

BA: «Bread and Circuses: The Dystopian Prophecy within *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*»
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Bread and Circuses: The Dystopian Prophecy within
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay

A Study of Ideological Structures and Power Corruption

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Abstract

Given the growing uncertainty and polarization in contemporary society, this thesis will investigate how the dystopian genre might offer insight into current socio-political challenges related to power. In extension of that, it will also harbour the belief that there is reason not only to simply view dystopias as cautionary tales that encapsules societies inherent flaws, but also as helpful narratives that instils the reader with a sense agency, inviting them to enact societal change. The thesis thus comprises an investigation of the workings of ideological and political structures in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*, in an attempt to uncover its implications of power dynamics in contemporary society, identifying the dystopian warning and exploring how Collins inspires the reader to confront the apparent oppression that contemporary society faces in the wake of a political uncertainty.

Introduction

Dystopian literature is generally seen as a genre that allows a society to recognize its own flaws and that hands it a second chance to steady its course. In relation to this, Margaret Atwood, acclaimed "prophet of dystopia" (*The New Yorker*) and famed author of *The Handmaid's Tale* remarked that: "It's a sad commentary on our age that we find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias" (Atwood, 95). Her observation frames the contemporary human condition and indicates a profound truth about society's collective psyche and its propensity to gravitate towards narratives of despair over those of hope. She cuts to the core of societal consciousness and highlights a reality wherein dystopian narratives tend to strike a chord more resonant than that of its utopian counterpart. However, contrary to Atwood's belief, one can also understand Dystopias as helpful exposure of what is wrong in contemporary society, thus inspiring its improvement. In recent years this has particularly captivated young adult readers, helping them to acknowledge significant challenges of our own time, encouraging them to confrontation. It is through the lens of dystopia that we confront uncomfortable socio-political truths about the fragility of democracy, the dangers of authoritarianism, and the impact of systemic injustice. Dystopian authors thus wield significant influence in shaping how future generations can come to perceive the world.

This thesis seeks to explore the ways in which Suzanne Collins' dystopian novel *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* intersects with these truths, ultimately inviting the reader to

reconsider the implications of authoritarian regimes and defiance in the face of oppression. *Mockingjay* currently serves as a compelling mirror to our own reality of political unrest, inequality, and uncertainty. It offers an urgent critique of political corruption, ideological manipulation, and the dire consequences of unchecked power. The novel has had great outreach, especially towards its predominantly young adult readership, encouraging political distrust by providing a sinister vision of their imminent future. Collins has effectively written a call for action, prompting the readers to break with contemporary society and confront its underlying structures that allow for social injustice. Thus, through close reading of the novel, this thesis will explore and illuminate the ways in which Collins utilizes the genre of dystopia, framing it in ideology, prophesising on the timeless truths surrounding the corruption of power, encouraging confrontation and inspiring hope.

Understanding The Genre

To sufficiently understand the basis of this thesis, it is necessary to further delve into the genre of Dystopia. The common understanding is that Utopia and Dystopia are exclusively opposing literary genres, that respectively serve as futuristic reflections of societal ideals and societal fears. Derivative of Utopia, Dystopia is thus generally understood to be “Utopia gone wrong”. It establishes itself as such through the prefix dys-, stemming from the Greek word *dus*, meaning bad, abnormal, or diseased (Vieira, 16). In that regard, it is a prediction that Utopia is merely an illusion, unattainable, and inevitably doomed to turn bad. It acts as the antithesis to societal perfection and highlights the ways in which society can degrade rather than progress. However, a closer examination would reveal a more nuanced relationship between the two.

In addition to her observation, Atwood pointed out that the meaning of the word “Utopia”, as coined by Sir Thomas More, is not “perfect society”, but rather “nowhere” (Atwood, 93). This plane of non-existence extends to Dystopia, reinforcing an idea that both genres are removed from reality, making Utopias “too good to be practicable”, and Dystopias “too bad to be practicable” (Vieira, 16). This established binary largely frames our general understanding of the respective genres, however, while they do represent contrasting visions of society, their boundary is not always so distinct. For even though traditionally Utopia is about hope and Dystopia is about despair, more often than not, utopian societies may harbour hidden flaws or oppressive structures beneath the veil of societal perfection, while on the

other hand, particularly interesting for this thesis, dystopian narratives often contain elements of utopian aspirations or glimpses of hope amidst the despair.

