

THE PRIMAL FEAR: THE LANGUAGE OF THE FUTURE IN *THE HUNGER GAMES***Mrs. G. ISWARYA GOPAN¹, Dr. P. MALATHY²**¹Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, Chikkaiah Naicker College, Erode – 4, Tamil Nadu.²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Chikkaiah Naicker College, Erode – 4, Tamil Nadu.

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ABSTRACT

The Hunger Games series was banned to begin with before even it became a cult classic because of its anti-family concerns, the rebellion and the attitude of challenging the governmental authority. The system of futuristic governance is a warning to the readers, especially the teens of tomorrow as to how their lives would be in future if they continue to remain complacent about the ways of the authorities who rule them over. There is crime, retribution and rebellion each of which has its causes, consequences and repercussions. The paper aims to look at the struggle for food which Katniss and Dale confront to take care of their families written in the language of the future. The words which the author has coined for the future and the shades of meaning that they give are also highlighted.

KEY WORDS: Survival, Future, Dystopia, Dark Days, Treason.

Aristotle said, “Man is a social animal” Freud declared, “Man is a sexual animal” and many other theorists, writers, scholars and critics have always kept man at the centre and society at the fulcrum of any literary endeavor. Ever since Darwin came up with the idea of evolution and survival, there has always been a transition in the way man has made mankind think and progress according to the way he adapts to new threats and unforeseen perils. The Victorian Period can be traced to the beginnings of science fiction fantasy. Wells’ *The Time Machine* is the precursor of futuristic fiction, where the events in the novel have an ominous foreboding with the Earth reaching a state of Armageddon. Visions of an ideal and a perfect society have always made man dream and aspire for a utopia which would be the ideal place for everyone to live across the face of the earth.

Dystopia on the other hand was a consequence of a society which man had made after two world wars. In a more precise manner, if utopian fiction projected the dreams of a perfect society, dystopia came up with the nightmares of an imperfect society. One of the bindings and the most common factors in the utopian and dystopian narratives is the fact that both these societies are relative. In other words, a writer wishes to highlight one aspect of the society which he wishes to change, like the *El Dorado*, which is a city of gold, and the *Lost Horizon* which looks at a society that addresses only the problem of ageing. Dystopia on the other hand takes up issues like the end of the world, an apocalypse, a post-apocalyptic survival or a holocaust. All these writings give two discerning pictures of the society, be it the writers of Utopian or Dystopian fiction have one factor in common, both of these authors are not happy by the way the current society operates. They write to either make some social changes or warn their readers of an ominous future. Most futuristic fictions are a projection of the past and the present so that the future can be corrected and made more utilitarian for the ones to come into perspective. Micheal Gordin in his work, *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* defines the defying difference between the societies of the future as,

Dystopia, utopia’s twentieth-century doppelganger also has difficulty escaping literary fetters. Much like utopia, dystopia has found fruitful ground to bloom in the copious expanses of science fiction, but it has also flourished in political fiction. The name dystopia is not the opposite of a utopia is a society which is totally unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful. It is a utopia which has gone wrong. (5)

Noah’s Ark religiously is regarded as the beginning of an apocalypse where the world comes to life after being under a disaster and the surviving ones begin to create a new world order. William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* and Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* all belong to this specific genre. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins comes under this particular genre which follows the survival strategies of Katniss, a girl in her mid-teens in the novel. She is at first misheard when Gales asks her the name, and she is also known as Catnip. The novel begins with much negativity and

pessimism where the words, bad dreams, reaping, cold and many other words show the way the Seam, which is district twelve of the total thirteen has been ruled over by the unseen Snow, a ruler who looks at the well being of his elite self.

The locale of the novel is Panem which is a borrowed phrase from the Roman poet Juvenile which roughly translates to bread and games, both of which form the kernel of the novel. The title of the novel, *The Hunger Games* gives a hint on the images of food and play, to the readers who come to question the most basic entity in the novel, the practice of hunting. The events of the novel take place in the future, the period when North America has got up from the rubble making a new country which has survived wars, famine and any other calamity which nature has attributed to throw upon mankind. Collins has used a lot of terms which might need to mean different for she has been cautious to use the language of the future because the entire novel is a part of the future which has risen from the apocalypse. The narrator begins the novel in the present tense and tries to picture her family, the district which is full of mines. Every district is involved in the production of some commodity or the other so that they can contribute to the capitalistic needs of the Capitol, the prime city in Panem.

