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On Love and Choices in *The Hunger Games*

Trilogy

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Resumen

Este ensayo busca, en primer lugar analizar la importancia del amor y las elecciones en la trilogía de *Los juegos del hambre* escrita por Suzanne Collins y ofrecer una lectura alternativa del desenlace de la saga, que ha sido un punto de desencuentro tanto para el público general como para la crítica y, en segundo lugar, reflexionar brevemente sobre la importancia del amor y de las decisiones más allá de las páginas. Por ello, este ensayo tiene en cuenta no solo la crítica literaria publicada sobre *Los juegos del hambre* con los diferentes enfoques y perspectivas sobre el amor y las relaciones entre los personajes, sino que además se fundamenta en ensayos y estudios de Psicología y Psiquiatría para abarcar el tema desde múltiples puntos de vista.

Introduction

This essay analyses the importance of love and choices in *The Hunger Games* trilogy and how both of them are key for the reading of the denouement, which has been an important point of debate among critics and general readers. For some readers the ending is traditional and anti-climactic, while for others it is rather uplifting.

With this essay I want to provide a different reading to the one I primarily faced in the reading-around-process, for both love and the ending. The first section of this essay approaches several aspects (plot, genre, and target audience of the novels) which are of remarkable importance to elucidate my conclusions. The second section focuses exclusively on love, from the point of view of Psychology, Psychiatry, and also the literature I have read around Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series, as it played an important role in the first stages of this essay, because it drew my attention to the topic of love (primarily focused on the love triangle) and the importance of choices, although both analysed separately. The third section deals with the characterization of some characters I consider to be essential for the analysis, and the role they play in the heroine's development and understanding of love. In the fourth section I suggest another, more metaphorical, approach to the ending of the trilogy based on the genre, the intended audience, and the importance of love and choices in the series, and the fact that they cannot be analysed separately in the trilogy. The fifth section is the conclusion and a brief reflection on how this reading of the denouement may help the readers to reflect on the importance of love and choices, not just for the trilogy or fiction, but also for themselves.

Approaching *The Hunger Games*

The Hunger Games trilogy (from now on THG) became the subject of my analysis for several reasons: First, science fiction, and particularly dystopian fictions are usually thought-provoking, if they are not presented as oversimplifications or polarised visions on good and evil; and second, they are usually subjects of debate and controversy. And it seems that THG trilogy suits there perfectly.

In the back cover praise for the novel the British novelist Anthony Horowitz wrote that THG is “One of the best written and most thought-provoking books I’ve read for a long time” (*The Hunger Games*). And he is not the only one because many different critics share the same view. Tom Henthorne in the introduction to his *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy* writes, “it is no wonder that the series has received both popular and critical acclaim: the *Hunger Games* trilogy is not only worth reading but worth thinking about” (12). In their Introduction to *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, Dunn and Michaud highlight the stimulating power of the book and write that THG trilogy makes the reader wonder “Why do we enjoy watching others suffer? Do ordinary rules of morality apply when we’re fighting just to survive? Could we be controlled and manipulated as easily as the citizens of Panem?” or “Are we *already* being controlled in insidious ways that escape our notice?” (3).

The fact that THG trilogy is stimulating may be related to its complexity and messiness in terms of themes, motifs and even genre, because in so doing it departs from oversimplifying its own themes and the issues it deals with, and does not present everything in dichotomous terms and archetypes. Henthorne writes, “If Katniss’s story were easy to follow, if the novel were easy to classify, if Collins’s themes were easy to discern, then the *Hunger Games* trilogy would tell us little about the world we live in or

how we might go about changing it” (6-7). Peters stated that “Part of the reason for the massive success of the series is its notably complex themes” (2). She also reflects on how the series was received by the critics, and how it resembles nowadays societies:

Indeed, many reviewers note the character development, sophisticated motifs, and distinct cultural criticism present in the novels as evidence of the series’ value. Furthermore, many critics have identified similarities between the fictional world in the series and our present U.S. society and have latched onto the notion that the series presents an anti-oppressive message. (Peters 2)

All of them seem to agree on the same issues, one of which is the fact that the books transcend ink and paper, and as Peters or Henthorne say above, many critics have found some similarities between Collins’s fiction and our contemporary world (Peters 2, Henthorne 7). In their Introduction to *The Hunger Games and Philosophy* Dunn and Michaud highlighted that the trilogy combines “thrilling action and captivating romance” (1), a “quest for truth” (1), and a “cautionary tale about what human society could easily become” (3). And Laura Miller, among others, pointed that “The Hunger Games is not an argument. It operates like a fable or a myth” with a didactic purpose in mind (*The New Yorker*).

