

A Narratological Approach to the Game Metaphor in Suzanne Collins Novel 'The Hunger Games'

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Abstract

Games are generally an activity for fun and entertainment. Many play games for relaxation and physical fitness. The novel "The Hunger Games" transforms them into mechanisms of oppression that expose the hegemonic power of the Capitol over the citizens of Panem. The study tries to understand how narrative structures and symbols within the novel reveal the realities of violence, inequality, and resistance in dystopian societies. The objective of the study is to analyze the game metaphor as a critique of political oppression, to examine the emotional and psychological burdens imposed upon the tributes, and to explore the symbolic significance of elements such as fire, the rose, and the Mockingjay in shaping the narrative of survival and rebellion. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis using narratology as its theoretical framework to investigate the narrative techniques, symbolic representations, and character transformations presented in the novel. The findings reveal that the Capitol sustains its authority not only through physical violence but also through ideological control and emotional manipulation embedded within the structure of the Games. Furthermore, the resistance of the tributes emerges as a narratological disruption that challenges the imposed system of power and reality. The study concludes that the game metaphor in the novel serves as a powerful literary device for critiquing authoritarianism and contributes significantly to contemporary literary and political criticism.

Keywords: Game Tyranny, Mediator, Mockingjay, Metaphor, Social Inequality, Tribute.

Introduction

A metaphor is an effective communication tool if it provides a clear image of the problem, especially when this image is fresh and pertinent to the subject. It is also a kind of communication that suggests different opinions. In politics and other contentious situations, metaphor is frequently used to strengthen a point perspective or encourage a change in behavior (1). Metaphor is also an effective way to understand the situation through the action. It is also defined as a cognitive style that examines how people use metaphor commonly in everyday conversation and think in different aspects (2). It is a commonly used device for communication and language. This device not only conveys the message but also decodes the hidden feelings (3). The Hunger Games is a dystopian novel that explores the people and tributes of twelve districts and their lives. Suzanne Collins, in her trilogy, "The Hunger Games", used games as a tool and tactic of the players for their survival and savagery. Games are played to win or

lose, but metaphorically, the games in the novel pave the way for life of the winners and loss of livelihood and sustenance for the losers. It is a seventy-four-year-old game organized by the wealthy Capitol to remind the poor district people of the past rebel. Researchers focused on demonstrating the novel in dystopian society where the normal people demanded to do sacrifice their life in the name of nation (4). The enduring authority of the Capitol not only controls society but also their freedom for thought. By placing peacekeepers in each district's border, the Capitol monitor the district people. This constant surveillance ensures citizens remain aware that they are being watched, effectively deterring any dissent against the regime. The protagonist breaks the thread of starvation and the deadly game through her wilderness attitude (5). She is the only individual to violate Capitol rules, but indirectly, by volunteering for the game. The novel also show case the absurdity followed the ordinary people

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as well as the tributes because of the past mistake. To overcome that fate, they rebel against the Capitol (6). The death of the tributes will be broadcast live to the parents. This is a terrible scenario in Panem, and the fact that the killer is welcomed by them makes the situation pitiful. Although, Katniss was portrayed as a young girl, her approach to the challenging circumstance and managing the family's responsibilities turned her into a warrior. The existing studies explore Katniss's warrior archetype, societal hunger, systemic powerlessness, district resilience, and the wilderness, previous research has lack to employ the game itself as a central metaphor to analyze these thematic areas.

The title of the novel "The Hunger Games" itself brings the game metaphor, which denotes the game is the hunger. Hunger not only means hungry; it is also a metaphor for survival, power, peace, war, social class, oppression etc. (7). The theme of the game is survival without war, subjugation without a fight, and death by losing the game. The textual material is used to investigate how the Capitol's rule hegemonizes the people as well as the tributes with their political influence. This reveals the hunting nature of the games and molding the players into a hunter is expose by illuminate the metaphorical connection between the game and the struggles of the players within their power. This study examines how the Capitols construct the game and broadcast the event on the media. The Capitol's restrictions, the arena's structure, and the role that game makers play is a narrative tool to impose political power and control over the district. In order to win the game, the characters such as Katniss and Peeta, who portrayed a star-crossed love role shows the tactic used by the tributes for their survival. This study also examines how the tributes internal identities are violently transformed due to this game. This narrative highlights the tributes systemic inability to examine the political game, their emotional trauma, lack of political expertise, and institutional helplessness. Most existing, the novel focus on oppression and this study concentrate on Capitol theme of brutality, famine, and media surveillance. The peacekeepers surveillance, cultural control like media influence, symbols and tactics of game operates are employed metaphorically is the finding of this study.

