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Space and Place in *The Hunger Games*: Fiction or Reality?

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I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone. All of this is wrong. (Collins 25)

1. Introduction

In this essay, I am going to analyse the importance of places and spaces in the novel *The Hunger Games* in relation to the notions of reality vs appearances. First, it is necessary to consider what kind of novel we are going to analyse. It is a dystopian young-adult novel written by American author Suzanne Collins in 2008. The novel is the first part of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, followed by *Catching Fire* in 2009 and *Mockingjay* in 2010. Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* is, according to David Denby, a sensational piece of pop primitivism, a Hobbesian war of all against all (Denby). The novel has received both good and bad criticism; what is undeniable is that the trilogy and its later film adaptation in 2012 have been a total success and a worldwide phenomenon that leaves nobody indifferent.

Collins's work has even been compared to Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* since both deal with a teenage drama in which the protagonist is an adolescent girl who is involved in a love triangle that marks the development of the story (Collin). For its part, John Green argues that in fact the story is much more like the Japanese author Koushun Takami's cult novel *Battle Royale*, itself adapted to cinema in 2000 by Kinji Fukasaku (Green). In this sense, both novels are very similar to each other since they share the same topic, the same kind of characters and the same goal. In his article for *The Telegraph*, Robbie Collin continues the premise that apart from *Battle Royale*, there are also borrowings from Stephen King's *The Running Man*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur (Collin). There is also a reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* as one of the protagonists, Gale Hawthorne, shares his surname with the

American author. And of course, there are references to real life and the factual world. It is clear that the novel revolves around a dichotomy. On the one hand, it has been a revolutionary novel that transcends the stereotype of the teenager novels of high school drama and unrequited love. This is a deeper critique of the social values of the present, capitalism, fascism and a wide range of metaphors that refer to them and to other classics of universal literature. On the other hand, Collins has also mixed this existential analysis of society with action, love and a complete rollercoaster of feelings that get to be inside the story from the first page.

If we try to classify the novel as belonging to a concrete genre, we find that there is not just one genre in which we can categorize it; in fact, in my opinion it is a perfect combination of several genres that turn this novel into a best seller. First of all, it is evident that the most predominant one is the dystopia. In this case the story is usually set in the future and oppressed by a fascist government and possesses a pessimistic and disconformity tone. Besides, it has been established that the dystopia has many similarities and differences with the more traditional genre of the *Bildungsroman*. For this reason, it many critics claim that these genres can be combined in order to have a more shocking and transcendental novel. In *The Hunger Games*, we can observe how the *Bildungsroman* plays a key role in the narrative level. Thus, according to Sara Peterson the *Bildungsroman* is also perfectly combined with the dystopia. This combination makes the novel a kind of warning to the reader of what can happen to society in the future, but also of what occurs if someone decides to change as an individual and its impact in the society as well (4). Consequently, we can observe a parallel evolution of Katniss as a single character and the entire society as a whole. In *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry suggest that the *Bildungsroman* has a determinant influence in the dystopian novel. By joining these two

genres what is achieved is something that lets the author deal with two issues at the same time, the criticism of society proper of dystopia, and the aim to transmit a concrete message to the reader from the *Bildungsroman*. In some way, it seems that they enrich each other and show a critique upon certain parts of the society through the moral evolution of one single character and an entire society respectively.

We cannot forget that apart from these genres the trilogy is utopian to a certain extent. Apart from the pessimistic and didactic tone, there is an air of utopianism. Although the novel is mainly characterised by the dystopia and the *Bildungsroman*, there are a few elements of the utopian genre that give the story a ray of hope among the oppression and desperation. Utopia is about the dreams and nightmares of a society radically different from the one in which “the dreamers” live (Sargent, 3). To be more specific, it is the way from desolation to joyfulness, the transformation of the unimaginable into the real. “A utopia can be simply a fantasy, it can be a description of a desirable or an undesirable society, an extrapolation, a warning, an alternative to the present, or a model to be achieved” (Sargent 4).

However, for Tom Henthorne, *The Hunger Games* is a different type of dystopia; it is literary rather than polemical (108). Although deep inside we find a political intention, what Collins tries to do is to encapsulate all the critiques and political issues in a single character, Katniss Everdeen. By doing this, she gives all the importance to the narration of the first person narrator. This lets the reader observe and assimilate not only the change and development of the protagonist throughout the story, but also the influence of the setting and its elements. As a result, Panem functions as a setting rather than as a subject and therefore the polemic is left in a secondary place. Besides, we achieve a closer identification to Katniss and the experience of living in Panem as she does (Henthorne 109). Finally, the author manages to transmit a more shocking and stronger ideology by

appealing to the emotions and feelings that Katniss inspires; that is, she manages to represent a whole by means of an individual.