The literature quoted so far perfectly illustrates all the elements this essays deals with. One way or another all the literature I have read took into account: firstly, the genre of the novels, or rather genres, because Collins’s trilogy “defies easy genre classification” (Henthorne 30), secondly, the intended purpose attached to the genre, and thirdly the intended audience of the trilogy.

It is important to say, however, that there is much controversy and debate around the trilogy, especially in terms of gender studies and gender perspective. As I have mentioned above, there are voices who claim the novels to defy genres and stereotypes, while there are voices who actually state that THG series is rather traditional or heteronormative. Kirstie Linstrom writes, “Suzanne Collins’s protagonist in *The*

Hunger Games trilogy, Katniss Everdeen, is no exception to the conventional female character. While she does commit acts of true bravery throughout the trilogy, she still is forced into a classic role for women in Western society” (1).

This essay neither contradicts nor supports any reading or analysis of the trilogy. With this essay I want to add just another possible reading, from a metaphorical perspective in which love and the choice of one partner and not the other is essential for the ending of Katniss’s story line but also for the whole of Panem.

First of all it is important to talk about *The Hunger Games* for those who may not be so familiar with Suzanne Collins’s trilogy.

The Plot

The blurb on the back cover of my edition provides quite an interesting but incomplete summary of the plot:

In a dark vision of the near future, twelve boys and twelve girls are forced to appear in a live TV show called the Hunger Games. There is only one rule: kill or be killed.

When a sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen steps forward to take her sister’s place in the games, she sees it as a death sentence. But Katniss has been close to death before. For her, survival is second nature. (Collins 2011)

I would just add that it is also about love, friendship, struggles against an oppressive status quo called Capitol, and about how her, and other people’s, choices change the world. Although none of the definitions is good enough to cover everything the trilogy deals with, Garriott, Jones and Tyler’s opening lines to their introduction to *Space and Place in The Hunger Games: New Reading of the Novels* encapsulate quite well some of the key features I have already mentioned:

Suzanne Collins’s dystopian, young adult (YA) trilogy *The Hunger Games* is not only about Katniss, the Girl on Fire, and her fight against the Capitol. It is not only a story about her romances with Gale, the vengeful rebel, and Peeta, the Boy with the Bread. Nor is it only a

story about killing children, the pervasive media, and reality television. It is a novel about all these things. (1)

For instance, both summaries, as well as the literature on THG, pinpoint the fact that the trilogy is dystopian, and young adult fiction (YA). Both highlight the violent component that permeates the trilogy, and the role of media and television in relation to all that. There are also references to love; in the blurb there is a reference to non-romantic love, while in the second there is one to the romance and the love triangle issue. Such a combination may seem strange, because it blends all those things together, but I believe it is not so, because even if Collins stated that she wrote a war story (Hudson), “war cannot be separated from themes such as family, friendship, love, and everything else because they are interrelated” (Henthorne 6). For love and the way we understand relationships is also the way we understand the world and such complicated issues as war.

Genres & Intended Audience

Hannah Trierweiler Hudson asked Suzanne Collins why did she opt for science fiction, and Collins answered:

Telling a story in a futuristic world gives you this freedom to explore things that bother you in contemporary times. So, in the case of the Hunger Games, issues like the vast discrepancy of wealth, the power of television and how it's used to influence our lives, the possibility that the government could use hunger as a weapon, and then first and foremost to me, the issue of war. (Scholastic.com)

Some literary genres seem to be more suitable for certain themes and ways of dealing with those themes. Readers' expectations depend on the way books are tagged and labeled, not only for the content they might find within, but also for the negotiation of meaning and the reading itself (Henthorne 30). It seems that Collins's trilogy is not framed within just one genre but “draws from a number of genres without confining

itself to any of them. As a result, her work rarely comes across as generic or formulaic” (Henthorne 30). Even though it may be so and THG series is not easy to classify, the literature I have read mostly agrees on the trilogy being at least young adult and dystopian fiction.

