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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Dystopia in the Contemporary Fiction: Dystopian
Elements in *The Hunger Games*

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ABSTRACT

In recent times there has been an increase in the production of dystopian literature, which at the current time targets mostly young adults and also teenagers. This dissertation briefly examines the evolution of the utopian and dystopian literary genre talking about some of its most known works up until the present. Then it explains some common elements of this type of fiction throughout contemporary novels which have achieved some success. Next, it studies which dystopian elements are present in the Hunger Games trilogy as it has been quite successful, both in literature and in cinema, as well as being a representative example of this field. Finally, this dissertation aims to find in what ways this trilogy of books written by Suzanne Collins can be considered to belong to the dystopian genre.

Utopia, dystopia, The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins, dehumanization

En los últimos tiempos ha habido un aumento en la producción de literatura distópica, que en estos momentos está orientada principalmente a jóvenes adultos e incluso adolescentes. Este trabajo de fin de grado examina brevemente la evolución del género literario utópico y distópico hablando sobre algunas de sus obras más conocidas hasta el momento actual. Luego explica algunos de los elementos comunes de este tipo de ficción, presentes en la trilogía de los Juegos del Hambre, ya que ha tenido bastante éxito, tanto en literatura como en cine, aparte de ser un ejemplo representativo de este campo. Finalmente, el objetivo de este trabajo de fin de grado es descubrir en qué modo se puede considerar que esta trilogía de libros escritos por Suzanne Collins pertenece al género distópico.

Utopía, distopía, Los juegos del hambre, Suzanne Collins, deshumanización

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I. Introduction

I.i. State of the question

In recent years there has been a high increase in the production of dystopian literature. This genre has never been one especially demanded by the masses as can be said of crime fiction or romantic novels; some of the last dystopian books which had been successful were *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *1984* by George Orwell which were written many years ago so it is interesting that people are aware again of this genre. However, while these books aimed at an adult audience and had a serious tone, the new ones target younger readers, such as teenagers and young adults. Many of these novels end up as best-sellers which are extremely popular, and the cinema industry rushes to produce films based on these novels. That is the case of *The Hunger Games*, a trilogy of books written by the North-American writer Suzanne Collins between 2008 and 2010.

In her trilogy, Collins depicts a post-apocalyptic society in which her main character, Katniss Everdeen tries to save her family and herself from the cruelty of elite society. There are more elements which catch the attention of the young ones as love relationships and some troubles that occur to this teenager which they can relate to such as family problems or confusing feelings. Therefore, it is comprehensible that it results an appealing reading for the public, despite being a dystopian novel which was not so popular between young people before. Throughout the novels, there is death, torture, maiming, social and political control and many other elements which were not that typical in young adult literature—at least, not until now.

I found this re-emergence of dystopian literature interesting and I decided to study the origins of this revival focusing on the contemporary situation. In addition, I chose *The Hunger Games* to perform a more-in-depth analysis of the dystopian elements present in Collins' trilogy. There are many aspects which I could talk about so I selected the ones I thought were more visible and relevant in the story. Moreover, I also found many films which belong to the dystopian genre but I want to focus strictly on literature. Although I find logical that the genre does not limit to literature but that it also extended to films and videogames.

The final aim of this dissertation is to determine whether the contemporary novels selected for the analysis can be considered dystopian and to analyze the dystopian elements of *The Hunger Games*. I would also like to observe if there are any differences between the current genre and the one that was common in the twentieth century.

I.ii Methodology

My first step in writing this dissertation was to compile a list of reliable sources that I would find useful for my topic. I used the Oxford English Dictionary online to get a better understanding of the terms “utopia” and “dystopia” but I needed more information so I also made use of some books and research papers that I found in online journals from Jstor among others.

Once I had these concepts clear in my head I determined a timeline for myself so I could see the evolution of the genre from Plato’s *The Republic* to the contemporary dystopian fiction. In order to get a general idea of the dystopian genre’s situation currently I selected a total of 7 book series—some trilogies and other larger series— that I read so that I could make a brief analysis of their common dystopian elements.

Then, I had to research what could be considered dystopian elements so I read essays that had already dealt with this topic and learnt what the most recurrent themes are. I first made a brief comparison between the different novels I had previously selected for the first part of the study. Then, I established what requirements these novels needed to get in order to be considered dystopian literature. Dystopian literature should contain at least a dystopian political system and some form of population control. Afterwards, I decided on seven different sections regarding this part, with one of them encompassing a miscellanea of not so visible elements. The aim of all of this was to study the elements that make *The Hunger Games* a dystopian novel and show how it is a representative example of this genre in contemporary times.

II. Utopia and dystopia

II.i. Evolution

Humans have always dreamed about an ideal place where society behaves perfectly and there are no problems. The first known author to write about a place with these features was Plato with *The Republic*. Christianity also designed an idyllic place, the Garden of Eden, which is depicted in the book of Genesis. However, it was not until 1516 that a proper term was coined by Thomas More in *Utopia*, which received its title from the name of the place where the novel was set. The origins of the term come from Greek “eu” (no) and “topos” (place); that is, a place that does not exist. One of the chief features of utopia is that it is not real. Some elements that are frequently found in utopian literature are the following:

- Freedom of speech and action
- There is no fear of society
- Life goes harmoniously
- Society cares about nature
- Society follows some moral and social values
- Money is frequently abolished. People work not because they need it but because they like what they do
- Society is ruled by a social government formed by citizens
- Everyone share some common religious beliefs

(Utopias and Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics, ReadWriteThink.org)

Throughout history there have been more authors who have written utopian novels such as Tommaso Campanella, Edmund Burke or H.G. Wells. One of this literary genre’s aims is to criticize those aspects of society that are in need of an improvement. It is not

uncommon for writers, and artists in general, to denounce a society's faults by medium of their works as Peterson states in the following fragment:

Literature has been used as a medium for social criticism for the greater part of literary history. Genres such as the novel of social criticism and the social novel are the ones most used when wanting to have an undertone of social criticism. (Peterson 1)

Utopian authors do it by creating perfect settings and ideal situations but other authors have preferred to use a contrary method of criticizing, called dystopia. The Oxford English dictionary defines dystopia as “an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one. The opposite of utopia.”

