

# Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* Trilogy and Social Criticism

Kjellaug Therese Hauge Hamre



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# 1 Introduction

After having been introduced (and re-introduced) to the worlds of the *Harry Potter* series, *Twilight*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hobbit*, the *Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins offers us a new sort of environment and setting for children's and young adult fiction. All things fantastic and supernatural are stripped away and we find ourselves in a depressing, dystopian version of our very own future. The time of vampires, werewolves, and wizards seems to be reaching its end for now, and the baton has been taken over by a set of more realistic and socially relevant novels for children and young adults. In addition to the *Hunger Games* series, other works of fiction have also entered this stage, such as Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series and a re-launch of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, both of which, along with the *Hunger Games* trilogy, are being made into films as this is being written. These books are not only darker and thus perhaps more frightening than other types of children's and young adult literature; they are also arguably more responsive to actual events and will therefore not allow the reader to let go of the real world while snuggling up to read it as she might other books. The *Hunger Games* trilogy, although a work of fiction, provides us with continuous hints and references to our own world and time, and also to how our actions may have lead to the dystopian future of Panem.

The *Hunger Games* trilogy consists of *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* and is set in the future country of Panem, a country that arose in North America after several natural disasters and wars in our not too distant future. Panem is divided into 12 districts, and they are ruled with an iron grip by the capital of Panem, the Capitol, and the leader, President Coriolanus Snow. Because of an uprising 74 years earlier, called the Dark Days (in which the 13<sup>th</sup> district was supposedly annihilated), the 12 districts must each year, as penance for their previous disobedience, send one boy and one girl between the age of 12 to 18, to fight to the death in the Hunger Games. The children, called tributes, fight in an enclosed arena, on a television show transmitted live, which serves as entertainment for the people who live the Capitol, and as a reminder for the people in the districts of the Capitol's power. In the arena, the tributes can find various weapons and food supply, but there are also venomous plants and animals, and "natural" disasters, such as storms, floods and volcanic eruptions, controlled by the Gamemakers. In the first of the three novels, Katniss Everdeen, the story's main character, volunteers to take her sister Prim's place as tribute when she is being chosen to represent District 12 in this year's Hunger Games, and Katniss is thus thrown into a dangerous, live sent reality show and also into a beginning rebellion. Being nicknamed

“the girl on fire” she provides the spark that eventually leads to a second uprising among the districts.

This uprising is the background for the two following books, where Katniss once again must confront the Hunger Games arena, and President Snow’s continuous threats against her and her family because she outsmarted him and the Gamemakers in the previous Hunger Games. While in the arena for the second time, Katniss and some of the other tributes are rescued by rebels and taken to District 13, destroyed in the previous war according to Panem propaganda. Here they join the leader of District 13, President Alma Coin, and the rest of the district in their fight against the oppressing Capitol. In these last two books in the series, Katniss must come to terms with what rebellion and war entail, what one must be willing to do for the prospect of a better life, and also what kind of world she wants to live in after the war is over.

As with most books for children and young adults, the *Hunger Games* series does take up traditional topics such as the good vs. the bad, friendship, family, loyalty, and love, but in addition it arguably also offers stark criticism of our present society and of our treatment of our fellow human beings and our planet; our lack of compassion, humanity, and future-orientation are central ideas here. Through this thesis, I intend to show that Collins, through her work and the topics she addresses, is really commenting on our society today. The purpose of this thesis will be to show what is being criticised in our society and how it is being criticised through this series. Collins touches upon many sensitive topics in her trilogy, such as entertainment, looks and appearances, science, environment, and warfare, areas in which there have been extreme advances and progress for better and worse. The developments in these areas, some in only the last few years, are both incredibly fantastic and at the same time terribly frightening, something Collins is making a point of in the trilogy. By discussing these topics in relation to the series and to our world, this thesis will endeavour to reveal the underlying social commentary that is to be found in the *Hunger Games* series.

Collins does not mention directly what the cause of these disasters and wars may be, but the hints are pointing to us. In *Mockingjay*, Katniss states her disappointment with us; “Frankly, our ancestors don’t seem much to brag about. I mean, look at the state they left us in, with the wars and the broken planet. Clearly, they didn’t care about what would happen to the people who came after them” (*Mockingjay* 99). We are being marked as the reason for the state of the world of Katniss. In addition we hear that the atmosphere is destroyed (*Mockingjay* 152). These two examples are arguably the most obvious and direct cases of criticism of our society in the *Hunger Games* trilogy.



The first book, *The Hunger Games*, will be dealt with in the following chapter and then the final two books, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* will be discussed in chapter three. The second chapter will have entertainment as its main topic. More specifically what is acceptable as entertainment in our society contra what has become accepted in Panem, and also what entertainment means to, and how it affects the people watching it in both worlds. In the third chapter, science and warfare will be the main topics discussed. The developments taking place in these areas today have great consequences for life on this planet, both in terms of inter-human relations and our survival. In the *Hunger Games* trilogy, we see how war and the struggle for survival have corrupted humans to the point of extinction. Through the events that take place in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, and with the help of the characters' qualities and the choices they make, the story and its events will be connected to our time.

Furthermore, the fact that the series is labelled a dystopia and also that it is written for children and young adults, will be taken into account in the discussion: how it may have consequences for the outcome of the story and also how it is perceived by different readers. The *Hunger Games* series has both received criticism and praise for its qualities as a literary work, the most frequent criticism being that it is too violent and dark for children, but not violent and dark enough for adults. At the other end of the scale there are those who think that the series is just what is needed to open up the young readers' eyes and educate children to make the right decisions in the future. The book then functions as "a cautionary tale about what human society could easily become" (Dunn and Michaud 4). "Rather than just [telling] readers how things might be" Tom Henthorne remarks, "dystopia helps us imagine it, engaging us in ways that are active rather than passive" (148). This last point is perhaps also more effective on children as they are arguably more susceptible to the influence of this type of message.

The *Hunger Games* trilogy has been classified according to many different genres, ranging from dystopian, action adventure, political, and science fiction to bildungsroman, survivor story, fantasy, and romance (Henthorne 6, 30, Pharr and Clark 9). The fascinating thing about the trilogy is that traits of all of these genres, and probably others for that matter, may be found in it. The genre mainly focused on in this thesis will be the dystopia. This is partly because this is thought to be the dominating genre in the trilogy, and also partly because in addition to genre, dystopia has also been interpreted as the trilogy's setting; an overall setting that incorporates elements of all the other different genres mentioned (Henthorne 10). By making dystopia the setting, the readers can arguably more easily relate to Katniss as they are experiencing the world of Panem along with her (Henthorne 10). The

readers have to decipher themselves what is wrong with this world as Katniss is only describing how things are in a rather neutral tone. This aspect of the *Hunger Games* series contributes to making the story more exciting, and it lets the readers experience the world, as it is being perceived by Katniss. Henthorne adds further that this first-person experience enhances the trilogy's "ideological impact by appealing to emotions as well as the intellect" (109). By telling the story in the present tense and in a first person voice, the readers are just as shocked as Katniss is when something new and unforeseen happens because both parties experience it at the same time. "Contemporary Western social ideologies condition subjects to value personal freedom, innovation, self-realisation, and self-expression, so readers are quick to discern when a society is being depicted as authoritarian and repressive" (Bradford et al. 29).

## 1.1 Dystopia

The *Hunger Games* trilogy has been categorized as a dystopia and there are several arguments that support this classification. Utopia and dystopia both represent worlds and/or societies that are meant to be better or worse, respectively, than that of the reader's (Hintz and Ostry 1), and as many would probably agree, Panem is undoubtedly worse than today's western world. The term "utopia" was first used in Thomas More's book *Utopia* (1516) and has ever since been followed by its darker twin concept, dystopia, both drawing their meaning from each other by the very fact that they are "contrast concepts" (Kumar 99-100). "Dystopia (...) is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that only functions for a particular segment of society" (Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash 1). The last part of this definition fits the world of the *Hunger Games* quite well, as it is only the residents of the Capitol that live a seemingly carefree and privileged life, while it is the people in the districts that work and provide them with various goods. We never learn whether or not there existed some utopian society for every one before the first rebellion, but given the fact that there was a rebellion and a period called the Dark Days, one can safely assume that things were not going so well at that time either.

What some scholars suggest is that utopia and dystopia are not exactly opposites, but rather two concepts that cannot exist without each other. Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash suggest that dystopia's opposite is utopia, but that the converse situation is not necessarily the case (2). In achieving utopia there is one way to go, whereas several roads lead the other way to dystopia. There are many ways in which things can fail, but only one way in which they can

go right. Kumar agrees that the relationship between the two concepts is asymmetrical; anti-utopia is dependent on utopia for its survival as a concept and is thus the ruined copy of the perfect original (100). Had there not been a better alternative to fight for or to dream of in dystopias such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and also in *The Hunger Games*, there would not have been a story to tell (the story would in that case have been about something entirely different). The very fact that there exists an idea of a better alternative, a utopia, gives the dystopia its life force, its purpose of existing. If we turn it the other way around and imagine a perfect place, we can at the same time imagine how it could go wrong, but the difference is that there are several ways in which things could take a turn for the worse. The *Hunger Games* trilogy is a dystopia because we, as we read, create a better and utopian version of Panem; we see what is wrong and think of better alternatives. Had we gone the other way, by starting with a utopian setting, there is no chance we would have ended up with the exact world that Collins has created. Utopia has an infinite number of dystopias, whereas dystopia only has one implied utopia. By writing the story as a dystopia, Collins is able to force the readers to imagine the one and only road to make things get better in Panem. She can control the reader's wishes for Katniss' future by creating a world where the defects and deficiencies are generally agreed upon must be fixed, thus at the same time making the readers agree with her intended message. This is not to state that Collins' message in the *Hunger Games* trilogy is good or bad, on the contrary, it is merely a comment on technique.

If we look for the purpose of a dystopian literary work it would most probably take the role of a social commentary, "After all, utopias and dystopias by definition seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level" (Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash 2). Although literary periods have come and gone over the years, and the types of stories being told have changed with them, the overall reason for writing may not have changed that much. Writers are, in some way or another, commenting on the society and the time they live in. We all have different ways of expressing ourselves, whether through the spoken or written word, or through our actions, and even though we may not intentionally have in mind to comment on the world today, our formulations by the word or the pen and our actions, betray us. Terry Eagleton comments that even when it comes to literary criticism, it is perhaps only significant when the literary works comment on "vital concerns deeply rooted in the general intellectual, cultural and political life of an epoch" (107). Literary criticism, whichever "-ism", is concerned with some specific topic in literary works and how that topic may be read as a comment on society. In the *Hunger Games* series, Collins is making both subtle and direct

references to our world, and the manner and tone in which she does it suggest her attitude and feelings toward society today.

Kumar (100-102) discusses an interesting point of utopia being the real, and most terrifying of all dystopias. There is supposedly a conflict between those who are sceptical of the hopes brought forward by utopian thinking and the like, and those who are not. The sceptics instead maintain the idea that men are selfish and “have evoked the dark side of human nature as the preponderant side” (100). Like Plutarch Heavensbee says in *Mockingjay*: “We (...) have a great gift for self destruction” (442). The fear of utopia is based on the idea that “such an achievement would violate the restlessness and striving that are an essential part of the human spirit” (Kumar 102). In other words, utopia would become an anti-utopia simply because it takes away a part of what it is to be human: “We would die of boredom.” Utopia should therefore always remain a dream and never truly be realized. Living in a world of hopes and dreams is then the real utopia. The ending in the *Hunger Games* series is therefore the best that could ever happen; a new, but luckily, an uncertain society, where the characters can appreciate the life that they have because they know from experience that there are worse alternatives to live with. They have learned the difference between good and bad, but still have hopes for a continuation of the good situation they are in. Dystopian writings are therefore not necessarily just cautionary tales of how wrong things might go, they are also tales of how neither extreme points are ideal for humans. Moderation should be sought after instead.

## 1.2 Dystopia in Children’s and YA Literature

“You may lead a child into darkness, but you must never turn out the light.”

Monica Hughes (156).

One of the things that set the *Hunger Games* trilogy apart from many other socially critical works and dystopias is the fact that it is written for children and young adults. Commenting on the state of the world today in a children’s novel is somewhat different from doing the same in an adult novel. The difference does not necessarily concern the topics that are commented on, but rather how they are being presented. The introductory quote above summarizes the very essence of the difference when it comes to writing dystopian books for children and young adults, and writing the same type of books for adults. The light must never be turned off; no matter how dark it gets. There must always be a tiny ray of hope,

even in the most depressing and frightening of places. *1984* is a good example of how at the end every bit of hope is extinguished and you realise that there is no way out of the situation for Winston Smith; the world of *1984* will not change for the better. By leaving the characters and the readers in a hopeless and depressing world, Orwell's novel is taking its place among similar books written for adults, and would have taken a very different turn if it were intended for children and/or young adults; "the narrative disclosure of the protagonist's final defeat and failure is absolutely crucial to the admonitory impulse of the classic adult dystopia" (Sambell 165). In *The Hunger Games*, however, hope is kindled throughout the narrative, and even if it seems to be dying at some points, it arrives at the end, still burning.