This fluidity challenges the previously established dichotomy and invites the reader to engage with and explore the nuances of societal visions portrayed in these narratives. While dystopian narratives are largely written to frighten the reader by putting forward real future possibilities that could manifest in the absence of moral, social and civic responsibility (Vieira, 17), their inherent ambiguity allows for seemingly pessimistic tales to not only reflect the negative, but also inspire optimism and resilience. Hope serves as a vital counterbalance to the pervasive despair and offers the reader a sense of agency and possibility. By showcasing characters who refuse to surrender and instead choose to resist oppression, dystopian literature underscores the transformative power of hope, and demonstrate how even in the most oppressive societies; individuals possess the ability to effect change and confront despair.

As suggested by Fátima Vieira, in “The Concept of Utopia”, it is therefore important to acknowledge that “Dystopias that leave no room for hope do in fact fail in their mission” and that “their true vocation is to make man realize that, since it is impossible for him to build an ideal society, then he must be committed to the construction of a better one” (Vieira, 17). Dystopia is therefore a rejection of societal perfection, whilst also being an inspiration to societal betterment. Consequently, as of late, dystopian writers have tried to make it very clear that there still is a chance for humanity to escape, usually offering a glimmer of hope at the end of their tales (Vieira, 17). *Mockingjay* stands as an important example in that regard, navigating between portrayals of the horrors of a possible, if not probable, future, yet also instilling hopefulness in that change is possible.

What Makes *Mockingjay* Dystopian?

The Hunger Games trilogy as a whole is true to the dystopian genre in that it ultimately points towards our future, should we continue to ignore the signs of political corruption and ideological manipulation. The narrative is intimately connected with ideas that continuously have fed the dystopian discourse, such as totalitarianism and scientific and technological advancements, which instead of benefitting society, proves instrumental to the establishment of dictatorships (Vieira, 18). Through depiction of oppressive governments, individual struggle, and moral corruption, the trilogy serves as a reminder of the consequences

of unchecked power and the importance of defiance in a society that passively tolerates and accepts injustice.

In the first novel, *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is subject to the oppressive rule of the Capitol as she is forced into the titular Hunger Games, a brutal spectacle designed to entertain and control the population. In the second novel, *Catching Fire*, she becomes a symbol of resistance and hope after her defiance in the previous Games sparks unrest in the districts, once again being forced into the Games as punishment. However, in the third instalment, Katniss finds herself thrust into the centre of a full-fledged rebellion against the Capitol.

Thus, it is not until *Mockingjay* that she truly embodies the contemporary dystopian protagonist that River Barton identifies in “Dystopia and The Promethean Nightmare”. He argues that contemporary dystopian fiction predominately features an adolescent female protagonist. She is both the victim and hero, getting pulled into a totalitarian, patriarchal underworld, where she is “forced to emerge as a warrior and symbol of defiance” (Barton, 13). This is significant because rather than searching for identity, she is searching for purpose. She is already the “other”, serving as the antithesis of society, being a symbol of salvation (Barton, 13). The implications of contemporary dystopias are then that society is degrading, and that to avoid dystopian societies from manifesting, adolescents, females in particular, must act, to overcome society’s inherent oppression. Katniss echoes this in the novel, as she states: “What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay” (Collins, 12). Thereafter, she is reluctantly caught in an extensive web of political corruption and ideological manipulation, grappling with her role as figurehead of the resistance, forced to be the one to take initiative in enacting societal change.

Collins enables the reader to recognize contemporary society, wherein action is long overdue, through the use of Dystopia. Suitably, in *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears, and Our Future*, Louisa MacKay Demerjian argues that we are living in an age of dystopia. She states that dystopian themes have become less speculative and more familiar, adding that our reality of “income inequality, the financial crisis, power in the hands of a few—a few anonymous, wealthy and powerful elite” (Demerjian, 1), brings to mind that of dystopian societies. Societies such as the one in *The Hunger Games* serve as manifestations of our “collective nightmares” (Demerjian, 2), forcing us to take a step back and reevaluate our own reality. In that regard, *Mockingjay* in particular serves an important role, by being the novel in the trilogy where Collins actively pushes against the actual source of oppression by confronting the structures that upholds it.