Regarding the plot, the story takes place in the post apocalyptic nation of Panem set in the futuristic North America after the destruction of what we know about civilization today by climate change and the wars that followed (Green). After a civil war in Panem, the government decided to destroy District 13 and kill its inhabitants, demonstrating what happens to traitors. In order to remember that event and keep on showing their strength, the Capitol created the so-called Hunger Games. Every year one boy and one girl from each of the 12 districts surrounding the Capitol are selected by lottery in a ceremony called "the Reaping" to compete in a televised battle to death. The worst part is that it can only have one winner, that is, one single survivor among 24 participants also known as "tributes". The story begins the day of the Reaping; our protagonist and first person narrator Katniss Everdeen, starts the novel in media res presenting us her home and therefore the society in which she lives.

Like the rest of the dystopian teenager novels, *The Hunger Games* introduces us to a particular social issue in relation to a concrete political movement. The society is divided in two groups, the influential and rich population who live in The Capitol, and the poor and working class people who conform the twelve districts that surround them.

The Capitol is portrayed as a dictatorial and totalitarian government that controls and subdues the population: first, by dividing them into districts with electrified fences that separate them from the external areas, and then by a punishment for treason when they tried to rebel against them, which is The Hunger Games. Throughout the story, we find many aspects that can relate the Capitol to a fascist government, and many of their practices to past important empires that ruled the world. In fact, thanks to some narrative elements that put fiction and reality at the same level, the story can be interpreted as an

echo of what is happening or actually happened in the past. This merging of past, present, fiction and reality, lets a younger reader to experience in some way what it is like to live within a totalitarian government through a fictional character. This, together with the impact that places and spaces have on the characters and the story itself, and how this use of space and place can influence our perception of reality and appearances, are the main points in the analysis of this essay.

2. Space and Place in *The Hunger Games*

In this section, I am going to analyse the relation between space and place with the characters and the influence the former can have on the latter. Then, I will study how this relation plays a key role in the understanding of reality and appearances throughout the novel and which elements help to build it.

To begin with, we must pay attention to the nation's name. Panem has not been selected by chance; there are many theories about its meaning. The first one and most obvious is in relation to Latin mythology. Originally, the word comes from Latin and means bread. The fact that Panem means bread could be an allusion to the grain that the inhabitants of Panem need to get every year by introducing more tesserae¹ in the annual selection of tributes in *The Hunger Games*. In fact, we can see a clear relation to the phrase: "panem et circenses" created by Juvenal, a roman poet belonging to the late first and early second century AD. The phrase was coined in reference to the way the ruling class pacified the commoners by diverting them from contemplating their subjugation (Cunningham). Applying the meaning of this phrase to the novel we can establish that in

¹ Tesserae, a piece of paper that contains your name and is introduced in the box that will determine who the tributes of that district are. The more tesserae with your name you introduce, the more food you will get, and the more chances you have to become a tribute.

the nation of Panem there is a need for entertainment (circenses) in order to get food (bread/panem).

Clearly, *The Hunger Games* is a mirror to what happened in the ancient Rome at the Coliseum. Besides, this could also be related to the scarcity that the population of Panem suffers and to one of the central motifs of the novel: bread. It appears in two turning points of the novel. The first one is the bread that Peeta gives Katniss at the beginning of the story when they were children and saves her from starvation. This gesture will be, with the passing of time, a determining moment in which their love story starts. Another turning point in which the motif appears is the bread that Katniss receives from district 11 after Rue's death as a kind of gratitude for her attitude towards the little girl.

Leaving all the Latin influence behind, another possible interpretation of the name could be a play word, using pan as a Greek prefix and adding a kind of abbreviation of America, then something similar to Pan-American will be obtained (Peterson, 4). In this way, since the prefix means all, the name of the fictional state will refer to the whole America as the target of the novel.