Collins stated that setting her story in a futuristic world allows her to explore issues people are concerned with now (Scholastic.com), but science fiction, and dystopian fiction especially, provides the opportunity to explore all those things mainly because it is a genre that relies on plausibility, “Collins’s trilogy is both plausible enough and speculative enough to serve as science fiction, attracting its core YA audience and ever increasing cluster of older readers” (Pharr and Clark 9). And this is important for several reasons.

The first reason is that if the trilogy was not plausible enough it would just be fiction people could not relate to (Pharr and Clark 7), and therefore the didactic purpose usually attached to science fiction would fade, and would no longer be a “cautionary tale about what human society could easily become” (Dunn and Michaud 3), or would no longer operate “like a fable or myth” (Miller). The second reason is that Collins consciously aimed at young adults and adolescents because she wanted to have this didactic dialogue and with people who are about to step into adulthood being aware of some life nuances they may face, but they are not educated in. Collins said that, “we need to talk with students about violence, war, and the difficult search for ‘reality’ in our media-saturated world” (Hudson), and that “we need to know why the battle occurred, how it played out, and the consequences” (*The Hunger Games*, “Getting to Know Suzzane Collins”). Canavan and Petrovic suggest that this genre and the first person narrator, which gives access to Katniss's mind, enable the readers to face the same struggles and making decisions (47). So, in a sense, all these elements are

important for the reading this essay provides, because if they are taken into account, the ending may acquire a different reading, in which Katniss's choice of Peeta instead of Gale is not just a random and minor issue, but rather the opposite. If the trilogy is to be read metaphorically, trying to teach YA about war, violence, the role of media, it also teaches them the importance of choosing who we keep by our side and how we relate to other people, how we love ourselves and others. I believe that the love triangle has a highly metaphorical reading and both males the heroine is in love with stand for different ways of loving, understanding relationships and even worldviews. Being Katniss the only point of access to the narrative, her choices seem to shape not only her future, but also the future of the whole of Panem. By choosing Peeta she provided Panem with a completely different pattern to the one the status quo promoted, in this case the Capitol, and which the rebels who claim to fight for freedom and liberty seem to have inherited, because they are the Capitol in reverse. Having said that, the third part of this essay, 'Characterization', deals with those characters in depth and shows the differences between Katniss's love interests and what each of them represent at different levels. In few words, Peeta is a person who does not believe in violence and despises it, while Gale does not hesitate to fight and punish. Peeta wants relief and peace, Gale wants revenge.

But first, we have to analyse or at least cast some light on the issue of love and relationships, because it is also a key feature for the reading this essay provides.

Approaching Love

Love and relationships are two things one may try to avoid, but there is no place one can hide from them, because “love is so intensely celebrated in culture that few people can grow up without longing to realize it” (Levine 145). Love and relationships are everywhere, all the time, and that may be the reason why they are so difficult to deal with. Everybody has her or his own definition of love, it is at our core, because from our very first arrival to this world we are, supposedly, surrounded by love and we learn to love others from those who love us. Therefore, the way we love and relate to other people has to do with how we were educated in love, or rather how we acquired it. We are bombed by love all the time, in music, literature, and the media. For instance, if we look at the top 100 most popular songs from the 2010s onwards, most of them deal with love directly or indirectly. According to Billboard.com, -in the 3rd place we have Ed Sheeran’s *Shape of You*; the 4th is for The Chainsmokers ft. Halsey’s *Closer*, the 5th place is for Maroon 5 ft. Cardi B’s *Girls Like You*, the 6th place is for Rihanna and Calvin Harris’s *We Found Love*, but the chart goes on and on, and we still find love songs in it like Post Malone’s *Better Now* in the 71st place of the chart or Hozier’s *Take Me to Church* in the 91st place. Another example could be the cinema industry, which exploits the theme of love to its maximum. Dion and Dion write that “Love stories and love songs probably occur in most, if not all, cultures” (6). As a way of illustrating my point we can see that the two most grossing films ever, the 1st Marvel’s *Avengers: Endgame* and the 2nd James Cameron’s *Avatar*, being both action-centred science fiction, incorporate love and particularly romantic love, even though none of them seem to develop it. So why is there love? Well, as I mentioned above, love is everywhere and it seems to be compulsory even if it is presented ephemerally in multimedia. It may be related to the fact that it is something we take for granted, we search and desire, we

