

## A Rhetorical Reading of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*

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### Abstract

This paper discusses Suzanne Collins' novel *The Hunger Games* (2008) in light of James Phelan's rhetorical model. It explores Phelan's theory of the reading of narrative as an activity that simultaneously engages the readers' intellects, emotions, ideologies, and ethics. The paper examines several issues central to rhetorical poetics: reliable/unreliable narrators, narrative ethics, narrative judgments, and narrative progression. It demonstrates how the rhetorical theory of narrative emphasizes the recursive relationships between authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response while remaining open to insights from a range of critical approaches such as feminism, formalism, and cultural studies. I argue that the narrator in this novel is largely reliable with only a few cases of slight deviation from the norms of the implied author due to unavoidable lack of cognition or to occasional cases of misinterpretation. The novel contains a powerful communication system that blends fictional and actual audiences into a network of recursive relations based on a multilayered narrative ethics. The paper also shows how the rhetorical model can illuminate and assist in our interpretation of literary texts especially when we view the reading experience as a vital engagement between the reader and the author controlled by an implied author affected by each of them.

**Keywords:** Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, James Phelan, Rhetorical Model Scholars.

### Introduction

In 1996, James Phelan proposed a rhetorical definition of narrative that has since become influential in all discussions of contemporary narrative theory. Phelan argues that "narrative is not just story but also action, *the telling of a story by someone to someone on some occasion for some purpose*" (Phelan 1996, 8; emphasis in the original). Elaborating on his definition, Phelan explains that it means, "(a) *Narrative is ultimately not a structure but an action*, a teller using resources of narrative to achieve a purpose in relation to an audience. (b) *The presence and the activity of the somebody else in the narrative action is integral to its shape*" (Phelan 2018, 2; emphasis in the original).

Phelan's rhetorical model advocates an approach that shifts emphasis from author as controller to the recursive relationships among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response and the way each of these elements both influences and can be influenced by the other elements (Phelan 2018, 2). The

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main aspects I will discuss in this paper include reliable and unreliable narration, narration audiences, narrative judgments and ethics, and the recursive relations among these narrative constituents. Actually, those aspects are so closely connected that they inevitably overlap, and in turn, impact the discussion.

The *Hunger Games* (2008) has been classified under various narrative genres: young adult (YA) novel, dystopia, science fiction, thriller, adventure fiction, etc. Actually, it is a blend of these intertwined genres. As texts can only be understood in the context or genre in which they are placed, a fundamental question is how each of these genres impacts the rhetorical dimension of the novel. Reading the text as a YA novel makes us wonder about the extent to which the implied author provides guidance for the YA reader and whether there is really a distinction between adult and YA literature. Collins seems to be deconstructing this notion, suggesting thereby how YA literature can bridge the gap between adolescent and adult literature and that her novel can appeal to all readers depending on their knowledge and experience.

*The Hunger Games* has also been considered a dystopian science fiction novel, a literary form that has flourished in the postmodern era. Actually, it includes both utopian and dystopian visions of the future, as well as modernist and postmodernist features. The fact that the novel is categorized as a dystopia written for young adults can have consequences for the outcome of the story and how it is perceived by different readers. Henthorne (2012, 148) argues that “dystopia helps us imagine it, engaging us in ways that are active rather than passive”. This argument is perhaps more effective on children than adults as they are possibly more susceptible to the influence of this type of message (Hamre 2013, 4). The dystopian image of fear and the postmodern atmosphere of uncertainty reflect on the rhetorical aspects of the novel and consequently enhance our reading and understanding of the text.

Categorized as adventure fiction, *The Hunger Games* has often been considered as a work that gives the reader a sense of emotional excitement and a feeling of impending danger. As this type usually involves a separation, an adventurous journey, and a final reunion, these features impact the structural framework of the text and the reader’s reaction, expectations, and emotional participation, making him/her expect the heroine to encounter violent confrontations with evil challenges that would change her at the end of the adventure. Adventure fiction is closely connected with the thriller, a genre commonly associated with suspense and excitement. These elements, which can easily be traced in this novel, keep the reader more engaged in the reading process and make him/her think about the outcome of events and anticipate the protagonist’s ultimate success.

