

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

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“The Hunger Games” is a highly engaging novel for analysis due to its detailed world-building, unique narrative style and strongly developed characters. Suzanne Collins created a piece of literature that managed to captivate millions of readers all around the world. With its release in 2008 it initiated a broader trend of books of a similar type – Dystopian novels mainly aimed at young adults and teenagers that gained widespread popularity and fan community like “Maze Runner” (James Dashner, 2009) or “Divergent” (Veronica Roth, 2011). But what exactly defines “The Hunger Games” as such a dystopian novel, even though it is so different from the classical ones like “1984” (George Orwell, 1949)? Despite the existing distinctions the book clearly can be classified as part of this genre as a closer analysis of its characteristics reveals.

First of all, the setting of the book corresponds to what is necessary for a book to be a dystopian one. It takes place in the future, in a country called Panem “that rose up out of the ashes of a place once called North America” (p.18). The world as we know it was destroyed by various catastrophes like droughts, storms, fires, floods and war (p.18). What was left became a new country with new rules, a new way of advertisement and organization and a new social order. Collins even refers to the former United States by how the districts are placed in the country depending on what their main responsibility is and how they are affected by the previous activities in these regions. Therefore Katniss explains us: “In school, they tell us the Capitol was built in a place once called the Rockies. District 12 was in a region known as Appalachia. Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here. Which is why our miners have to dig so deep.” (p.41). Accordingly it’s definitely not just a Science Fiction book, that takes place in a completely different, technically advanced future but one that shows us a society that emerged from great damage and disasters we also fight nowadays such as the climate change, war or economic crisis. It doesn’t include any type of unrealistic or completely unknown aspects like many (Science) Fiction books do. There are no aliens, no foreign dimensions, no magic – Just people who try to survive in our damaged world, ruled with cruel laws. That’s what makes it a dystopian novel; it’s created in a way every reader can relate to because

at no point there is something introduced that couldn't happen in the world as we know it today too. Collins took existing problems and conflicts and pushed these ideas to the limit so everyone just has to think one or two steps ahead while reading to imagine how our "safe" world could turn into what we're seeing on the pages in front of us.

What "The Hunger Games" does have in common with typical Science Fiction is the technological innovation which is also a clear characteristic of dystopian literature. Throughout the book we are introduced to many aspects of the highly developed technology that is present in Panem. For example the trains "that average 250 miles per hour" (p.41) or the hovercrafts that according to Katniss, can "appear out of nowhere" (p.82). In the story, we encounter mutations – genetically altered animals like jabberjays or tracker jackers –, synthetic fire and an inconceivable amount of technical luxury in the Capitol. When Katniss arrives there she describes her room like that: "I program the closet for an outfit to my taste. The windows zoom on and out on parts of the city at my command. You need only whisper a type of food from a gigantic menu into a mouthpiece and it appears, hot and steamy, before you in less than a minute." (p.75). On the one hand, this development backs up the futuristic aspect of the story, on the other hand it is used by the author to ensure that the government stays in control over the districts. By the contrast between the technology used in the Capitol that creates pure luxury and extravagance and the complete lack of technology in the districts a significant inequality emerges that makes the oppression of these districts a lot easier. Those who have nothing to fight with are easily led to believe that they have no use in fighting at all. And to show them all exactly that superiority the only technology they get to see is the one which is being used against them – Mutated animals to hunt them down, holograms to show them how their kids are getting used and murdered. That's the dystopian aspect of this technological progress: Even though we have a society which could be able to achieve a lot with its possibilities, they are used to oppress a group of people, fight against each other and create a terrifying world full of cruelty.

But the main aspect that makes "The Hunger Games" without any doubts a dystopian novel is the aforementioned control the government has about not only the oppressed group, meaning the districts, but also the privileged class, the elites of the

country. This control shows in almost every possible way: Of course there is nothing like freedom of speech, when Katniss says something critical about the Capitol out loud she regrets it immediately because “even here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you. (...) When I was younger, I scared my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about District 12, about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called The Capitol. Eventually I understood this would only lead us to more trouble.” (p.6). We see how the government is able to spread so much fear, no one even dares to say a word against them. They force the people to watch how they make their children kill each other, they lock them up in districts they’re not allowed to leave and take full control about resources. “We’re not allowed to eat the crops” (p.282), Rue tells Katniss but that “they feed us a bit extra during harvest, so that people can keep going longer” (p.283). This demonstrates that they would have the resources to keep the people from starving but use the hunger as a method of control instead. Hunger creates fear, weakness, distraction and scared, weak and distracted people don’t have courage, energy or time to think about rebellion. With the tesserae they make sure even the slightest inequalities in the districts become apparent and with that they direct the hate, anger and frustration of the people against each other instead of the ones who actually are responsible. “A way to plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another” (p.14), is Gale’s view on the tesserae and how the Capitol weaponizes the hunger of the population.

Another important point in the government’s control over Panem is their propaganda and that’s also the aspect of controlling that includes the Capitol people as well as the ones from the districts. The Capitol makes sure everyone is watching every aspect of propaganda they show in TV. “At homes and community halls around the country, every television set is turned on. Every citizen of Panem is turned in. There will be no blackouts tonight.” (p.124). There again it gets illustrated that the Capitol does have the opportunity to improve the situation in the districts and keep the electricity steady but creates misery and shortcomings on purpose to remain in control without exceptions. They control every little piece of information every single citizen gets. “They don’t want people in different districts to know about one another” (p.283). So the Capitol definitely understands that information and communication

can be one of the most dangerous things for a government that rules with fear and inequality. They create different images for the people. On one hand we have the people in the districts that are kept in the dark about everything that is going on outside of their borders, on the other we have the people from the Capitol who are being overwhelmed with luxury and entertainment – And both are fed with precisely those information the government wants them to have. With narratives that this is exactly the way the world should be, that it's fair and right how they rule. "The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens." (p.18) – That's what they tell them. So the government has control over every part of their citizens life – what they say, how much they own, what they know, even what they think, to some extent – and everything they do for ruling is with the sole aim of maintaining exactly this amount of control.

In conclusion, we can say that "The Hunger Games" is definitely a dystopian novel with all its characteristics. We are introduced to a world that is being ruled by fear, control and oppression, that rose from catastrophes a society had to face and failed dealing with. By that it is like every dystopia some kind of a mirror that shows us what can happen when problems we already have escalate in a dangerous way. So even though it's different from classical dystopian books, "The Hunger Games" is no less part of that genre than them.