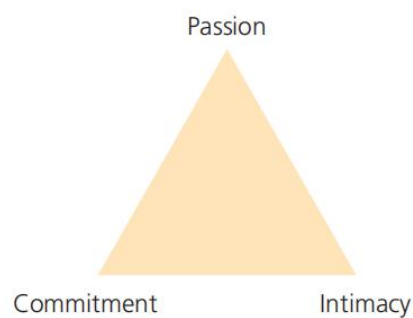
share and try to keep for ourselves. It may also be because love is rooted in our nature and shaped by culture and context, which implies that different cultures and worldviews may also shape the way we understand love, because these “Cultural differences are not simply variations reflecting a biological core. These variations offer insights into qualitatively different views about love that have developed and evolved across different societies and in the same society at different phases of its history” (Dion and Dion 7).

The fact that love is culture dependent and it seems to be almost universal suggests complexity in both approaching and defining it. Even though throughout history there have been attempts to define love, it was not until the 20th century and the advancements in the fields of psychology and psychiatry that we started understanding love and its complexity, driven by the research of people like Freud, Reik, Maslow and Lee (Sternberg 313, 314). Nowadays, specialists rely on the assumption of love being not an isolated feeling but something that depends on different elements, such as other feelings (Levine 144), personality and individual traits (Sternberg 314), culture and even context (Dion and Dion 6, 7). In his article “What Is Love Anyway?” Stephen B. Levine wrote that “LOVE IS NOT A SINGLE FEELING” (144), and also that:

The ubiquitous assumption that love is a feeling is a dangerous simplification. Too many people spend their lives waiting to have what they expect is the pure feeling. We are not indicating a discrete feeling when we tell anyone that we love him or her. The ordinary use of this verb connotes at least two feelings: pleasure and interest, as when we say, "I love this book." In this context, love implies an intense degree of pleasure and interest sometimes to the point of joy. But even joyful moments—such as discovering your recent beloved wants to marry you—usually consist of at least four feelings: happiness, pride, gratitude, and awe. (144)

Nowadays, specialists seem to understand love much better than ever before despite the fact that many people still believe love to be “magical and mysterious” (Hogg and Vaughan 306). This deeper understanding led specialists to break love down into different types of love. For Sternberg there are eight types of love based on three

components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment, and “each component manifests a different aspect of love” (315). Intimacy “refers to feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships”; passion “refers to the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationship” while decision/commitment “refers, in the short-term, to the decision that one loves a certain other, and in the long term, to one's commitment to maintain that love” (Sternberg 315). The eight types of love suggested by Sternberg result from the interaction among these three elements. Hogg and Vaughan illustrated and summarised all of them into a very visual and straightforward figure:



	Passion	Commitment	Intimacy
No love	X	X	X
Infatuation	✓	X	X
Empty love	X	✓	X
Liking	X	X	✓
Fatuous love	✓	✓	X
Romantic love	✓	X	✓
Companionate love	X	✓	✓
Consummate love	✓	✓	✓

(Hogg and Vaughan 310)

Sternberg's classification is key for this essay and approaching the denouement because, first of all, it demotes romantic love from the pedestal people tend to place it upon. Secondly, because it provides up to eight different types of love people

experience but tag with one single label: love. Sternberg, among other specialists, just named these existing types in his breaking-down process, because “most research on love has used survey and interview methods” in order to gather reliable information for the studies (Hogg and Vaughan 306). Thirdly, because those studies on love show how complicated love is, and despite that complexity people keep on labelling the way they feel with just one word, love, which may end in troubles because their own definition of love may differ from other people’s. Sternberg wrote that “most loves are ‘impure’ examples of these various kinds: they partake of all three vertices of the triangle, but in different amounts” and that “no relationship is likely to be a pure case of any of them” (316). The other important element for this essay is that of the love triangle itself and what it may represent. Sternberg wrote that “the triangle is used as a metaphor, rather than a strict geometric model” (314). While he referred to the three components that configure his love triangle, I tried to apply the same figure in a more metaphorical way. Being Katniss the heroine and the decision-maker in the books, her choice of one male or the other may also be the choice of one kind of love, the one she may need at the moment. But at the same time, the way people understand love is also the way people understand the world. Therefore, she does not simply choose a lover, she also chooses what that person represents. It may seem simplistic and too metaphorical, but if we take into account the intended audience, the genre and the didactic purpose, highlighted by Suzanne Collins herself, the ending is rather hopeful and highly symbolic.

