

**EXPLORING SPATIALITY AND SOVEREIGNTY
IN THE HUNGER GAMES QUARTET**

Ph.D. Synopsis



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Introduction

This thesis focusses on the four novels of the Hunger Games series, written by Suzanne Collins. The quartet includes *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), *Mockingjay* (2010), and the more recently published *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020). In my study, I approach the novels within a framework of spatial analysis, as an exploration of the politics of control, and governmentality¹. I read them as narratives which encode a questioning of the concept of sovereignty, in its various manifestations. I examine the links between space, territory, the body of the citizen, and the exercise of power.

My thesis has a tripartite structure, which flows from the three themes of the HGQ that I explore—that of spatiality, then, a movement from social contract theory to sovereignty, and finally sovereignty in the HGQ. The first and third sections each have chapters which examine the minutiae of the issue investigated in it. The first section explores the issue of spatiality in the HGQ, while the third section examines the shades of meaning attached to the term sovereignty and the forms of the concept manifested in the HGQ. The second section is the fulcrum on which rest the sections before and after. It is an examination of the epigraphs to the fourth book, and this section provides the chain of connections between the first and third section of my study. The second section does not have chapters, because it follows the logic of the epigraphs in TB; the epigraphs have an organic, inextricable link with each other, and hence I did not wish to disturb the flow by breaking this section into chapters.

I begin by examining the novels of the Hunger Games Quartet (hereafter HGQ), through the lens of spatiality and spatial studies. I suggest that a navigation through the spaces and places of the Quartet, leads to an exploration of the operation of power, and power

¹ Foucault's concept of governmentality, developed in his works over the years, refers to control of populations through self-regulation, a way of thinking, "achieved through multi-form tactics" (1991 95), which operate through "institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections" (1991 102). Murray Li, 2007, offers a detailed explanation of this term.

structures at play within this dystopian world. I argue that the control of territory, and body, as we see in *Panem*, ultimately raises questions linked to the issue of sovereignty. The final section of my thesis dwells on the shades of meaning imbricated within the idea of sovereignty, which are touched upon in the *Quartet*, and made more explicit through its probing of the idea of Social Contract, presented through the epigraphs to the fourth book. I locate the HGQ novels, largely within the category of Young-adult (YA) literature; this is itself often considered a subcategory of Children's Literature; both are complex terms.

Peter Hunt argues that the genre of Children's Literature gains recognition with the rise of print culture and should properly include only those books "written expressly for children". (1991 67). A host of critics disagree with him and point out that books were written for children much earlier, even in ancient times in fact; further, that often children read everything from fables to Shakespeare, and delimitation of the genre is a critical convenience. (see Nodelman 1992 37-39, Gannon 63-73). However, there is some acceptance of the idea that the term now means literature directed at readers who are not yet adults. But it must also be recognized that in the present day, as Sandra Beckett contends, "a large number of works marketed as children's books are in fact intended for readers of all ages" (3).

YA fiction is an even more contentious term in literature. Michael Cart in his lucid introduction to the genre, likens attempts at defining the term to "nailing Jell-O to a wall" (3). He explains that "the emerging youth culture of the 1930s" led publishers to target adolescent readers who had turned away from books meant for children (9). He traces the rise of the teenage consumer in the 1990s to the boom in books marketed for readers between the age of fourteen to twenty (44). Cart asserts that today, the term 'young adult' is thought to "embrace...nineteen-to twenty-five-year-olds", due to various sociological and economic reasons (139).