The society in this novel is divided into two sections as I said above, the Capitol and the districts, rich and poor people respectively, and there is one character that represents the transition from one world to the other and the identity confusion that this involves for her: Katniss. It is in Katniss that we can observe the combination of *bildungsroman* and dystopian fiction, two parallel evolutions that converge in a single one. There are many examples of this throughout the story, the first one is at her arrival to the Capitol, it is her first time there and she starts to observe everything: the people, their clothes, habits and so on. As a result, this provokes a confusion of identity; she

wonders why they are so different from each other, why they are suffering and dying of hunger while these people are surrounded by luxuries, and what is more important, why they have to play The Hunger Games just for having the Capitol fun and entertained and filling their empty lives. She is stunned by their superficiality. It is here that Katniss embodies the fusion of both worlds: during the television interview that presents her as a tribute for district 12, she represents at the same time the luxury and glamour of the Capitol in her dress, make up and polite tone in the way she speaks, but also her inner innocence, pureness and reality, in her look when she talks about her little sister.

Therefore, if we take a look to all of this we can conclude that this is not a dystopian fiction of the future, but a dystopian fiction of present day America, in which reality and appearances coexist in many programs and television shows daily. In fact, this is the secret of its success, the merging of reality and appearances in the same place. We can find this in Big Brother, Keeping Up With The Kardashians or RuPaul's Drag Race, in which all that exaggerated and pompous style reminds us a little bit of those described in the Capitol by Effie or Caesar (Nedeedog). Yet, as happens in the novel, in real life there are more and more series and documentaries that show their dark side and a strong criticism against them.²

This is one of the most interesting things in the novel, how reality is blurred by appearances, which is also connected to the confusion about her identity that Katniss suffers at her arrival at the Capitol; in this novel nothing is what it looks like. To begin with, neither the districts nor the Capitol correspond themselves with their initial description and their appearance. On the one hand, the districts are described as dark, ruined and impoverished places where people work to serve the Capitol and try to survive.

² TV series like Black Mirror show the submission and mental control that without knowing, the realities provoke on population. The episode "Fifteen Million Merits" is the episode where they talk about that.

Yet, they are the places where real life occurs, where real love happens and where everything is sincere and pure (at least at the beginning):³ “The square’s surrounded by shops, and on public market days, especially if there’s good weather, it has a holiday feel to it” (Collins 18). This makes a clear contrast with the description of the Capitol, full of luxuries, huge buildings and shiny cars. This is just in appearance, since indeed there are no pure feelings, life or any trace of humanity; ironically, it seems to be a dehumanised place where everything is fake or pretended: “All the colors seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes” (Collins 59).

Following this, we find the inhabitants of the Capitol are constantly trying to impress each other, to look perfect, with the best clothes and make up, but that is all they have, they are not real. In order to fill this emptiness, they watch every year The Hunger games, just to watch for a while the self-identity and authenticity of the districts. In the novel there are many examples that support this argument. We find the first one in Peeta and Effie as well. Peeta, on his part, talks about self-identity and how important it is for him to die being himself. In Peeta’s words: “I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?” “I don’t want them to change me in there”; the same as Katniss who says: “Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self” (Collins 140). In this quotation we can see how Peeta’s only desire on the verge of death is to be himself, something totally contrary to Effie’s and Capitol people’s attitude, who are only worried about the image they offer to the world; again, people from desolate and devastated places are more authentic while those from wealthy and prosperous places are more concerned with aesthetics. It is at the end of the third chapter that they are watching the recap of the Reapings across Panem on the train, everyone is gloomy about the

³ We will find out throughout the trilogy how even the people who used to be pure and real have ended up being just as corrupted and influenced as the Capitol.

situation except for Effie who is only worried about her wig: “Effie Trinket is disgruntled about the state her wig was in” (Collins 47). In the chapter, it can be seen how Peeta confesses his love for Katniss when Caesar is interviewing him provoking surprise and excitement among the public. By doing this Peeta and Haymitch are looking for real feelings inside them, they want to awake their dormant feelings behind all of that make up and wigs. Of course, this is part of their strategy, to impress the public to get sponsors. Katniss reacts very badly to this, she is taken by surprise and gets angry with Peeta for what he has done. She says that it is a lie, they are not star-crossed lovers but Haymitch summarizes the whole contest in a perfect sentence: “It’s all a big show. It’s all how you’re perceived” (Collins 134). Therefore, we can see again the difference between characters, those from district 12 represent truth, values and pure feelings. The Capitol on the other hand only shows falseness, appearances, and spectacle. According to Deidre Anne Evans Carriot et al, “Space and Place are essential to identity and even identification as a rhetorical process” (1), in some way it is not your origin that determines you but it exerts a huge influence both in your personality and values.

