

# Crafted by Conflict: The Mutual Shaping of Selfhood and Surroundings in *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent*

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:  
ENG-2026-14029830

Volume: 14

Issue: 2

Month: March

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 25.01.2026

Accepted: 24.02.2026

Published Online: 01.03.2026

Citation:

J, Rini Joyce, and S. Vijayarani. "Crafted by Conflict: The Mutual Shaping of Selfhood and Surroundings in *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent*." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2026, pp. 23–26.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v14i2.9830>




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## Abstract:

Katniss Everdeen and Beatrice (Tris) Prior are iconic female protagonists in dystopian literature. Through a comparative analysis, this paper highlights how Katniss and Tris navigate their oppressive societies, which challenge notions of individuality, moral dilemmas, and societal roles. These heroines embody a duality in which their innate traits, such as instinct and bravery, intersect with environmental factors, their social upbringing, family, friends, and mentorship, shaping their identities. This study explores how these factors contribute to character development. By highlighting the intricate balance of self-discovery through exhibiting empathy, courage, and defiance, and external influence, such as communal expectations, the research argues that the protagonist's growth is a testament to identity formation as a dynamic process shaped by internal and external forces.

**Keywords:** *Innate Traits, Environmental Influence, Identity Formation, Dystopian Bildungsroman Narrative, Growth*

Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trace the evolution of the characters Katniss and Tris through a coming-of-age narrative. The oppressive environment redefines traditional identity formation, self-realisation, and moral growth themes. Their volatile environment brings out their intrinsic traits, such as their sense of justice, resilience, and courage, and they are tested by external factors, such as interpersonal relationships, societal control, and rebellion. Within the framework of Bildungsroman fiction, the growth of the characters is based on the cultural and political critiques of power, conformity and individual agency.

## Katniss Everdeen and the Politics of Reluctant Selfhood

Katniss' innate trait is demonstrated in the very beginning of the novel as she volunteers to take the place of her sister Prim in the Hunger Games. This is a clear indication of her inclination toward self-sacrifice and protection. "Prim being called, me running forward to volunteer. You can't miss the desperation in my voice as I shove Prim behind me, as if I'm afraid no one will hear and they'll take Prim away." (Collins 53) Katniss is also gifted with the ability to adapt to the environment. Her resourcefulness can be seen in her ability to use the bow and arrow that she acquired when she had to step up as the breadwinner to her family after the loss of her father.

Peeta, Effie Trinket, and Haymitch Abernathy validate her instincts. “My father buys her squirrels. He always comments on how the arrows never pierce the body. She hits everyone in the eye. It’s the same with the rabbits she sells to the butcher. She can ever bring down deer.”(103) Katniss is overwhelmed by the credit she received, and this very moment shows the readers her ability as a provider and protector.

Katniss’s resourcefulness is gained from the need to provide for her family by hunting in the woods, which sharpens her survival skills and resilience as she hails from an impoverished background. In their article, ‘Wilderness as Katniss’ Savior in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*,’ the scholars present her thorough knowledge of the woods in District 12, which gives her an advantage over her counterpart, Peeta, in the Arena. The stark contrast between how the woods of District 12 nurture her and how the woods of the arena challenge her shows how wilderness is presented in dystopian fiction as a prominent setting that contributes to the growth and development of the characters. The woods became Katniss’s cornucopia as she relied on the woods to hone her wilderness survival skills to help her with the danger in the Hunger Games. In contrast, the landscapes of the arena are hazardous and deceitful. “Katniss is aware that her survival in the Games is highly possible if the battle happens in the woods.” (45)

Katniss’s overall progress is also influenced by her fellow tribute Peeta Mellark, her mentor Haymitch Abernathy and her stylist Cinna. Cinna reinforces her identity as a rebel through the construction of her Mockingjay outfit. Haymitch sees her potential from the beginning and manages to teach her a trick or two to survive in the arena by earning sponsors. “You’re golden, sweetheart. You’re going to have sponsors lined up around the block,” says Haymitch.” (160) Cinna’s stylistic choices boosted Katniss’s confidence outside the arena. In Kathryn Strong Hansen’s ‘The Metamorphosis of Katniss Everdeen: *The Hunger Games*, myth, and femininity,’ the author emphasises that her attachment to her mother and sister is the reason for her volunteering which breaks the cycle of traditional femininity. “In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss finds herself forced to endure some of the trappings of conventional femininity,

such as romance and elaborate clothes, as part of her public persona” (164)

### **Performativity and Gendered Identity of Katniss Everdeen**

Katniss negotiates femininity on her own terms. She selectively embraces femininity in places that are necessary and meaningful. She blends strength and care in an unusual way that destabilises gender binaries. “Because my dress, oh, my dress is entirely covered in reflective precious gems, red and yellow and white with bits of blue that accent the tips of the flame design. The slightest movement gives the impression I am engulfed in tongues of fire. I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun.” (Collins 139-140)

Katniss’s ability to be a protector and nurturer is evident when she empathises with Rue by considering her equivalent to Prim. To balance her defiance against the Capitol’s cruelty and her empathy for Rue, she decorates Rue’s grave with flowers. This expression is a natural expression of grief and an act of rebellion. Although Katniss balances survival with compassion, Gale’s anger is sharpened by external injustice. Gale views his rebellion not as a survival technique but as a retribution towards the Capitol. His revolutionary rhetoric broadens her perspective, urging her to think of collective action. His conviction to fight back resonates with Katniss’s own instinct to resist the Capitol and fuels her defiance.