The love triangle can allow for angst, confusion, joy, and myriad emotions that a teen or young adult faces. Even if not a part of a love triangle themselves, teens may find catharsis in reading about someone facing difficult decisions that allow the character/reader to experience a gamut of emotions. Furthermore, as teens face many decisions in solidifying their identity and choosing a path in life, the love triangle may act as a symbol for some of these challenges. In deciding between two potential mates, the apex person often is just as much deciding between directions in life—for example, choosing one partner may lead to wealth but an unknown life far away; choosing the other may allow for staying in one’s hometown and living with the already-known. (McPherson 3)

The fact that the ending of Suzanne Collins's trilogy has been regarded by some readers and critics as anti-climactic, as I mentioned in the 'Introduction', may be related precisely to the usage of the word love as an umbrella term which comprises so many definitions and ways of understanding love. Some people may feel disappointed with the ending of the trilogy due to their expectations. Even before opening a book we already have expectations about the content because of the genre, the blurb, the reviews or the advertisements. Those expectations change or evolve as we start reading, but there are always expectations of some kind. Some may have expected Katniss to sacrifice herself for the whole of Panem as she did in the second chapter of the first book, when she volunteered as a tribute in order to save her sister because in so doing "even if Katniss dies, there's a good chance that Prim could live" (Mann 110). This may be related precisely to the complexity of the series and the fact that it does not fully adhere to any genre. The same may happen with the issue of love if people entered the world of *The Hunger Games* expecting a specific romantic relationship, they would not find it here, because if we believe there to be just one type of love "we are apt to misunderstand our partner and ourselves" (Levine 145). And the main point is that this research on love shows us that there is no one love or one way of loving others, which implies that understanding what people mean when they speak of love is important for our understanding of their true motifs. Sternberg's classification does not suggest that one love is better than others, they are different and may change over time as people grow up and change as well. According to McPherson,

teens face many decisions in solidifying their identity and choosing a path in life, the love triangle may act as a symbol for some of these challenges. In deciding between two potential mates, the apex person often is just as much deciding between directions in life—for example, choosing one partner may lead to wealth but an unknown life far away; choosing the other may allow for staying in one's hometown and living with the already-known. (3)

She highlights the importance of making decisions, the symbolic role of the love triangle and how both of them are unavoidably connected when it comes to shaping the future of the individuals who engage in a relationship, because “Love is a transformational force” resulting in changes especially at a personality level (Sternberg 91). Although most stories focus on the falling in love process and the evolution of those relationships, Sternberg highlights the importance of falling out of love and how this experience helps us discover what we really want from a relationship (95, 98). This falling in love and falling out of love is also very important for the analysis of the relationship of Katniss and Gale, as she actually goes from loving him to hating him due to what he became for the rebels and his role in the death of Katniss's sister, Prim. In chapter one of the first book Katniss stated in a conversation with Gale that Prim “is the only person in the world I'm certain I love” (*The Hunger Games* 11). This statement of Katniss reveals two different things which should be taken into account and which are dealt with in the following section, ‘Characterization’; the first is that Katniss does care about people and love them, and the second is that she is not interested in romantic love and she makes it clear from the very beginning of the first book when she says in chapter one, “There's never been anything romantic between Gale and me” (*The Hunger Games* 11). This suggests that she is aware of the existence of romantic love and sentimental relationships, but it seems that she does not want them, because she has adopted a different role in which her family is the only recipient for her love. Chapter one of *The Hunger Games* is a convergence point between love and choices, because Gale offers Katniss to escape into the wilderness leaving all behind:

“We could do it, you know,” Gale says quietly.

“What?” I ask.

“Leave the district. Run off. Live in the woods. You and I, we could make it,” says Gale.

I don't know how to respond. The idea is so preposterous.

“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 two little brothers and a sister. Prim.

[...] The conversation feels all wrong. Leave? How could I leave Prim, who is the only person I'm certain I love? And Gale is devoted to his family. We can't leave, so why bother talking about it? (*The Hunger Games* 10, 11)

This conversation, as well as many others they have throughout the trilogy, suggests that Gale is in love with Katniss and he imagines a future. The most important thing is that Katniss rejects the possibility of romantic love in favor of her family, especially her sister. So this is just one of the many instances in which love and choices are connected, and sometimes love pushes her to make decisions, while at other times the decisions she makes push her to love.