Thus, although we tend to separate space and place as individual concepts indeed they are part of each other. This means that space and place are not binaries but relational, space must exist for a place to be constructed and created, because something turns into a place when the human action intervenes in a space. In *The Hunger Games*, space and place are used not only to define and develop the characters but also to pinpoint the different stages of the evolution of the protagonist and to the relation that she has with each character. Then each place would be significant to her mind and her world. In this way, the woods would mean freedom and safety for her, because they involve not only the relationship she had with her father when he taught her about plants and animals but also the talks and plays she had with Gale. Otherwise, the black market functions as a

dichotomy, both as place of sorrow when she remembers her father again and also of hope, as it provides the opportunity to survive by selling the hunt and getting food. Finally, the Seam is the place where she was born, has grown up and been both happy and sad. All of the significant places mean to her different things but globally they form a single thing, District 12, her home, her family, the values for which she is ready to lose her life.

This division is even physical between districts since people are not allowed to move between them or to the Capitol unless thus required by the authorities. Officials control them and, if they dare to trespass any fence or physical division, they can be publically punished, or even executed for instance if they penetrate into the forest (Collins 6). The separation is not only between districts but also with the forest or the outside world; at the beginning of the novel Katniss describes a barbed wire, a supposedly electrified fence that establishes a physical division of worlds. “Separating the Meadow from the woods, in fact enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed- wire loops” (Collins 5)

Moving on to physical divisions of spaces, during her journey to the capitol, she tells us the story of where the Capitol and district 12 are. Apparently, the capitol was built in a place once called “The Rockies” and district 12 was in a region called “Appalachia” (Garriot et al, 2). This makes a clear reference to the actual Rocky and Appalachian Mountains, the most well-known system of mountains in North America. With this in mind, these locations based on real ones could suggest in some way that the division that exists among some of the inhabitants of Panem is much stronger than mountains, difficult to destroy.

In *Space and Place in the Hunger Games* its editors argue that the trilogy reverses

the expected chronology of using space to create place by destroying place to create a space. That is, by breaking down the traditional sense of space and our knowledge of it, the novel takes us to its primitive form, the space, thus the purest form of place, without human intervention or alterations (3). Garriot et al suggest that the creation of safe and radical spaces has been introduced in the narrative level. On the one hand, they claim that safe spaces provoke a wide range of scholarly conversations and debates, on the other hand, radical spaces are created for the sake of change, for transgressing conventional scholarship (Garriot et al 4). Following the same line, this change of the perception of space gives the reader the possibility of using this transgression for their intellectual or emotional needs, following their desires to challenge the status quo and readjust the established system or just as a way to heal their traumas and anxieties (4).

3. *The Hunger Games* and the evocation of emotions

Taking this into account, it is clear that one of the purposes of *The Hunger Games* is to make the reader identify and involve her/himself in deeper ways with the novel, being part of the story, and experiment life in Panem through Katniss's eyes. But the question is, how do they get that? The answer is easy: by evoking an emotional response through the events and character's thoughts. Putting in the protagonist or secondary character similar goals or worries to those that the reader can have will influence the reading a lot. This way, the protagonist's sorrows and achievements would be the same as the reader's, who would feel just as capable of facing and solving the problems as the character does. Therefore, feelings of understanding and identification through someone else will let the reader get a better assimilation and engagement with the text and its premises. According to Raymond A. Mar and his colleagues, these emotions are evoked when entering the narrative world of a story, thus, this set of emotions are known as narrative emotions and, once evoked, in turn influence engagement with the text (822). In 1920 the well-known

British-American writer T.S Eliot wrote a collection of essays on poetry and criticism, where he showed: “the necessary and inviolable bond between past and present literary achievement; the need for criticism that carefully attends to the integrity of a work of art, its essential relation of part to whole; and the concepts of poetic impersonality and the objective correlative” (Domestico). In his critique of *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare, we can observe how he relates the evoking of emotions to its understanding and assimilation. He talks about “the objective correlative” and its influence on literature:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative”; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (100)

By asserting this phrase, what Eliot tries to do, is to express that in order to evoke a certain emotion, the author needs to portray a concrete place, situation or action that make the reader place him/herself in the story. As a result, the reader will assimilate the story by means of the feelings, and probably will assume better what the author tries to transmit. And if the author fails in this task, maybe the reader or audiences will be left unconvinced, unmoved or even confused (Sharma)