Before Collins, many modernist novelists such as Fitzgerald and Faulkner wrote in the first person and had to grapple with the issue of the unreliable narrator. In Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the first-person narrator has a relatively minor involvement and his reliability is conventionally questionable, despite Nick’s claims of honesty and high moral standards. Like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Hunger Games* is written in first-person limited perspective but unlike it, its narrator plays a major and crucial part in almost all the events, experiencing, witnessing, reporting and judging them. In contrast with *Gatsby*, who is not fully reliable, Katniss is a largely reliable narrator whose views and reporting can be trusted. Again, Collins seems to be deconstructing the traditional concept of the first-person narrator as unreliable and posits her heroine as a predominantly reliable narrator. Phelan (1996, 141) maintains that in the case of an

unreliable narrator, "the rhetorical critic focuses on how an actual reader can recognize the signs of unreliability and infer the author's different assumptions, knowledge, or values".

Collins' use of first-person narrator is also reminiscent of Faulkner's use of first-person narration with a high degree of objectivity achieved through his experimental use of multiple narrative perspectives and voices. Like Faulkner, Collins refrains from making comments herself and, instead, depends on the characters' perceptions, without making them her mouthpiece. Pratt (1997, 136) cogently argues that in literary and ordinary narratives, events are related from an evaluative viewpoint because the author or speaker is "not only reporting but also verbally displaying a state of affairs, inviting his addressee(s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it". As a first-person narrator, Katniss narrates the events exactly as they happen, passing only little judgements on them. Such narration makes it necessary for the reader to examine the words and deeds of the characters as well as their motives to determine his/her appropriate response. Henthorne (2012, 109) observes that first-person experience enhances the trilogy's ideological impact by appealing to the readers' emotions and intellect as they are shocked just like Katniss is when some unforeseen events happen because both parties are expected to experience them at the same time and in a much similar way.

*The Hunger Games* was made into a film in 2012. One of the challenges the screenwriters had to contend with was how to preserve Katniss at the centre of the story while being unable to tell the story entirely from her point of view. Unlike the case in the book, there are a number of scenes in the film in which Katniss is not present. In the film, parts of the novel have been cut and several departures from the novel are inevitable, something that would have an impact on the audience response.

### **Literature Review**

Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008) has been examined from various critical perspectives: gender, philosophy, political criticism, social criticism, dystopian literature, YA literature, etc. Averill (2012) utilizes Kant's ideas on "impartial morality" to examine how moral Katniss really is. However, she suggests that Katniss' ethics should be viewed against the backdrop of "feminist care ethics". Similarly, Foy (2012) bases his discussion of ethics in *The Hunger Games* on the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. He observes that Peeta's ethical stand is closer to Kant's moral perspective, which stressed that people should be guided by moral obligations, no matter what. Brewster (2014) applies rhetorical narrative theory to explore Collins' use of simultaneous present tense narration technique in *The Hunger Games* to address issues of reader judgment, narrative audience and ethics. However, apart from a few references to Phelan, her use of the tools of the rhetorical model is concentrated on Chatman's communication model (1978). Soter (2014) deploys cultural criticism to provide a lens for a deeper inquiry into *The Hunger Games*. Some of the issues she discusses pertain to the rhetorical approach, including the differences between the reader's values and the values implicit in the work itself as well as the text's ethical orientation.

Little scholarly attention has been paid to rhetorical narratology in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Some scholars have analyzed the novel/s from the perspective of politics (Henthorne 2012; Zhange 2020), focusing on the expansion of state power and the abuse of science and technology. Hamer (2013) deals

with Collins' trilogy from a social perspective, arguing that the series "offers stark criticism of our present society and of our treatment of our fellow human beings and our planet" (2013, 3). Stovall (2015) examines *The Hunger Games* trilogy through the lens of ideological analysis to identify political and social oppression, including class inequality and education in current USA.

Several works deal with *The Hunger Games* as dystopian literature. Hamer (2013) focuses on the theme of dystopia, which she considers with reference to YA literature. Henthorne (2012) also examines dystopia in the novel, viewing it as the trilogy's "overall setting that incorporates elements of all the other different genres mentioned" (2012, 10). Godbey (2014) addresses the novel as dystopian literature, maintaining that "young readers do not recognize the dystopian aspects of the series", treating them as "entertainment" while adult readers who recognize the violent content tend to "minimize it" (2014, 17).

Feminist critics such as Godbey (2014) are inclined to be critical of Collins' portrayal of Katniss as a powerful character that evokes only a female power that does not contravene the traditional conception for teenaged girls' gendered behavior (20). Similarly, Thaller (2016) argues that Katniss "eventually abandons her steadfast individualism and feminist sensibilities in order to submit to the domestic desires of a male character" (Para.1). By contrast, Astrom (2018) concentrates on the role Katniss' mother plays in the series and Katniss' "ambivalent attitude towards her own potential motherhood" (3).