By employing a narratological approach the game metaphor functions as a narrative within the novel. However, a game requires an unpredictability, because it forces the players to make decisions within the rule. This study demonstrates how the tributes change from passive scapegoat to active warrior. The framework examines the text through narrative pacing. The aim of this study analyses the relationship between political authority and the tributes survival. It also investigates how symbols are used as a metaphorical tool for survival. The power mechanism of the Capitol through totalitarian control and the symbolic tactic obtained by the tribute are deliberated in the end of this study.

Methodology

The primary text includes "The Hunger Games" by Suzanne Collins is a source for this study. The close reading of the text is a core methodology to examine how the novel uses the game metaphor to reflect narrative arcs of character trauma, social isolation, and political transition. The textual elements of the game in the novel are taken as the primary source material. Interpretively, the study emphasizes power dynamics and the role of violence in shaping social collapse. Data collection required for metaphorical analysis involves the identification of relevant passages from the novel, focusing on game metaphor, game spectacles, visualization of inequality, mediator and consoler. The core methodology involves a close reading of the text and a narratological approach that focus on linguistic features, structural elements, and narrative patterns. The selected characters are used as players in the novel. Their victory or loss is considered as the mandate for their community's life or death (starvation). The Capitol takes up the role of organizer of the game; the twenty-four teenage boys and girls are the players, and the people of the Capitol and the twelve districts become the audience. This study reveals how nature (wood) can become a person's comforter and how a bird can serve as a mediator for survival. The lifestyle of the people is shaped by the Capitol is examined by analysing the characters in the novel. Game used as a tool to control the district people deliberate the power control and how this painful and violent game promote the tributes to change their talent to survival skill metaphorically is analysed. Through the narratological analysis the

symbols like mocking jay pin, fire, rose are visualized as an expression of indirect resistance against authoritarian control. The new critical method of analyzing a text from the reader is used in this paper. The intricacy of the game and its rhetorical interpretations are examined with metaphor.

Results

The analysis of novel reveals that the game is not conducted in a fair way. The rules are changed thin and there to make players face hardship in between. The ultimate intention of the Capitol is that none should win. The selected players do not have the sports spirit rather fear of life. The players are necessitated with the killing of their co-players. The organizers and the audience from the capitol have the fun of the game. The audience from the 12 districts hold their breath in fear and uncertainty of their livelihood and the life of their representatives. The game starts with killing, hunting, and surviving. This game gives the audience certain curiosity and entertainment. However, research has focused in different aspects of the novel. The game also emphasizes the importance of mediator and consoler who is only their direct supporter in the arena. The Games turn human misery into entertainment. Tributes lose their unique identities and are transformed into characters in a reality show that is directed by the Capitol. Poverty forced them to sacrifice their life for the family as well as for the district wellbeing. The Game Metaphor highlights the powerful multi-layered critique of political power rule and contemporary issues including economic inequity, media distraction, and the dehumanization of suffering. The game is less about survival skills and more about upholding the oppressive social system and suppressing the collective spirit of the poorest people. The metaphor demonstrates the acts of cooperation, kindness, and humanism of political oppression throughout the Games. This analysis focused on the metaphorical framing that prevalent in the game includes the evolution of game changes the tributes normal life to hunting life metaphorically as well as explore the intention of game, insatiable hungry, game as an enemy which defeat with every individual's life.

The arena is more than just a platform for an entertainment broadcast is a symbolic metaphor. The Gamemaker's constant presence, secret

cameras, and mutations reflect an absolute state infrastructure that eliminates privacy and enforces acceptance. As a result of Hunger game serves as an instrument of authority by analysing the game functions less as an event and more as a panoptic mechanism of surveillance. The Capitol operationalizes trauma in order to compel innocent parents to sacrifice their children for the game. The live telecast of game transforms a violent spectacle into a ritual of collective oppression. The narrative structure exposes the political and economic disparity because the Capitol determines the inequality between the wealthy district and the poor district. As a wealthy district they see the death of tributes as an entertainment and a pride of enjoyment but the one who struggles is the tributes from poor district. The arena becomes a site of profound psychological metamorphosis and resistance. The narratological analysis reveals that while the Capitol utilizes the Games as a tool of violent subjugation, the state apparatus paradoxically frames the event as a source of district pride, making the tributes' survival skills mandatory spectacles. Moreover, the white rose, fire, and the mocking jay pin serve as symbolic mechanism of indirect resistance. By changing meaning of these terms into symbols of resistance, these symbols consistently subvert the Capitol's systems of authority and control. The finding demonstrate that the power authorized Capitol visualize the real-world social inequality.