Bradford et al. write that for readers to be able to imagine a better world than the one they know, the utopia must be transformative (4). The same could be said about dystopia. Although adult dystopian novels rarely end with any change whatsoever, the children and young adult versions very often do. In the children's versions, the transformation of the existing society is difficult, but possible, whereas in the adult counterpart the hope more often than not brutally dies at the end. In *1984*'s London we learn that the existing society cannot be changed, whereas the world of Panem in the *Hunger Games* series, through display of the Capitol's weaknesses, is clearly possible to change.

Also in its formation, the young adult dystopia differs from its adult counterpart. The children are often at odds with the adults and very often have to take the main responsibility for the dystopian world to change into a better place (Hintz and Ostry 1). Bradford et al. add that it is the "child protagonists who must take responsibility for the future, and (...) overcome the problems the adult generation has created" (182). In the *Hunger Games* trilogy, it is Katniss who must find the right path to a better world, and although she does not have any real say in military decisions and tactics, her being "only" the symbol of the rebellion, it was her actions that initiated the rebellion, and it is because of her role as the Mockingjay that it is spread to the rest of Panem, thus uniting the districts against the Capitol. Bradford et al. add to this by saying that in these types of stories "[the] child protagonist is bound to rebel against the high level of conformity demanded by utopian society" (12). This description also goes for the dystopian stories. It is the adolescent Katniss who does not conform to the rules in the *Hunger Games* series, both when under the Capitol's rule and later under District 13's short leadership. The implication being perhaps that the adults in children's dystopias are too scared or too incorporated into the ways of the ruling regime. In any case, for the books to appeal to younger readers, it is an advantage that the protagonists are about the same age as

the readers. This way it is easier for the intended readers to identify themselves with the characters.

“In utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults, the stakes are high,” write Hintz and Ostry (2). This is because, they argue, that this type of literature may be the first encounter that children have with “texts that systematically explore collective social organization.” In addition, Bradford et al. add, another challenge is that the dystopian topic must be combined with topics that adolescents are concerned with, such as “the development of the notion of selfhood” (12). In the *Hunger Games* trilogy we learn how Katniss at only eleven years, took action in order to save her family from starvation and separation, thus forcing her to grow up before her time. Had this been her only trait and concern, she might have felt unfamiliar to many readers, but by adding the at times difficult relationship to her mother and a love plot, Collins has made Katniss a grown-up revolutionary *and* a teenage girl fussing about how this or that dress makes her look, and what this or that kiss meant. Tropes of bildungsroman are an important element in books for children and young adults because they very often portray and reflect the development the young readers are going through themselves. Combined with dystopia this creates a “powerful metaphor for adolescence” (Hintz and Ostry 9). This is because, argue Hintz and Ostry, for adolescents, authority appears oppressive, and teenagers feel perhaps more under surveillance than others: “The adolescent craves more power and control, and feels the limits on his or her freedom intensely” (10). The lack of freedom displayed in the *Hunger Games* trilogy for those living in the districts may be recognized by teenaged readers as the same restraint they have when it comes to curfew and bedtimes.

Hintz and Ostry point out that the reasons for writing dystopias for children and young adults are varied and range from “play and escape to sustained political reflection” (1). They further add that this sort of writing encourages children to question the society they live in by examining the roots of social behaviour (1). The books then become an early, and relatively mild, introduction to the political life for the young readers. By adding adventure, humour, and romance into the mix, the dystopian stories become less frightening and “real” and thus the real political message is subtly transmitted to the children. Hughes adds that “dystopian worlds are exiting” (156), but nihilism and despair cannot be the end result. Sambell (163) writes that the purpose of dystopian novels for children mainly has been twofold: that of a cautionary tale of the consequences of human behaviour, and that of an appeal for social change. The *Hunger Games* trilogy contains examples of all these traits, including the excitement part. Collins is both cautioning the readers to think through their

actions now, and is also promoting that something has to change. If not, the world might be heading in the same direction as Panem. In order to avoid pointing her finger too much, Collins has included in her story thrilling combat scenes, exciting hunts, and a romantic plot where the heroine must choose between two different, but equally attractive, suitors. In addition to keeping the interest of the young readers, these additional effects also make the trilogy more accessible to both boys and girls alike.

Bradford et al. explain that to “grasp what children’s texts propose about values, politics, and social practices is to see what they envisage as desirable possibilities for the world” (6). Hintz and Ostry add to this by pointing out that there is always some lesson to be learned in children’s literature; “it is an inherently pedagogical genre” (7). By writing this type of socially commenting literature for children and young adults, one might begin to wonder if this is an attempt by authors to steer the children towards specific actions in the future. And if so, is it merely an everyday attempt at socialization, or is it rather recognition of their own mistakes? After all, it is the children of today that have to live with the world their parents created. By rereading the books later in life, children and young adults reveal more and more of the layers of messages in them as they mature into adulthood. It is noteworthy that the initial good feeling a child has towards a book, may colour the grown up child’s adoption of the message provided in it. Thus the message, whether it is right or wrong, could be internalized without critical thinking on the reader’s side, just because there are good memories connected to the book. Knowles and Malmkjær remind us of the great power adults have over children in socializing them into the society in which they grow up. Further, the texts that are provided to children to be read, and the language in them, are important tools when it comes to “promoting the acceptance by the child of [the] customs, institutions and hierarchies” that are desired in society (44). All the things that adults teach children are arguably meant to continue the traditions and values of the parents, and therefore authors who want to make children aware of the world they are living in, might end up with a bit of dilemma. On the one hand, they want the children to conform to the set rules of the society, but on the other hand, they are writing a story with the intended purpose to change the world for the better. They must perform a balancing act with their wishes for the present and their wishes for the future. If Suzanne Collins really did intend to comment on our society and give us a terrifying image of what may happen if we continue on the course we are on, it is the intention of this thesis to prove so, and by doing so also help bring the author’s message to more people.





## 2 *The Hunger Games*

In this chapter the different aspects of the existence of the Hunger Games themselves will be discussed along with what they symbolize. Entertainment and means of control and power are the major points here; what control and power mean in the world of the *Hunger Games* trilogy and also what control and power mean and are related to us in the present. Connected to this are also what consequences this type of punishment/entertainment might have on a population and how long mistreatment of the population can be allowed to continue. Some of the things Katniss and Peeta go through as they prepare for the Games, both physically and psychologically, and also how they use the information they have about the games to their advantage will also have a place in this chapter. Katniss and Peeta's rebellious acts in the arena are what initiates the rebellion that continues in the next two books of the series and that will ultimately change the lives of the people in Panem. They both resist being pawns in the Capitol's Hunger Games and by doing so, they are initiating a chain of events that, when first started, is demanding a lot of them as human beings and which is also almost impossible to stop. The human aspects of the Hunger Games are probably what is the most unsettling about them, especially when it comes to how participants and viewers are affected.

From the very beginning we are made aware that everything is not as it should be in Panem, the vision of the future in the trilogy. The mood is set in the first paragraph, and it is not a jolly one; words like "cold," "rough," "bad dreams," and "reaping" (*Hunger Games 3*) bring with them negative connotations. In addition, there are also other things that make us sceptical and uneasy about the world Katniss is living in. Not only is she leaving to go hunting (why would she need to do that in the future), she also describes a huge fence, which she has to sneak through, that surrounds the district she lives in: The "high chain-link fence, topped with barbed wire loops" (*Hunger Games 5*), sounds very much like a construction from a WWII detention camp or like something you would find surrounding a prison nowadays. The official reason for the fence's existence, we are told, is to protect the people who live in the district from wild animals. The real reason, we learn later, is of course to keep the people inside from running away. Interestingly enough, the fence surrounding District 12 is supposed to be electrified, but rarely is, thus providing Katniss and her best friend, Gale, with an opportunity to hunt in the woods for extra food for themselves and their families. In addition to the lack of electricity, there are also several weak spots – holes – in the fence (*Hunger Games 5*), which Katniss and Gale can sneak through. Just in these first few pages, we learn of fencing, reaping, and food shortages in District 12. It is all in all a rather bleak

setting for a bleak future, and the setting is not made any brighter by the introduction of the Hunger Games.

## 2.1 Entertainment

When we enter the story, it is the day of the reaping – the selection, by lottery, of the tributes who will fight in the 74<sup>th</sup> annual Hunger Games. After learning more about the Games, their purpose and how they work, the concept of the Hunger Games reminds us very much of the reality television shows we have today. By mixing *Survivor* and *Big Brother* with murderous children, Collins has taken this concept to an extreme level. By having boys and girls kill each other for the amusement of the very few and well to do in the Capitol, and as punishment for the people in the districts, we are way beyond the limit of what we would find acceptable both as entertainment and most likely as punishment today. At least that is what we hope, right? We should not forget, however, the fact that reality shows have become more and more popular during the last two decades, increasing both in topics and concepts, and what are the Hunger Games if not a very barbaric, and yet, for some, a very entertaining, live reality show?

The reason for the Hunger Games' existence in Panem is twofold: “on the one hand they entertain a frivolous crowd in the Capitol [...] and it reminds those in the districts of the Capitol's relentless powers” (Clemente 24). In addition, Collins' directness in describing the brutalities of this extreme version, is most likely a comment on whether or not we are heading in a direction that will ultimately end up with our own television shows becoming something in the nature of the Hunger Games.

### 2.1.1 Panem et Circenses and the Importance of Food

The Latin phrase “panem et circenses” was used by the writer Juvenal to describe the society of ancient Rome. By placing a society whose elite's only concern is bread and circuses in the future and where the rest of the population is struggling to get by under its hard rule, it is possible that Collins wants to give us a warning concerning the direction in which we are heading with regard to political ignorance and desensitising entertainment. If we do not learn from our history, who is to say that we will not enter into the same trap again? As Plutarch tells Katniss after the war and rebellion is over: “We're fickle, stupid beings with poor memories and a great gift for self destruction” (*Mockingjay* 442), indicating that the hard won victory is a fragile one. The phrase “panem et circenses” (bread and circuses) explains very

well how the Hunger Games are connected to entertainment for the citizens in the Capitol. This metaphor for food in exchange for political power is heavily played upon in the *Hunger Games* trilogy and provides us with an excellent view of the system of government in Panem. “In the case of politics, the phrase is used to describe the creation of public approval, not through exemplary or excellent public service or public policy, but through diversion; distraction; or the mere satisfaction of the immediate, shallow requirements of a populace, as an offered ‘palliative’” (*Wikipedia* webpage). The Merriam-Webster webpage adds that it is “a palliative offered especially to avert potential discontent.” These definitions state that a society where this form of rule is prevalent is not necessarily a place where the government is being fair to all its citizens or where the rule is democratic or in any way just. On the contrary, as long as the citizens get their basic and superficial needs met, like food and entertainment, those in charge can do more or less as they please. To the people in the Capitol, the Hunger Games have taken the role of “circenses”, the distraction; they “are so caught up in the artificial drama that plays out on the television that they pay little attention to the fact that their “president” is, in fact, a dictator who attained power by murdering his rivals, or that their affluence comes at the cost of great privation elsewhere” (Henthorne 105).

In *Mockingjay*, Plutarch Heavensbee tells the history of the “panem et circenses”-phrase and explains “that in return for full bellies and entertainment, [the] people had given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power”. Katniss then “[thinks] about the Capitol. The excess of food. And the ultimate entertainment. The Hunger Games. ‘So that’s what the districts are for. To provide the bread and circuses’” (*Mockingjay* 261). In Panem, many people are working for the wellbeing of the few; each district has its main product (everything from food to luxury items), which they provide the Capitol with. This system of (not) sharing the resources of the earth is found throughout our history, and history also attests to the fall of regimes where the governments have shown no concern for the population over whom they rule; from Imperial Rome, to Bourbon France, to the Soviet Union (Pharr 13). Those who have, want more, and those who have little, get less. By giving up their political rights, the people of the Capitol have also turned a blind eye to the people and places their wealth originates from. The same situation can be found elsewhere, all over the world today. Although we do not live under the same circumstances as the people in Panem do, there are similarities to be found between us, suggesting that very little have changed in Panem from our time, at least not to the better.

It is not difficult to see that it is this type of unjust government that rules Panem, especially when we look at the Capitol where the citizens have succumbed to decadence.