Pharr and Clark's (2012) collection of critical essays deal with Collins' trilogy, using theories grounded in a variety of critical disciplines. The collection also includes a comprehensive bibliography of dystopian and postapocalyptic works, with emphasis on YA literature genre. In her exploration of the role that pop culture plays in creating positive peace, McEvoy-Levy (2018) treats *The Hunger Games* as part of fan fiction which is presented as an example of how humans are able to challenge ideas and bring about change.

*The Hunger Games* has also been examined from an ecocritical perspective. Burke (2013) utilizes this YA novel "for teaching environmental and social justice" (53). Similarly, Bland and Strotmann (2014) offer an ecocritical examination of *The Hunger Games* to promote eco-pedagogy by tracing the tropes of apocalypse, pastoral, and wilderness and by reflecting on the trilogy's approach towards the relationship between the human and the non-human.

Working with the tools of the rhetorical theory of narrative fiction, I will examine Collins' *The Hunger Games*, with a view to shedding light on some dimensions of rhetorical narratology that have not as yet been discussed in the previous studies of the novel or have not received due critical attention.

## Discussion

In a series of works, Phelan (e.g.1996; 2005; 2006; 2007) has been developing a comprehensive theory of narrative that has been used as a basis for contemporary rhetorical analysis. Asserting that Booth's (1961) rhetorical theory puts special emphasis on the emotive and the ethical dimensions of the communication act among the characters and between narrators and audiences, Phelan concentrates on expanding Booth's distinction of kinds and forms of unreliability and on the various types of interrelationship between the author, the text, and the reader (2006, 297-298). Phelan argues that narrators perform three main roles: reporting, interpreting, and evaluating. He also notes that "there are multiple

kinds of unreliability and that narrators can be reliable in some ways and unreliable in others" (2006, 322). He classifies unreliability along three axes: the axis of facts; the axis of values and ethics; and the axis of knowledge and perception. He then identifies six types of unreliability: narrators can underreport or misreport; underread or misread; and underevaluate or misevaluate. That is to say, narrators can be unreliable either by offering distorted reports, misinterpretations, and misevaluations, or by underperforming their functions by reporting less than they observe, offering only partially correct interpretations of what they report, or by stopping too soon in their evaluations. A narrator may also report the events accurately but may misinterpret or misevaluate them (Phelan 2006, 322-323).

Phelan regards ethical values as an integral part of stories and storytelling, arguing that narrative ethics basically explores the intersections between the domain of stories and storytelling on the one hand and that of moral values on the other. Couching this view in apparently philosophical moral terms, Phelan asserts that this is so because narratives themselves are concerned with how one should think, judge as author, narrator, character, or audience for the greater good (2014 par. 1). He also notes that the rhetorical approach views the ethical dimension of narrative as a dynamic interplay of four distinct ethical positions: first, that of the characters in relation to one another; second, that of the narrator in relation to the characters and the narratee; third, that of the implied author in relation to the narrator, the characters, the narratee, and the authorial audience; and fourth, that of the flesh-and-blood audience in relation to the first three positions (2006, 323). In a later work, Phelan (2017) notes that he intends to focus rhetorical narratology on: "tellers, that is, narrators (especially character narrators and characters in their dialogue with each other), text, and audiences, whether authorial or actual, and the relations among tellers and audiences (2017: xi).

*The Hunger Games* portrays Katniss as a generally reliable reporter but an occasionally inaccurate interpreter of events. The problem with Katniss' assumed reliability is that it is at times colored by her own personal interpretation of characters' motives and acts as well as the events that happen to her. Katniss' occasional misinterpretation of some crucial events affects the whole narrative and draws attention to the tension between a young adult world view and that of a grown adult world she cannot fully comprehend at the time. As a reliable narrator, Katniss establishes her relationship to the story she tells right at the beginning of the narrative. Speaking in the style of a homodiegetic narrator who assumes some kind of an independent judgment and an objective external perspective, she tells:

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the Reaping. (*The Hunger Games* 2008, 3)

In the above passage, the protagonist is revealing her empathetic feelings toward her sister and her mother and is also introducing the reader to the storyworld of *The Hunger Games*, which includes the Reaping, an annual event that takes place in every District before the start of the Games, where the tributes of the upcoming Games are chosen. Here, two contrasting storyworlds are created: one of innocence and purity, and the other of violence and tyranny. In the rest of the novel, Katniss will be immersed in these two conflicting worlds where she has to deal with, report about, and judge a wide array

of characters ranging from her simple and naïve sister to more sophisticated characters and more complex situations.