Characterization

The love triangle consists of three main characters; the heroine Katniss Everdeen, and her two love interests, Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark, but the analysis should not only focus on them. In her character analysis, Linstrom writes that Katniss “also owes a part of her image to Peeta” (10), and I would say that she owes different pieces of her personality not only to Gale and Peeta, but also to her father, how is much present in her thoughts, especially in the first book *The Hunger Games*, her mother, her sister, and Rue, among many others. Although the primary focus of this essay is the love triangle and its metaphorical significance regarding the ending, Katniss's other relationships are mentioned as well because they perform a significant role in the evolution and development of the heroine.

Through the analysis of characterization this essay aims to present the essence of each part of the triangle, their defining features, and in the case of the two males what they stand for at a more metaphorical level.

Katniss Everdeen

Katniss is the heroine and, probably, the most complex character in the whole trilogy. Many reviews on the web and media regarded Katniss as a feminist character, capable of empowering women and young adult girls, by showing her strength, intelligence and independence (Ellis; Stark). Linstrom, however, writes that “this idea of Katniss as an independent female is also challenged by the relationship she has with the male characters in the novel” because “their opinions often shape the way Katniss is perceived by the other characters and by the reader” (9). Many critics coincide on the fact that Katniss is brave, strong and even brutal when needed, although this does not imply that she is independent because “she admits in the first chapter of the book that she submits to the rules of the community without a fight” (Linstrom 9). The reader may see this subservience fade in the second and the third book of the trilogy as Katniss seems to develop and understand the situations she is forced into. However, the truth is that even if Katniss is aware of all those narratives and situations she is made part of and she believes to have some power over them (Canavan and Petrovic 46), it seems that she “becomes increasingly trapped by the roles she has created for herself as being in love with Peeta and as the symbol of rebellion against the Capitol” (Canavan and Petrovic 57).

In the first book of the trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is forced into a love story designed by Peeta and Haymitch, their tutor for the games. Peeta and Katniss become the “star-crossed lovers” (*The Hunger Games* 158), and this is an important element for the whole of the plot as it will cause a lot of problems to Katniss, even though it did help her and Peeta survive in the arena, which was the original purpose of this spectacle designed by Haymitch. The first problem is that Katniss does not trust Peeta and believes that his love to her is fake and performed as hers to him. Yet he is in

love with her. Apparently she does not believe in kindness and altruism, which may be the reason why she is trapped within “her own self-imposed sense of indebtedness until she can reciprocate her benefactor in some way” (Culver 90). Nevertheless, it seems that Katniss is in constant conflict with herself, and that there are two impulses clashing within her nature. On the one hand, the impulse to mistrust people and be on her own, and on the other hand, the impulse to trust and not be alone. This can be seen from the very beginning of the series. For instance she does not trust her tutor Haymitch and we can read that she literally hates him:

I'm too angry with Haymitch for what he said and that I even have to answer the questions. All I can think is how unjust the whole thing is, the Hunger Games. Why am I hopping around like some trained dog trying to please people I hate? The longer the interview goes on, the more my fury seems to rise to the surface, until I'm literally spitting out answers at him. (*The Hunger Games* 135-136)

But it does not happen with characters like Rue, the girl from District 11, maybe because she resembles Katniss's sister. But the more interesting case is her relationship with Peeta, because during the whole trilogy she questions him more than any other character, because of this clashing nature of hers. This dichotomous view on people can be related to the two main influences that shaped Panem. On the one hand we have the Capitol, an oppressive status quo, for whom violence and fear is the only way of arranging society, which promotes individualism and subservience, while on the other hand we can see that people from different districts tend to togetherness and collectivism in order to survive. This can be exemplified by the fact that the Hunger Games were designed upon one single rule repeated once and again throughout the trilogy: there can be only one winner. This way the Capitol promotes individualism and isolation among the tributes and, therefore, the Districts. And the fact that Katniss saves Peeta when the game-makers change the rules to make the Capitol enjoy watching

others suffering just reinforces the tendency people in the Districts maintain at their core of helping each other whenever possible.