Adrienne Kress points out that decadence is not necessarily a problem in itself, but the troubles come when people begin to overindulge in it – when moderation is gone (223). She further adds that the world of Panem could only have come to be when people’s purpose in life became only to indulge themselves and only care about themselves, and then anything that comes in the way of this purpose must be stopped. When you care only for yourself, why should you care for the people who make your lifestyle possible (Wilson 224)? It does sound a bit backwards and even a bit like a paradox, but if your sole purpose in life is to make sure that you are doing well and having a good time, then all other things become minor and unimportant. As long as the government provides you with what you need, food and entertainment, you do not need to care about anything else; that is the government’s job, the deal you have entered into. This has made the citizens of the Capitol more concerned with “their appearance, food and entertainment, than with politics or the fate of the districts that they consider beneath them” (Pavlik 33). Compassion towards other human beings is gone and thus there is no moral concern about sending children to slaughter. To say it pointedly, the people of the Capitol have forsaken their humanity and care for others in order to live a carefree life, where the most terrible thing for them is to be out of nail polish, whereas the really terrible things are not thought twice about. The citizens of the Capitol have given up their right to have a say in politics and with it their responsibility for their fellow human beings (they think), and in return they are provided with an abundance of food and the ultimate form of entertainment: the Hunger Games.

### **2.1.2 Loss of Humanity vs. Discovery of Oneself**

When it comes to the people of the Capitol, the Hunger Games constitute the television event of the year, and they are all glued to the screens from the reappings to the final moment when there is a single person left in the arena. To enjoy this form of entertainment one might wonder if they are in their right minds. What has enabled them to accept this type of barbarism as a means of entertainment? By giving up their political rights to the government, the people of the Capitol seem to have become numb to the massacres that happen year after year in the arenas. By the time we enter the story, the Hunger Games has been on air for 74 years, and so it is probable that very few of the people alive in the Capitol remember the Dark Days and the rebellion. They have, in other words grown up with the system of rule in Panem and the Hunger Games as normality. Even so, for how long can we excuse their ignorance? As Gale comments in *Mockingjay*, after Katniss defends her prep team and compares them to

ignorant children, “They don’t know what, Katniss? That tributes – who are the actual children involved here, not your trio of freaks – are forced to fight to the death? That you were going into that arena for people’s amusements? Was that a big secret in the Capitol?” (*Mockingjay* 64). According to Gale, everyone is responsible for what has happened to the children in the Hunger Games over the years. The people of the Capitol are as guilty of the massacres as the authorities that initiated the Hunger Games in the first place and those who continue to arrange them. Passivity is not the same as opposition, it is more like silent approval, and that is no different from direct action in Gale’s eyes. We all hear the truth in his comment, and being ignorant seems like a very weak excuse. Should the people of the Capitol just be forgiven, for they knew not what they did (Luke 23:34)? Another point in Gale’s view is that the citizens of the Capitol are not actually passive either; they are in fact enjoying the Hunger Games, making them more than just silent watchers. The more they enjoy the Games, the more reason and incentive for the government to keep the show running.

Another reason for the way in which the people of the Capitol respond (or fail to respond) to the Games, may be because the tributes are not viewed as entirely human. Not that they do not know that the children are human beings, but that in order to enjoy the Hunger Games and the brutalities that happen there, the tributes are given a status that is not quite real, more like actors that you do not see again after they “die” on television shows. The loss of humanity, argues Meagan Whalen Turner in *Publishers Weekly*, is not just a risk for the contestants, which will be dealt with later, but also for those who watch. By veiling the reality, the watchers of the Hunger Games (mainly those in the Capitol) are able to enjoy the killings without feeling sympathy for the children who are being murdered. Of course, they do not like it when the one they were cheering for dies, but it is more like when the suitor we like the best on the *Bachelor* show has to go home with a broken heart: that’s too bad, but there are more to go. Collins said in an interview that she came up with the idea for the Hunger Games when she was channel surfing one night and the shifts between a reality show and a war coverage became blurred and started to mix (*Scholastic* webpage). “Popular programming desensitizes people to violence and conflict”, writes Henthorne (95), and this is what we see has happened in the Capitol and what also may be happening in the here and now. By creating a fake reality on television shows, the real and serious news reports of people in actual pain and suffering in the same medium do not have the impact they should have. The reality shows make people numb to the real and important concerns. A killed person shown in the news is “just the same” as what we saw on that television show last

night. This is what made Collins aware of this potential danger when she experienced it herself. By merging entertainment and real suffering, Collins has amplified what she wants fixed in real life. True to dystopian traits, she steers the readers towards her desired solution, and by keeping the light on as it were, giving the young readers hope that they have the power to change things for the better.

“The only difference between us and the viewers in the Capitol is that we have agency to turn off the television at any time; we just choose not to” (Ryan 100). Does that make us in any way better than them? That we choose freely to watch people being miserable on television might even be worse. We could argue that the nature of the show in *The Hunger Games* is not the same as the ones we watch. We watch people starve (*Survivor*), get their heart broken (*The Bachelor*), and have sex for everyone to see (*Big Brother*); there are no boundaries being crossed here, this is in fact accepted television. But how and when do we draw these boundaries of what is acceptable or not? And there is no getting away from the fact that in only the last 10 years the limits of what is being perceived as acceptable television have changed drastically. By taking the limit to the extreme, Collins is making us consider how far we are willing to go in order to be entertained. Lili Wilkinson asks the question how many steps there are between our TV shows today and the Hunger Games (Wilkinson 73)? It is rather interesting that even though a limit seems to have been reached by the Hunger Games, there are still some steps to go even there. One year, Katniss tells us, a tribute tried to eat the heart of another tribute he had killed. “There are no rules in the arena, but cannibalism doesn’t play well with the Capitol audience” (*Hunger Games* 173). Collins seems to suggest that we should draw the line sooner rather than later, before the only limit we have left is cannibalism. We must rid ourselves of the passivity governing most of us nowadays and step up and draw a line between what is acceptable and what is not. By doing this, we might avoid the state that Panem has come to. By caring about what happens to people in the world today we have not yet let go of our humanity, nor for that matter of our political responsibilities.

By controlling the media in Panem, the authorities in the Capitol determine not only what the people in the districts know about each other, but also what the people in the Capitol know of the districts. This is why, Koenig (43) argues, the children require “modification to fit the fictionalized versions” that the government has made up about them. For, after being selected as a tribute, the children are being transformed, so to speak, to representatives the people of the Capitol feel acceptable, believable, and enjoyable. They are moulding them into what they want them to be, at least when it comes to looks. Katniss, before she is even allowed to meet her stylist, is being bathed, scrubbed, and stripped of body hair, “leaving

[her] feeling like a plucked bird” (*Hunger Games* 75). One of the prep team members, Flavius’ comment to Katniss reveals how they view the children they are prepping for battle: “Excellent! You look almost like a human being now” (*Hunger Games* 76). Although he is most likely commenting on her being dirty and hairy, the comment has a certain undertone indicating that he does not recognize the fact that he is handling a person that will probably be dead in two weeks. As for Katniss, the feeling of being in the presence of someone not quite human seems mutual. Even when she is standing naked in front of them while they are looking for anything left to “fix”, she is not embarrassed. “They are so unlike people that I’m no more self-conscious than if a trio of oddly coloured birds were pecking at my feet” (*Hunger Games* 76). Every person in Panem is being taught by the Capitol to view the tributes as less than human (Borsellini 34), and to this one might add that to the people in the districts, the citizens of the Capitol *are* not quite human.

Katniss is also seen dehumanizing others when Peeta’s name is being called at the reaping in District 12. After a quick regret that it had to be him, she begins to distance herself and compares him with something she might have hunted in the woods; “his blue eyes show the alarm I’ve seen so often in prey” (*Hunger Games* 31). Katniss is at once analysing, at once preparing herself for the Games. In addition, when Gale comes to say good-bye, he stresses the importance of getting a bow, and after that “it’s just hunting” (*Hunger Games* 48). Katniss seems to be concerned with the fact that it is not animals she will be hunting, but as she says herself after thinking a bit: “The awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different at all.” By dehumanizing the contestants, both the citizens of the Capitol and the tributes are can more easily accept the killings, both as spectators and as murderers to-be.

The pre-game programming that transform Katniss “into a sexual object” can in itself be seen as a commentary on reality shows such as *Extreme Makeover* and *America’s Next Top Model* (Henthorne 100). Like the contestants on such reality shows, Katniss is being objectified and made into something that is not her original state; something the viewers find attractive. That being said, Henthorne (100) further points out that unlike Katniss, the contestants on most shows like these are happy with their transformation, which is also their main reason for entering in the first place. Katniss has the same realization after a while and is able to appreciate her prep team’s effort to make her as attractive to the sponsors as possible. “The Hunger Games is not a beauty contest, but the best-looking tributes always seem to pull more sponsors” (*Hunger Games* 70). Henthorne (53) adds that before the Hunger Games, Katniss was not concerned with looks and beauty, since it did not help her

provide food for her family. However, after becoming a tribute, she sees the value of good looks, and in addition, good behaviour, attributes that are not necessarily important to her but to others.

By doing as her mentor and stylist want, Katniss captures the attention of the Capitol audience and thus secures her chances of having good sponsors once she is in the arena. But this change is not easy, neither for her, nor for Peeta. Katniss does not feel like herself after having been hosed down, and she is constantly concerned with not being perceived as a weak contestant, something she actually is not. She is furious with Peeta when he declares his love for her on live television. Being a girl she cannot pull off being rude and curt, and when she claims that Peeta made her look weak, Haymitch counters and says that “he made you look desirable” (*Hunger Games* 164). To sell Katniss and Peeta as star-crossed lovers is to their advantage when they are in the arena; it gives them a characteristic and attribute that the viewers will find entertaining, and when Katniss protests and says that they are not, Haymitch, cutting to the core of how the Hunger Games work, answers:

“Who cares? It’s all a big show. It’s all how you’re perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you’re a heartbreaker. Oh, oh, oh, how the boys back home fall longingly at your feet. Which do you think will get you more sponsors?” (*Hunger Games* 164).

Like the reality shows we have today, it is not in fact the reality we care about as viewers; it is what is perceived as reality.

Henthorne (50) suggests that female tributes are at a disadvantage because they, unlike boys, have less experience from fighting and are discouraged from aggressive behaviour. For girls then, only two strategies are left if they should have any chance to win: behaving like boys or using “feminine wiles”. Even though Katniss probably would have wanted a more aggressive approach to her character in the arena, it is a version of the latter that is decided, and that fits more nicely with the star-crossed lovers tactic. This is a big step for a girl who has been self-sufficient since the age of eleven, and has had the role of provider for her family, and who now must use all her experience in keeping up appearances to win the audience over with her tragic love story. What is being perceived as reality is not necessarily true, but that is how reality shows work; whatever idea or pretence brings the most viewers is the one that will be used, whether it is relationships or looks. Katniss changes



her ways for a period of time so that she later, hopefully, may return to the person she was before.

Peeta is also going through a tough time in preparations for the Hunger Games. Like Katniss he wants to remain who he is, but in another way than Katniss. Where Katniss wants to quit playing games in the pre-Games week and start thinking about tactics for survival in the arena, Peeta seems to want the opposite. He has no problem with flattering the people of the Capitol and tagging along on interviews. However, as he says to Katniss, “I want to die as myself. (...) I don’t want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I’m not. (...) 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” (*Hunger Games* 171-172). Peeta is rebelling on a psychological level rather than a physical one; it is what he does not do that is showing resistance to the Capitol and its ways. If he is able to keep himself, his values and beliefs, in the arena and not lose track of who he is, he would succeed in keeping command of his mind over the Capitol’s attempt to do it, who also wish to alter it, along with everyone else’s, to its standards and thus prove its complete authority over the people of Panem. In addition, Peeta’s real feelings for Katniss are what make the “showmance” so believable, and are arguably also what make him survive in the Games so long. His real self is not thrown away, which is also why the romance on screen is pulling viewers. And that is not something the Capitol and the Gamemakers can ignore. This is also the reason why they let Katniss live after her bold actions in the arena; she pulls more viewers alive than she does dead. That people change who they are when they are on television is not something new; it is the rule rather than the exception, but having to put aside your beliefs and morality, and commit murder in order to stay alive, is something quite different from just getting a makeover. By fighting in order to remain who they are, and to a certain degree getting away with it, Katniss and Peeta prove that transformation is possible in Panem, and thus keep the hope burning both for the people in the districts and for the readers.