Phelan (2007, 203-216) also outlines six basic principles of narrative. The first principle gives a special significance to the relations among tellers, audiences, and the narrated events. Phelan notes that the reference to purpose in this principle indicates that narrative communication is a multi-layered activity, “one in which tellers seek to engage and influence their audiences’ cognition, emotions, and values” (2007, 203). As observers, the members of the narrative audience would regard the characters and events as real rather than fictional, and they accept the whole storyworld as real, regardless of whether or not it conforms to the actual world (Phelan 2017, 7). This means that the beliefs of the authorial audience and those of the narrative audience are not necessarily the same and that they can vary considerably. The narrative audience does not necessarily accept the narrator’s portrayal of everything as accurate. However, the basic issue that should be regarded in this context is the code of ethics deployed in the narrative and how far the narrator conforms to it. The rhetorical approach recognizes that in their narratives, narrators are bound by an ethical code in the same way that the characters in their interactions are obligated to observe an ethical code. However, not all narrators are equally reliable or moral and so, the reader is sometimes led to distrust what a narrator tells (Phelan 2017, 8).

\* In *The Hunger Games*, the story recounts the narrator’s personal history and experiences and her reaction to and involvement in her storyworld. On some occasions, Katniss has to put herself in other characters’ shoes in order to imagine what they must be feeling. This entails the possibility of her making some misinterpretations or doing some kind of unintentional underreporting. As a story teller whose function is to report about the characters and the events, interpret the reports, and ethically evaluate those reports, Katniss does not seem to be deliberately telling lies or omitting crucial information nor does she appear to be intentionally underreporting or misreporting. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that she sometimes seems to be misreading or misevaluating some events. For instance, when Peeta professes his love for Katniss during an interview before the start of the Games (150), she protests that Peeta’s comment makes her look weak while, in fact, it is meant to make her even more attractive to the Games audience and sponsors (157). While Katniss doubts Peeta’s love for her, readers would find his love to be genuine throughout the story, especially when they watch Peeta feeling betrayed at the end of the story when he reckons that Katniss has not been as sincere as he has (430).

\*In her position as an external focalizer, there is a lot that Katniss does not know about: her life as a very young child, the past history of the Games, which she can only relate from hearsay, and, obviously, part of the events in the arena which she does not witness. In contrast with a well-informed omniscient narrator who is conventionally able to give information of considerable detail about all characters, Katniss’ cognitive position confines her knowledge to what she can observe or hear. That is why she may at times seem to be underreporting. For example, her unintentional underreporting about the current events back home is due to the fact that she does not know enough to give an accurate account of what actually happens there. All she can do is to recount some relevant parts of her memories. Throughout the story, she occasionally omits mentioning how something happened and reveals it later, especially with

regard to her family background and her personal relationships with other characters or presumably does not mention it at all.

Phelan (2006, 300) notes that the second principle of narrative “postulates a recursive relationship among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader response”. He adds that in dealing with this triangle, the rhetorical critic has to consider how each element both influences and is influenced by the other two and how narrative texts have some effect on their readers. Those effects are conveyed through the author’s particular use of words, techniques, structures, and intertextual relations of texts. Reader responses function as a guide to how authorial designs are created through textual phenomena. Phelan regards moral values as an integral part of stories and storytelling, arguing that narrative ethics basically explores the intersections between the domain of stories and storytelling on the one hand and that of moral values on the other (2007, 209; 2017, xi).

\*In *The Hunger Games*, the greatest part of Katniss’ dealings with other characters and her reaction to the developing events are invariably conducted on some kind of moral or ethical grounds. At a young age, she becomes the provider of the family and takes care of her depressed mother and her twelve-year-old younger sister, Prim, following the death of their father in a mine explosion. After Peeta teams up with the Careers, Katniss allies with a little black girl, Rue. In this move, Katniss displays both a sense of self-control in dealing with a fellow tribute and a feeling of compassion and friendship towards a nice and co-operative opponent. Later on, when Katniss is saved from death by Peeta (227), she aptly feels doubly indebted to him, as he had earlier done her a favour by giving her some bread to save her and her family from starvation (34-35). Confessing her debt to Peeta, she acts on this recognition of indebtedness by nursing him back to health, even though this puts her life at great risk. Similarly, Katniss’ ethical treatment of Rue is manifested through their short-lived loving relationship during which Rue protects Katniss against the attack from the Careers (221) to which Katniss responds with great appreciation. Following Katniss’ failure to save the life of her friend and ally from the Careers attack, Katniss honors Rue by covering her corpse with flowers, an act that reveals that Katniss is basing her treatment of other characters on the basis of ethical reciprocity: “One good turn deserves another”.