Mockingjay delves particularly into the workings of power in Panem, offering an obvious reflection of our own reality, wherein power is concentrated in the hands of the few at the expense of the many. The novel challenges the established systems of oppression, while additionally confronting the consequences of rebellion, stressing the seamless ambiguity in between opposing governments, ultimately exposing the political institution itself as unavoidably corrupt due to inevitable challenges in relation to power. In the following sections, I will therefore investigate the workings of ideology at play in Collins' writing, unmasking the underlying power-structures within the novel, with particular focus on so-called intertextual ideologemes, that ultimately contextualizes the novel as a testament of ideological manipulation.

Rooted in Ideological Manipulation

Collins' dystopian nightmare largely stems from the manipulation of ideology. It is manipulative utilization of ideology that allow for concentrated power and that makes the corruption of power possible. To sustain it, is effectively to sustain tyranny itself.

Consequently, Literary theorist and philosopher Terry Eagleton states in his book *Ideology: An Introduction* that:

The study of ideology is among other things an inquiry into the ways in which people may come to invest in their own unhappiness. It is because being oppressed sometimes brings with it some slim bonuses that we are occasionally prepared to put up with it. (...) any practice of political emancipation thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves (Eagleton, Introduction)

In order to progressively sharpen our focus, Eagleton proceeds to narrow down his understanding of ideology to six possible definitions. The final three definitions are particularly useful to this thesis as they all attend to the *promotion* and *legitimation* of interests.

His third definition regards this as a matter of fact in between social groups of opposing interest, even though "not all such promotions of groups interests are usually dubbed ideological" (Eagleton, 29). He notes that the interest in question "must have some relevance to the sustaining or challenging of a whole political form of life" in order to be deemed ideological (Eagleton, 29). This shortcoming allows for Eagleton's fourth definition,

which retains the emphasis on the promotion and legitimation of sectoral interests, however, confining it to the activities of a dominant social power. Such a dominant social power would not only unify a social formation convenient for its rules, but also secure the complicity of its subordinates (Eagleton, 29-30). By epistemologically refining this understanding, we find ourselves with a fifth definition in which ideology “signifies ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation” (Eagleton, 30). Ultimately, this involves frequent use of methods such as naturalizing, universalizing, and the cloaking of intensions, in order to promote and legitimate disguised self-serving interests (Eagleton, 30).

In the context of Eagleton’s definitions, it becomes apparent that Suzanne Collins explores and challenges ideology through the societal structures present in *Mockingjay*. The implication from the very start of the trilogy is that Panem is a largely hierarchical society founded on the notion that some rule, and some serve. The hierarchical structure is naturalized and entrenched in the Capitol’s ideology, allowing it to maintain dominance by cultivating fear, glorifying power, and forcing submission from its subservient districts. In order to further understand this, we might add a statement by sociologist John B. Thompson; that “to study ideology (...) is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 4). Adapting this understanding to the Capitol’s inherent emphasis on power and control, it becomes clear that Panem as a whole is designed to sustain the dominance of an upper class. Power and control are not just tools of governance, but the very foundation upon which society is built. Extraordinary displays of wealth, carefully tailored propaganda, and the violence through public executions and the Hunger Games, all merely serve as reminders of this inherent social hierarchy. Adapting Eagleton’s understanding of ideology as the promotion and legitimating of interests, thus makes as ideology itself inherently untrustworthy.

To further explore this notion, Eagleton additionally stated that ideology allows for people to invest in their own unhappiness. Collins has captured such an insight by ensuring that the reader understands the inhabitants of the Capitol both as victims of and complicit participants in tyranny. However, I would argue that *Mockingjay* makes it apparent that the same could be said for the districts. They too are trapped in a cycle, making them complicit of their own subjugation. Despite their hardships, they endure the Capitol’s superiority. Moreover, they have internalized the belief that resistance is futile, making co-operation seem more beneficial.

To exemplify, we learn in *Mockingjay* that District 2 “has always had a favoured relationship with our enemies despite its participation in the Hunger Games” (Collins, 97). It has become the centre of the Capitol’s defence and “not only manufactures weaponry, it trains and even supplies Peacekeepers” (Collins, 97). In return “they get more food and better living conditions” than the rest of the districts (Collins, 97). Thus, they have given up their rights and morals for comfort, echoing Eagleton’s point by investing in their own unhappiness. District 2 thus stands not only as a reminder of the Capitol’s influence, but also captures the deep-seated corruption inherent of Panem’s structure. By training and supplying Peacekeepers, District 2 is effectively its own oppressor, underscoring the power dynamics present in a totalitarian society, which is once again evocative of Eagleton’s statements, suggesting that what political emancipation requires us to do is to free ourselves from ourselves.