Much like Katniss, Beatrice (Tris) Prior, genetically identified through the simulation as a Divergent, allows her to fit into multiple factions. Her innate traits, such as complexity and adaptability, enable her to think outside the box. Tris is curious and courageous. Tris desires to challenge the already established boundaries, and that is why she chooses Dauntless over Abnegation. According to her, choosing Dauntless means choosing freedom and self-discovery. “I realize that the decision might be simple. It will require a great act of selflessness to choose Abnegation, or a great act of courage to choose Dauntless, and maybe just choosing one over the other will prove that I belong. Tomorrow, those two qualities will struggle within me, and only one can win.” (Roth 37)

## **Tris Prior and the Fragmentation of the Factional self**

The visceral or basic part of us that cannot be taught or even understood is who we are at the core of our being, and Tris feels that natural inclination toward Dauntless. Tris was fascinated by Dauntless for years, and without any doubt, that is the lifestyle she gravitated towards. She acknowledges the Abnegation habits that might take a long time to break, but by choosing Dauntless, she is allowing her repressed part for 16 years to become active. With her developing sense of belonging, her experiences inside the Dauntless compound ease her sense of self, which does not have to be suppressed. Tris has been presented to the readers as a selfless and intelligent person. This credibility solidifies her identity as a Divergent. “The phrase “do whatever you like” still in my mind. At home, I could never do what I wanted, not even for an evening. I had to think of other people’s needs first. I don’t even know what I like to do.” (70)

Later in her life, her upbringing as an Abnegation instills in Tris a sense of selflessness, and eventually these values are reflected through her sacrifices and leadership, even though she has distanced herself from the Abnegation lifestyle. Just like Katniss, Tris has her mob, which includes her mentor Tobias Eaton (Four), Christina, and Al, who helped her build up physical and mental toughness through the rough training she undertook. Tris has accepted that although she embraced being a Dauntless, and they are her people, so are the Abnegation. She was unbothered by showing her loyalties toward her old faction and the danger she might be putting herself in. Tris adapts quickly under stress, reflecting her strong inner resourcefulness. Tris’s relationship with Tobias encourages her to embrace bravery and vulnerability. Her parents, who represent Abnegation values, shape her compassion and sacrifice.

Despite her bravery, Katniss is guided by a moral compass that drives her defiance of the Capitol’s oppressive regime, while Tris uses her genetic divergence to symbolise her natural ability to think critically and challenge social structures. Katniss’s transformation into a heroine begins the moment she steps forward to take Prim’s place at the reaping. Similarly, Beatrice, a reserved girl living with her

parents in a peaceful environment, transforms into Tris, a heroine who willingly fights for herself and others who are Divergents. Tris’s narrative presents her character growth as playing a significant role, as the characters leave an indelible mark on the readers. Tris’s Abnegation lifestyle demanded too much self-denial for a driven person like her. Though she was nurtured to be someone who embraced selflessness, Tris had to suppress something stronger than the force of nurture.

When I look at the Abnegation lifestyle as an outsider, I think it is beautiful. When I watch my family move in harmony; when we go to dinner parties and everyone cleans together afterwards without having to be asked; when I see Caleb help strangers carry their groceries. I fall in love with this life all over again. It is only when I try to live it myself that I have trouble. It never feels genuine. (24)

Katniss is emotionally guarded as she keeps most of her emotions reserved for herself, which makes her vulnerabilities hidden. Thus, she makes careful choices in forming relationships with people around her. Tris is often plagued by moments of self-doubt that shape her inner conflicts and make her relatable to the other characters. The Hunger Games Arena acts as a shaping force for Katniss to embrace her strategic skills and follow her survival instincts to keep herself and Peeta alive. Similarly, Tris’s transformation to Dauntless exposes her to a culture of physical risk and courage that allows her to embrace her bravery and construct her identity.

Katniss is a reluctant leader who was thrust into the role of Mockingjay, while Tris is a willing participant and a natural in her display of leadership qualities that shape her resistance movement. Katniss masks her feelings and hesitates to trust others, and Tris is comparatively more open about her feelings, especially with Four. Katniss’s cynical outlook is entrenched in the harshness of District 12 and her experiences in the Games. Tris’s change and growth stem from her upbringing in abnegation and her journey through Dauntless.

In conclusion, Katniss and Tris are shaped by the dynamic interplay between innate traits and environmental influences. Their differences feature the rich complexity of their characters, making them

iconic heroines in dystopian fiction. Although their paths differ, Katniss and Tris embody the struggle for individuality and justice as they navigate their dystopian worlds. These female protagonists redefine a bildungsroman narrative by blending personal growth and societal transformation.

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