Following this, something that plays a key role in this objective correlative is the figure of the protagonist and how she transmits her feelings and emotions to the reader. Mainly, this identification with Katniss is achieved first through her thoughts and actions that in some way determine her, and second through the evolution that she experiences from the beginning to the end of the trilogy. For this reason, even though the novel shows a post-apocalyptic world corrupted by greed, hypocrisy and oppression of the lower classes we can also see a ray of hope, of salvation for humanity embodied by her. It is

Katniss that embodies this feeling of hope, being also capable of merging with the readers, becoming one with them. Since the change falls on young adults, the readers of this novel can identify themselves with the heroine and follow her on her journey and adventures till the end.

Likewise, according to Lauren L. Reber, young adult dystopian texts use identification to suggest that the reader has the same power as the protagonist (8-9), which means that since the reader identifies her/himself with the protagonist of the novel, she/he feels capable of doing things and overcoming different obstacles as the heroine/hero does (Peterson, 8). Besides, through identification and the evocation of emotions (the objective correlative) the different ideas and ideals that the author wants to transmit to the public are much easier to assimilate than if there was not anything in common between reader and character, between reader and the essence of the story. Reber continues her statement in her thesis for Brigham Young University about identification in young adult dystopian texts claiming that: “hope is figured in the young adult, inside and outside the text” (9).

4. Oppression and surveillance

However, we cannot forget the fact that this is not only a story about self-identification and the evocation of feelings, but also a story about pervasive media and social control which, along with other weapons like physical division, scarcity and the possibility of dying at The Hunger Games every year, form a total control over society that the Capitol has over the population. Things that happened in the past like wars, the government of fascist regimes controlling the world, is happening more or less today. They are not so evident and established as in the past, but some of their ideologies are still there. And what Collins tries to do is to put us between two worlds, the real and fictional one. Thus, as a story set in the future, she tries to warn us against what can

happen if we do not act, if we do not rebel, fight for our rights, we maybe can come back to the past. As a consequence, by blurring these boundaries between worlds, the reader feels even more identified again. The novel's purpose of questioning everything and forcing the reader to build his/her own criteria and interpretation of the events leaves a deeper mark as the novel progresses. With this in mind, it is necessary to focus for a while on the physical division that the government uses over population to isolate them from the outside. Panem is a post apocalyptical nation divided in twelve districts (initially thirteen) depending on the task they realize. The problem comes out when this division is used in order to segregate the population and therefore undermine their strength and communication. The sentence "divide and conquer" comes to our mind, suggesting that, being separated, people are less strong than being together and this is a way of having more power over them. Along with scarcity, physical separation is, according to Tom Henthorne, a good way to divide and control them better (115). The treatment of space is used to create radical and delimited places where people are confined. In this case the space is not broken to create safe places but dangerous ones.

On the other hand, another way of further oppressing people is by isolating them from the outside world. By knowing a limited extension of land and just one way of life marked by the government, they are deprived of wider knowledge, ideals and possibilities. An example of this can be found in the real North Korea. In terms of isolation, surveillance and social control we can observe many things in common of both totalitarian governments, real and fictional. As we can see in *North Korea Country Profile*, the BBC gives us information of this similar control and oppression that Panem suffers. For instance, North Korea has its own radio and TV pre-tuned to government stations that control what information is given to the population. Besides, it has also never-ending propaganda that goes in favour of this type of government. This control of

information is reinforced by having all the press and broadcasters under direct state control. Thus, covering these living conditions and showing them to the world is very hard for any outside media. They just know about what they have been watching all of their lives, they do not have any contact with the external world and they are not even allowed to go outside the country. Consequently, they are prisoners in their own country, as in Panem. Most of them have never been abroad, so they do not have the knowledge and the intellectual weapons to defeat the status quo and create a new place.

As observed above, mass media is also another tool to exert pressure and control over people, and we can see this repeatedly throughout the story: "Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch — this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy" (Collins, 19). As happens in reality, in the novel part of the government's control lies on mass media and the part of "reality" as well they want us to receive, they manipulate and use the information as it is convenient for them. This is going to determine first the quantity and quality of information they receive every day, and second how it is assimilated and therefore how it affects their mental development and creation of their own ideals.

