notes that “All those years of having enough to eat and hauling bread trays around have made [Peeta] broad-shouldered and strong” (49). Although she later comes to associate her own ability to withstand hunger as a greater source of strength than a comfortable upbringing (252), in the earlier stages of the novel, Katniss fears that “kind Peeta Mellark, the boy who gave me the bread, is fighting hard to kill me” (73). By preparing to fight for his life, and particularly by seeming to form an alliance with the Career tributes, Peeta becomes for Katniss as much of a dangerous predator as the Capitol itself.

Drawing on the imagery of the bread basket, in his televised interview Peeta “compar[es] the tributes to the breads from their districts” (157). Another way in which the personalities of the tributes are constructed for the Capitol audience is via the mode of dress each tribute is forced to adopt to represent their district (80). In the case of District 12, the fire-themed costume that both tributes wear is ostensibly associated with coal mining and with Katniss — “The girl who was on fire” (85) — rather than Peeta. However, the baker is also characterised in terms of his relationship with fire, a connection Katniss makes explicit in reference to their costumes: “He should know about fire, being a baker’s son and all” (82). Peeta’s father is described as “a big, broad-shouldered man with burn scars from years at the ovens” (45); the baker is physically marked his association with fire, though clearly not as violently affected as the coal miner, represented in this first novel by Katniss’ dead father. There is a sense here that, in the right hands and with safety measures in place, fire can be controlled, although this perhaps renders it more, rather than less, deadly. The fire of the baker’s oven is both as life-sustaining and as dangerous as the more volatile fire that threatens the coal miners, and its warmth can be harnessed to influence others.

The warmth constantly attributed to Peeta is both appealing and alarming; when, for example, he makes Katniss feel warm — “he gives me a smile that seems so genuinely sweet with just the right touch of shyness that unexpected warmth rushes through me” (88) — this only serves to remind her that the baker’s boy is, for now, her worst enemy. Katniss’ dislike of fire is similarly associated later in the novel, not with the tragedy and magnitude of a mine explosion, but with the seemingly innocuous act of baking: “I hate burns, have always hated them, even a small one got from pulling a pan of bread from the oven” (215). She seems to have an awareness that bread and the production thereof are as potentially dangerous as they are nourishing and sustaining. It is perhaps not surprising that the starting point of Katniss and Peeta’s relationship — the incident where Peeta risks the wrath of his mother to offer Katniss food — is characterised by the joining of bread and fire. The loaves that Peeta throws to Katniss are simultaneously burnt and capable of causing burns: “The heat of the bread burned into my skin, but I clutched it tighter, clinging to life” (37). Later, the scene in which a cake soaked in alcohol is set alight (“It blazes up and then the flames flicker around the edges a while until it finally goes out” (94)) shows the coming together of bread, fire and alcohol — all important symbols in Christianity, but also more superficially representative of Peeta, Katniss and Haymitch, and their partnership. As events unfold, Katniss’s uncertainty gives way to a recognition of Peeta’s vulnerability and a desire to repay

her debt. Ultimately Peeta is not characterised as a hoarding witch, nor is his own gift of bread explicitly described as a weapon; rather, he appears more often in the guise of prey, compared to the animals that Katniss is accustomed to shooting. The first time the reader encounters Peeta at the reaping, we are told that “his blue eyes show the alarm I’ve seen so often in prey” (31), and this vulnerability is reinforced when Katniss later finds him fighting for life. Katniss also later learns that Peeta’s life has not been as privileged as she had imagined: “Peeta has always had enough to eat. But there’s something kind of depressing about living your life on stale bread, the hard, dry loaves that no one else wanted” (377). As the novel goes on, it seems that Katniss has an exaggerated sense of debt owed to Peeta: in return for the gift of burnt loaves, she must trust him and nurse him back to health at the risk of her own life. His gift of bread is in some senses a weapon, inasmuch as it makes Katniss feel obligated towards him. Such a reading however, downplays the significance of the original gift of bread, and perhaps the only suitable return on an investment that gives the gift of life is protection from death. When Peeta dismisses Katniss’ feelings of obligation, telling her “you just brought me back from the dead” (356), he does not seem to realise that he had done the same for her. The Christian allusions of the act of giving bread — an act of giving of oneself, of one’s own home, one’s own ‘body’, which can be repaid only with sacrifice in the service of the needy — are emphasised here. Indeed, Peeta’s fall from material comfort into injury, sickness and pain, tests and tempts the limits of Katniss’ compassion, a compassion defined in opposition to the cannibalistic and corporate state, which encourages competition to the point of extremity, not only in the arena but in the districts as well.