In the Hunger Games arena, it is Katniss’ experience from watching earlier Games that ultimately leads to her, and as a consequence, Peeta’s survival, like knowing that the Gamemakers will probably come up with some form of challenge after a quiet day; “No deaths, perhaps no fights at all. The audience in the Capitol will be getting bored” (*Hunger Games* 209). Her intuition and experience as a viewer lead her to give the audience what she thinks they might want to see, and so the continued demand from the viewers keeps her alive. By playing on the star-crossed lovers strategy, the team from District 12 is able to get sponsors. By reading the signs, or lack thereof, that she gets from her mentor, both she and

Peeta are watered, fed, and medicated and able to make it to the final three. Katniss is playing on the romance with Peeta to obtain gifts from sponsors (Henthorne 102). Nevertheless, not playing by the rules in certain parts of the Games is also what makes her a prime object of rebellion and thus the focus of suspicion of the Capitol. When Katniss understands that it was always the Gamemakers' plan to have her and Peeta left in the end, and that "they never intended to let us both live" (*Hunger Games* 416), Katniss' real self begins to emerge and she slips sometimes in her acting. Katniss thus convinces the Gamemakers to let them both live (Henthorne 102). By pulling out the poisonous berries, like Eve of a dystopian garden, Katniss is challenging the rules set forth by the Gamemakers by giving them an ultimatum; two winners or none at all. Not only would the Capitol be losing a victor to parade through Panem as a reminder of its power, Katniss and Peeta would by killing themselves "subvert the ideological purpose of the Games, which is to dramatize the government's absolute power over its citizens" by demonstrating agency and free will (Henthorne 102). Suicide becomes an act of independence and resistance towards the Capitol, and by threatening to do it, Katniss and Peeta are officially displaying a rebellion on live television. This threat also becomes a symbol of thinking independently, to stand up against the oppressing regime. Although it is only the beginning of the opposition against the Capitol, it is also the beginning of Katniss' personal growth and development.

The fact that the tributes are being watched all the time "is what makes the Hunger Games so powerful" (Wilkinson 70). Not only is the power of the Capitol being demonstrated to every citizen; the Games are also a potential and powerful weapon for a rebellious mind. Wilkinson (71) points out that Katniss at first is only playing to the cameras, as when she gives a knowing smile to the cameras after it is revealed that Peeta has joined the Career Tributes' gang, but afterwards she "starts to use her position, her visibility, as a message". By using the cameras to her purpose, Katniss is getting more attention than she might have hoped for. The response after Rue's death is proof of this. She decorates Rue's body with flowers. After Rue's death Katniss realises who it she really should be fighting, who the real opponent is, "It's the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us" (*Hunger Games* 286). This is also where she actively, and also more consciously, starts her anti-Capitol actions. From this moment she understands both Gale's angry "ranting" towards the Capitol in the woods and Peeta's wish to be more than just a piece in their Games. "Innocence, youth loss and human compassion" (Koenig 43) is what is represented by the flowers; things that are necessary for the people of the Capitol not to associate themselves with the tributes for the Hunger Games to have the desired effect on everyone.

## 2.2 Control

In addition to the fences and the control of information and food supplies, the ultimate way of controlling the districts, however, is through the Hunger Games themselves, which then become the second reason for their existence in Panem. “The Games are the ultimate terror tactic because they are played with the lives of innocents” (Pavlik 30). However terrifying the Games are, the rulers of Panem must nevertheless each year give their citizens a show worthy of the name in order to keep their power and to prove their dominance. The Games must both be entertaining and horrific. The Hunger Games mirrors the Capitol’s control over the districts only on a smaller scale; the Gamemakers control the availability of food and other goods necessary for survival in the arena, just as the Capitol controls the resources the districts need (Henthorne 98). Pavlik (31) adds to this and explains that by making the districts compete in the arenas we are shown the continuation of the divide and conquer method exercised by the physical separation of the districts. The Hunger Games being such an important symbol of the Capitol’s power cannot afford to send any signal of weakness or lack of control to the people of Panem. However, throughout the series we are made aware of small shortcomings in its power and it is the exploitation of these shortcomings that ultimately helps Katniss and the other rebels to show their dissatisfaction with the Capitol’s rule and change the world they live in.

### 2.2.1 Divide & Conquer

The Capitol exerts its dominance and control over the various districts in many ways, and the fence surrounding the districts is only one of them. But as we are told of the shortcomings of the fence, we are also given that very first glimpse of hope that is supposedly to be found in dystopias for children and young adults; the Capitol’s control has its defects, or holes if you like, just like the fence, and is therefore, if unintentionally, giving someone like Katniss an opportunity to develop into a potential threat to its rule. For in addition to hunting, the holes also provide Katniss and Gale with a moment of liberty to speak their mind about the Capitol, the Hunger Games, and the unfairness of their situation; to think out loud, something that cannot normally be done without serious consequences. Katniss explains that when she was younger, she would scare “my mother to death, the things I would blurt out” (*Hunger Games* 7). Not even in their own home are the characters free to say what they want. They can never

be sure whether they are being overheard or not, and even in the woods, Katniss' acquired habit of keeping her thoughts to herself, is sometimes hard to overcome.

The hunting trips also contribute to social bonding, not only between Katniss and Gale, but also with the people they trade with. People forming loyalty to someone other than the Capitol, cannot be good for it. In this connection, it should also be mentioned that it is not only the inhabitants that keep quiet about their feelings and knowledge; the Peacekeepers in District 12, although they know of Katniss and Gale's illegal hunting, keep quiet because they themselves are enjoying the prospects of fresh meat and other things found in the woods. They even meet in the "Hub", the black market in District 12 and share a meal once in a while. Even Mayor Undersee is a customer of Katniss', enjoying the sweet strawberries she picks for him. Again we see weak links in the system of control in Panem; when the servants of the authorities are not following the rules established by the government, this gives courage to, and sets precedence for, the rest of the population and thus creates another hole in the total control the Capitol wishes to exert over the districts. This, combined with the defects of the fence, provides more of the hope that things may change, that the Capitol's power is not total, and as a consequence the future prospects of Panem do not seem so dark anymore. Not only is the Capitol's lack of attention to, and lack of law reinforcement in District 12 one reason for Katniss' development, in addition, Despain (71) comments, the Capitol actually forces the people in the districts to illegal actions because of the desperate situation they have been put in. If there had been no food shortages, there would have been less reason for poaching, stealing, and prostitution, and for thinking alternatively.

The 12 districts of Panem are controlled mainly through division by creating gaps between individuals and groups; between the genders, the working and merchant classes, and between the districts themselves (Henthorne 46). A classic "Divide and Conquer"-tactic. The Capitol does this by controlling the supply of food, work, and information. Freedom of speech is unthinkable and those who in various ways have acted or spoken in opposition to the Capitol have been turned into Avoxes. An Avox is "someone who committed a crime. They cut [their] tongue so [they] can't speak" (*Hunger Games* 94-95), and then made into a servant for the Capitol. This also creates a barrier between those who dare speak, and those who do not. Everything in Panem is controlled and therefore even the smallest of lapses in District 12 becomes that much clearer.

In connection with the entertainment part of the Hunger Games, one might wonder why on earth the Capitol carries out something as horrible, expensive, and time consuming as the Hunger Games in the first place? Of course it is to punish the districts for their previous

disobedience, but why not just round up 24 boys and girls and have them executed? Why make a show out of it? There are several possible reasons for that. One is what Katniss points out:

“This is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. 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.’ 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” (*Hunger Games* 22).

Not only do they have to send their children to slaughter, they must also watch them being killed and pretend to be happy about it. By going after the children, the very symbol of hope and future, the Capitol is trying to kill off any hope or idea about rebellion. If people do not have the means and power to protect their own children, then the means to do anything rebellious at all is gone too. By taking the children away, the Capitol also creates a gap between children and adults. In an act of self-preservation, the adults might not get that much attached to their children because it hurts too much to have them taken away. Katniss even swears that she will never have children because of this. By draining the people of hope, they are also being drained of the will to act in opposition. Just to add further to this point, there is also the case of the Quarter Quell, which is held every 25 years and where there are some exceptional rules to the Hunger Games. In the first Quarter Quell, the twist was that to remind the rebels and the adults that their children were dying in the arena because of their choice to start a rebellion, the adults in each districts had to cast a vote to decide which children should represent them in the Games (*Catching Fire* 207). The Capitol is always in control and always reminding the people of it. “It is hard not to fear a power that can so easily, thoughtlessly sacrifice the lives of children” (Kress 233).

Although the movie adaption of the first book is not being discussed in this thesis, there is an interesting conversation in it between President Snow and the Head Gamemaker of the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, Seneca Crane, about the purpose of having a winner and Snow asks:

”Seneca, why do you think we have a winner?” “What do you mean?” “I mean: Why do we have a winner? Hope.” “Hope?” “Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear.

A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is fine, as long as it is contained.” “So...?” “So; contain it!” (*The Hunger Games* Movie: 2012).

By providing the contestants with that taunting, little spark of hope, not more than can be controlled by the Capitol, the people of the districts have a chance of seeing their child again, and it also provides the contestants themselves with an incentive to try and win the Games because they have a chance of coming home, which in turn provides for a much better show. If we compare this tiny ray of light with the complete darkness in Orwell’s *1984*, we see a clear difference between the adult and the children’s version of the dystopia novel. By giving the people of the districts this small possibility of a better life, the Capitol is arguably also making its biggest mistake. By not completely quenching the spark of hope, the Capitol is making itself vulnerable. In *1984*, the Party does no such thing (the one hope turns out to be a ruse) and has thus a very different ending than the *Hunger Games* trilogy. The spark of hope that Katniss provides the districts with becomes too big for the Capitol to contain.

Most reality shows that fail to keep up with the increasing demands of the viewers, are quickly abandoned by them, and for the Capitol, being abandoned by its viewers may be the beginning of the end of its rule. This nearly happened one year we are told by Katniss, when “we spent one Hunger Games watching the players freeze to death at night (...) it was considered very anticlimactic in the Capitol, all those quiet, bloodless deaths” (*Hunger Games* 48). So with the popularity that comes with the Hunger Games comes an ever-increasing demand to keep the viewers watching. “To hold on to [the] viewers, the producers have to make each season fresh and new” (Ryan 101). Therefore, the Gamemakers are constantly trying to come up with new and terrible ways to make the life in the arena as challenging as possible, and making sure that a quiet death becomes the exception to the rule. They cannot afford for the Games to look cheap and boring. The shows are kept interesting by making them more demanding and extreme for the contestants. As Carrie Ryan comments, the annual Hunger Games are the very symbol of the Capitol’s power over the Districts and their people, and a boring game may be taken as a sign of the Capitol’s weakness and of lacking the means necessary to produce a worthy Game, and thus people might begin to question their allegiance to it (Ryan 102).

By turning the symbol of power into something physical, that almost everybody has an opinion about, and which the citizens of the Capitol think of as a necessity in their lives, the Capitol has also materialized its biggest weakness. Although a powerful weapon against the oppressed population in the districts, the Hunger Games are also the very reason there

exists an opposition in the first place. In addition, the Capitol's total dependence on the districts for various goods "makes its position somewhat precarious" (Palvik 31), and so the holes in the Capitol's power are getting bigger and more numerous.

### **2.2.2 Human Connections**

As mentioned earlier, one way of keeping the districts from forming an alliance against the Capitol is to always keep them separated, both the districts and the people within the districts. The children are eligible for the Hunger Games from the year they are twelve till they turn eighteen, and each year their name is entered one more time than the previous year, so that in the last year it is a total of seven times. However, the children can choose to put their name in more times in exchange for tesserae – an extra year's supply of oil and grain for one person – for each member of their family. As Katniss explains, this is just another way to spread mistrust between the workers and the merchants, between those who have to sign up for tesserae and those who do not need to. "It's to the Capitol's advantage to have us divided among ourselves" (*Hunger Games* 16), says Gale to Katniss. A divided people have very little chance of forming an opposition together, and social classes' mistrust of one another makes that chance even smaller. In addition, the district whose tribute wins the Games, is rewarded with extra food for the entire district for the next year and if the same district should win several years in a row the children there would be better fed and more fit to at least try and win the next year's Hunger Games. This is what has happened in districts 1, 2, and 4 where the children train and prepare for the Games, called Career Tributes, "and like as not, the winner will be one of them" (*Hunger Games* 115). These children seek to win the Games for glory. This only adds further to the split between the districts and also between the tributes in the arena. Everyone becomes an enemy for one reason or another. Furthermore, by controlling the channels of information and what the districts know about each other, the Capitol is keeping the districts from coordinating with each other and also keeping them from identifying with one another. By being hindered a communal, inter-district feeling, the people stand less chance of forming a unity (Henthorne 47).