Before analysing the two male characters it is important to say that both of them love Katniss, both of them care about her well-being. Throughout the trilogy and as Katniss understands relationships better and especially romantic-love relationships, she realises that what she felt for Gale and Peeta was something more than friendship, she realises that she loved both of them in different ways, because they offered her different things she needed at that moment. This may sound strange for those who expected to find a traditional relationship based on romantic-love views and cliches. But Katniss does not seem to chase romantic love and passion, because more than once throughout the trilogy she makes the reader know that she hates being alone (*The Hunger Games* 130). In the previous section we have seen that love is not something static, that there is not just one love but many, which might change over time because they are context dependent, and because there is no right or wrong way to love, precisely because love changes and evolves (Sternberg 315-316).

Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark

Although some character features of both males are described in the second and the third book, the most relevant traits and defining elements are presented in the first novel. It is important to say that both males are to be analysed together, mainly because Katniss usually compares them. Katniss herself describes Gale as “devoted to his family”, “strong enough to handle the work in the mines” because at his fourteen Gale “already looked like a man”, “good-looking” and capable of hunting (*The Hunger Games* 11). Besides Katniss makes it clear that Gale is an angry person:

Gale knows his anger at Madge is misdirected. On other days, deep in the woods, I've listened to him rant about how the tessera are just another tool to cause misery in our district. A way to plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another. "It's to the Capitol's advantage to have us divided among ourselves," he might say if there were no ears to hear but mine. (*The Hunger Games* 15)

The day of the reaping they meet a character called Madge, who is the mayor's daughter and in a more beneficial position than both Katniss and Gale because her name appears less times in the reaping as her family never needed basic supplies due to their social position, while Katniss's name appears "in the reaping twenty times", and Gale's "forty-two times" (*The Hunger Games* 15). Katniss also says that Gale is "a genius with traps and snares" (*The Hunger Games* 103). Finally Katniss says that "Gale gave me a sense of security I'd lacked since my father's death", and that:

he turned into so much more than a hunting partner. He became my confidant, someone with whom I could share thoughts I could never voice inside the fence. In exchange, he trusted me with his. Being out in the woods with Gale . . . sometimes I was actually happy. I call him my friend, but in the last year it's seemed too casual a word for what Gale is to me. (*The Hunger Games* 129)

Katniss concludes, "I can't help comparing what I have with Gale to what I'm pretending to have with Peeta. How I never question Gale's motives while I do nothing but doubt the latter's" (*The Hunger Games* 130). Mann highlights this fact by writing "it is interesting that she never questions Gale's motives in the same way she does Peeta's" and she suggest that this may be done because their cooperative relationship is beneficial for both families, resulting in more opportunities to survive (118). Gale seems to represent the "Western notion of active and destructive masculinity", "hyper-masculine", an "emotionally hardened warrior, hunter, provider, and overall alpha male. He fits a traditional model of masculinity associated with power, aggression and sexuality" (Jones 62-63).

Peeta Mellark on the other side "represents western ideas of passive and nurturing femininity", with "golden hair, pale skin, and blue eyes" embodying the

stereotypical “physical markers of pure and innocent romantic heroine” (Jones 62). Jones concluded in his essay that “the main driving force behind each boy’s personality can be associated with either masculine or feminine gender trait” (62). It might be so, but the thing is that both characters are described in more or less the same light, because Katniss also describes Peeta as strong, manly and even brutal when needed, but emphasizing his ability to empathise with others, his sensitiveness, and kindness (Henthorne 31). For instance in *Mockingjay* Peeta did not hesitate to kill in the arena when Katniss and their allies were in danger, the main difference with Gale is that Peeta does not want to harm others, while Gale wants revenge and voluntarily participates in bombing innocent people. When Katniss was about to leave District 12 she had some words with Gale:

“Katniss, it’s just hunting. You are the best hunter I know”, says Gale.
“It’s not just hunting. They’re armed. They think” I say.
“So do you. And you’ve had more practice. Real practice,” he says. “You know how to kill.”
“Not people,” I say.
“How different can it be, really?” says Gale grimly. (*The Hunger Games* 46)

On the other hand we can see how different Peeta is in comparison, for instance, in the conversation he had with Katniss on the roof of the training centre the night before the games began:

“I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?” he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? “I don’t want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I’m not.”

I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I’ve been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self. “Do you mean you won’t kill anyone?” I ask.