Discussion

The Games as a Tool of Power Control

The Hunger Games depicts the life experience of the tributes in the game. The characters are involved with different motives to play the game. Selecting the teenager from age 12 to 18 to play the game brings curiosity, and the hidden motive is reminding the past rebel (8). To control war and avoid more death, the game is initiated. A group of twenty-four players, from each district with a girl and a boy, enter an arena to play a game where they complete a task and kill opponents. The game ends with only one person alive, ensuring a thrilling and challenging experience. The players play the game for their district's survival. It is a brutal and cruel strategy implemented by the capitol to maintain control (9). This shows the power manipulation of

game but intention to punish the people for their mistake.

The game is a tool used by the Capitol to control the people in order to maintain their fear of the Capitol. This game made the people stay calm. So here the absurdity is considering death as a privilege (6). The novel clearly describes the inequality and social control of the district where poor gets struggle and the rich gets their comfort (7). Even though the death cause pain it also over experienced by the people and the game denotes metaphor.

The game is also considered a kind of warfare, but not killing many numbers of people but killing a few numbers of people in the name of the game. This game allows for just one winner enforces the intention of the Capitol to punish the people for their past rebel. While the twenty-three players lose their life without any credits, the final winner is rewarded leads to an ironic and twisted situation (10).

Game's Tyranny and the Tributes

As Katniss mentioned, "The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins" (11). This deliberates the field that tributes play as a field of enforced violence. The broadcaster in the novel promotes this as a motto: "Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor!" (11). This motto deliberates the wishes of success and luck for the players. But through the analysis, it deeply understands the political complex words of the president, which the game is filled with fights, survival tactics, escaping from the trap and violence. This delivers the pessimistic tone of society and the atmosphere of the novel.

The term 'tributes' refers to the players in the game who hunt down and kill other players. At first, the players are honored as tributes and later transfigure into players of the game. While the tributes were honored, they were provided with good food, new dresses, and a separate residence for each tribute, but later when the game starts, they have to find water, food, and residence for them to take rest. This shows that gratitude is given at first as a tribute and twirl them into players, and oblige them to lose their lives. This explores how the author brings the characters into the metaphor

of the novel. This reflects the lifestyle of the people that is shaped by the power. The brutality of the game is heartless fighting. This dehumanized system leads the people to suffer in their daily lives (9). This deliberate about the absurd situation of the tributes transformation of honored guests to animalized people that deliver the conceptual metaphor of the game that is filled with tyranny (12).

Most of the other tributes sit alone, like lost sheep (11). The term lost sheep also deliberates about the tributes who missed their family physically and emotionally. Through this kind of metaphor, the author visualizes an intentional or unintentional situation and the inability of the tributes in the game and mainly focuses on social and power discrimination.

The game always create entertainment and this game creates curiosity for the wealthy people and horrifies the poor people in the district, and so the wealthy people enjoy it and the poor struggle. Here the power of authoritarianism is manifested in various ways. This implies that the people living in the Capitol are unaware of how their way of life differs from that of the rest of Panem (13). The Capitols most fortunate way they used to control society is death and violence, but it is indirectly called game. They use their authority towards the poor people. Thus, the game metaphor emphasizes the totalitarian and absurdity of the Capitols control (14).

The intention of the game is to prevent war but the prediction of whose death makes them more eager to watch the game and later it becomes an entertainment. Thus, the game exhibits a double role to society. The arena is described as a battleground, a place where the tributes fight each other for survival. Thus, this place deliberates the real-world challenges and competition between people and also the power oppression, media manipulation and discrimination are also visualized through this novel.