Along with the people of the Capitol, the contestants must also put aside their humanity only they must do it in order to survive in the arena. The loss of one's humanity can go to the extreme, as in the case mentioned above of the tribute, Titus, who tried to eat his victims. The Hunger Games do more to the children than forcing them into a terrible situation. In addition to having to embrace the idea of their imminent death or them becoming

murderers, the children are, from the moment their names are called, toys for the Capitol to play with. The meeting with the fashions and the behaviour of the people in the Capitol is so far from what Katniss is used to that it all seems a bit surreal, however, being in the Capitol and in addition being a tribute, it is Katniss who now must change her appearance to be accepted in order to get sponsors for the Games and ultimately to win. By being presented to people so different from herself, Katniss also reveals the biggest difference between the people of Panem; that between the citizens in the Capitol and those in the districts. Elizabeth M. Rees describes Katniss' life in District 12 as a boot camp where she acquired the physical skills of a hunter, but also the skill of hiding her emotions and thoughts (Rees 47). All these skills are necessary in order to survive in the arena and in order to prove to the Capitol that she is the person they believe her to be. If we add the idea that it is the Capitol's own fault that Katniss has become who she is, by allowing holes in the fence, then the pre-game preparations and Katniss' continued distrust of the Capitol becomes a continuation of her prepping in the woods back home, only now the influence is more direct and active. After having unknowingly trained Katniss for the Hunger Games, the Capitol's, or rather President Snow's, attempt to do with her as he pleases, both succeed and fail. Like Finnick, who in *Mockingjay* tragically reveals being sold as a sex-slave by President Snow, Katniss is also being threatened that the people she loves might get hurt if she does not do as she is told. "Any girl who goes to such lengths to preserve her life isn't going to be interested in throwing it away with both hands. And then there's her family to think of" (*Catching Fire* 23), says President Snow to Katniss. Katniss and the other characters' major strength and weakness are that they have people in her life that they care about (Borsellino 38). Nevertheless, after the Capitol destroys her home district, Katniss agrees to join the rebel side as the "Mockingjay," but not until she secures the safety of those whom she loves.

Connected to the Divide and Conquer method of the Capitol is the breaking of inter-human connections. This goes for both the citizens of the Capitol and the people of the districts. In the Capitol we see it in how they only care for each other and in the districts how they are being set up to compete for everything, all to prevent the people from forming connections and finding a common cause. Katniss' strategy of refusing to play by the rules and Peeta's wish not to let go of who he is, is part of what makes their survival possible and also what makes the districts start to stir restlessly against the oppressing Capitol. By acting as a team, Peeta and Katniss are tying, rather than breaking connections.

The very first act of rebellion, the act of caring for another human being so everyone can see, gives immediate response in an act unprecedented before: Katniss receives a piece of



bread from District 11, Rue's district, for caring about her. Katniss' kindness towards Rue "shows a nation that its members can work together rather than feel isolated from each other" (Despain 245), community and humanity being important messages in the trilogy. Henthorne (104) adds that by giving Katniss, a girl now suspected of rebellious acts, a piece of bread is in itself a rebellious act, and District 11 is thereby not only showing their support, but also showing the Capitol that physical separation is not always enough. And to add further to the message, the bread is sent through the Capitol's own device: the Hunger Games' interactivity. Both Katniss and District 11 are using the Hunger Games' mandatory broadcast to show their action to the rest of the country, and thereby restoring some of the bonds that have been broken by the Capitol. In addition to the flower arrangements there is actually one more act of compassion on Katniss' side; "pity, not vengeance, sends my arrow flying into [Cato's] skull" (*Hunger Games* 414). By mercifully killing her opponent and giving him a swift death, as he is being torn to pieces by mutated wolf creatures ("mutts"), Katniss is once again showing kindness when the most horrible death is gluing people to the television screens, ruining the Gamemakers' horrific finale.

It is through Katniss' actions we see how the Capitol's policies have gone right and wrong. Katniss, being the breadwinner of her family, is both sceptical of receiving help, and does not want to be in anyone's debt, but at the same time she is volunteering for her sister who is the only person she says she is sure she loves. "On live television, all over Panem, she introduces a radical new idea: that it is important to care about other people; that it is the most important thing in the world" (Borsellino 31). And she does it more than once after the reaping. Borsellino (32) further adds that like The Party in *1984*, President Snow wants to "cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman" (*1984* 280). The Party has achieved this to a much greater degree than the Capitol has, but the direction of the Capitol is the same. Therefore it is of such great consequence that Katniss volunteers for her sister. She gives living proof that there is still some compassion and love between human beings left in the world. The contrast is stark to Peeta's brothers who remain silent when his name is called. "Family devotion only goes so far for most people on reaping day" (*Hunger Games* 31). Katniss' willingness and mentality to sacrifice herself for her sister, goes against what the Capitol has worked for. She has, because of the Capitol's lack of attention to District 12, developed into a human being who is almost everything the Capitol has worked against. Katniss should, in the eyes of the Capitol, never have been allowed to exist, but by existing, she provides the hope that a new and better world can rise out of the Capitol's faults.

The tactic, and later demand, that Katniss and Peeta say and act that they did what they did for love, is actually counterproductive, according to Borsellino (35); “with every interview and appearance, both Katniss and Peeta declare themselves loyal to something other than the Capitol”. By doing this, the Capitol actually accepts the act with the berries and this becomes yet another hole in the control the Capitol has over the districts. President Snow tells Katniss that “if the Head Gamemaker, Seneca Crane, had had any brains, he’d have blown you to dust right then” (*Catching Fire* 24). By not doing it, the “little scenario” had to be played out to appease the people in the Capitol. Seneca Crane paid for that mistake with his life, and Katniss and Peeta are threatened with the same fate should they fail to convince Panem and President Snow that the berries did not represent an act of rebellion, but rather their love for each other.

## 3 *Catching Fire and Mockingjay*

The topics discussed in the previous chapter, concerning most of the action taking place in *The Hunger Games*, are also encountered in the next two books, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*. The topics Collins highlights throughout the trilogy cannot, and are not meant to be separated and locked to only one of the three individual books, but are instead interwoven through all of them and so a choice of which topics to discuss in relation to which books had to be made. In this chapter, science, knowledge, and war and their inevitable consequences will be the main topics. In *The Hunger Games* we learn of the war that became the reason for the Hunger Games in the first place, but it is not until *Mockingjay* that the topic of war and warfare becomes essential to the plot, when the new rebellion asserts itself in the fight against the Capitol. When it comes to science, we learn of both technical and medical advances compared to our world in all of the three novels; science connected to surveillance and media, to warfare and weaponry, and to various medical treatments. In relation to both science and war, questions of morality and ethics will have their place in the discussion, as will a comparison to our world and the way we use science and warfare to create a better world for ourselves.

### 3.1 **Science and Knowledge**

In addition to the highly technical arenas in which the Hunger Games are played out, the advanced future developments in the *Hunger Games* series are also found elsewhere in Panem, especially in the Capitol. In addition to the apparently idle inventions, such as the fabric that gives the illusion of being real fire, forever fresh roses and multifunctional showers, we are also becoming familiarized with so called hovercrafts, high-speed trains, deadly, new weapons, and fantastic progress when it comes to both lifesaving and beautifying medical treatments. It should also be noted that these things, along with every other form of luxury items in Panem, the useful as well as the useless, are almost exclusive to the citizens of the Capitol and to a very few of the well to do people in the districts. Some items however, are to be found in the districts because the use of them is in some way directly or indirectly beneficial to the Capitol, such as the two-way communication television in Mayor Undersee's house, the train used to transport coal to the Capitol and the other districts that might need it, or the big viewing screens in the town square in each district. In addition, every household,

no matter how poor, possesses a television. All the citizens in Panem have to watch the Hunger Games, and for that a television is required. No one escapes that display of power.

At the same time one may wonder why there exists something as comparatively useless as a multifunctional shower, but not a new and safer way to extract coal, and other alternatives to produce energy. In addition to the obvious dangers of coal mining, the *Climate Science Watch* webpage points out that other, indirect dangers such as the high rate of birth defects, as it is today in areas such as West Virginia, are not mentioned in the trilogy, but should not therefore be ignored as a factor. Katniss also tells us that in District 12, everything is covered in coal dust, and daily intake of this by just breathing cannot possibly be healthy. Districts 12, in other words, “bears the costs, but sees few of the benefits of coal mining” (*Climate Science Watch* web). Benefits which are not necessarily important ones such as means of transportation and food production, but rather something as simple as hot water, which is instead used for the Capitol’s fancy showers.

### **3.1.1 Food**

Another example where we see the Capitol using technological innovation in order to promote their own lifestyle, and not the well being of the people of the districts, is when Katniss and Peeta are attending the party in the president’s mansion after the Victory Tour and are overwhelmed by the abundance of food. Even though they only have one small bite of each dish, they are both soon full and cannot eat more. Their prep team members, however, “laugh as if that’s the silliest thing they’ve ever heard” (*Catching Fire* 97). Katniss and Peeta then notice that everyone else keeps eating non-stop and soon learn that there are small glasses placed around the room, filled with a clear liquid that makes you vomit. That way, the party guests can eat as much as they want without ever getting filled up. This form of gorging only highlights the social differences between the Capitol and the districts, where food is so scarce that dying of starvation is as common a cause of death as any. After realising what the implication of this liquid invention is, all Katniss can think about is “the emaciated bodies of the children on our kitchen table as my mother prescribes what the parents can’t give. More food” (*Catching Fire* 98). The huge waste of food in the Capitol clearly shows that the resources are not being used or distributed fairly in Panem. By allowing children to starve while they are giving their own citizens the possibility to vomit for fun, the rulers of the Capitol are, if possible, even worse than first believed.

When it comes to the districts of Panem, the lack of food is a highly intentional move by the Capitol to keep the districts under control. And by in addition controlling the media, the Capitol makes sure that its own citizens do not know on what or at whose expense their feasting is done. In addition, being in possession of technology that could potentially feed a large number of starving people, the cruelty towards the starving districts is only made more obvious by the Capitol's gluttony. Further, the deception is only made clearer when the Gamemakers, after Katniss and Peeta win the Hunger Games, wish to surgically alter Katniss' body to hide the fact that she has been starving and wounded during the Games. A compromise was made by adding padding to her dress, so that she would seem fit and well for the following interviews. The corruption and double standards of the Capitol know no boundaries.

Food is a huge metaphor in the Hunger Games trilogy, and it serves as the main symbol of people's well being and feeling of community. Food, or lack of it, is also what moves the story forward; Peeta giving Katniss bread, Katniss' need to hunt, District 11's gesture to Katniss, and the messages sent to the tributes during the 75<sup>th</sup> annual Hunger Games. In addition, food becomes the utmost symbol of rebellion when Katniss pours out, and threatens to eat the Nightlock berries that would ensure the failure of the Gamemakers to produce a winner. Food becomes an essential part of everyone's lives in Panem, except perhaps for those in the Capitol, where food plays a different role. Despain (70-71), quoting Levenstein, says that the relationship that the citizens in the Capitol have to food, can be compared to the relationship that many Americans have to food; there is plenty of it, but there is no satisfaction or appreciation in having it. Abundance of food is normal and therefore not something that is thought about daily; its presence and availability are taken for granted. Instead, food receives other attributes than that of nutrition when we do not have to fight to obtain it. Collins uses this poisonous quality of food "throughout the novels as foodstuff moves from daily sustenance to political power play" (Despain 71). Food, at least enough of it, both in the future Panem and in our time, is available for very few people and in the western world, as in the Capitol, food is not being viewed as a nutrient, but rather as something we have for our own enjoyment and as something we can afford to waste. Sometimes even for the simple reason that it has the potential to make us fat. "American readers [of the *Hunger Games* trilogy] can see a parallel in bulimics, people who can afford to throw away food, binge and purge from dieting, and waste more meals than some people ever see" (Frankel 50). Bulimia and anorexia are luxury diseases: a clear indicator that people

in the western world have too much spare time, and means for that matter, to think only of their appearances and how they are perceived by others.

Science and food have another outcome in District 13, where the daily rations are handed out after careful calculations of each person's nutrition needs: "You leave with enough calories to take you to the next meal, no more, no less" (*Mockingjay* 42). Although no one starves, there is not freedom in District 13. Katniss tells us that on certain matters, District 13 is even stricter and more controlling than the Capitol. Having been isolated from the rest of Panem for 75 years, District 13 had to take drastic measures in order to survive and "pleasure [became] secondary to survival" (Kress 234). This need for control, however, seems to have stuck with the district (and its leaders) after the initial danger was over. The Capitol and District 13 are being presented as two extreme points in rule, but an interesting point is that both exercise control over their populations by controlling the supplies of food available. The Capitol does it by withholding food to prove its dominance in the districts and by distributing it freely to keep the citizens in the Capitol satisfied, and District 13 by providing just enough so its citizens can perform roles necessary to its own agenda, such as being soldiers; "I guess bony soldiers tire too quickly", comments Katniss (*Mockingjay* 42). In addition, all the food in District 13 is grown and produced underground, the need for control seems to have made them sceptical about even trusting nature to provide them with what they need.