The origins of the term, which are in Greek too, give a precise explanation of the meaning of this word. “Dys” -bad- followed by utopia, a bad utopia. While utopia was an idyllic story which tried to criticize society by designing a paradisiac situation which was not possible for humans, dystopia presents a nightmarish setting in which fear and danger reign. Dystopias represent an exaggerated version of the problems of a society, and are usually set in the future. It is the author's way of warning society about what can take place if they do not change. According to Siswantia Sar, “The writers of dystopia get their inspiration from experience or they see it from reality. (...) As the famous writers of dystopia, Ray Bradbury and John Brunner said that they were not trying to predict the future of dystopia but to prevent it.” (Political Dystopia in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* 3)

Dystopia is quite a modern term as the first person to use it was J.S. Mill in 1868 during a Parliamentary speech when he tried to contrast the term “utopia”. Claeys stated that “From the 1890s onwards the appearance of an increasing number of dystopian texts thus seemingly indicates a negative trend in the wider utopian genre as a whole” (Claeys 111). Although there was dystopian literature prior to the twentieth century—for instance, Christianity had already talked about Heaven (utopian place) and Hell (dystopian place)—,

some scholars consider the novel *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin as the beginning of modern dystopia. The success of *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *1984* by George Orwell published in 1932 and 1948 respectively, is the most remarkable example about the fears of the population throughout the twentieth century. These novels include several common elements such as the fear of a government which controls every aspect of life, the terrors of war and the dehumanization of society among others. In recent times, they have experienced a revival as people have turned to them because the same worries are disturbing people again.

Apart from these novels there are other works in the past century such as *The Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood or *Battle Royale* by Koushun Takami but they appeared later and deal with different themes, e.g. youth problems, gender roles or education.

II.ii. Contemporary fiction

Nowadays, there are many issues present in this genre and there are elements which appear frequently in the contemporary fiction. First of all, many of them are aimed to a young-adult audience, probably due to the almost constant occurrence of world problems in the media that new generations have had. Some authors also consider the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 11, 2001 to be a clue element to justify this increase of consumption of dystopian literature by the young as we can see in the following extract:

The rise in dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction may be linked to America's response to the events of September 11, 2001. Dystopian and post-apocalyptic novels seem both to evoke and relieve the mindset of fear and isolation felt by many real people after the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center (Pharr and Clark 8)

The situation in other countries was not very different as there were also attacks and some general knowledge of the war which were taking place in those times. Furthermore, the economic crisis which started in 2008 also affected people's mood which in turn led to their growing interest in dystopian literature as Henthorne argues below:

The mood of the time shaped its reception; the book's biting irony matched the mood of the times as a population, which was already weary of the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and suspicious of its political leaders, faced a very real prospect of economic ruin. (Henthorne 2)

Thus, it is not surprising that young people demanded a dystopian literature which dealt with these themes. If we examine briefly some of the major works since *Battle Royale*, we can see some common features in these works such as the dehumanization of mankind.

I will now examine the following books that have been successful among the young: *Battle Royale* (1999), *The Uglies Series* (2005-2007), *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), *Divergent* trilogy (2011-2013), *Ashes* trilogy (2011-2013), *The Selection* series (2012-2015) and *Red Queen* series (2015-2017).

First, they can be classified in the categories of regular dystopia, apocalyptic fiction and post-apocalyptic literature *Battle Royale* is the only one that belongs to pure dystopian genre since *Ashes* is an apocalyptic trilogy and the rest of these novels are post-apocalyptic fiction.

Regarding their physical location, most of them are set in the United States of America, although *Battle Royale* takes place in Japan. Another aspect they have in common is that they are set in the future. One exception to this is *Battle Royale* which was written in 1996 although it was not published until 1999, so it was supposed to be set in the future (1997). Nevertheless, the situation is different as in the world where *Battle Royale* takes place—the author altered history— Japan won the World War II so they are much more powerful and have under their control Korea and part of China. Another exception is *Ashes*, whose time location is not specified but it resembles the current time so we might guess that the plot occurs at some time in the 21st century. However, although they are set in the future, some of them present a primitive background due to the destruction of previous civilization; for example in some of the novels, there is a clear contrast between futuristic sides of society and the primitive one.

In *the Uglies* series, for instance, people live in modern technological cities and have a completely different lifestyle from the one we know while other parts of society prefer to live in the wild, trying to protect themselves and Earth from the harm mankind can cause to the world — destroying natural resources and artificially modifying nature.

In the case of *Divergent*, society has managed to start a new life and have some technological advancements but the Earth is in a terrible state so it is not possible to create a completely futuristic society.

Red Queen is set in a distant future after a mutation provoked huge transformations in society and life in general; it has modern elements such as factories and media communications but at the same time, there are elements from the old times like the presence of a monarchy which rules in a similar way to the Media Ages in Europe.

This also happens in *the Selection* series where the plot revolves around a monarchy which is looking for a consort for the male heir. In fact, the setting takes place mostly in the royal palace where the female candidates to be engaged with the prince go throughout the selection process. It mixes modern elements such as some professions, like modelling, with an aesthetic typical of past time periods (servants, strict morals or a curfew for example)

Moreover, *The Hunger Games* which I will analyze in more detail later is set in a remote time after a third world war which has left the Earth in ruins. The survivors of the United States are organized into a Capitol —the privileged ones— and districts which provide resources for the Capitol citizens while living in much inferior conditions.