Though the terms Children’s Literature, and Young Adult literature are certainly not synonymous, critical approaches to both tend to coalesce (Coats 2018), especially in their view that these literatures are marked by the age of the protagonist and are “shaped primarily by the age of the work’s intended reader” (Talley 229). It is significant to note that the term ‘Young Adult Literature’ is included in the influential *Keywords for Children’s Literature*, edited by Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (2011). However, the 2021 edition skips the term, and instead advocates that “detaching adulthood from a developmental narrative is a generative rebellion” (Ford-Smith 1). The editors argue that this separation is necessitated by a post 9/11², post-pandemic³ world, which seems to have lost “hope in the historical inevitability of democracy and the consequent decline of totalitarianism” (Nel et al xi), among other factors. They seem to suggest that loss of agency and an anxiety about the future, are widespread. Children’s Literature, and YA fiction often addresses such issues directly, and this may be a possible reason that they attract readers of all ages. The HGQ perhaps addresses the precarity of our times; it is considered a landmark in the history of publishing, a prime example of the crossover phenomenon (Falconer). Its popularity is certainly a compelling reason to direct serious critical attention to the series, and YA fiction.

In critical studies on the HG series, the narratives have been placed in many different genres, from action, adventure, and bildungsroman, to fantasy, and romance; the most prolific criticism however views it as belonging to the YA, dystopic, SF genre (Henthorne 6, Pharr

² David Holloway writes “When Islamist insurgents hijacked four commercial airliners on September 11 2001 and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC...the attacks were widely described as a moment of historical rupture, an epochal event that drew a clear line through world history” (1). He elucidates that post 9/11 set in a widespread “sensitivity of... trauma and crisis” (6).

³ The outbreak of corona virus infection (Covid 19), led to the world-wide pandemic of 2020; social distancing and lockdown entered the lexicon, and “distorted the mirror of time for all of us” (Wayne Grady 2023). It “disrupted the normal”, and was a stark, unnerving reminder that “morbidity and mortality [are] undeniable” in the “vast disorientating space of the pandemic”; its cultural impact was significant, and in many places “a chronic battle for hegemony over a people’s self-determination” became evident. (John Nguyet Erni and Ted Striphos 2023)

and Clark 9). I read the novels as YA fiction, largely within the genre of speculative fiction⁴, which like science fiction, offers a critique of our present-day world. The frames of reference (SF/dystopia) are not areas of investigation for the purposes of my study, and so I offer mere working definitions here.

Susan Schneider writes that “some of the best science fiction tales are...versions of philosophical thought experiments” (2); it can “foreground alternate perspectives ...to key cultural and socio-political issues” (Saint xiv), and thus they can also be read as versions of political and economic thought experiments (Macleod 2003, William Davies 2018). In times of rapid flux of every type-social, economic, political, coupled with an increase in militarised zones around the world, it is but natural that the instability and anxiety perceived, is reflected in the literature produced. The twentieth century has witnessed a surge of writing within the science fiction or speculative fiction mode, much of it in the dystopic⁵ mode. Tom Moylan points out that since the 1970s dystopic literature has proliferated. It is a “product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life” (2000 xi) creates perfect conditions for the writing and reading of dystopic literature. Darko Suvin declares that “we live morally in an almost complete dystopia...on the razor’s edge of collapse, distributive and collective” (2003 187). The themes of the HGQ, are without doubt, deeply dystopic, and

⁴ M. Keith Booker and Anne Marie Thomas, in their book *The Science Fiction Handbook*, agree that there is much in common with science fiction and speculative fiction. They suggest that the term speculative fiction has a wider reach, and it is a “term for imaginative fiction that involves the construction of worlds different from our own in fundamental ways. This category thus encompasses science fiction, fantasy, horror, and some forms of romance” (331).

⁵ If Utopia is a ‘good place’, then its corollary, dystopia, is obviously the opposite (Gordin et al 2). Andrew Ross succinctly declares that while utopias are “based on a critique of the present”, dystopias often critique possible “deficiencies of the future” (143). Keith Booker expands on this idea and writes that “dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices” (1994 19).

grapple with the issues mentioned above. I read the HGQ as lying within the paradigm of “critical dystopia” (Sargent), works which also straddle the category of YA Fiction.