### **3.1.2 Genetic Engineering and Transformation**

In addition to tools and medicine, the Capitol has also been making progress in the area of cloning and genetic engineering of animals and other living creatures. The most terrifying example of this is the "muttations" or "mutts". Mutts are either animals, which in some way or another have been genetically altered to possess certain qualities, such as the tracker jackers, or they are a whole new creation, often a mixture of man and animal, such as the wolf creatures in the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games or the lizard men in the sewers under the Capitol. In addition, the question of what makes the difference between human and beast can also be asked in this context as the border between the two is blurred in some parts of the story. Seen along with what was mentioned earlier, the tributes in the Hunger Games also become some form of mutts, as they are, if not genetically altered, then at least changed to become what the Capitol wants them to be, like Katniss' transformation mentioned above. "If monstrosity is defined by hybridity, by the blurring boundaries of self and other, Peeta and Katniss are

indeed monsters” (King 115). Both become physically and mentally changed after their visits to the Capitol and the Hunger Games arenas and even more so after the war. The same topic can be found in Disney classics such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Tarzan*, where the differences between beast and man are blurred, asking the viewers what truly makes a man and what makes a monster. In the *Hunger Games* trilogy, both technology and people’s actions are contributing to this confusion, and like Peeta, the readers might start to ask themselves the question “real, or not real”. The splicing of man and animal into a new creature is one thing; another is whether or not such cruel executions and punishments, such as the Hunger Games, could ever have been initiated by a human being, being so inhumane as they are. By making some of the scientific developments part of what is wrong with Panem, Collins is combining traits of both the dystopia and science fiction. This combination, among others, proves the mixture of genres that the *Hunger Games* trilogy can be put in, and perhaps also what makes it appeal to so many people.

Genetic engineering is nothing new and already in 1997 the first cloned sheep, Dolly, was born. The same year, another sheep, Polly, was born, genetically altered with human genes (*Britannica* website). Animals have also been spliced with each other in order for one species to obtain qualities desired by humans to be possessed by another species. In relation to food, animals and plants intended for consumption are also being genetically altered to provide people with more and better food (Lockwood 116).

The first mutt we are introduced to is the jabberjay, an all male bird created by the Capitol to use as a recording device during the first rebellion. After the jabberjay was discovered by the rebels and used as a weapon against the Capitol (by feeding it false information), it was considered a failure and abandoned in nature to die. However, against all odds it survived by mating with female mockingbirds and thus creating a whole new species, the mockingjay, no longer capable of recording human conversations, but instead only mimicking songs and tunes. Katniss as the Mockingjay is the most important symbol in the trilogy, both being creatures not intended by the Capitol to exist, but existing nonetheless because the Capitol paid little attention to them. And by existing against all odds, so to speak, they become a sign of rebellion and opposition to the Capitol’s suppressing rule. By opposing the Capitol in the arena, Katniss and her similarities with the mockingjay become the symbol of the rebellion. Like the mockingjay, Katniss reaches the apotheosis of the transformation when she is intended to die: after the explosion in the Capitol, she is left with severe burn injuries and yet she rises once again to live on (King 114), if somewhat altered from her original state. “Mockingjays are living symbols of the Capitol’s short-sightedness and prove

that it isn't invincible" (Lockwood 122). Like the mockingjay, Katniss is the result of the Capitol's carelessness when it comes to its creations and its subjects in District 12. By making these sorts of mistakes, the Capitol has made itself vulnerable. The same carelessness is what worries scientists today, especially biologists. Carl Zimmer writes in his *New York Times* article that the falling prices of the equipment that biologists use to work on viruses, like the H5N1-virus, have contributed to growing numbers of so called D.I.Y.-biologists. The fear is that without the proper knowledge of what they are doing, amateurs can, without necessarily meaning to, release dangerous viruses into the world, thus creating a pandemic. Although the Capitol does not provide the people in the districts with equipment, its own thoughtlessness is shown both through the mockingjay and its predecessor, the jabberjay, and also through the tracker jacker nests left in the woods after the first rebellion, much like land mines left in the ground after recent wars. Knowledge is a powerful weapon and with it comes the responsibility of using it with care.

The disturbing thing with the mutts is that they are not, as far as we are told in the books, made for any other reason than as some form of weapon or tool, either in the war against the rebels or in the Hunger Games arenas against the tributes. The tracker jackers for example, are wasps with genetically modified venom designed to attack the fear centre in the brain and give the victim powerful hallucinations. Furthermore, the same venom is used to brainwash Peeta, making him also into a form of mutt, designed to hate and fear Katniss. Although he eventually regains most of his old self as time passes, he is never truly healed. Lockwood points out that it is not the science in itself that is scary, but rather how it is used: "If mutts are bad, it's not because science is bad. It's because the people who created them are bad" (118). Katniss adds to this by saying:

"No mutt is good. All are meant to damage you. Some take your life, like the monkeys. Others your reason, like the tracker jackers. However, the true atrocities, the most frightening, incorporate a perverse psychological twist to terrify the victim. The sight of the wolf mutts with the dead tributes' eyes. The sound of the jabberjays replicating Prim's tortured screams" (*Mockingjay*, 364).

What we see here is powerful and potentially good science being used for selfish and destructive purposes. The science cannot be denied to be brilliant, but it is the way it is used that makes it wrong. Lockwood further points out that even in Panem, not all science is used for evil. The doctors in District 13 are helping Peeta by trying to reverse the torturous



treatment he received in the Capitol by using similar techniques. “Science is only a tool: it’s how you use it that matters” (Lockwood 119). In addition, Lockwood (121) says that being overconfident in our own abilities may result in bad inventions and unforeseen consequences. Just as the Capitol did not intend for the jabberjay to procreate, so even the smallest inventions and creations can find a way to become something other than what was originally planned.

### **3.1.3 Medicine**

In addition to the advances made in genetic alteration, the future world of Panem has also made progress in the field of medicine, and medical treatments and surgery. These innovations, however, like most of the new inventions in Panem, are not used for the good of the people in the districts, but exclusively for the citizens of the Capitol. Furthermore, there they use the medical possibilities they have mainly to alter their looks in some way, which, along with their concern for clothes and make-up, only adds to their sumptuous lifestyle. We hear that there is one doctor in District 12, but almost no one can afford to see him and as a consequence alternative forms of treatment have become necessary. Katniss’ mother for example, is the most known and skilled healer in the district, a skill she passes on to her youngest daughter, Prim. Katniss’ hunting trips to the woods, in addition to provide food, also contribute to keeping her mother’s stock of medical herbs filled. Other than plants, whatever else is available in nature is used, like when Gale has been whipped and his wounds are treated with a snow coat. Those being sick or wounded during other parts of the year were not so fortunate we are told when Katniss asks her mother what she did during the summer when these things happened, and she replies: “tried to keep the flies away” (*Catching Fire* 151). The same form of nature medicine is also seen when Rue uses her knowledge of plants to help the healing process after Katniss has been stung by the swarm of tracker jackers in the arena. Even Finnick’s knowledge of CPR proves helpful in the Quarter Quell arena when Peeta’s heart stops after the shock from the force field. Knowledge of alternative treatments is key to survival in the districts. Nature medicine, homeopathy and the like have both supporters and those who oppose it in our time, and that discussion will not be dealt with here, but nevertheless, whether or not there actually are some valid medical effects of this type of medicine, it certainly seems better to have some form of pain relief, if only a little, than be without any form of help at all.

The lack of available medicines and possible treatments in the districts is made very obvious, not only compared to the Capitol's equipment and advances in the field, but also in comparison to what we have available in the present. The implication of a few people having a lot more than they need, and probably deserve, is the same as many people having less than their basic needs covered, thus creating horrible suffering, both in our world and in Panem. One difference is, however, that today there are various aid organizations, but this sort of help does not exist in Panem. The greed and the need to control the resources and by extension the districts, have made these forms of aid impossible and unwanted by the Capitol which is why people, like Katniss' mother, take on roles as necessary, if not optimal, substitutes. In one way, District 13 takes this role further, but that is mostly out of the prospect of own potential gain and not so much for just being helpful and good towards other people. It turns out that President Coin's intentions are far from helping Panem's poor.

The medical innovations that we witness in the course of the trilogy are quite fantastic even compared to the developments being made right now in medical science. In the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, Katniss receives a cream to heal her burn wounds and after a short night the burn is almost healed. In addition, after she and Peeta win the Games, both are being treated for the wounds they suffered in the arena; Katniss has her ear fixed and regains her hearing and although Peeta must have his leg amputated, he receives a prosthetic leg, which is nearly impossible to notice. In addition, he is up and walking only a week after surgery. Even though this is helpful surgery for Katniss and Peeta, the reason for it is not solely to help them, it is also to give a display of the (false) generosity that the Capitol is able to provide to those who follow their rules and also as a part of the reward to the winners. Further, the Capitol cannot afford to show off two half-starved and nearly dead winners. That might lead the audience in the Capitol to rethink their fascination and enjoyment with the Hunger Games and realize that it is in fact as gruesome as it is. It should also be remembered that it is only when there is a prospect of an exciting encounter in the games that the Gamemakers and/or the sponsors provide Katniss with the sleep syrup so that Peeta will not hinder her in her attempt to get his much needed medication. Always they measure their own winnings and gains in their gifts and actions.

The extreme disadvantages with the new and innovative forms of medical treatments also have their counterparts in the present. Just as we witness in our time, the extreme focus on looks and appearances may tempt some people to take drastic steps to obtain a desired appearance. Plastic surgery is especially common among the rich and famous and "a sign of true wealth and decadence is a woman who is more plastic than flesh" (Kress 228). An

extreme case today is the so-called “Cat Lady”, Jocelyn Wildenstein, who has surgically altered her facial features in order to look more feline. She actually has a direct counterpart in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, the helpful woman, Tigris, who, in addition to surgery, also has gotten whiskers, tattooed stripes, and a tail to look more like the big cat she is named after. In order to better fit her image, one earlier winner of the Hunger Games even had her teeth sharpened and inlaid with gold, to remind everyone “she killed one tribute by ripping open his throat with her teeth“ (*Catching Fire* 270). Kress points out that not very long ago, those who had had some form of plastic surgery were considered unnatural; no lines around the eyes and the mouth of a 50 year old woman, was not normal. Now, however, this “tightness [around the eyes] is becoming so common that people hardly notice it as unusual” (228). We see it every day with Hollywood actors. Katniss comments on the difference between the people in the Capitol and those she is used to from her district: “In District 12, looking old is something of an achievement since so many people die early [...] but here it is different. Wrinkles aren’t desirable. A round belly isn’t a sign of success” (*Hunger Games* 150). The same desire to look thin and flawless is what dominates the western world today, whereas having a well fed look is desirable in other, often poorer, parts of the world. It is quite ironic that the desired look is almost always what is not possible due to the circumstances; the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Cinna, however, recognises this twistedness and even says to Katniss: “how despicable we must seem to you” (*Hunger Games*, 80).

Another drawback with the extreme focus on appearance is how it affects young people. This might also be a reason why Collins has included this topic in her books. Teenagers, being in a phase filled with insecurity concerning their own person and body, might find it particularly difficult to resist peer pressure concerning looks and behaviour. ”An important driving factor behind the increase in cosmetic and weight reduction surgery may well be the large number of “reality” television programs that focus on weight loss and appearance change” (Petrie). This does not necessarily apply only to younger girls (and boys), but to the public as a whole. The pressure of having a particular look and figure is nevertheless demanding for almost everyone, and the extreme means and resources some go to in order to get it, could, and should, have been used elsewhere.

The differences between our world and Panem in this case become extreme for two reasons. First, we learn of the lack of medicines in the districts and the relatively primitive substitutions the people there have should they become ill. In addition, the extreme advances seen in the Capitol contribute to making the dystopian experience twice as effective; in the districts the situation is worse compared to our world because of the lack of sufficient

medical treatments, whereas in the Capitol it is worse, not because there is a shortage, but because the abundance and advances are not used for the good of the people, but rather as a drastic make-up tool. We could even add a third effect, that of *realizing* the similarities between our world and Panem, as both contain these problems, only the latter is deliberately made worse to make a point.