Mockingjay reveals how power can be corrupted and how ideology, when wielded without accountability, can lead to oppression, violence, and systemic injustice. It is a testament that contemporary complacency and apathy has made society complicit of its own oppression. We have settled for comforts, blinding ourselves from socio-political issues such as inequality and poverty increasing, polarization, migration crises, and wars. Ideology could then be understood as a systemically manipulative structure, that knowingly utilizes inherently manipulative devices to exclusively promote the interests of those in power and displacing the power of the people.

Intertextual Ideologemes

Within *Mockingjay*, there are several intertextual ideologemes that further extends our understanding of ideology’s centrality in the corruption of power. In the article “Some Walks You Have To Take Alone”, Roberta Seelinger Trites identifies, deconstructs, and explores Suzanne Collins’ literary influences in *The Hunger Games* novels. She argues that Collins goes beyond simply writing an anti-war commentary, and that her allusions serve not only as references for the reader to anticipate the plot, but also evokes a complex ideological dialogue between her novels and their literary predecessors. An ideologeme is “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (Trites, 16). Thus, intertextual ideologemes could be understood as identifiable critiques of social values within a text that become apparent through intertextuality (Trites, 16). The effect is that Collins is able

to deconstruct and highlight important themes, symbols, and concepts, underscoring how they are universal and allowing for a deeper understanding of her novels.

Consequently, in *Mockingjay*, these intertextual ideologemes are largely invested in issues related to power. Some of the intertextual ideologemes are simply a matter of spotting similarities between Collins' Panem and other dystopian societies. Influences include Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" (1948), from which Collins could be seen to take her ideas of a government-manipulated caste system, a tarnished revolution, and the reaping. A greater influence would be George Orwell's *1984* (1949). Other than similarities such as the presence of nuclear weapons and impersonalized placenames, *1984*'s Oceania also features a manipulative, corrupt, and brutal government, known to torture citizens to remind them where social power lies (Trites, p. 18).

This brings to mind Collins' portrayal of "hijacking" in *Mockingjay*, a concept best described as: "a type of fear conditioning. (...) means 'to capture', or even better, 'seize'" (Collins, 209-210). Essentially what it is, is replacing, altering, and removing memories through torture. It is achievable through the use of "tracker jacker venom", which induces a state of terror and causes hallucinations and nightmarish visions wherein the subject is susceptible to brainwashing. The victim becomes unable to judge what is true and what is false, reacting in a severely deranged manner when unable to do so. Take for instance this scene from the novel: "My lips are just forming his name when his fingers lock around my throat" (Collins, 206). Here, Peeta has just been rescued from his prolonged imprisonment in the Capitol as Katniss steps into the room. Every sense of love he held for Katniss has been replaced with that of intense hatred:

She's a liar! You can't believe anything she says! She's some kind of mutt the Capitol created to use against the rest of us! (...). She killed my friends. My family. Don't even go near her! (...) She's a stinking mutt! (Collins, 221-222).

As Peeta frantically exclaims this, he angrily tries to free himself from his restraints, hissing and screaming in deranged panic. The Capitol's immense torture has made him associate everything that is evil with Katniss' very being, making her inhuman and ultimately a threat. The Capitol have thus shown its ability to manipulate and twist reality, reminding the reader where power lies and what the consequences are if you choose to forget.

Other intertextual ideologemes are more direct references made in order to create certain implications. For instance, this is the case for several central characters, who are

named after classical influences. For instance, President Coriolanus Snow, whose name directly links him to Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus* (1623). Here, Coriolanus is a Roman general despised for withholding grain from the starving populace. President Snow embodies this in his manipulation of food as a tool of control. The name Coriolanus thus evokes themes of class conflict and political corruption, serving as a reflection of Snow's tyrannical rule over Panem, bringing to mind that of tesseraes and the general lack of food throughout the trilogy (Trites, 22).