Visualizing Social Inequality

The preconceptual structure of image is created by human experience in real world through their sense which is a schematic level of metaphor (15). Suzanne Collins novel also shows a few visual metaphors that help the reader to imagine social issues. The bread, Mockingjay pin, fire, and roses are the four visual metaphors used to visualize social injustice. The bread shows the poverty of the

people, as Katniss exposed while seeing Peeta, who gave her bread when she needed food. It is also considered as a hope. The Mocking Jay pin also serves as a metaphor that is a sign of rebellion, which emphasizes the struggle of the Panem people. The pin is also modified as a hope for the district's survival, which indirectly says to rebel. "I want the audience to recognize you when you're in the arena, says Cinna dreamily. 'Katniss, the girl who was on fire'" (11). As portrayed by Cinna in the novel *The Girl on Fire*, that does not mean Katniss is fire; rather, it means that everyone admires her, that she is the star of the day, and that she sparkles like a fire. This also reveals how she looks for sponsors to help safeguard her survival in the game. The *Girl on Fire* comment gives her a lot of motivation to fight (9). It also portrayed a commercial part of visual metaphor as her costume and her appearance led her to the brand (16).

Rose is a sign of Capitol's pretense where the President pretends like he is very much in favor of the people, but his words will be the thorn of roses. He also wore the rose on the lapel of his coat (17). By having rose he convey the elegance and purity but this beauty is filled with artificial manipulation. The beauty of rose hide his true nature. Here his character compares with Rose and reveals that he pretends to the people like a rose. His speech and attitude with people look pleasant that leads people to accept his words. But the deep meaning of speech will be cruel and the intention of speech will be only in favor of game. Thus, the rose in the novel represents deception which is used to hide the sense of death and corruption.

Conceptually, a metaphor is a cross-domain mapping that can be stated linguistically in a number of ways, including as an explicit simile that indicates how concepts from different domains are related to one another by using comparison markers like 'like' and 'as' (1). Even though the game is a survival competition and creates the people's intention to mistrust, the protagonist's younger sister, Prim, is portrayed as embodiment of innocence. Katniss exposes that "Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named (11). This expresses the figurative language of the protagonist about her younger sister prim emphasizes the purity and reinforces her symbolic representation of innocence.

Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of the novel, volunteers as a female tribute instead of her younger sister Primrose. The baker's son, Peeta, is selected as a male tribute. To get the audience's sympathy, they both played a star-crossed love role (18). The star-crossed love role is also an indirect tactic of resistance and survival. This explains the life metaphor of the tribute who struggles to survive and uses tactics to satisfy the viewers and so the support of the viewers will help them to survive. This also emphasizes the dominating nature of the President and how humans are the price of their cruel entertainment.

Any visual event that communicates with emotions and ideas in a different manner can be a visual metaphor (19). Media influence is also a way to control the people in the sense of live telecasting of the tributes. This is a weapon to control the protest of the people (20). This makes the people shut their mouths against the Capitol as a refuge from punishment. The tributes were live telecast, and their fights and struggles were all telecast, which made the people and the family members of the tributes feel emotional. This denotes the game as a visible reminder of the Capitol's power threat, particularly the cameras, microphones, and electric fences that surround each district. It is a thread for the people not to act against the Capitol (21). The virtual reality of this game is related to real life (22). Telecasting the individual is also the authorizer's way to hegemonize the society (23). So here the message is conveyed that every second the people are watched and they could not escape from the eyes of the Capitol.

The Capitol stands as a symbol of tyranny whereas the district symbolizes the specialized labor, economic control, media manipulation and the tributes represent the common human life style. It is well known that game is not just a punishment but it is a tool to follow the system of the Capitol. Here the division control is the metaphor that state the entertainment and scarcity is a way of Capitol to prevent them from uniting the people against the Capitol. Here, the Capitol use game metaphor as control mechanism. The tributes such as Rue, Katniss use their skills to survive in the arena. Not only them but each tributes perused their own talents of archery, mocking, painting and these skills turn into a survival skill brings the metaphorical framework of survival. The district filled with media, economic, slave authority shows

the real-world struggles. As a connection between Capitol, district and the tributes the real-world structure like media manipulation, exploitation, power authority. These interconnections elevate the symbol into an inclusive metaphor.

Mediator and Consoler

Mocking Jay is a kind of bird that is also a symbol of rebellion and hope. We usually remember a bird as a beautiful pet having sweet voice. As the bird has a quality to listen human words and mock like them and so it is used as a messenger and mediator of the Capitol. Katniss mentions that "my father was particularly fond of mocking jays. When we went hunting, he would whistle or sing complicated songs to them, and after a polite pause, they'd always sing back." (11). Thus, her father also used this bird as a mediator to escape from the troubles and from the hand of Capitol.

Rue the tribute from district eight also has the same quality of singing, and she used Mockingjay as a mediator (24). Rue says, "I have a few that are my special friends. We can sing back and forth for hours. They carry a message for me" (11). Even though the bird is created as a spy tool for the Capitol it exposes the unique identity of freedom. By using its voice, Rue survives in the arena.