Moving on to their political system, both *Red Queen* and *The Selection* have monarchies who rule over the other groups which are organized in castes depending on their job. *Ashes* starts with the current political system but when the mutation takes place, population centres appear where the old ones govern according to their own convictions and beliefs using the fear of the exterior world as a threat. (Bick 290) In *Divergent* society are also organized depending on their occupations and there is one faction which rules the rest although there are others who want that power. Likewise, *The Uglies* depict a world in which an elite part of society controls the others via surgical processes and classifies them

according to their age, status and level of beauty. In contrast, *Battle Royale* is difficult to define, its government is much more powerful than the current one and the students abducted to fight are controlled all the time but the plot focuses more on dehumanization than on the government.

Furthermore, these novels have other elements in common as the fact that, as these books are aimed to young adults or teenagers, the main characters are usually quite young, and their age range is from 15 to 17 though they grow up as time goes by in the books. To end this chapter, this genre of books should not be mistaken with those belonging to the fantastic genre. It is true that there are some abnormal elements like radiation or mutations but there is not magic or fantastic creatures such as talking-animals or mythical personages.

One last aspect I would like to comment on is that I have observed that although the events taking place in the novels are typically dystopian, the endings are more positive than those of the past century. For instance, in the majority of these new novels, the main character survives and manages to either solve the problem or at least to improve the situation. This is different from other novels of the twentieth century like *1984* in which the protagonist is finally defeated. This difference is most likely due to fact that the audience who is going to read these books as are used to having a happy ending in order to enjoy the product.

III. Analysis of the dystopian elements of *The Hunger games*

The Hunger Games trilogy is comprised of *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*. It follows the life of a young woman — Katniss Everdeen— who is forced to participate in the “Hunger Games” and wins them in such an unusual way that she becomes the symbol of a rebellion. Throughout all the novels you learn about the country of Panem — the former United States of America — and the society who has inherited the Earth in this post-apocalyptic future. Thus, this series belongs to the dystopian genre.

Every dystopia is different but there are some common elements that can be found in the majority of them. I have selected some of the most visible ones and I will explain them in the next subsections, including references to other dystopian novels in order to exemplify their influence in the *Hunger Games* novels.

III.i. Post-apocalyptic setting

The Hunger Games story is set in a fictional future, after a huge war which almost ended with both humankind and the Earth. The remains of the United States of America are now called Panem and are organized in a Capitol and twelve districts —formerly thirteen— that supply the needs of the citizens from the Capitol —this resembles the organization of North America in the colonial times as the territory was also organized in thirteen colonies that provided the British, who ruled them, with cotton and other products.

Before the story takes place, district thirteen started a rebellion against the Capitol as life conditions were quite different; hard conditions and no privileges at all in the districts; and a life of luxury and excesses in the Capitol. The Capitol defeated the districts but district thirteen had been secretly asked to produce nuclear armory and neither it nor the Capital wanted to get involved in a nuclear war so they reached an agreement, district thirteen would have to fake its own destruction and they will be left alone. This implied that they had to get accustomed to being self-sufficient, which is not easy as each district

specialized in one area (coal, wood, meat, and etcetera) and they depended upon each other to survive. As a consequence of the districts rebellion, the Capitol created “The Hunger Games”, a competition in which a boy and a girl of each district will compete to death; only one could survive and be rewarded. As Suzanne Collins explains:

The rules of the Hunger Games are simple. In punishment for the uprising, the twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. (*The Hunger Games* 21)

Theoretically, this was supposed to be a reminder of the many lives lost in the rebellion but it was actually a cruel way of showing the citizens that the Capitol was in charge as demonstrated by the quote below:

Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen. (*The Hunger Games* 21)

This constant fear used as a repression is a common element in dystopias; governments use fear to control citizens like in *1984*, where citizens were afraid of war with other countries so they obeyed government for protection.

The truth about district thirteen is not learnt until the end of the second book — *Catching Fire*—, until that moment Katniss is unaware of the survival of the district although she was suspicious when she found people who have fled from their original districts searching it. It is in these moments when Katniss starts to hope for a rebellion though she does not get actively involved yet. As a consequence of the Dark Days, the Capitol created The Hunger Games. Throughout the book they make multiple references to the fact that they are fighting like in the old ways because they do not want to start a war that would destroy the Earth.

We could’ve nuked them with missiles, yes. But there’s always the larger question: if we engage in that type of war with the Capitol, would there be any human life left? (...) You’ll

notice neither side has launched nuclear weapons. We're working it out the old-fashioned way
(*Mockingjay* 96)

III.ii. Political dystopia

There are two political sides, the Capitol and the rebels. The first one is formed by the elite society of Panem, who live in the Capitol, and is commanded by President Snow. The rebels began in district thirteen although they were joined by refugees from other districts and some Capitol citizens. In *Catching Fire*, citizens started to rebel slightly but it is not until the third book, *Mockingjay*, that the rebels go public with their objectives and who they are composed of —district citizens, previous games winners, celebrities and even a games organizer, Plutarch Heavensbee. Their leader is Alma Coin, the president of district thirteen; although many people consider that there are other candidates who could be a better choice. The rebellion which takes place in *Mockingjay* started because of all the oppression that the citizens from the districts suffered. The Hunger Games were imposed on them; many of them starved to death or lived in subhuman conditions (poor hygienic system, not enough power supply, and etcetera) as Suzanne Collins describes in *The Hunger Games*:

Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District Twelve. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines. (...) Starvation is never the cause death officially. It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one (*The Hunger Games* 32)

In addition to these problems, citizens are monitored by the peacekeepers, which could be depicted as a police body which is in charge of maintaining order and making sure people follow the rules. They have authority to punish or even kill citizens if they are found guilty of any criminal activity. Some criminal activities can be hunting for food in the wild, being found in the possession of armory, stealing, criticizing the Capitol and many others. However, in the first book of the trilogy, peacekeepers are corrupted so they can be bribed occasionally but things change in the second book as I will state later.