The government just shows to the public right what they want them to know, nothing less, and nothing more. This way what they achieved is a total control over the population's minds as well as a mass fear that terrifies and intimidates them, thereby avoiding any chance of uprising on their part. Together with media control, the issue of surveillance has to be mentioned, thus, another wink to the real world. As happens at present, The Hunger Games are not only a way of punishing the population's rebellion but also a reality show released on TV over the whole Panem: just "a sadistic voyeurism for an effete elite of consumers" (Thomas, 211). Due to the lack of humanity and truth over the Capitol, its overloaded inhabitants have the need of watching adolescents

fighting to death as if they were gladiatorial combats in which they decide who lives or not by sending them supplies. For them, it is just a funny spectacle to watch and the tributes are the puppets to drive, turning the Gamemakers into the Gods who control the weather and atmospheric phenomena when the spectacle is too boring for them.

Apart from establishing a distance between reality and appearances by the use of space and place throughout the novel, it can be seen also how this constant separation is broken in its constant allusions to the real world and therefore the union of both worlds (real and fictional). It is a kind of dichotomy, something has a meaning inside the text but a different one outside it. On the one hand, the treatment of space and place has an influence in the characters and their origins, on the other hand there is a constant reference to the real world in the past (totalitarian regimes, latin symbols) and at present or future provoking a blurring of boundaries. This makes the reader aware of not only what happened before but also what can happen in the future since it is a dystopian novel. But, what is more important, it creates a feeling of equality, of identification with the novel as if the reader understood what really happens, as if he/she had seen or lived it before. These points in common with the characters and social situation allow for a better and deeper transmission of the main points and aims of the novel because, as demonstrated above, one of the key points in the assimilation of ideals and structure of a novel consist, first, in the evocation of feelings and then in the reader's identification with the story. Thus, by including references to the real world and, more surprisingly, chronological references to our past and present the author achieves another way to get into the reader's mind. These constant references to real past and present events demonstrate the circularity of time and how the same mistakes can be committed all over again.

Thus, I will now analyse what kind of references and allusions Collins makes to the past in the novel. The first and most obvious one is ancient Rome. We can observe

the first reference in the nation's name as we commented above and its allusion to the Juvenal's phrase "panem et circenses". The second example is the place where the games are developed, the arena, which reminds us a lot of the Roman Coliseum in which gladiators fought to death, with the same rules, and the same space (Cunningham). Again, the author uses spaces and places to transmit a message, to join both worlds, real and fictional. Another reference to Roman culture is the mutants that the author introduces at the end of the first novel, they seem to be a kind of enormous dogs, which could be related first to the carnivorous animals that were introduced in the Coliseum during the battles, and second to the Roman mythology in which there were animal and human mutations like the faun (half goat, half man) or the glycon (an ancient snake God) (Smith). Finally, as I said before, the Gamemakers are considered a kind of Gods that control and manipulate everything, including the land in order to make the game more interesting and entertaining just to please the spectators.

Moving on, another element of reality that the author alludes to in the novel is that of fascist governments. It is quite clear that the Capitol seems to be a totalitarian regime that divides and oppresses the lower class, undermining their rights and voice and forcing them to fight in The Hunger Games as a punishment for their rebellion. They force the districts to serve and work for them. They are even capable of cutting their tongues and turning them into servants for the rest of their lives if they dare to escape or rebel against them. These tongue-less servants are called avox and once someone becomes one of them, no one is allowed to speak to them except for giving an order. Besides, the territory, the space in which the population lives, is divided in numbered districts with a different task to be accomplished, without the possibility of going out without being captured. This reminds us of the concentration camps in which millions of people were secluded and forced to work for the government until death, including their random selection to be

executed, which in some way happens in The Hunger Games every year.

It is clear throughout the novel that there are many references to the past, ancient and more recent, but also there are many references to the present. The geographical situation of Panem, the districts and Capitol in present day North America is one of them. Social control and surveillance are the most recurrent topics in the story. From the very beginning, Katniss introduces to us her world and society, and how they are controlled and forced to live as the Capitol wants “to make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat The Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others” (Collins, 19). On the other hand, surveillance is a very important weapon by which the Capitol has even more power and control over them. Every second of the games is recorded and released on TV, and the things that are not released are constantly watched by the Gamemakers. By doing this they get not only control over the population’s actions, but also over the thoughts and way of thinking, as David Petts says: “The control of the landscape has an obvious ideological impact, but the control of access to certain areas and the importance of surveillance are equally significant” (Petts, 79). This means that the division and separation of spaces by walls of electrified fence have more or less the same impact in the mind of people than the surveillance and observation of every move they make. It is a way of making the people know who rules and who decides if they live or not, whether they can go or not.