Katniss has persisted against the objectives of the Capitol and perform much like a Mocking Jay to helps the people get free from the Capitol (25). Thus, her character is also deliberate the character of Mockingjay and considered as a symbol of rebel (4). Thus, analyzing those characters, they used the bird as their mediator, which helped them to escape from the Capitol made troubles, and these characters deliberated the implied metaphor.

Katniss's statement that "The woods became our savior, and each day I went a bit farther into its arms" (11). The metaphor of the woods becoming their savior symbolizes the food she found in the woods to prevent starvation and feed her family more food than the tesserae they get from the Capitol (5). Many people associate a savior with someone who assists them during perilous situations and provides for their needs. In this context, Katniss points out that the forest is the source of food for her and her friend. She feels a sense of tranquility when she is in the woods. Similarly, in the arena of the games, which also takes place in the forest, Katniss uses it as a hiding place to protect herself from other competitors while hunting small animals for sustenance. The

forest not only provides her with food but also acts as a refuge during critical moments when she needs to conceal herself from others. Therefore, Katniss describes the forest as a savior, offering her emotional support. In this way, the woods embody the human trait of a savior, assisting the protagonist in various scenarios to survive, illustrating a standard metaphor that directly connects the forest to human qualities to highlight their parallels.

While observing the characters in the novel, Katniss as a protagonist, the opponent Capitol and The Hunger Games relate the other two. Katniss is the one who is focused mainly on the novel, who conquers the Capitol against the game (26). Katniss's character is portrayed as a hope and enemy, which means hope for the district and enemy for the Capitol for making a team for survival (27). Katniss's hunting skill is a metaphor for survival and strength. At first, she hunted animals to feed her family for survival; later in the arena she hunted humans for her survival. It deliberates the theme of survival. As enduring rebellion against Capitol ambitions, she is portrayed as the Mockingjay. Katniss, the Girl on Fire, symbolizes her ability to inspire rebellion and bravery, sparking change in districts. However, being struck by a fireball is interpreted more metaphorically.

Conclusion

The study of the game metaphor in the novel can be extensive. It focuses on the economic, psychological, and physical expression of social tyranny. As Katniss shows, the only way to win the game is not by according to its rules in order to survive, but rather by committing an act of humanity and disobedience that profoundly contrary the Capitol's narrative and inspires an honest protest that required to overthrow the oppressive system. Here, particularly the Capitol's dominating power and the protagonist's character is focused as well as on game metaphor, game spectacles, visualization of inequality, mediator and consoler of game are mostly implied in this paper to give scope to the study.

The Capitol initially conducted the game as a punishment, but later the taste of blood in the tributes made them entertain. The end of the game makes Katniss understand the Capitol's torturous mind and transforms the unwilling participant into

a bold rebel girl. This examines that the game changes every tribute professional life into hunting humans. Thus metaphorically, this game affects the normal human life. Thus, these potential challenges bring out the game metaphor in the novel.

The physical and psychological components of the Capitol control over its citizens are discovered through narrative and metaphorical analysis. Peacekeeper surveillance is a symbol of the citizen's internalized anxiety of continuous surveillance. The media and symbol represent for the tyranny of power, mandatory tribute performances, and a role that is imposed upon them. Lastly, the game itself serves as a metaphor for the Capitol's goal of dividing people rather than uniting them against the real enemy by forcing the districts to compete with one another for survival. This demonstrates how elements can be used symbolically to indicate that games are more than simply fiction; but they can also visualize real-world conflicts over power. In the end, this narratological analysis teach us how popular culture narratives simulate resource exploitation, structural inequality, and authoritarian rule over the general populace. In order to investigate writing metaphorically, the future research can expand the framework by comparing the Hunger games with other dystopian fiction and can analyse how these symbols reflect in real world.

Abbreviations

None.

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Author Contributions

Abisha AP: Conceptualization, Material Analysis, Writing–Original Draft, VM Berlin Grace: Structure the Manuscript, Arnest Kharmawlong: Conceptualization, Material Analysis, Writing–Original Draft, Shiny Karunya T: Conceptualization, Material Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Preha C: Conceptualization, Material Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, D David Wilson: Writing – Review, Editing, Supervision.

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No apparent or actual conflict of interest for each listed author.

Data Availability

The compiled data can be made available from the corresponding author on a reasonable request.

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