Besides this, citizens of the districts have very few rights; for instance, they do not have access to a health system which helps them if they get injured or sick. Another thing they lack is freedom to travel to other districts or to the Capitol; they are only allowed to travel in special occasions like participating in the Hunger Games or being required in the Capitol. They do not have freedom of speech either, there is not such a thing as a newspaper or a job of novelist; there are some citizens of the Capitol who could be considered similar to journalists as they present tv shows, e.g. Caesar Flickerman, the man who interviews the tributes before they go into the arena and the survivors of the “games”, apart from other type of tv programmes which deal with The Hunger Games.

The rebels also have strict rules in district thirteen although life-conditions are much better. However, citizens need to follow a routine in order to be useful to society and they are not usually allowed to go to the exterior —District Thirteen developed underground after they faked their annihilation— unless they have permission, their tasks require it or in the case that they are going to fight at the war. So both political sides have some similarities, which is why Katniss does not agree with Coin’s ideas and finally murders her once the war is over. Symbology is very notable on both sides; for instance the Capitol plays Panem’s anthem each night in the Hunger Games, just before displaying on the sky images of districts numbers who have lost a tribute that day. In addition they have a motto, “Panem today, Panem tomorrow, Panem forever” which they are forced to learn.

It is curious to observe the resemblance between Panem and the Roman Imperium. First of all, the name of Panem derives from the Latin statement, “panem et circenses”, which in English means “bread and circuses”. The same system is repeated in this society, in that citizens from the Capitol are happy because they have enough to eat —in fact, more than enough. In the feasts they organize at the Capitol, guests are provided with drinks to make them vomit when they are full so they can continue eating — and because they also have entertainment, the Hunger Games. In addition, the Capitol’s emblem contains an eagle, which symbolizes power and has been used throughout history by governments, including the Roman Imperium.

On the other hand, Katniss provided the rebels with one of their symbols, the mockingjay, which is a cross between mockingbirds and jabberjays. This last one was a mutation created by the Capitol to spy the rebels in the previous uprising, but the rebels found it and used jabberjays for their own purposes misleading the Capitol by transmitting fake information via these birds. Because of it, the Capitol tried to get rid of the jabberjays but they managed to breed with mockingbirds creating mockingjays, birds who can repeat tunes they have heard before—jabberjays could repeat entire conversations. Therefore, the mockingjays are a rebellious symbol in themselves, that is why the rebels chose it to represent themselves after seeing Katniss wearing pin in the shape of a mockingjay as a token of her district to the games although she was not aware in those moments of the importance of this gesture. She often creates rebellious emblems without noticing; apart from the mockingjay symbol, she also came up with two of the mottos the rebels would take as their own: “Because you know who they [the Capitol] are and what they do [...] If we [the rebels] burn, you [the Capitol] burn with us!” (*Mockingjay* 118)

Consequently, the political situation in Panem is terrible, with a government that only cares about power and about protecting one group of society and a rebel group which might seem different but whose leader might also have dark hidden intentions. Fortunately, at the end of the third book there is a turn of events. The war ends and president Coriolanus Snow is killed by the rebels. Afterwards, President Alma Coin is murdered by Katniss while she was mentally disorientated and a new leader who seems to be more trustworthy occupies the place of leader. This does not usually happen in dystopias but the Hunger Games has an ending which tries to soften the story.

III.iii. Control of population

It is common in dystopias that the government controls the population in order to detect possible menaces as well as being aware of the number of citizens it is controlling. In this case, both the Capitol government and the rebels carry out a research study. Firstly,

when citizens of the district reach twelve years-old, the government registers it and continues controlling it every year when they attend the reaping again:

Attendance is mandatory unless you are on death's door. This evening, officials will come around and check to see if that is the case. If not, you'll be imprisoned. (...) People file in silently and sign in. The reaping is a good opportunity for the Capitol to keep tabs on the population as well. Twelve- to eighteen-year-olds- are herded into rope areas marked off by ages (*The Hunger Games 18*)

Thus, the Hunger Games reaping —the moment when the names of the female and male tribute are chosen via a draw— is a good opportunity for the government to count the number of live citizens, both adults and teenagers. Once the citizens of the districts reach the legal age they need to find a job to survive because they do not need to attend classes anymore. The lucky ones might inherit a business from their parents like an apothecary or a bakery while most of the population has to dedicate themselves to the production of resources their district is specialized in (fishing, mining, cutting wood, harvesting and etcetera) or, if they are not physically able, find another way of making many possibly through illegal methods such as prostitution. No matter what they dedicate their life to, peacekeepers would check up on them to monitor their activities.

In some districts there are illegal black markets where people can trade and where people know that others are guilty of not following the law, but they do not care as it improves many people's life. In the first book, Katniss usually goes to the Hob, the black market of district twelve, where even peacekeepers go sometimes and who do not punish anyone but in *Catching Fire* the situation changes. The old peacekeepers disappear and new ones arrive, bringing with them new rules, sadistic forms of punishment and no intentions of following their predecessors example; in fact, one of their first activities is burning down the Hob as it is something not regulated by the Capitol.