\* Katniss’ magnanimous treatment of Rue elicits a highly unexpected positive reaction from one of the contestants when Thresh, after saving Katniss’ life from Clove’s attack, says that he will let her go just this once, because Katniss and his fellow district companion Rue were allies and because she had sung to Rue before she died and covered her corpse with flowers. Regardless of his general demeanour, Thresh’s particular behaviour also offers an example of a characters’ moral reasoning of a sort.

In the third principle, Phelan outlines a complex taxonomy of narrative audiences that include: the actual author, the narrator, the narratee, the authorial audience, the ideal narrative audience, and the actual reader. Actual author refers to the flesh-and-blood writer in the same way that actual reader refers to the flesh-and-blood individual. Narrator is, of course, the one who tells. The narratee is the audience addressed by the narrator, who may address someone distinct from the flesh-and-blood reader. By authorial audience, Phelan means “the author’s ideal reader”. In this act of multilayered communication, the actual reader tries to engage the authorial audience with a view to understanding what the narrative offers. Consequently, the reader assesses those invitations and can either accept or reject them partially or

wholly. The narrative audience refers to the imaginative observer position that the actual reader assumes. This entails that the reader responds affectively to characters in fictional narratives as if they were real people. The ideal narrative audience signifies the narrator's hypothetical perfect audience who is expected to understand every nuance of his communication. The ideal narrative audience may or may not coincide with the actual reader as the actual narratee may or may not be able to recognize what the ideal narrative audience would recognize (Phelan 2007, 210).

In *The Hunger Games*, we can identify four main audiences: the actual reader, the authorial audience, the narrative audience, and the narratee. In this model, the actual reader tries to enter the authorial audience that is in the position of observing the narrator (Katniss) tell the story. Occasionally, there appears some degree of incongruity between what Katniss reports about Peeta, for instance, and what the author knows about him, and the audience's judgement of him. Katniss misconstrues Peeta's comments about the romance between her and Peeta and does not understand why Peeta teamed up with the Career and doesn't know if he loves her truly or just for the Games. It is only towards the end of the narrative that Katniss gets to witness how Peeta endeavoured to save her from the start, misleading the Careers and staying awake the whole night when she was pinned up in the tree: "Now I see what the audience saw, how he misled the Careers about me, stayed awake the entire night under the tracker jacker tree, fought Cato to let me escape" (424).

In his recent revision of Chatman's (1978) communication model, Phelan (2018, 5-7) comes up with a new approach that focuses on the implied author "as the ultimate somebody who tells" (10), or "the streamlined version of the actual author responsible for the construction of the narrative, including its ethical and thematic commitments" (2018, 8). In this model, the implied author's role in telling is "to affect real rather than hypothetical audiences" (Phelan 2018, 6). In *The Hunger Games*, the implied author presumably devises the narrative in such a way that it can attract a larger audience for the work by making the narrative all the more spectacular. However, the narrator's norms do not seem to coincide with those of the implied author and instead, implicitly oppose the use of violence as a means of entertainment. As a narrator, Katniss presents two different and conflicting reactions to the Games. While the Capitol citizens watch for entertainment, District citizens watch in fear. As Katniss reports: "We don't wallow around in the Games in District 12. We grit our teeth and watch because we must and try to get back to business as soon as possible when they're over." (413). All through the Games, the implied author allows only for one type of media to present the Games, that is, the live television show controlled by the totalitarian government of the Capitol. By using a one-way medium of communication, the implied author negates the freedom of choice with a view to creating a dystopian setting for the novel. As a consequence, the narrator and the actual reader are made to reflect upon the relation between the media and the public and, consequently, make their own judgments about the despicable and unethical role of the media in the Games televised show.

The fourth principle is concerned with the nature of readers' responses to the mimetic, thematic, and synthetic components of the narrative. Responses to the mimetic component involve an audience's interest in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as something like our own. They also include the readers' evolving judgments of the characters and how they trigger the readers'



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subsequent emotions, hopes, expectations, satisfactions, and disappointments. Responses to the thematic component involve an interest in the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues addressed by the narrative. Responses to the synthetic component refer to an audience's interest in and attention to the characters and to the larger narrative, which can generate new relations among those interests (Phelan 2007, 210).

*The Hunger Games* enables the readers to locate their main interest in the characters as real-life people and in the storyworld as something real, even though they assume that they are reading a fictional story. Readers also become aware of the intricate ways in which the narrative functions and how the character—narrator—reader audiences blend into each other in a reciprocal relationship that contributes to the development of the narrative. As a result of that interaction, readers can identify with the characters or with some of them and build their own hopes, expectations, and disappointments with them as the narrative unfolds. They also become interested in the main thematic issues that the narrative raises and the way the author deploys her narrative devices to affect the readers' reaction. Overall, *The Hunger Games* treats various subjects such as friendship, love, loyalty, totalitarianism, and offers an implicit criticism of our present society, thus highlighting the author's underlying sociological, political, and ideological commentary.