“No, when the time comes, I’m sure I’ll kill just like everybody else. I can’t go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to . . . to show the Capitol they don’t own me. That I’m more than just a piece in their Games,” says Peeta. (*The Hunger Games* 165)

This concern with being oneself, not following the narratives imposed on them, and the fact that even though Peeta is questioned all the time, it is also him who saves Katniss in the first Games, who tries to keep her away from danger, and so does she. Both of them help each other to survive, not only during the games, but especially after those took place and with the sequels they left on Peeta and Katniss. In *Mockingjay*, the third book, Peeta is held captive, tortured, and brainwashed against Katniss. When he is rescued and meets Katniss he tries to kill her because he is not the same. As the novel advances Peeta discovers little by little gaps in his memories which allow him to return to his true nature progressively. The last paragraph of *Mockingjay*'s Chapter 27, just before the epilogue makes very clear what Katniss thinks about all the things she went through and the role Peeta plays in her life:

Peeta and I grow back together. There are still moments when he clutches the back of a chair and hangs on until the flashbacks are over. I wake screaming from nightmares of mutts and lost children. But his arms are there to comfort me. And eventually his lips. On the night I feel that thing again, the hunger that overtook me on the beach, I know this would have happened anyway. That what I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that. So after, when he whispers, "You love me. Real or not real?" I tell him, "Real." (*Mockingjay* 391)

This paragraph is quite telling because it represents their understanding of love. There are no references to passion or the traditional happy ending in which the reader is told that the protagonists managed to achieve happiness, here we can see that Katniss and Peeta are still struggling with their past and their present in order to survive.

The Denouement

The last paragraph of the previous section elucidates the fact that she choose Peeta because he represented things Gale did not. It is remarkable, however, that she does not actually choose Peeta, they rather end up together because both of them reject the

Capitol and the new system imposed by the rebels. In rejecting Gale and returning to District 12, Katniss metaphorically rejects the whole set of beliefs promoted by the new status quo, so does Peeta, while at the same time he tries to recuperate what he lost, his identity. Katniss leaves the rebels and returns to District 12 on her own because she does not want people around, and only after several months of working with specialists Peeta arrives in District 12 and there they meet each other and as we can read on the quotation above, both of them are still trying to overcome their problems. It seems that both of them can create a relationship precisely because they understand each other. They may not be the example of a cliché romantic love relationship, but it does not mean their love is fake or wrong, it is just what they need to keep on living and the “promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again” (*Mockingjay* 391). So, following Sternberg’s classification we can say that Katniss’s and Peeta’s relationship is an example of “companionate love”, because both of them share intimacy and show commitment with the relationship, while displacing passion to the background because for them it does not seem to be as important as the other two elements. Finally, Katniss chooses Peeta because Gale represents everything she hates and if she did choose him she would betray her own core values, “the preservation of innocent life” she fought for from the very beginning of the trilogy, and he is the one who “helps her to survive as herself, with her values intact” (Myers 142). We can say that Katniss steps out the mainstream narrative and follows neither the Capitol’s nor the Rebels’ status quo. Katniss and Peeta represent a third possible option, an option that avoids conflict, division and violence as tools of power, and embrace life and creation as essentials for the future.

Conclusions

This essay tried to show that *The Hunger Games* trilogy is far more complex than it may seem at first. Although there are elements which seem to support the traditional role models attached to males and females, as many critics have pointed out, there are also very positive things the trilogy can show and teach young adults, such as the importance of love and choices we make in life, that the love triangle issue is not just for women as it is traditionally believed, but for males also and that it shows a different kind of masculinity, deviating from the traditionally established one (Jones 61). At the same time it does not present a typical romantic-love relationship, but a different one showing the readers that there is no such a thing as love in singular, but loves. Sternberg defined up to eight different types and wrote that “most loves are ‘impure’ examples” of those types combine passion, commitment and intimacy in different degrees (316).

The denouement of Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy can be regarded as anti-climactic, as traditional or conventional, but also hopeful and uplifting, precisely because its approach to different themes allows several levels of reading. If we take into account the didactic purpose of the genre, the intended audience and the fact that Collins herself stated in many interviews that the trilogy was a war story and that she wanted to show to young adults what war really is and what is about (Hudson), we can conclude that *The Hunger Games* trilogy works “like a fable or a myth” (Miller), and therefore the ending is to be read metaphorically. This metaphorical reading provides a hopeful ending and a promise that the future will be better than both the past and the present.

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