Not every district is controlled in the same way; some of them are privileged compared with others. Districts one, two and four live in better condition due to many reasons. District one is specialized in luxury products which makes them more popular in

the Capitol, district two has a secret nuclear armoury for the Capitol and is also the place where most peacekeepers come from, and district four is one of the wealthiest as it is the one in charge of providing marine products. These districts have better fed people who even sometimes learn how to fight in order to volunteer at the Hunger Games and achieve fame and more wealth. This is what is called a “career tribute”, and they are often the favourites of the audience who receive useful gifts from the citizens while they are in the arena. They are therefore much more likely to win the games than those who come from poor districts such as district eleven or district twelve.

In regards to the “Hunger Games”, tributes are inserted a tracer device before entering the arena so the organizers know where they are in every moment. In addition, there are cameras that record them in every moment although the organizers decide what to show to the audience.

In comparison, President Coin’s method is different from Snow’s. In district Thirteen, each citizen is assigned a compartment to live in—normally with his family—and each person is tattooed every morning with a list of his tasks and schedule. Thus, it is easy for them to compare what people are doing as the tattoo does not disappear until the shower. They are also given food according to the effort their activities require, their age and their physical condition and maintain a strict security system, where only those who are authorized can access to certain sections of the facilities.

III.iv. Brainwashing

The most indoctrinated people are the citizens of the Capitol. They do not have real needs and they are taught to think of the people in the districts as inferior even if they are not aware of their actual conditions. They are concerned with consumerist needs such as dressing fashionably, attending parties and meeting celebrities and they do not have access to what could be considered as culture. They have the mentality of a child; most of them do not reach the maturity of a real adult because they do not have the necessary experience. For example Katniss sees her old prep team from the Capitol as:

“Not evil or cruel. They’re not even smart. Hurting them, it’s like hurting children. They don’t see....I mean, they don’t know.....” (*Mockingjay* 64)

During these novels there is no presence of reading books as a hobby; and the history books have been previously manipulated by the government. According to them, the Capitol tries to not repeat mankind’s past mistakes and that is why they control everything. They also say that their intention is to take care of everyone, kind of a paternalistic leadership style, and that President Snow is a great leader who worries about everyone. In the districts, children are taught at school about how dreadful the world was before and about how they need to produce in their district but they are not provided with a real education as it does not interest the Capitol that they improve their living conditions. According to Jan Pospíšil, this is a feature common in dystopia as he states in the following extract:

Taking care of children’s upbringing is, therefore, a distinct theme in dystopian literature. It does have logical explanation. The mind of a child is flexible, easily adaptable and can be shaped into anything imaginable (*The Historical Development of Dystopian Literature* 32)

With these words he was referring to *Brave New World* but the same could be applied to *The Hunger Games* and many other dystopian works. For instance, Prim never thought she could train to be a nurse until she got to district thirteen as she had always been taught that her future was related to coal production.

Every year, when they celebrate the Hunger Games, they retell the story of how District Thirteen rebelled and the Capitol was “forced” to create the tradition so that they remember the loss of lives. Here there is an explanation by Katniss of the speech citizens hear every year:

It’s the same story every year. He tells the story of Panem, the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms [...] The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the

districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games. (*The Hunger Games 21*)

The speech citizens are forced to hear is just another tool used to make them hopeless and so that they do not dare to protest, although it reaches a point where, along with the other types of oppression people from the districts suffer, it ignites a rebellion against the Capitol. Furthermore, they are presented with the idea of the Capitol being an utopia when it is really the opposite.

There is a clear similarity with *1984* in the way citizens of the districts are forced to see the reaping. In addition, during the time of the games, the televisions which are compulsory to be in each house receive enough energy to broadcast “the Hunger Games”. There are moments which everybody has to see. The same happened with the announcements made by “Big Brother” in *1984*. (Orwell 16) Most likely, Collins was inspired by it as citizens are supposed to show respect for the government too while they are watching these televisions. Moreover, apart from the Hunger Games, the news programmes and announcements by the government, the districts cannot see anything else on the televisions. In the Capitol they broadcast some entertainment programmes too but they try to talk about the games all year: the competition, the victory, the winner’s tour, interviews with old victors, etcetera. This is both entertainment for the Capitol and torture for the districts who are constantly reminded of it.

Another clear example of how the citizens’ minds are manipulated is how, via the media, the public profile of Katniss and other victors is altered. When the Capitol needed to show them as a spectacle, they were presented as marvelous creatures, graceful, powerful and lovely. For instance, Katniss is called “the girl on fire”, and people try to imitate the way she dresses and many demand to know every detail of her life as they are fascinated. Conversely though, once some of them reveal themselves as rebels, they are depicted as criminals, evil and powerless. This also resembles *1984*, where there were people in charge of altering the information about the past in order to manipulate the public opinion about

the government, fellow citizens and the war. The constant bombardment of news with information about them is enough to turn citizens against what they previously glorified. The same happens in *The Hunger Games*, people are manipulated to change their views of the world.

III.v. Dehumanization

Collins presents the reader a dehumanized society in various aspects, since the life conditions of the districts to the Hunger Games and the behaviours present along the trilogy.

One of the first elements which contributes to this climate of dehumanization is the contrast between living in the Capitol and living in a district. Citizens from the districts often do not have the necessary provisions to have a good quality of life (basic hygiene resources, electricity supply, hot water, enough space, a public health system or enough food, among many other things that we take for granted nowadays). Whilst at the same time people in the Capitol do not care as they do not see the people from the districts as human beings, indeed they even consider them to be inferior because they are not concerned with their physical appearance— something logical as they have much more important issues to deal with. An example of the shallowness of the Capitol is in the following extract which shows the attitude of the prep team of Katniss when they met her:

The three step back and admire their work. “Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!” says Flavius, and they all laugh. I force my lips into a smile to show how grateful I am. (...) “We promise! You know, now that we’ve got rid of all the hair and filth, you’re not horrible at all!” says Flavius encouragingly. (*The Hunger Games* 72)

The fact that Katniss’s prep team say to her “you almost look like a human being now” after they have put make-up on her shows how superficial the Capitol are, because they rate physical appearance above other attributes.

