

Power, Spectacle and Resistance: A Study of Contemporary Reality in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games

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Abstract

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* presents a dystopian narrative that closely mirrors the structures and contradictions of contemporary society. The novel exposes political domination, social inequality, and media-controlled violence that resemble modern systems of governance and surveillance (Booker 3). By portraying the Capitol's manipulation of fear and entertainment, Collins reveals the moral decline that often accompanies technological advancement and economic privilege (Foucault 195). Through the character of Katniss Everdeen, the narrative foregrounds resistance, ethical choice, and collective awakening. The article argues that present-day society, like Panem, exists in a paradoxical condition where prosperity and deprivation coexist (Jameson 12). Ultimately, the study emphasizes empathy, unity, and conscious rebellion as essential forces for restoring human values in an increasingly competitive world.

Keywords: Power, Inequality, Resistance, Media, Violence, Humanity, Contemporary Society

Literature has long served as a mirror reflecting social realities and as a lamp illuminating hidden structures of power. Dystopian fiction, in particular, exaggerates existing social and political flaws in order to warn readers about their possible consequences. As Tom Moylan notes, dystopian narratives expose “the dark underside of social progress” (Moylan 1). Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* stands as a striking example of this tradition. Although the novel is set in the fictional nation of Panem, its depiction of authoritarian governance, economic disparity, and normalized violence closely resembles contemporary global realities. At the heart of the novel lies hunger—not only as bodily deprivation but as a sustained condition shaping identity, behavior, and obedience. Katniss Everdeen’s world is defined by scarcity, fear, and survival. As she states plainly, “Starvation’s not an uncommon fate in District 12” (Collins 28). *The Hunger Games* thus function not merely as a narrative spectacle but as a critique of modern societies where inequality, media manipulation, and political control coexist under the illusion of progress.

Utopian ideals promise harmony, prosperity, and equality, yet dystopian realities expose imbalance and injustice. Contemporary society often contains both conditions simultaneously, producing what Fredric Jameson describes as a false sense of progress that conceals exploitation (Jameson 5). This contradiction is vividly represented in Panem, where the Capitol enjoys excess while the districts struggle to survive.

Hunger in *The Hunger Games* is systematic and normalized. Katniss observes, “I never feel truly full” (Collins 65), suggesting that deprivation is not episodic but permanent. The Capitol’s luxury is sustained by the districts’ starvation, revealing how abundance for a few depends on scarcity for many. The ironic phrase “May the odds be ever in your favor” (Collins 19) further exposes the illusion of fairness in a system designed to ensure inequality. This structure mirrors contemporary societies where economic growth benefits elites while

marginalized communities face food insecurity and poverty. Hunger becomes a silent form of violence, enforcing compliance without visible force. As Booker argues, dystopian societies often use deprivation to maintain hierarchical control (Booker 78).

In *Panem*, hunger is not accidental but political. The Capitol controls food supply, employment, and survival itself. Katniss notes, “The Capitol has not forgiven the districts. And never will” (Collins 23), emphasizing that hunger operates as ongoing punishment for past rebellion. Hunger also functions as collective trauma passed across generations. Families in District 12 inherit deprivation along with fear. Katniss’s memories of hunting illegally to feed her family illustrate how survival becomes criminalized. “We are not allowed to starve to death, but we are allowed to be killed” (Collins 69) captures the brutal logic of the system.

Such representation reflects real-world societies where poverty is inherited rather than chosen, and where survival itself becomes a daily struggle. Hunger erodes hope, discourages resistance, and fragments communities, ensuring long-term obedience.

One of the most disturbing aspects of *The Hunger Games* is the transformation of death into entertainment. The Games are televised rituals of punishment that serve both as warning and spectacle. Michel Foucault’s concept of public punishment as a display of power is evident here, where violence is theatrical and instructional (Foucault 170). Katniss explains the purpose of the Games clearly: “Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy” (Collins 18). The tributes are reduced to performers, stripped of individuality, and valued only for their ability to entertain. “They don’t care who we are. Only that we entertain them” (Collins 124).

This mirrors contemporary media culture, where suffering is consumed passively through screens. Henry Giroux argues that such spectacles produce emotional detachment and moral indifference (Giroux 31). Collins thus critiques a society that prioritizes entertainment over empathy and spectacle over human life. Fear is the central mechanism sustaining *Panem*’s

order. Constant surveillance and punishment prevent unity among the districts. Katniss admits, “It’s the hope that’s dangerous” (Collins 21), revealing how authoritarian systems suppress even imagination.

People in Panem are not living full lives but merely surviving. This condition reflects Orwell’s assertion that authoritarian regimes thrive when citizens internalize fear (1984, 47). Despite technological advancement, emotional bonds weaken. Compassion becomes risky, and trust becomes rare.

Similarly, contemporary societies driven by competition and economic anxiety often reduce human relationships to utility. Collins demonstrates that progress without ethics leads to alienation and moral collapse. Katniss Everdeen emerges as a symbol of resistance not through ambition but through awareness. She understands that power operates through manipulation rather than overt force. Her identity as the Mockingjay represents survival beyond control. Declaring her symbolic power, she states: “The bird, the pin, the song, the berries... I am the Mockingjay” (Collins 377). Her resistance challenges both the Capitol and false revolutionaries, emphasizing moral clarity over blind rebellion. Foucault suggests that power is most vulnerable when its mechanisms are exposed (Foucault 202). Katniss’s refusal to conform exposes the system’s fragility. Despite its bleakness, *The Hunger Games* affirms the power of love and solidarity. Katniss and Peeta’s relationship challenge the Capitol’s ideology of competition. “Without Peeta, the Games would be unbearable” (Collins 297) reveals how emotional connection sustains humanity.

Their final act with the night lock berries transforms love into rebellion. “Trust me,” Peeta says, “Let’s do it together” (Collins 344). By refusing to kill each other, they reject the system’s logic of winners and losers. Plato argues that justice emerges from moral harmony rather than domination (*Republic*, 112). Collins echoes this belief, suggesting that rebellion without empathy risks replicating oppression.

The Hunger Games stands as a powerful reflection of contemporary society's moral and political contradictions. Through hunger, spectacle, and fear, Collins exposes how modern systems sustain inequality and control. Katniss Everdeen's journey affirms that resistance must be rooted in empathy, ethical awareness, and solidarity. As she warns the Capitol, "Fire is catching. And if we burn, you burn with us" (Collins 33). In a world divided between abundance and deprivation, living and merely surviving, Collins urges readers to question authority, resist indifference, and reclaim human values. Only through conscious rebellion and compassion can societies move beyond dystopia toward justice and collective renewal.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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