## 3.2 Warfare

The *Hunger Games* series' depiction of war and violence has earned it some criticism, as some seem to think that it is too descriptive and dark for young adults to read, but as Henthorne points out, had Collins not written the books the way she did, the risk would be to glamourize "war rather than calling into question whether it should be ever used to settle conflicts between peoples or states" (63). He further comments that although vividly described, violence and war are not at all seen as something good or desirable in the trilogy, and points out that those who happen to enjoy these things are depicted negatively (such as the Career Tributes and the citizens of the Capitol), "and the only two wars mentioned in the narrative (...) only made already horrific situations worse" (69). So war and violence are definitely not good or states that are desirable, but nevertheless, they exist in Panem, and in our world, and that cannot be denied, nor should it be made into something glamorous or heroic. In fact, by letting Katniss shoot freely in the confusion that occurs outside President Snow's mansion towards the end, without any regard for whether her victims are allies or enemies, "Collins denies Katniss any glory" (Henthorne 73). War can make anyone a murderer, even the supposed hero. Lem and Hassel add that war is critiqued and challenged "through the human relationships that take central stage" (125). The losses the main characters experience because of the war are proof of this. Pavlik (37) on the other hand points out that the *Hunger Games* trilogy "does not wholly escape the contextual proposition that might is right in pursuit of a higher purpose". Although not a good thing, war apparently is sometimes the only solution. Collins, although negative to war, is through the *Hunger Games* series showing that violence and sacrifice might lead to something better. Perhaps the ideal must then be to avoid the state of war, and, equally important, a state that might lead to war.

One question that arises in connection to this is whether war can ever be justified. In the *Hunger Games* series, both wars that we learn of arose after a fight for resources and decades of suppression by a dictatorial regime. Pavlik points out that this presentation of

ultimate control “offers an implicit understanding that the downfall of totalitarian political systems require people to engage in violent and military actions for a supposed ultimate good: the just war” (30). The “just war” is in other words necessary in order to obtain a better situation afterwards. A necessary evil, if you like. He further adds that oppressive violence is portrayed as the primary political tool in the trilogy (30). Violence is seen both in entertainment through the Hunger Games, and in control over the districts, but it is also through violence that the reigns of President Snow and President Coin are finally ended. Evil is conquered with evil, so to speak. Again we see that there is ambivalence towards war and its consequences in the *Hunger Games* series. What is also noteworthy is that there seems to be no attempt to solve the situation peacefully through diplomacy. Peeta’s demand for a ceasefire is quietly ignored. One can muse that either Collins avoids this solution in order to make a point about the negative sides of war and to make the books darker (it is after all a dystopia), or perhaps she does not believe that a solution like that is probable. Either way, portraying violence as the bad, but only solution, Collins has not sent a message discouraging people to fight with their fists, but she has neither encouraged people to find a solution otherwise. In other words, as far as providing her readers with a solution goes, Collins is most ambiguous.

### **3.2.1 All Is Fair in Love and War**

“I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”

– Albert Einstein.

Advances in weapon technology have made us very powerful but also very vulnerable when it comes to armed conflict. Apparently, the atomic bombs existing in the world today have enough potential power to extinguish all life on the planet several times over, making Einstein’s quote above understandable if not predictive: if the massive weapons we possess today do not kill us off entirely should they ever be used, they will at least be so destructive that the setback for humans after a detonation will be significant. This setback seems to already have happened to some degree in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, as we learn from the conversation Plutarch and Katniss have, where Plutarch tells Katniss about weapons no longer in existence in their time: “High-flying planes, military satellites, cell disintegrators,

drones and biological weapons with expiration dates” all no longer available because of “the destruction of the atmosphere or lack of resources or moral squeamishness” (*Mockingjay* 152-153). Nevertheless, although the weapons used both by Katniss and Gale, bow and arrows, and snares, seem out-dated even in our time, there are several examples of more advanced weapons not yet invented in the present. The result of man’s thoughtless, selfish, and “squeamish” behaviour has not made Einstein’s prediction come true per se, but man’s behaviour has created a society where social distress, poverty and fear is prevalent for a majority of the population. So although not fought with sticks and stones, the armed conflicts in Panem are fought with a different set weapons which are adapted to the situation. It is not a technological setback, but rather a social one that has occurred.

There are several types of weapons used in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, both physical and psychological weapons, and also media and human beings, all of them destructive and harmful in their own ways. The physical weapons are perhaps those that are the most familiar to us, swords, bows and arrows, bombs and various advanced forms of traps and snares. We also see examples of torture and threat being used to incapacitate the enemy, as when we learn of President Snow’s threat to both Katniss and Finnick to hurt their loved ones if they do not do as he says. For Finnick this has led to prostitution for Snow’s political allies. Torture can be seen in combination with humans being used as weapons, the prime example being Peeta who is captured after the rescuing of the tributes from the Quarter Quell arena. After Peeta has been re-rescued and brought to District 13, we learn that he has been tortured and brainwashed, “hijacked” is the term used, into believing that Katniss is the enemy. “Peeta becomes what the Capitol perceives as the ultimate weapon against Katniss” (King 115). Not only has the Capitol made Katniss feel guilty and worried for what might be happening to Peeta, now she is also afraid of being attacked by him. By keeping Peeta prisoner, the Capitol has also been hindering Katniss to focus on her role as the Mockingjay. She compares herself with Buttercup, and his chase for the torch beam in the game “Crazy Cat”. When the desired object is out of reach, both Katniss and Buttercup are sent “into a tailspin” and neither can be “comforted or distracted” (*Mockingjay* 180). Furthermore, the thought that “[Peeta] is being tortured specifically to incapacitate [her] is unendurable” and this is also what happens to Finnick: “It’s what broke him” and what is breaking Katniss (*Mockingjay* 180-181). Peeta is the Capitol’s only weapon against Katniss and they will do to him “what ever it takes to break [her]” (*Mockingjay* 177).

We see another example of this form of weaponry in the Quarter Quell arena, where the old jabberjay is given a role. Both Katniss and Finnick hear the screams of persons close

to them; Katniss hears Prim, her mother, Gale, and several others, and Finnick hears Annie Cresta, his wife-to-be. Before they realize that the screams come from the birds, both of them are nearly driven crazy in their attempt to find the source. Threat has had a different outcome for the Quarter Quell Tribute, Joanna, as we learn when she enters the jabberjay part of the arena: “They can’t hurt me. I’m not like the rest of you. There’s no one left I love” (*Catching Fire* 418). The awfulness of Panem becomes extra clear here, as the alternatives are to either live under constant threat and fear when it comes to your family’s well being, or to lose those that you have dear and live with the knowledge that it is your fault. Similar to the constant surveillance, the constant fear and guilt becomes another way of controlling the people of the districts and the winners of the Games.

Katniss is another example of a human weapon, but initially not intended to be as deadly as she in fact becomes. Although not hijacked, Katniss is being used as the rebels’ front figure, a deal she entered into believing that it would help the cause and her own wish to get revenge. Her role as the Mockingjay, however, is very similar to her role as the Girl on Fire: “in both cases her words, actions and appearance are managed by others as to achieve certain effects” (Henthorne 75). The difference may be that the Girl on Fire was solely for her own cause and survival, but the Mockingjay is for others’ as well. In addition, Katniss’ role as the Mockingjay also becomes a form of weapon when she appears in promos and in person to speak the rebels’ cause. In *Mockingjay*, the battle of the television screen becomes in itself somewhat of a war between the two opposing sides, both eager to present their own versions of what is happening and why they should be supported in their cause. Katniss is the main actor in the rebels’ promos and they use her popularity and the fact that people recognize her to send their messages to the people in the districts. In District 13 and as the Mockingjay, “Katniss serves as persona rather than person” (Wezner 153). Both Peeta and Katniss are victims of manipulation by higher powers who want to use them for their own gain. Peeta, after he is rescued and has received some treatment for his mental state, president Coin, like Snow before her, attempts to use him against Katniss when she orders them to be put in the same squad. After having served her purpose in uniting the districts, the Mockingjay can continue to serve as a symbol equally well being dead as being alive.

By using the same means and tactics, both the rebels and the Capitol are after a while viewed as equally bad, and the differences between the two become blurred. “While torture and crimes against humanity are expected of the Capitol, Coin’s own regime is not above such practices” (Pavlik 33). The whole point of the rebellion was to end the tyrannical rule of the Snow government, and create a “republic where the people of each district and the

Capitol can elect their own representatives to be their voice in a centralized government” (*Mockingjay* 99). But after a while it is clear that this is not Coin’s intent, especially when she is the one who suggests that another Hunger Games should be held. In addition, the use and types of weapons and tactics that the rebels come up with, especially Gale and Beetee’s inventions are quite disturbing. Gale proposes to start an avalanche to bury the people inside the “Nut”, a hollow mountain containing the Capitol’s military base. Katniss, having lost her own father in a mining accident, has strong reservations against Gale’s plan, and reminds him that there are innocents in there as well. The need to sacrifice in order to achieve a greater goal is implied in Gale’s mind, whereas Katniss struggles between the desire for revenge and her conscience. “She begins to think that ends may justify certain means but not any means” (Henthorne 71). Littman comments that a version of the Golden Rule plays out when torture is being answered with torture: “It does not make us even, it just means that more horrifying acts have occurred” (198). Kress argues that the *Hunger Games* trilogy suggests that “the only way to break out of the cycle is a third choice: moderation. Neither Snow nor Coin” (235). Neither end of the scale is desirable.

The different views Katniss and Gale have on these matters are also evident when Katniss sees the advanced weapons he and Beetee have been working on; among them is the “compassion bombs” which play on human impulses, that eventually kill the children: “That seems to be crossing some kind of line (...) I guess there isn’t a rulebook for what might be unacceptable to do to another human being”, Katniss says, and Gale answers: “Sure there is. Beetee and I have been following the same rule book President Snow used when he hijacked Peeta” (*Mockingjay* 216). Katniss’ response to the bombs is making her doubt the turn the war is taking. She realizes that this is causing the same “physical, emotional, and ethical deterioration seen in the Games” (Pharr 225). There is a difference between killing out of necessity, as when they were attacked in District 8, and simply killing for revenge. As Henthorne points out, by joining the rebellion as the Mockingjay, Katniss becomes part of the cruel things that the Capitol has been doing “since the rebellion’s tactics mirror those of the Capitol” (70). It should be noted however, that where Gale would have used a weapon if he had one (*Mockingjay* 81), Katniss does feel a lot of guilt after causing someone’s death, and is therefore more reserved about taking lives. There is for those like Katniss, a difference between the just way and the right way, but not for everyone. What she has realized however, is that even though the Capitol’s record is not clean, the rebels, by “choosing to play by the same horrific rules, [is causing] the same kind of tragedy it was intended to prevent” (Littman 202). Katniss’ realization of the way in which things are heading can be seen when she



speaks to the survivors in District 2, after the Nut has been incapacitated. When one of the victims has her at gunpoint and asks her to give him one reason not to kill her, she honestly replies: “I can’t. That’s the problem, isn’t it? (...) We’ve got every reason to kill each other. (...) It just goes around and around, and who wins? Not us. Not the districts. Always the Capitol. But I’m tired of being a piece in their Games” (*Mockingjay* 251). As it turns out, she is tired of being a piece in anyone’s game, including District 13’s.

The dilemma of rights and wrongs in warfare is also connected to the love-triangle in the series and who Katniss chooses of her two suitors. Gale represents the revengeful and the act-first-think-after type, most likely partly responsible for the bombing in the end, whereas Peeta is the one who wants to achieve peace through humane means and end the conflict and the years of violence without any form of revenge. He “is the one who, despite everything he’s been through (...) is able to retain his essential humanity. [He], unlike Gale, recognizes there is a line that must never, *ever* be crossed” (Littman 202, emphasis in original). Peeta is the one who calls for a ceasefire, and also the first one to express his abhorrence with Coin’s suggestion of another, allegedly final, Hunger Games. The believed turning point comes when Katniss votes for a final Hunger Games with Capitol children as Tributes. The first thought is that she has chosen the revenge side, but when she assassinates President Coin instead of Snow, it is clear that she has not only chosen to really end the war, but also that she clearly thinks that Coin is not a good alternative to Snow. “Even without proof beyond Snow’s words, Katniss knows the kind of military tactics that rebel leaders like Coin and Gale are willing to deploy in pursuit of their own supposedly justified means” (Pavlik 34). Although not a Hunger Game per se, the killing of the children outside the mansion puts Coin in the same category as Snow and she could therefore not be allowed to continue the horrible tradition.