Another name carrying heavy implications is that of Plutarch Heavensbee, Head Gamemaker turned rebel ally. His name is a direct reference to the ancient Greco-Roman historian and biographer Plutarch, who famously wrote *The Life of Caesar* (AD 81-96), wherein he detailed the slave rebellion that ultimately inspired Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (2010). The parallels between the movie *Spartacus* and Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy themselves are unavoidably interesting. A struggling slave population rebelling against its oppressors, wherein the ironic "May the odds be ever in your favour!" (Collins, 84) mimic that of Kubrick's "And may fortune smile on most of you" (Trites, 20). Regardless, the suggestion of Plutarch being Heavensbee's first name is that he is an observer and chronicler, shaping history and controlling the narrative. This aligns with his role in orchestrating the rebellion and additionally enhances an implied metanarrative of gamesmanship and showmanship, wherein war is glorified rather than condemned (Trites, 19-21).

If we then reconsider Trites' argument, we find that intertextual ideologeme has allowed for a larger political and ideological conversation: Who has power and how do they come by it? The exploration of intertextual ideologemes thus sheds light on Collins' nuanced engagement with political and ideological themes. Overall, its incorporation enriches the ideological discourse of *Mockingjay*, encouraging readers to critically examine the dynamics of power and resistance in both the novel and the broader socio-political context, understanding how they are universal. Trites concludes that Collins strategically uses intertextual references to manipulate the readers' perception of ideology, in order to exploit and frighten her readership into a distrust of government (Trites, 16). She exposes the underlying ideological structures, framing ideology as the main contributor to the corruption of power. Additionally, Collins' use of intertextual ideologemes could be seen as a reminder that power is fleeting and does not last. Like Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias", this gives hope to the reader that even immense structures that control society are fragile and vanish over the course of time.

The Warning and The Encouragement

Corruption and abuse of power are universal truths that Collins seek to illuminate in *Mockingjay*. She exposes the workings of ideology and warns against its manipulation. However, there are also strong implications that powerful structures can be overturned. Throughout the novel, the reader is encouraged to consider and then reconsider the intentions and actions of those in power. As the war escalates and the body count rises, the reader finds Katniss grappling with doubts about the righteousness of the cause she has ignited. She witnesses first-hand the brutality and ruthlessness of both sides, realizing that no government, nor the rebellion, is immune to corruption and moral compromises.

The immense responsibility put upon Katniss in *Mockingjay* emphasises the importance of action. The novel signals that ideological awareness might function to free the people. Collins attempts to further emphasise this when she states in the novel that “(...) in the Capitol, all they’ve known is *Panem et Circenses*” (Collins, 260). The statement is presented by Plutarch, who finds it to be self-evident. However, Katniss does not, requiring him to clarify:

Panem et Circenses translates into ‘Bread and circuses’. The writer was saying that in return for full bellies and entertainment, his people had given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power (Collins, 261)

The saying originally stems from ancient Rome and describes the relationship between government and people. Though it comes from the past, it prophesies about what could be our future. It is implying that by providing food and entertainment, a government has the ability to distract and pacify its population. In doing so, it can maintain control through superficial comforts, while also being able to ignore underlying issues such as poverty and inequality.

In *Panem*, this is put to an extreme. Here, every district has a designated industry. For instance, District 1 is luxury items, District 5 is power/electricity, and District 10 is livestock (Johnson). Bread and circuses have thus been extended, involving everything modern life deems necessary. The Capitol robs the districts of all their resources to sustain its own lavish lifestyle and to maintain control. By providing the districts with basic necessities and

superficial entertainment, such as the Hunger Games, the Capitol effectively manipulates them into submission, ensuring their compliance and quelling any dissent. This becomes strikingly apparent through the stark discrepancy between the over-the-top lifestyle enjoyed by Capitol citizens and the poverty and hardship endured by those in the districts.

Panem and the Capitol rely on sustaining the status quo. In the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games*, President Snow remarks that “A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous. (...). Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear” (*The Hunger Games*). In saying so, he is effectively acknowledging his dependence on frightening the districts, whilst also exposing an ideological challenge of balancing hope and suppression. This manipulation of hope and fear reflects a strategy employed by most oppressive regimes throughout the course of history. Too much hope would allow for the emergence of opposition, too little could effectively do the same. Just the right amount of hope however, and you have got a sustainable tyranny. Panem takes this to an extreme in making the Hunger Games the main means to do so, providing some sense of hope in that there are victors and awards for winning the district. However, these are mere distractions in an otherwise horrific all-consuming trauma, mainly constructed to instil a sense of fear and powerlessness. Like the dystopian genre, hope depends on knowing what and where you can resist. Hope, as pointed out by Snow is a delicate and dangerous thing that could threaten societal stability. That is why the Capitol strategically does anything to ensure that the districts remain fragmented, unable to challenge its authority and way of life.