Another thing that Katniss complains about is that the Capitol forces the citizens to treat the Games as a festivity, which is something humiliating because it is a tradition which causes them pain and misery and treats them almost as animals that have to kill to survive. The format of the Games also resembles the Roman gladiator fights, as people are thrown into an arena with the aim of killing the other to survive and because they are used as a form of entertainment for the elite.

When they are in the Games, the tributes are not supposed to show human attributes such as compassion or generosity as this goes against their primary objective of surviving, because the rules state clearly that only one tribute can win. However, Katniss befriends Rue, a 12-year-old girl from district eleven who reminds her of her little sister, Prim. Their friendship starts when little Rue takes care of Katniss injuries after an attack of venomous tracker jackers—a type of insect whose bite causes extreme pain, hallucinations and which can be mortal if not treated—and continues with them making an alliance. They share food, other resources and tell each other about their families and the routines they had back in their districts. Together, they plan the destruction of the resources of the career tributes in order to weaken them and they manage to do it but when carrying out their plan, they get separated and Rue is murdered by another tribute. Katniss avenges her and spends her last moments singing a lullaby to calm her as Rue loved music. In addition, she honours her lost friend by adding flowers to her body. The Capitol does not want the audience to watch this—as it is an example of humanity and friendship, and they do not want the citizens from the Capitol to think about it—so they do not transmit the singing but they cannot avoid the moment where the corpse is collected by the Capitol.

However, not all the tributes were as compassionate as Katniss. Glimmer, for instance, was a sadistic girl who, among the career tributes pack, who ended with the lives of many tributes. This group act like predators, hunting the others in a pack to kill them, and are incapable of have feelings such as regret or empathy. They had been brought up with the proper mentality of murdering people without giving them a second thought. Most of them belong to privileged districts and they are more than willing to participate in the Hunger Games. In *Catching Fire* older victors are presented and are forced to compete

again in the Quarter Quell and most of them are horrified by this as they were promised that they would never have to fight again. Yet, some of them are enthusiastic about returning to the Games as they were previously career tributes.

One of them, Enobaria, was famous because of her last murder as it was particularly bloody and inhuman. Thus, it was a huge success in the Capitol:

She killed one tribute by ripping open his throat with her teeth. She became so famous for this act that, after she was a victor, she had her teeth cosmetically altered so each one ends in a sharp point like a fang and is inlaid with gold. She has no shortage of admirers in the Capitol (*Catching Fire* 270)

People at the Capitol would rather see bloody deaths than more peaceful ones and for them the more spectacular the death, the more they like it. In order to help them with this show, the Capitol provides them with armoury and other devices which are kept in a gigantic Cornucopia when the Games start. This results in bloodshed in the first moments of the games because many tributes try to reach these resources but not many survive. As Collins wrote, “it was considered very anticlimactic in the Capitol, all those quiet, bloodless deaths”. (*The Hunger Games* 45)

On the other hand, it is not only in the Games where dreadful deaths take place in these books. Katniss and Gale’s dads were killed in a mine explosion, and their entire district was annihilated at the end of the second book, when the rebellion started and Katniss was rescued from the arena. For instance, in the third novel, Boggs had his legs blown up by an explosion, and Finnick Odair and other members of Katniss’ military unit were brutally killed by some mutations which smelled like roses —a smell that reminded Katniss of President Snow. Furthermore, the action which ended the war shows perfectly how both sides have already lost humanity by this point. President Snow offered the refugees a place to stay in his own palace. However, he also gave the orders that kids needed to remain in front of the palace, as a shield to protect him, probably thinking that this would stop the rebels. Unfortunately, he underestimated their cruelty; because they robbed an aircraft from the Capitol —in order to make citizens that the action had been

ordered by Snow— and threw bombs disguised as presents to the children, who were massacred. At this moment, Katniss's little sister Prim, who was training to be a nurse but who was too young to be there, appeared with other nurses and doctors and tried to help the children. Nevertheless, at that moment some explosives which had been programmed to explode later ended their lives. This made Katniss suspicious of Gale as he had talked about creating a trap like that back in district thirteen so; although no one admitted it, she knew that it had been her best friend and other rebels who had killed her sister.

I have already mentioned that Finnick had an awful death, but his life was quite horrible too. He won the games at the age of fourteen and was a very attractive young man, so the organizers sold it to its citizens throughout his life. He was similar to a prostitute and he could not refuse because the Capitol had threatened to murder his sweetheart, a girl from his district. Nevertheless, this helped him to gather information about the Capitol and how to destroy it, because he asked his clients to tell him secrets instead of giving him money or luxuries. The book does not offer any more names but it says that it was not an uncommon life for attractive winners.

Moreover, one way that the authorities used to control the population, including those of the Capitol and the winners, was the removing of their tongues. If someone was found to be a traitor, he had his tongue cut out and became an avox, incapable of talking and forced to serve the Capitol for the rest of his life. Katniss met some of them during her stay in the Capitol and one of her friends in her military unit was an avox too. He could not talk but his brother explained that he had been condemned to work and live in the sewers, a terrible experience, and that they had to pay a huge amount of money which was only saved up over various years, in order to get him a better workstation which allowed him to be on the surface again.