The fifth principle pertains to the kinds of narrative judgments that readers make regarding the multilayered narrative communication. The principle assumes that readers make three main types of potentially overlapping narrative judgments: interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic judgments. A single action may evoke multiple kinds of judgments which ultimately affect each other. This explains the differences in individual evaluations and our shared interpretive experiences. Phelan divides these judgments into two subtypes: characters' judgments and audience's judgments. Interpretive judgments are concerned with the nature of actions and other elements of the narrative (Phelan 2005, 324).

In *The Hunger Games*, the characters make different interpretative judgments about their responses and reactions to specific events that happen in the story, which, in turn, overlap with their ethical judgments and the audience's judgments. Readers may make positive or negative judgments of the characters' performance. For example, they may value highly Katniss' empathizing with the loss of her dear ally and friend Rue or admire her self-sacrifice regarding her sister or condone her regret over the unavoidable killing of other contesting tributes. Katniss also partakes in the whole narrative in a humane manner, sometimes debating or judging which actions are morally acceptable and which are not, thus giving a chance to the narratee and the audience to decide for themselves what is ethical and what is unethical. Katniss cannot harm either Peeta or Rue because her ethics will not allow her to become a ruthless murderer of her best friends. Indeed, in the end, she performs an exemplary ethical act when she is not prepared to sacrifice Peeta so that she might survive.

When the Gamemakers arbitrarily revoke their original rule change that would have allowed two tributes to win, they reveal that their hidden goal has been to make the Games all the more dramatic by forcing one lover to kill the other. By threatening to kill themselves with the poisonous berries, Katniss and Peeta force the Gamemakers to change the rules again or otherwise the seventy-fourth Hunger Games will end up without a winner (400). As a consequence to this threat, the Gamemakers reinstate the earlier

rule which allows two winners. In making his judgment about these two conflicting positions, the reader will be affected by the standpoint of the implied author, whose value system can be elicited from the whole narrative. All along, the reader has been led to believe that the rules of the Games and the changes they undergo are entirely dependent on the whims of a tyrannical dictatorship whose main goal is to entertain the audience with the most ruthless acts of murder. Consequently, he/she interprets Katniss' and Peeta's success to force the Gamemakers to change the rules as a victory against a despotic regime.

Ethical judgments in this rhetorical model refer to "the telling and the told" Phelan (2017, 9). The ethics of the telling refers to the ethical dimensions of author-narrator-audience relationships as constructed through everything from plotting to direct address to the audience. On the other hand, the ethics of the told refers to the ethical dimensions of characters and events, including character-character interactions and choices to act in one way rather than another by individual characters. In other words, ethical judgments represent the motives and interactions of the characters and the values implicit in the narrator's relation to the tale and the audience.

\*A good example of character-character ethical judgment materializes in Katniss-Peeta relationship. Peeta's decision to save Katniss is a rare occurrence of ethical action in the arena. When Peeta declared his love for Katniss, he wanted to make her more desirable for the sponsors, even though this would make him less known because of the focus on Katniss. On another occasion, he risks his own safety in order to save Katniss from Cato (392). At the end of the Games, both Katniss and Peeta demonstrate an exceptionally moral behaviour when they refuse to win the Games unless both of them win together, even if this would cost them their lives (401-402). They are ready to sacrifice themselves for each other's wellbeing. Had each of them fought to save his/her own life alone, they would have chosen life over ethics. However, they choose self-sacrifice, a definitely more ethical choice. Through their ethical behavior, both Katniss and Peeta save themselves and win against the Gamemakers machinations and, consequently, win the readers' sympathy and admiration.

A Narrative's ethical judgments also include the underlying value system of the author and how her relation to narrator, story, and audience relates to that value system. For example, we can judge the Gamemakers' acts as unethical and Peeta's and Katniss' acts as ethical and justifiable, because they are based on the value system of the narrative and the consequent relations that Collins seeks to establish with the actual reader through the ideal narrative audience, who is supposed to reflect the real intentions of the work and its author. As depicted in *The Hunger Games*, different characters appear to have different ethical judgments. For example, Peeta's conception of morality appears to be at variance with Katniss' understanding of moral behaviour. As Foy (2012, 207) convincingly argues, "Peeta's attitude... is closer to the views of Immanuel Kant ... who insisted that morality imposes obligations on us and ought to guide our conduct no matter what". Katniss, by contrast, develops her sense of morality on a somewhat different viewpoint. As Foy explicates:

When we first meet her [Katniss], she doesn't seem to have a very strong sense of moral duty. ... Entering the arena for the first time, she accepts its murderous logic of kill or be killed. But through firsthand experience of just where that logic leads,

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she gradually comes to glimpse the possibility of something more than the logic of survival at any cost. (2012, 207)

While Peeta seems to be unwilling to forego his objectivity, Katniss appears to represent a more complex and more pragmatic attitude which makes her a lot more like the people the reader meets in everyday life besides her role as an exemplary hero.