Together with the issue of geographical division and surveillance, we find the main topic of the novel: the reality show. We cannot forget that apart from being an essential motif of the trilogy, it is also a clear allusion to the real world and present time. Like the Capitol’s inhabitants, we need to watch realities on TV constantly in order to watch this sense of spontaneity and humanity that is becoming rarer and rarer. Allysa

Rosenberg argues that these narratives are so effective because “the Hunger Games are produced for and broadcast on television, and just as fans of competition reality shows can vote for their favorites and help them advance, spectators, known as sponsors in Collins’s books, can send material objects to participants in the Hunger Games” (Rosenberg).

In the novel, the games are first, a way of demonstrating the power that the Capitol has by reaping their children without being able to intervene, but also an entertainment for the public who watch The Hunger Games on TV every year. To be more concrete, the games are at the same time oppression and hypocrisy. That points out once again the emptiness and falseness on which the Capitol’s lives are based. This sense of emptiness and lack of reality is filled by the lives of the purest human beings, the children. By risking and finishing with their lives, the Capitol sees for once a year real humans using their primary instincts in order to survive. At the beginning of the games when they are presenting all the tributes to the audience we can observe how Katniss makes reference to their emptiness and lack of reality when she says: “A hundred hands reach up to catch my kiss, as if it were a real and tangible thing” (Collins 70).

Conclusion

To sum up, it is clear that space and place play a key role in the development of the novel and that they influence at the same time our perception of reality and appearances. From the very first moment Suzanne Collins plays perfectly the different strategies and resources that let the reader immerse her/himself in a world of fantasy in which he/she can be the hero that saves the world. Together with the similarities to the real world that remind the reader of some situations of her/his own life, certain types of emotions and feelings are evoked and the author uses it to catch the reader’s attention from the very

beginning. As a result, Collins introduces the self-identification and the evocation of emotions, a good strategy that makes the reader achieve a better and deeper assimilation of the contents and ideals of the novel. By making the reader feel in the same position as the protagonist having the same age, love problems and worries, as commented above, Collins evokes certain types of feelings in the inside of the reader that facilitate the assimilation of the story and the ideals she wants to transmit. Regarding the ideas exposed and denounced in this novel, there are those related to social control, oppression of the lower classes and surveillance. In the case of social control, the fact that there are electrified fences over the whole of Panem that separate the districts and these from the outside, make the physical division of spaces a great tool to demonstrate this control. This in turn, is also supported by the great contrast that Katniss establishes at the beginning when describing the forest and how she feels when she is in there. Free and safer that differs from the description and feelings of sadness and social injustice she feels when she comes back to the Seam. Furthermore, social oppression is epitomised by the central issue of the novel, The Hunger Games. Thus, by the introduction of The Hunger Games as a punishment for an attempt of rebellion years before, Collins sows the seed of the feeling of social injustice and oppression by a totalitarian government, but also the surveillance they suffer through the reality show that televises the games. This use of the reality show establishes a link with the real world and how nowadays there is a need for watching and observing the misery and difficulties of others' lives. In fact, it can be seen in the novel how surveillance and human misery are used in the reality to entertain and ennoble the human values and pureness to make a contrast with the hypocrisy and appearances of the Capitol. This is a link with reality for the reader because it is something that happens nowadays in our society, something to identify with: that is, two worlds, real and fictional, in the same place or at least at the same level. The coexistence of these two

worlds is going to be the real protagonist of the story, and this constant tension between the reality and appearances will mark not only the relationships between characters but also their development individually depending on the place and space they move on. Consequently, the reader starts to question everything; what is real? What is fake? Is what they live actually real or is it part of something else? Of something meant to achieve something better, to improve in the social scale. As can be seen all through the trilogy, even those who seem to be sincere end up being someone else who moves by interest⁴. This makes the readers question everything not only in the novel but also in real life, it activates their curiosity, their own criticism, because there is nothing more dangerous than the lack of curiosity and interest in what surrounds you.

⁴ The forces of the rebellious District 13 turn out to be in *Mockingjay* another ruthless organisation that wants Katniss to give a different performance (Rosenberg).

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