The last element I would like to analyze regarding dehumanization is the victor's tour that Katniss and Peeta have to participate in, in *Catching Fire*. As the Capitol treated the Games a festivity and did not want either the winners or the rest of the people to forget, it organized a tour around all the districts. In each of them, Katniss and Peeta had to give

speeches written by the Capitol and maintain a façade of happiness, as if they were celebrities. This affected them as they had to meet the families of the tributes that they had killed or witnessed their deaths. Similarly, the districts have to celebrate the victory of someone who had killed their tributes.

To conclude with this chapter, I will just say that although there are many other dehumanization elements that I have not talked about there also positive aspects in these books. For instance, District twelve refused to cheer Katniss volunteering as a tribute to save her sister; instead they silent stayed respectfully and gave her the symbol they used to bid farewell at a funeral to express admiration. Many people help Katniss throughout the story and she manages to find friendship and love in the middle of all this misery. Furthermore, she finds people who sacrifice their lives for others or who do their best to help the world become a better place. Despite everything, there is a small glimmer of hope in these novels as it is demonstrated in the following extract:

That's when I make a list in my head of every act of goodness I've seen someone do. It's like a game. Repetitive. Even a little tedious after more than twenty years. But there are much worse games to play. (*Mockingjay* 455)

III.vi. Other elements

In this subsection I will briefly talk about some more elements typical in dystopias that are present in *The Hunger Games*. For instance, winners of the “Games” are supposed to achieve a better life and not have to worry anymore but this is a lie. They might get a safe economic situation, and they do not have to get a job if they do not want to as they can dedicate their time to an occupation of their own choice, i.e. painting, singing, knitting, and etcetera. However, they will always be persecuted by the “Games” in the shape of nightmares, traumas, permanent injuries or depression.

In order to escape this reality, many winners turn to drugs such as morphling or alcohol; Haymitch for instance is known as a drunkard in district twelve. He drinks so

much so that he can forget for a while his own “Hunger Games” which he won thanks to the fact that the organizers made a mistake designing the arena and Haymitch then took advantage of this mistake to win so the Capitol was mad at him and murdered his family and his girlfriend. Additionally, all the winners have to mentor tributes from their district and Haymitch was the only winner alive from district twelve so he had to mentor many tributes who died. This led to this alcoholism as if he were trying to numb himself from pain. He is not the only one, there are a couple of tributes in *Catching Fire* who were extremely addicted to morphling—a drug created by the Capitol although their stories are never known. Even Katniss and her hospital partner, Johanna Mason, struggle to go off of consuming morphling after they get injured.

This is similar to the use of drugs in *Brave New World*, where citizens administered constantly drugs (soma) so they felt happy and would not complain about the society. (Huxley 49) In this case, it is only a minority of people who can afford these drugs but they use them for similar purposes. An exception is the case of Peeta, who needs to use morphling in order to nurse his mental health back to normal. He was cruelly tortured by the Capitol; they injected tracker jacker venom into him to make him confused about his feelings and his memories, which made him hate his friends and Katniss. Consequently, the rebels tried to use morphling in order to calm his pain and to counteract the effects of the venom with satisfactory results although he was never the same.

Another consequence of the “Hunger Games” and of the society in general, is the way people interact with others, in the relationships that take place in the story. Firstly, children learn quickly that their parents cannot protect them from the world. Katniss herself says: At eleven years old, with Prim just seven, I took over as head of the family. (*The Hunger Games* 31). This happened after Katniss and Prim’s father died in an explosion in the mines and when her mother became deeply depressed and could not take care of her children. This meant that they were almost starving until Katniss took charge and started collecting herbs first and hunting later. Something similar occurred to her friend Gale, the oldest of a very large family whose father died in the same explosion as Katniss’. Both of

them are teenagers but they act as if they were much older and have assigned themselves the role of providers for their family. This can be clearly seen in this example:

“If we didn’t have so many kids,” he adds quickly. They’re not our kids, of course. But they might as well be. Gale’s two little brothers and a sister. Prim. And you may as well throw in our mothers, too, because how would they live without us? Who would fill those mouths that are always asking for more? (*The Hunger Games 10-11*)

Susan Shau Ming Tan commented on the idea that the system is constructed to turn children into agents of their family’s survival and:

Thus, adults cannot provide, but children can. Childhood is stripped away as families and adults offer up their children as potential sacrifice. (Burn with Us: Sacrificing Childhood in *The Hunger Games 56*)

Throughout the series, Katniss complains about this situation and blames her mother for not having been there for her daughters. This added to her fear of having a child chosen as tribute makes her state various times that she does not want to have children. It is only when the war is over and several years have passed that she is convinced to try and even then, she remains scared.

Thus, family relationships are not easy in this unsafe world but they are not the only relationships to suffer. Friendship is also affected by this climate of misery. They have problems knowing who to trust as if they tell the wrong thing to someone they could be arrested or even executed. Moreover, people are segregated because of their economic situation. In district twelve children from the Seam—the poor zone—are resentful that they are much more likely to get chosen to participate in “the Games” than the privileged kids who live in the merchant’s zone. The reason for this is the tesserae, a system by which children accept to enter their name more times in the reaping in exchange for some grain and oil. Therefore, children who need help to survive and to provide for their families enter their names more times into the reaping in exchange for tesserae so that their families can have more food. Aside from this, merchant children are better fed and do not have to work so hard. This situation changes after the destruction of district twelve as those who escaped

the flames and got to district thirteen have to adapt themselves to their new life as is shown in the extract below:

Delly's a bit thinner than I remember, but she was one of the few kids in District Twelve with a couple of pounds to spare. The diet here, the stress, the grief of losing her parents have all, no doubt, contributed. (*Mockingjay* 218)

Delly is not the only one who finds it difficult to adapt; Katniss is terribly unsettled and does not know who to trust. She is mad at Haymitch, misses Peeta, argues with Gale and does not trust President Coin and her team. Peeta also feels lost when he is rescued as he has been tortured in order to hate Katniss and the others. Apart from that, none of his family survived the destruction of the district and, although they were not very united, they were a family.