Aesthetic judgments are about the artistic quality of the narrative and of its parts and are closely connected to ethical judgments. Phelan (2005, 325) states: "The decisions we make about ... ethical questions will have consequences for our aesthetic judgments". Phelan also notes that as narrative judgments proceed from the inside out (using the text itself to determine the set of ethics presented to the reader) rather than the outside in (on the basis of some ethical system that the interpreter brings to the narrative), they are closely tied to the internal aesthetic judgments (2007, 212). When the Capitol officials claim that District 13 was destroyed because of an alleged rebellion, but it turns out later that it had actually struck a deal with the Capitol to secede from Panem (Collins 2008, 96; Collins 2014, 19), we recognize that there are no sufficient grounds for the Capitol's revenge and that it has been broadcasting fake propaganda as a means of forcing the other twelve districts into unquestionable submission. Apparently, Collins is communicating a clear discrepancy between the Capitol's values and those of the authorial audience, who does bring some ethical values to the text but which remain open to challenge by the actual reader and the aesthetic reading experience.

Finally, the sixth principle is concerned with the question of narrative progression. Phelan (2007, 212-213) defines progression as a concept that subsumes plot, as it encompasses not only events and their interrelations but also the audience responses to those events. More specifically, narrative progression is the combination of textual dynamics and readerly dynamics. By textual dynamics, Phelan means the internal movement of narrative from beginning through middle to ending. By readerly dynamics, he means the corresponding cognitive, affective, ethical, and aesthetic responses of the audience to those textual dynamics. By describing progression as a synthesis, Phelan seeks to capture the ways that textual dynamics and readerly dynamics influence each other (2018, 12-13). The bridge between textual dynamics and readerly dynamics is implemented through the interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic judgments which are encoded in the narrative but enacted by the audience. Thus, while reading the story, readers make interpretive and ethical judgments which will ultimately have their impact on their aesthetic judgments.

Textual dynamics in *The Hunger Games* are generated through telling the story of a dystopian society ruled by an oppressive regime which annually punishes its twelve districts for an uprising that occurred seventy-five years ago. Running parallel to this textual development is the romantic love story of Katniss and Peeta, which becomes so closely intertwined with the first story that they seem to function as one integrated narrative. The story is narrated in the present tense and the narrator is telling the reader about events as they happen. Excluding some flashbacks which deal with some events prior to the starting point of the narrative like those pertaining to Katniss' family and personal background and the Games previous history, the story constantly moves chronologically forward, though with several surprises or reversals that are hardly predictable. One of the most significant reversals occurs when the Gamemakers

announce a hitherto unheard-of rule change that would allow both Katniss and Peeta to win if they were the two competitors alive (285). From an aesthetic viewpoint, the rule change in the middle of the Games serves to please the audience, create suspense, and make the Games story more interesting.

The readerly dynamics in this novel are realized through the narration method and its techniques involving relations among author, narrator, narratee, and audience, and the gaps between narrator and audience vis-à-vis their knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and values. As a young adult who is narrating a story covering certain present events which she is witnessing and certain past events which she cannot be sure about, Katniss inevitably leaves some gaps in the narrative, which provide an ample opportunity for the reader to fill in those gaps. In this way, a positive reader-response is engendered, based on the emergent close relation between the reader and the narrator.

Narrative progression in *The Hunger Games* is generated by the tension resulting from the relationship of mistrust and conflict between the characters, the narrator, and the oppressive regime of President Snow and among the contesting tributes themselves. The occurrence of some surprises/reversals during the story's evolution is a clear evidence of the way textual and readerly dynamics interact. Those surprises depend on the textual dynamics which lead the audience's responses in one direction and then suddenly taking them in a completely different one. It is also realized through using mimesis (showing) instead of diegesis (telling) as the main narration medium. Traditionally, "showing," is considered artistic, while "telling," is inartistic (Booth 1961, 8). A greater mimetic effect is achieved in the novel by means of character-character dialogue and interior monologue technique. The greatest part of the story is rendered through the use of direct rather than indirect speech or through the use of interior monologue. In the excerpt below, Katniss is not speaking aloud as it is the case in character-character dialogue. By using interior monologue, the implied author enables the reader to hear Katniss' voice through a revelation of her inner thoughts and feelings as a means of taking the reader into Katniss' unconscious to develop an important part of the narrative:

Sometimes, when things are particularly bad, my brain will give me a happy dream.  
... Tonight it sends me Rue, still decked in her flowers, perched in a high sea of trees, trying to teach me to talk to the mockingjays. She sings songs I've never heard in a clear, melodic voice. (278)

The reader's ethical judgments of the characters are crucial for his readerly reaction, as they influence his emotional response to them. Thus, he may be moved by the suffering of some of the characters such as Katniss, Peeta, and Rue, whose behavior he regards as ethically admirable and, on the other hand, he may be pleased with the punishment of characters whose behavior he regards as ethically deficient such as Snow, the Gamemakers, and the Careers. Apparently, this is the ethical position endorsed by the implied author, who is "the *sense* of the author one gets from reading the text" (Brewster 2014, 171).

Although Collins seems to be generally approving the ethics of her narrator, she appears to be sending a few signals about the protagonist's moral dilemmas and her occasional slight departures from the work's ethics. One way of recognizing those signals is the author's noticeable dwelling on such issues as pretended love, suicidal acts, brutal killings, disinformation etc. Katniss has some tough moral choices

to make about whether she can sacrifice Peeta so that she might stay alive, or rather, whether she must kill a fellow she loves in order to safeguard a safe return to her younger sister whom she also loves. Toward the end of the novel (401) both Peeta and Katniss show their readiness to die together. The question remains as to whether or not suicide is an ethical act. As neither the implied author nor the narrator says or hints anything about this matter, a gap is automatically created in the narrative, making it necessary for the readers to fill in this gap and perhaps several others as part of the rhetorical narrative experience.

### **Conclusion**

Phelan has developed a rhetorical approach to fiction that concentrates on an intricate net of interrelationships between the various participants and audiences in fictional narrative. Phelan's rhetorical approach has brought to the forefront the importance of (un)reliable narration, narrative ethics, narrative judgments, and the recursive relations of narrative audiences, thus making meanings arise out of author-text-reader interrelationships.

Applying rhetorical theory to Collins' *The Hunger Games* has demonstrated that the narrator, who is guided by a solid code of ethics, brings about mostly accurate reports but occasionally inaccurate interpretations or underreporting due either to the cognitive restrictions of her position as an external focalizer or to her limited experience as a young adult first-person narrator. As the narrative allows close bonding and easy affective ties between the fictional and the actual audiences/participants, a positive reader-response is engendered, thus leading to the development of further ethical judgments and affective reactions that involve all its participants in a dynamic and recursive communication process.

## قراءة بلاغية لرواية (ألعاب الجوع) لسوزان كولينز

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### الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث رواية سوزان كولينز (ألعاب الجوع) (2008) في ضوء النموذج البلاغي لجيمز فيلان، ويبحث في نظرية فيلان لقراءة النصوص السردية على أنه نشاط يشارك فيه في وقت واحد عقول قارئ تلك النصوص وعواطفهم وأيديولوجياتهم وأخلاقياتهم، ويناقش البحث مسائل عديدة تتعلق بالفن البلاغي: الرواة الثقة/غيرالثقة، وأخلاقيات السرد القصصي، والأحكام السردية، والتطور السردية. ويبين البحث أن النظرية البلاغية للسرد القصصي تؤكد العلاقات الارتدادية بين المؤلف والنص والمتلقي مع إمكانية تقبل أي أفكار من النظريات النقدية الأخرى مثل النسوية والشكلانية والدراسات الثقافية. ويرى الباحث أن الرواية في هذه القصة هي موضع ثقة إلى حد كبير مع وجود عدد قليل من حالات الابتعاد الطفيف عن معايير المؤلف المستتر؛ وذلك بسبب عدم إمام الرواية المحتوم بجميع الأمور أو بسبب فهمها الخاطى لها. وتحتوي هذه الرواية على نظام تواصل يجمع ما بين الجمهور الخيالي والجمهور الحقيقي في شبكة من العلاقات الارتدادية المبنية على أخلاقيات السرد المتعددة التركيب. كما يوضح البحث دور النموذج البلاغي في المساعدة والإرشاد في تفسير النصوص الأدبية وبخاصة عندما ننظر إلى قراءة النصوص على أنها مشاركة حيوية بين القارئ والمؤلف يديرها المؤلف المستتر المتأثر بكلا الجانبين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سوزان كولينز، ألعاب الجوع، جيمز فيلان، النموذج البلاغي.

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