Katniss has by this action hopefully broken the cycle. Pavlik suggests that this is a way of saying that “one form of absolute power cannot be used to replace another” (35). By killing Coin, Katniss has finally come to terms with how she wants the future to be and with her choice of mate. Thinking of the things she has witnessed during the war, she no longer “[feels] any allegiance to these monsters called human beings,” arguing that there “is something significantly wrong with a creature that sacrifices its children’s lives to settle its differences” (*Mockingjay* 440). Although both Snow and Coin are out of the picture, the reminder of Prim’s death and the connection it has to Gale, eliminates him as an alternative suitor. She cannot live and at the same time kindle her hatred for what has happened; what she needs is a symbol of rebirth, not destruction, and a “promise that life can go on, no matter

how bad [the] losses. That it can be good again” (*Mockingjay* 453). And that only Peeta can give her. And true to Gale’s prediction about Katniss, she chooses the one “she thinks she can’t survive without” (*Mockingjay* 385). What we choose to do with our lives and how we choose to treat each other, should both reflect how we want to be treated and what kind of world we want to live in.

Almost all the characters are in one way or another affected by the various weapons mentioned, either after having used them, been wounded by them, or having actually been them, and all seem to have suffered badly from the experience. What comes after a war is an equally important topic in *Mockingjay*, where we learn not only what happens to the characters later, but also how they cope with the things they have seen and been through. This both counts for those who fought in the rebellion, but equally important, for those who survived the arenas over the years and are now “Victors.” The misuse of Victors has already been mentioned, but there are also examples of coping with the bad experiences from the arena and the war. Katniss’ mother buries herself in her work, Haymitch drinks, and Katniss and Peeta write the book in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the terror rule of the Capitol. Although the war is over and things are going better, “there are still moments when [Peeta] clutches the back of a chair and hangs on until the flashbacks are over,” and “[Katniss wakes] screaming from nightmares of mutts and lost children” (*Mockingjay* 453). The consequences of war are not just the mourning of the ones lost, but also coping with the trauma of the experience for those who survive. Henthorne argues that since Katniss is a character who changes and develops through the story, she “provides the reader with a means of thinking through the costs of war,” (74) both when it comes to society and the individual.

Both Henthorne and Gant agree that Peeta and Katniss and the other Victors and characters are displaying symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is yet another consequence of war and torture, a consequence we hear about today of veterans after various wars in our time, shell-shocked and traumatized because of war and its horrors. The Games, writes Woolston, are not only a “well-designed instrument of terror,” but one of its main functions is in addition to inflict lasting damage on the survivors (168). Although not specifically designed for lasting damage, real wars do nevertheless come with that consequence and in addition to the other costs when it comes to society and human lives we should really think it through before engaging in this way of resolving conflicts. As Finnick says to Katniss: “It takes ten times as long to put yourself back together as it does to fall apart” (*Mockingjay* 183). Katniss manages to pull herself up again and although not fully healed, she manages to live with the memories after all. “She really is like the Mockingjay. In

the past she was an instrument, a weapon in a war, but life is finding a way forward in her” (Woolston 178).

In addition, even though it is far from the same as surviving a war, the readers of the trilogy might even have some trouble after finishing the books. They are not damaged as the characters are, obviously, but the vivid descriptions in the books might be necessary for people to open their eyes and realize what war really is about. The characters both show and describe the pain they are going through because of what they have experienced. As Peeta tells Caesar, to kill an innocent person “costs everything you are” (*Mockingjay* 27). Imagine then being the cause of hundreds, maybe thousands, of innocent people’s lives. Pharr argues that Katniss’ sombre realization and knowledge about war and its costs and ambiguity, makes her, more than other young adult literary heroes, “even more consequential for the adolescents becoming adults in an uncertain world” (227). This dystopian story does not try to hide what war entails, but says it out loud. Even so, the last chapter is there to remind the readers that things may yet make a turn for the better, even after a horrible war.

If we go back to Einstein’s quote at the beginning of this section, we can see his words reflected in Peeta’s solicitation for a ceasefire: “We almost went extinct fighting one another before (...) is this really what we want to do? Kill ourselves off completely” (*Mockingjay* 31). Beetee even follows up this request in the end, perhaps realizing the importance of friendship and community over fancy weapons: “We have to stop viewing one another as enemies. At this point, unity is essential for our survival” (*Mockingjay* 432). Unity is indeed essential for our survival today as well. Not because there are so few of us today as in the *Hunger Games* series, but because it may be the only thing that can save us from becoming Panem. Should there ever be a great and destructive war in our near future, unity and compassion may be the only thing that will prevent us from ending up like that. Collins’ trilogy “does not offer solutions to the massive problems of the world,” but it nevertheless shows through Katniss’ actions that it is possible to “rebuild peaceful communities” (Hanlon 67). For war to exist and have meaning for people, there also has to exist the possibility of peace. Palvik (37) does, however, point out that the American “values of pacifism and those of the American revolutionary heritage” remain an unresolved contradiction in the trilogy, and thus proving that the justification of war is an extremely difficult topic to handle.



## 4 May the Odds Be Ever in Our Favour

“When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realize, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can’t eat money.”

- Alanis Obomsawin

Brian McDonald defines dystopia as a fictional work “that take[s] a negative cultural trend and imagines a future or an alternative world in which that trend dominates every aspect of life” (9). This definition suits the *Hunger Games* trilogy well as it displays an exaggerated version of the world we live in now. McDonald further adds that by exaggerating aspects of the human condition and “dramatizing their possible distortions (...) dystopian fiction can give us a clearer view of [them]” (9). Although we might not like to admit it, the exaggerations of our world, found in the *Hunger Games* series, are spot on. Further, the people depicted negatively in the series, are exaggerations (mainly) of us in the western world, which is probably the reason why the message may hit harder with us. Everything that is wrong in Panem reflects badly on us in the present, because our actions today made it possible. Through the descriptions of the conflicts and the state of things in Panem, it seems evident that Collins is trying to comment on our actions and behaviour in the present. The things that are obviously wrong in Panem, have their counterpart in our world today, some more obvious than others. In the previous chapters, the different aspects of entertainment, science, and warfare have been explored, and the result of this investigation has proved fruitful; we can see parts of our own lives and current situation in the three books and thereby safely conclude that Collins is indeed commenting on our society and actions today.

In addition to being a dystopia, the *Hunger Games* trilogy is written for children and young adults. By creating a story set in a dystopian future for this age group, Collins is addressing those who have to live with the consequences of decisions being made now, both within science, war, and environment. It may be too late for the adult generation to change the course they are on, but it might not be too late to prevent the next generation from going in the same direction. As mentioned in the introduction, dystopias written for children and young adults almost always end on a happy note. This is one of the traits that separate them from their adult equivalents. By ending the trilogy in a relatively optimistic way, Collins is telling her readers that although it might be hard to fight for a better life and change a set

course, and that people might be lost on the way, it is possible to create a better world. “New utopias and dystopias for children and young adults are being written today, reflecting the uncertainties and possibilities of our time. Utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults will continue to be central (...) for the young readers who are shaped by its questions and challenges” (Hintz and Ostry 17). By intentionally writing for children and young adults, authors are trusting the next generation to do a better job than the last one did. The *Hunger Games* series asks important questions about how we would like our future to be, and through its identifiable qualities, children and young adults can more easily understand the importance of Collins’ message.

The entertainment found in the *Hunger Games* trilogy turns out to be a very extreme and distorted version of our own. Although watching people being killed for entertainment is not exactly something new, having been top entertainment in the Roman era, it is quite disturbing when it is children who now have taken the role of gladiators in future Panem. In addition, this form of entertainment is not at all common anymore, and it is doubtful that even the Romans would have found children gladiators entertaining. The most extreme forms of entertainment today are reality shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, where, although they are to some degree acted out and edited before broadcasting, we can watch people suffering in tough environments and disclose their innermost feelings for everyone who cares to turn on their television set. It has become a perverted form of pastime where people engage themselves in other peoples’ lives instead of their own. In the *Hunger Games* trilogy, we see how the residents of the Capitol have become completely desensitised to the horrible things that happen to the children in the arena. The same thing might be happening to us, argues Collins through her work; we engage ourselves in the lives of reality show stars, and thereby forget to be involved in the real events of the world. The difference between the two becomes blurred and as a result we can no longer differentiate between acting and reality. Just like the people in the Capitol have become desensitised to the annual murder of children, we are becoming desensitised to the suffering of real people because we have already “seen” something like it on a reality show.

The same warning also goes for science and war. The descriptions and uses of both these topics in the trilogy, are warning us that the wrong use of either may not be to the benefit of humanity as a whole, and how continuing this may lead to a world like Panem. When it comes to science, we learn how, in the Capitol, fantastic progress has been made in this area, but also of how the new inventions are not being used to the benefit of the entire country. Instead, the progress we see is being more or less wasted on the citizens of the

Capitol's extravagant lifestyle. It is possible to draw a parallel between the western world and developing countries today, where we see resources being used to promote the lifestyle of the rich, while people in some parts of the world have the technology equal to that of the Stone Age. In the *Hunger Games* trilogy, helping the people in the districts is unthinkable because the Capitol would lose their power and privileges. This will probably not have the same outcome in our world, and so there are very few excuses not to do so. Nevertheless, perhaps as a result of the desensitising we get from television shows, the compassion toward our fellow human beings seems to have been lost among various other concerns, making humanitarian aid, more often than not, too little to properly help those who need it. This is not to say that we should slow down or stop the technological innovation and development, and humanitarian aid (we probably could not do it even if we tried), but instead make sure that more people engage in, and benefit from it. As mentioned above, the *Hunger Games* trilogy stresses the importance of human connections.

When it comes to warfare, it is the losses and the suffering weighed up against the goal of a better future that becomes the main discussion in the *Hunger Games* trilogy. Almost all the characters agree that the tyrannical rule of the Capitol and President Snow must end, but they disagree on the means of achieving that goal. People like Gale and President Coin maintain that the end justifies the means, but Peeta advocates a more peaceful solution, one that does not threaten to "kill ourselves off completely" (*Mockingjay* 31). This Gale versus Peeta problem is reflected in the romantic plot in the series, as Katniss by choosing the one or the other, is also coming to terms with what she thinks of war, how to solve it, and the inevitable casualties. The romantic plot is solved with the compassion bombs, which end up killing innocent children and medical workers. War entails the loss of innocents, but the difference is whether the killing of them is intentional or not. By killing President Coin in the end, Katniss clearly shows what she thinks of war, and the proposed policies of Coin, which are basically a continuation of Snow's. The solution is to have neither extreme points, but to find a middle way. Henthorne comments that the *Hunger Games* trilogy, through Katniss' actions, is demonstrating that "nobody gains from living in a society where such terrible events are allowed to take place" (36). Killings should not be taken lightly, whether it is in a television programme or in real war. If we reach the point where killing is OK, who is to say that we will not end up with something like the Hunger Games? Littman believes that "in order to support the use of torture one has to convince oneself, through hatred, that the person being tortured is subhuman, or else surrender a part of one's own humanity" (199). Keeping one's humanity is essential to survival, not just as a person, but also as a species.

Learning from history is important, as it seems that many of the mistakes made now have been made before and are being made again in the *Hunger Games* series. As the introductory quote says, we might not even realize the extent of our mistakes before it is too late, and there are not many excuses we have considering all the time we have had to learn our lesson. By planning to make a republic, the characters in the *Hunger Games* trilogy suggest a belief in learning from history to prevent the same mistakes from being repeated. And perhaps by writing this story, Collins suggests that we should start learning sooner rather than later to avoid a situation like Panem. By writing about the topics commented on in this thesis, Collins has also made clear what issues she thinks are the most important to address. The *Hunger Games* series does end on an optimistic note, but still it cautions us not to take anything, food, medicine, and peace, for granted. Although having been presented within children and young adult literature, the *Hunger Games* trilogy is rather bleak despite the relatively happy ending. However, the light is not turned off yet, and if we are willing to learn and consider the needs of our fellow human beings, the light might remain on.

Collins is commenting on our society through the *Hunger Games* trilogy, because most of the topics in it are also relevant and have their counterpart in our world. The different views the characters have when it comes to handling a difficult situation are reflected in conflicts today. Further, their situation is a result of our actions, according to Katniss. To change the course of humanity seems to be a lost cause even before the plan can be thought through properly, but we have all heard that even the smallest of contributions can make a difference to a cause, and so we should not stop trying to make the world a better place for everyone. This may be the reason why authors like Collins bother to write stories like the *Hunger Games* trilogy; it is their own contribution. And the response this particular literary work has received suggests that there are more people out there who want to join the cause for a better future. Although Collins does not provide us with all the answers, she has in any case opened our eyes to the problems and challenges at hand. By remembering our past and caring for our fellow human beings we are heading with small steps in the right direction. “We are responsible, as citizens, to look beyond bread and circuses and not to accept information as it is handed to us but search for a deeper truth” (Vizzini 111). Like the light left on in children’s and young adult dystopias, so the light is on in our world as well; at least for now.



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