The only one person that Katniss always trust and cares about throughout the series is her sister Prim. Their bond is so strong that Katniss even volunteered to go to the "Games" when Prim was chosen. This is not common because, as Katniss expresses: "Family devotion only goes so far for most people on reaping day. What I did was a radical thing." (*The Hunger Games* 30)

Love is not easy either as there are more worrying issues to deal with for Katniss. Furthermore, she gets confused when she is forced to fake a relationship with Peeta as she does not know what is true and what is not. She has feelings for both Gale and Peeta but she does not know which are stronger and they do not make things easy for her. Peeta saved her from starvation when her father had just died and then protected her from the Capitol as much as he could. On the other hand, Gale was her oldest friend and always took care of her family when she was not able to; for instance, when she went to the Games or when District Twelve was destroyed.

There are also other cases like Haymitch, who did not dare to love anyone else anymore as his loved ones had been murdered as punishment for his trick in his "Games",

or Finnick, who could not reveal who he truly loved as he had to be with many different people in order to protect Annie, his true love.

Readers will not find many couples in the story as most of the characters are alone or have a family which is broken. This is probably due to the lack of expression and the fear disseminated by the Capitol. The epilogue of the story allows the reader to see that Katniss started to reconstruct her life and even built a family as well as maintaining a friendly relationship with Haymitch and other survivors of the last war. However, her mother got separated from her family as she could not accept the loss of her daughter Prim. Gale also lost his relationship with Katniss as she blamed him for the death of her sister; and many of her friends, like Finnick, died in the war. Therefore it is a bittersweet ending as the main character survives and has some positive elements in her life but she also loses a lot.

III.vii. Resemblance with the current moment

As the aim of dystopian novels is to prevent possible situations, authors try to establish similarities with the contemporary times so that people can relate to the story and understand the message. In the case of the *Hunger Games* trilogy, the similarities are enormous.

Firstly, there is a small but powerful group of people who benefit from the work of the rest of the world—the Capitol—, similar to the way our society is organized at the moment. Most countries from the denominated “first world countries” purchase items that have been produced in other parts of the world where they are not paid fair wages. In addition, many people prefer to ignore the situation in other parts although the situation is not so extreme in real life. There are still people who want to help those who are not so lucky.

Another similarity is the drug abuse used by people to forget their problems as many people are currently reported to consume both legal and illegal drugs. In its annual World Drug Report issued on Thursday, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said

there were now more than 29 million people suffering from drug use disorders worldwide; well up on the 27 million reported a year ago. (www.dw.com), Deutsche)

In addition to these similarities, experts say that relationships are becoming more superficial nowadays. People tend to do things in order to share them on social networks instead of because they want to. Thus, although the causes are not the same, the results are similar.

The political situation now is not as bad as in the books but there are many problems because of wars, terror attacks, tyrannies and etcetera. Thus, Collins' message is clear: if the situation continues like this, the future might be similar to the one depicted in her books. The same can be said about the environmental problems that many nations are trying to resolve without success. If things do not change, the future does not look good.

Fortunately, although there might be more resemblances than the mentioned here, many of the elements of *The Hunger Games* are just fiction.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has dealt with dystopian literature and looked at some representative novels of the genre in the contemporary moment. In order to prove that they belonged to the genre they needed to meet the requirements previously established, something that they did satisfactorily. Moreover, the study of some of their common elements allowed me to show a general vision of the contemporary dystopian fiction, emphasizing the changes suffered by the genre like the target audience which is now younger.

Secondly, the other theme this dissertation has studied is the dystopian elements that can be found in Suzanne Collins' trilogy *The Hunger Games*. Several elements were found and analyzed using for that purpose cites from the book and comparison with previous dystopian literature like *Brave New World* and *1984*. For instance, I found similarities with previous elements such as drug abuse or history distortion. Thus, these elements are evidence enough that the books belong to the genre of dystopia, in detail; they could be classified as post-apocalyptic dystopia because of their setting (after a war).

The political elements of dystopia have been clearly found in the organization of the government and of society and I have also shown the similarities with historical events that may have inspired them. Furthermore, the role of brainwashing was analyzed with examples coming from the book. This paper also studied how population control was present in the books and found different types of dehumanization elements, from the appearance of death to the indifference of the Capitol citizens towards those of the districts. I have also discussed the consequences of these dystopian features in the story, from the relationship breakdowns to drug abuse, which is similar to *Brave New World*.

To end with the results, there are clear similarities with the modern world which allow Collins to transmit her precautionary message, which is the main aim of any dystopian work. The study of the dystopian elements in *The Hunger Games* that this dissertation has started might be useful for future sociological and literary studies among others. Currently, there are teachers who try to use these books with educational aims as can be seen for instance in this fragment which talked about the uses of these books in

teaching, “This discussion on Mockingjay.net shows how students crave experiences in school that allow them to closely analyze and transform literature.” (Curwood 423).

Moreover, there are many web pages on the internet which allow teachers to share the activities they have created for their students regarding *The Hunger Games*. For instance, these activities can consist on comprehensive questions or more imaginative exercises like role-playing. Another example is that they can use the series to teach people not to allow the wrong person in power or to worry about people who suffer.

To conclude, some features are different from the first dystopian novels and those of the 1st half of the 20th century, such as the fact that happy endings appear more frequently now than in past dystopias, but this is logical as times have changed and literature has moved on. The main characteristics of the genre still remain, as has been proved in my analysis of *The Hunger Games* and the other novels I looked at such as *Ashes* or *Red Queen*.

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