The novel does not begin with any sign of hope or positivity which is a sign of certitude that the author wishes to give her readers about a place which is not cool, which entails a lot of suffering. Prim, the sister of Katniss, who is named in remembrance of Prim Rose is cuddling her mother on the day of reaping. The reader does not understand the exact connotation of the word for the novel takes place in an unknown future. The image of food is a constant occurrence when Katniss begins to detail the members of the family she needs to support amidst an acute shortage of supplies. Buttercup, the cat is one of her liabilities which she had taken to support due to the bickering of Prim. As it is, she has to fend for her mother who is ill at ease after the death of her father in a mine explosion and her sister Prim who knows nothing about the place or the problems in breadwinning. The government of Capitol is more watchful in they keep spying on the ones who express their dissatisfaction with their governance and that is one of the reasons why Katniss had to be tight-lipped whenever she had to speak something which the rulers of the state do not provide. To begin with, there is a large, electrified fence which is put over the entire place with the pretext of telling the citizens that the fencing is to ward off any animal which might cross over the frontiers and harm them. In reality, the fence is drawn so that the citizens do not escape their control. Even the most necessary food items like bread do not reach them properly.

The quality of baking them is inferior and the supply which they draw from the ration store does not help them overcome their hunger. Gale and Katniss are at home only when they go around the forest to hunt. The bread which they eat at the novel's beginning is a bargain from an old man for a squirrel which he had given him as his catch. The berries and the bread which they eat in the woods are secretly an example to show the intensity of hunger they have to undergo under the government. The routine involves Katniss and Gale getting into the forest to hunt, sell their catch, divide their booty and get home. The peacekeepers or the guards who are at the fence permit them to hunt without the knowledge of anyone because they too have a share in the hunt Katniss would give them. There is an attendance session at one every noon and everyone is expected to be present unless they are at the death bed.

There is certain futuristic vocabulary which the novelist has coined to make sure the readers understand them for the novel gets to take place in the future and the language of the future must not find itself assimilating with the past. The word, Tribute for example in the present means, a kind of reverence and the novel defines the tribute as the representative of a particular district who is to fight a one-to-one battle with the rest of the districts. The other word is reaping, the novel begins on the day of reaping where the citizens between the ages of twelve and eighteen will have to get their names enrolled or registered with the government so that they might be chosen through a system of a lot for being a tribute when chosen. The family of the selected tribute go home sad because they might never know that their son or their daughter might come home victorious or die a bloody death in combat. The others rejoice on the day of reaping and deem it as an opportunity to celebrate because they are safe and sound for a year until the next day of reaping is announced.

The other word is Tesserae, a word of Latin origin which signifies the number of tiles in mosaic flooring but the word in the novel has a different usage and meaning. The word signifies a system where the tributes who are between the ages of twelve and eighteen have to get their names registered on the day of reaping as confirmation of

their participation in *The Hunger Games*. In return, they are given food and cooking oil for a person for a year. A particular person can have his name any number of times registered in return for the meagre supplies they get. Katniss and Gale have made their names come into the list many times for both have their families to support. To Katniss, it is her mother and her sister while for Gale it is his two little sisters and a brother who are his dependents.

But here's a catch. Say you are poor and starving, as we were. You can opt to add your name more times in exchange for tesserae. Each tessera is worth a meagre year's supply of grain and oil for one person. You may do this for each of your family members as well. So, at the age of twelve, I have my name entered four times. Once because I had to; and three times, for tesserae, for grain, for oil, for myself, Prim and my mother. (15)

The government in the novel has a very categorical way of controlling its subjects. They feel that when essentials like food are taken control by the government, the citizens will not rebel against them. Panem has come to existence after a long and arduous struggle and the ruler has taken over to bring hope, happiness and peace to each of the thirteen districts under its umbrella. The districts were fine and abiding until the thirteenth district opted for a rebellion and was subsequently defeated by Panem. The Treaty of Treason is an immediate consequence of such an uprising and all the districts must pay the price needed for the rebellion. As a reminder of the dark days, which means the days when the thirteenth district came to oppose Panem, the government convenes *The Hunger Games* as a reminder to the citizens of their previous acts of treason. It has since then been made a compulsory routine for the Mayors of each district to read the reminder giving details of the dark days and also the name of the Tribute to be represented this year on the day of reaping. Twelve boys and twelve girls are chosen from each of the districts and the twenty-four of them are made to get into a televised combat. The names are drawn through a system of lots by a representative from each district who is called an escort. The Tribute who wins the bloody combat will get back home as a victor and the entire district would be rewarded with food and other gifts as a token of their success. The Mayor tells the crowd that the day is both the day of winning over as well as the day of repenting for their past deeds. The day of reaping is a reminder for every citizen to mend his ways.

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