The arrival of Katniss, *The Mockingjay*, proves catastrophic. Throughout the novel, Katniss is frequently referred to as “the girl on fire”, attributing her the qualities of a flame, a beacon of light, hope. President Snow comes to acknowledge her as such, adding that she has “provided a spark that, left unattended, may grow to an inferno that destroys Panem” (Collins, 6). In reconsidering Snow’s words, Katniss realizes the impact of her actions. By evoking the trope of tragic love in the vein of Romeo and Juliet her first time in the arena, she has unknowingly challenged the Capitol’s absolute power. Through continuous displays of sympathy with the other districts thereafter, she has also proved it possible to overcome their involuntary rivalry and unify in the pursuit of betterment. For instance, in *Catching Fire* she grieves the loss of Rue, District 11’s tribute and Katniss’ deceased friend from the 74th Hunger Games. In unification however, the districts leave a power vacuum that allows for the emergence of the rebellion and an alternative government led by President Alma Coin, initially presenting itself as a refuge from the Capitol’s oppression. Katniss becomes

instrumental to fill this power vacuum in her role as the Mockingjay, only to realize that she is merely being used in a power grab: “Once I had outlived my usefulness, I was expendable.” (Collins, 420). Katniss draws this conclusion after having faced the now deposed Snow in his rose garden. In their conversation, her suspicions about District 13, its alternative government, and President Coin are reaffirmed:

‘My failure’ says Snow, ‘was being so slow to grasp Coin’s plan. To let the Capitol and districts destroy one another, and then step in to take power with Thirteen barely scratched. Make no mistake, she was intending to take my place right from the beginning. (...) I’m afraid we have both been played for fools (Collins, 418)

This acknowledgement stresses the manipulative nature of those in power. It reveals that Katniss and the rebellion have been used as pawns in a larger game of political ambition. President Coin’s intentions, once veiled in the guise of liberation, are exposed as merely a self-serving coup. The revelation shatters Katniss’ faith in the rebellion and its leaders, forcing her to confront the harsh reality about the inherent corruption apparent in the pursuit of power. This builds upon the inherent ambiguity already present in dystopian narratives, and reveals that political corruption and abuse is universal.

For instance, District 13 is just as heavy reliant on the frequent use of “propos” as the Capitol. Propos are essentially carefully crafted, short, and catchy propaganda instalments, televised and employed in order to sway public opinion and rally support. They tend to feature over-the-top imagery, with short and concise messages such as: “People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!” (Collins, 84). They are designed to be impactful, and in the case of District 13, they repeat the promise of liberation. However, at the end of the day, it comes to show that there is no one to hold them to their promises.

To expand upon this, we can consider the concept known as the “big lie”:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its power to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State (“Jewish Virtual Library”)

This definition is often attributed to Joseph Goebbels, minister of “Public Enlightenment and Propaganda” in Nazi Germany. Regardless the actual origin, its message is universally true. It speaks to the importance of being able to control the narrative, which is what District 13 and President Coin seeks to do with propos. Thus, underscoring the fact that neither they are above manipulation nor purposefully misleading the population to seize and keep power.

Another significant display of District 13 and President Coin’s ambiguous abuse of power is their brutality. Katniss can be seen throughout the novel questioning whether or not they have gone too far. For instance, during the siege of the Capitol’s military stronghold “the nut” located in District 2. The mountain in which it lies proves impenetrable, thus they opt to disable it by starting avalanches to block the exits. This course of action is heavily debated among the rebels. It is pointed out that: “You risk killing everyone inside. (...) you’ll suffocate whoever is trapped” (Collins, 237) and that “the majority of the workers are citizens from two” (Collins, 238). To which Gale, who at this point has been somewhat groomed by Coin, responds: “So what?” (Collins, 238). His impassive response instantly makes Katniss react with disgust. She points out that some of them are their spies. Gale, however, remains true to his Machiavellian mindset, with utter disregard of human life, stating that he “would sacrifice a few, yes, to take out the rest of them” (Collins, 239-240). It is then clear, that the rebellions leadership will go to any length to ensure victory and that ideological manipulation allows for moral compromise by promoting self-serving interests despite their repercussions.