The shot-down loaf that Gale presents to Katniss at the beginning of the novel is a vivid illustration of the baker as victim, as prey. It is also an early indication of the extent to which Peeta appears as the embodiment of bread. Susan Tan references “Jesus’s role as the ultimate sacrificial body” in her exploration of violence against the child in *The Hunger Games* (“Burn with Us” 54); the sacrificial body, inasmuch as we continue the parallel with Jesus, is also the edible body. For Katniss, Peeta *is* the food he represents, his hands “as solid and warm as those loaves of bread” (39). A further example comes when she tells us: “Peeta’s eyes flicker down to the roll in my hands, and I know he remembers that day too... I glower at the roll, sure he meant to insult me” (111). Here, instead of directing the anger of her gaze at Peeta himself, Katniss looks at the bread in her hand. “The boy with the bread” and the bread itself are inseparable and interchangeable. The personification of bread in the figure of the baker adds to the sense that he is somehow himself a source of

nourishment and salvation, but potentially a poisoned, tainted and untrustworthy one, as the state is. The idea of tribute as bread also lends new meaning to the bread basket: each district is represented by the edible child. Honeyman argues that “Food lures can seemingly uncomplicated situations of power inequity by conveniently essentializing national identities... How better to represent the world as domitable than to reduce each country to a helping of its national cuisine?” (“Gingerbread Wishes” 202). Similarly, the reduction of each district to a loaf of bread can be seen to represent the domitable, sacrificial and edible nature of both the tributes and the communities to which they belong.

However, as with Peeta’s relationship with fire, his apparent vulnerability as an edible body is both a source of weakness and of strength. His mastery of camouflage developed through “all those hours decorating cakes” (306) builds on the idea of bread embodied, and subverts the Capitol positioning of each tribute as edible and disposable, reduced to a loaf of bread. Thus Peeta is able to defend himself from attack through the ostensibly shallow act of decorating himself, and when found by Katniss is “*caked* with mud and matted leaves” (308, emphasis added). Earlier, Katniss highlights the superficiality of the cakes Peeta decorates, “the ones they display in the windows. Fancy cakes with flowers and pretty things painted in frosting” (117). For Despain, the use of superficial foods in the Capitol highlights a situation in which “meals are no longer solely about sustenance, [so] the food takes on the qualities of sumptuousness to symbolize prosperity” (72); Peeta’s “inaccessible cakes” (Collins 117) are seemingly similar to the “vulgar pretension” of food in the Capitol (Despain 72). Decorative food signifies the height of decadence, with Panem’s Capitol appearing again as a stand-in for the last days of Rome — “both as the capital of all pleasure and as necropolis, the ultimate dead end of history... at once utopia and dystopia” (Brantlinger 115). While Peeta is joking when he says that frosting is “The final defence of the dying” (306), this phrase signals that, for Peeta, using his skills as a form of self-defence is a way in which he can fulfil his goal of “maintain[ing] his identity” (171). His self-decoration is a means of subverting the idea of decadent food as spectacle over substance, as well as disguising himself from both predators and cameras, thus undermining the Capitol’s designation of prey as spectacle.

There is a wider significance to the motif of boy-as-bread too, one that can be traced through folklore. Aptly summarised by Tina Hanlon as “Runaway Cakes and Gingerbread Boys,” the stories of the runaway gingerbread man or johnny-cake typically feature a series of animals, ending with the fox who outsmarts the cake-boy and eats him.² In many versions of the story, the gingerbread man calls

out the refrain “Run, run as fast as you can” to mock his pursuers (see for instance, McCaughrean 27), a refrain which finds a parallel in Haymitch’s instructions to Katniss and Peeta before they enter the arena (168), and later, Peeta ordering Katniss to run from the Career tributes after the wasp attack (235). In Peeta’s case, the fox does not catch him. In fact, the outcome is quite the reverse: the tribute nicknamed “Foxface” by Katniss is poisoned by the berries he collects; she is “outfoxed” by Peeta (389), albeit not intentionally. The metaphor of boy-as-bread comes full circle at the conclusion of the Games, when Katniss secures Peeta’s tourniquet with her arrow (411); here she replicates Gale’s shot-down loaf of bread, but with the intention of saving his life rather than devouring him, albeit at the cost of his leg (448).