Yet, the greatest display of District 13’s leadership and Coin’s brutality and abuse of power, would be their deceptive move to masquerade as the Capitol desperately bombing its own citizens to stay the rebels:

A hovercraft marked with the Capitol’s seal materializes directly over the barricaded children. Scores of silver parachutes rain down on them. (...) five seconds pass, and then about twenty parachutes simultaneously explode. (...) They swarm in among the children, wielding medical kits. (...) that’s when the rest of the parachutes go off (Collins, 405-406)

This apparent mass killing, and morally reprehensible action is later proven to be the work of President Coin. President Snow clarifies to Katniss: “Well, you didn’t think I gave the order, did you? (...) We both know I’m not above killing children, but I’m not wasteful. I take life for very specific reasons” (Collins, 417). In his revelation, President Snow is not only

acknowledging his own indifference, but also highlights the inherent lack of responsibility that accompanies those in power. To stay in power and remain in control evidently requires its abuse. Utter disregard for human life and willingness to commit atrocities in pursuit of power underscores the moral decay and corruption that permeate the leadership of both President Coin and President Snow. It comes to show that President Coin is not above adopting the same mindset as the oppressive government she opposes, evidently exposing all governments at best as morally conflicted. In the conclusion of the war this is reaffirmed by Coin's proposal to reinstate the Hunger Games using the Capitol children as a form of retribution. This shocking revelation is met with a horrified disbelief from both Katniss and the reader alike and underscores the depths of Coin's moral corruption and thirst for power. This is echoed in Katniss' conversation with rebel commander Boggs, where he acknowledges that if questioned about Snow's replacement after the war: "If your immediate answer isn't Coin, then you're a threat" (Collins, 310), implying that Coin would not think twice about having opposition removed.

The striking parallels between President Snow's Capitol and President Coin's future Panem become gradually apparent throughout the novel. Both are presented as willing to manipulate, deceive, and go to any length to maintain their power, the only difference being the masks they wear to justify their actions. Suzanne Collins paints a chilling portrait of the corruptive nature of power and blurs the line between good and evil in order to make the reader stay vigilant. She leaves both Katniss and the reader questioning whether or not any government can withstand corruption by detailing its horrors. Ultimately, Collins makes Katniss release the arrow that kills President Coin, signalling the end of cyclical tyranny and showing that adolescents are in fact the ones that need to effect change.

Conclusion

Collins is effectively telling the reader that all of which I have discussed above could very well soon be our reality. She details the depths of political corruption and ideological manipulation and implicates that neither contemporary society is immune. By using ideology and specifically intertextual ideologemes she underscores how themes of dystopian narratives are universal. "Bread and circuses" is not only a sad, factitious state of powerlessness, but it is

our reality, wherein society is blinded through the spectacle of comforts, unable to properly acknowledge uncomfortable socio-political truths.

She does however also signal that power is transient and that change is within reach. Collins encourages the reader to question authority and, like the Katniss, to confront it. She provides hope that it is not yet too late, using the Capitol's governance and District 13's corruption as a cautionary tale about the dangers of apathy and complacency, using Katniss to signal the impact of action. To do nothing is to allow for injustice, therefore Collins thoroughly stresses how governments have to be confronted, once by deposing Snow, again by assassinating Coin. She wants to enable the reader, not necessarily to start rebellions or to commit murder, but to confront authority, because otherwise society will succumb to it.

In the conclusion of the novel, the future seems somewhat uncertain. It is pointed out by Plutarch that: "Collective thinking is usually short-lived. We're fickle, stupid beings with poor memories and a great gift for self-destruction." (Collins, 442). His statement serves as a sobering reminder of the fragility of societal change and the cyclical nature of human history. It highlights the importance of vigilance in safeguarding against the resurgence of oppression. *Mockingjay*'s epilogue emphasizes this further by presenting us with an Edenic allusion wherein Katniss is reflecting on the horrors of the past and internally debating how she is to raise her own children in the shadow of such a world. It signals a new start, where future generations have to be enlightened about the dangers of political corruption, signalling hope that they will be the ones able to break the chain and improve society. Thus, encapsulating both the dystopian prophecy within *Mockingjay* and its message hope.

BA: «Bread and Circuses: The Dystopian Prophecy within *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*»
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