You can’t Catch me: To Eat or Be Eaten

Implicit in the interplay of the gingerbread man and the fox as represented by Peeta and the tribute from District 5, and to some extent Peeta and Katniss (as the hunter), is the close relationship between cannibalism and bestiality. Camporesi discusses the extent to which forms of cannibalism including “self-devourment” were normalised in the starvation conditions of early modern Europe (40-55). In Panem however, “the unspoken rule about not eating one another” (295) appears to apply in the districts as well as in the arena. The threat of cannibalism, though ruled out overtly, is omnipresent, from the “camera crews, perched like buzzards” (19) through to the arena. The cameras as buzzards remind us that the violence here is enforced and put on show, and are emblematic both of the state’s control and its disregard for the lives of the poor. Tan notes that “the Capitol’s obsession with and desire for the child’s body is intimately connected with a literal desire to see it devoured” (62); elsewhere she argues that “cannibalism comes dangerously close to embodying the political goals of the Games” (“Burn with Us” 28).

Bestiality is not limited to the Capitol’s cameras, but is replicated in the arena. Many of the individual tributes, particularly “the Career wolf pack” (196), are described by Katniss in terms of their animalistic features. The girl from District 2 is a “predator who might kill me in seconds” (182), for instance. She also initially suspects that Peeta could become cannibalistic: “He’ll probably turn into one of those raging beast tributes, the kind who tries to eat someone’s heart after they’ve killed them” (173). The attribution of animal characteristics to other starving tributes is reminiscent of Camporesi’s conclusion that “In representing the hell of the poor one constant motif is used: the physical degradation of the starving pauper and his bestial metamorphosis” (33). It is a motif used by the

Gamesmakers in the arena too; here, the process of transmutation is made literal by the use of the genetically engineered and “unmistakably human” tribute-wolves at the climax of the Games (405). This again emphasises the similarities with the Roman circus, in which “There could be no grounds for humanitarian protest when it was felt that the victims were not fully human” (Brantlinger 73). However, when Katniss, after the Games, sees herself “Rabid” and “Feral” (422), her shock at her own appearance allows the mirror to act as a device to question her view of other tributes as dehumanised. She turns her attention instead to the tame ‘animals’ of the Capitol, comparing Venia, Flavius and Octavia to “an affectionate trio of pets” (428-429). Despain points out that “As if proving what abundance and excess can lead to, the hyper-civilisation in the Capitol is much more barbaric than the more “primitive” outlying districts” (71): it is the hunger and violence inherent in a system that enforces food scarcity for the majority while ensuring gluttony for the few that create the bestiality and insanity Katniss must confront.

The animal tribute and the edible tribute do not then exist separately; they are two halves of the whole, both eater and eaten, making it possible to argue that, in *The Hunger Games*, “Nothing separates predator and prey except their relative success” (King 111). Just as Peeta is both predator and prey, both fire and warmth, danger and saviour, he is cast, along with the rest of the tributes, as both cannibal and edible. If bread can be seen as a primary means of escaping starvation, providing a route to salvation, and enforcing social control, then the baker is the figure who stands as the gatekeeper, a bridge between two worlds, both controlling and controlled by abundance and scarcity alike.

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Notes

1. This is emphasised in Melvin Burgess’s *The Baby and Fly Pie*, a dystopia set in a bleak futuristic London. Protagonist Fly dreams of becoming a baker: “...a baker has a good life. Everyone needs him, the world passes through his shop. He sells bread to poor people and fancy cakes to rich people. I want to be a baker for all those reasons but mostly I want to be a baker because a baker is always warm and he always has enough to eat. One day, I’ll have a shop of my own and have cream slices and Viennese twists in the window. I’ll eat them every day — and whatever I can’t eat and I can’t sell I’ll give to the kids who live on the street, like my friend

Luke does.” (20-21)

2. For readers who are wondering whether the seemingly incompatible ideas of gladiatorial combat and the escape of a runaway biscuit are successfully synthesised in other contexts, the film *Shrek Forever After*, as a symbol of complete social decay in the kingdom of Far Far Away, features the gingerbread man in the guise of a gladiator, his opponents in the arena a gang of ferocious animal crackers (Mitchell).

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