Dystopic, young adult (YA) fiction, often written within the science fiction, or the speculative fiction, mould, became a cultural phenomenon by the late twentieth century. Kay Sambell observes that such dystopian writing does not presuppose “the protagonist’s final defeat and failure” (165). While engaging with troubling issues, the genre still “stresses hope” (Basu et al 2) and is therefore “replete with radical potential” (Reynolds 1), which perhaps explains their appeal to a wide audience. This century has seen an explosion of YA dystopic writing, especially after the publication of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. The success of Suzanne Collins’, *The Hunger Games* led to a veritable flood of dystopic novels, notable among them being the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth, Scott Westerfeld’s series *The Uglies*, and the *Maze Runner* books by James Dashner. All these series have been very successful movie franchises as well.

About the Hunger Games Quartet

The *Hunger Games* series occupies a notable space in dystopic YA fiction, and the trilogy immediately spawned a cult following upon its publication. *The Hunger Games* was swiftly followed by *Catching Fire*, and *The Mockingjay*, (hereafter, HG, CF, and MJ respectively), each book following the last within a year’s gap. A decade after the publication of the third book, another in the series followed. The fourth book, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, (hereafter TB), published in 2020 also sold well.

The four novels of the Hunger Games Quartet are set in a post-apocalyptic America, now named Panem. The trilogy opens with Collins’ vision of a dystopic America after an unspecified ecological and military disaster has taken place, and her work obviously draws its

inspiration from the ancient Roman Empire⁶. Names in the Capitol are drawn from Latin, and the motto of the Capitol is the Juvenalian phrase, “Panem et circenses”, or ‘bread and circuses’; it alludes to the political strategy of controlling citizens using food and entertainment.

At the opening of the first novel, we are told of the failed rebellion by the twelve districts against the stranglehold of the Capitol. The Capitol emerged victorious, and as retribution for the ‘Dark Days’ it has imposed harsh, punitive and restrictive measures on the districts. Further, the all-powerful Capitol compels the outlying twelve districts to send two ‘tributes’ each, to the Hunger Games. This is a televised, annual event where the tributes fight each other to death in a struggle to survive. The Hunger Games are a symbol of the Capitol’s absolute power over its citizens and serve as a warning against future, possible rebellions. In the series, an oppressive military and police presence is ubiquitous; the Capitol controls all material resources produced in the nation, and it also controls the media. Hunger is a strategy to control the masses, which the Capitol deploys ruthlessly. The trilogy charts out the journey of Katniss Everdeen the central protagonist. It begins with her volunteering to be a tribute in the Hunger Games, in place of her younger sister; from a victim of the Capitol’s stranglehold, Katniss evolves into a rebel leader against the power of the Capitol.

The despotic President Snow is the unlikely protagonist of the fourth novel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, which returns to the past of Panem, six decades before the events of the first novel. Collins traces the rise of an oppressive state, and questions about the relationship of the individual with the government are brought to the forefront. In my thesis, I suggest that the fourth book is crucial, a key to reading the earlier three books, especially in light of the epigraphs which accompany the book. In TB, the series of quotations, from

⁶ Critical essays by Barkman, Heit, Selle, among others, discuss this aspect in detail.

Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley suggest a philosophical, layered approach, to the issues evident in the trilogy. I discuss the the epigraphs to trace their multivalent connections with the novels and decode their involvement with the themes explored in the HGQ. My reading throws light on the manner in which the epigraphs provide intricate links between concepts of governance, especially through Social Contract theory, the concept of ‘just war’, and ultimately, the concept of sovereignty, in ways which were perhaps not as obvious in the trilogy alone.

The HG trilogy, with its sharp critique of a slew of contemporary issues such as social inequality, war, violence, ubiquitous surveillance, the nexus between entertainment, media, and politics, touched a chord with the reading public at large. Pharr and Clark term it “a cultural and literary phenomenon” (2). The fourth book, which expands the trilogy to a Quartet, openly displays its links with works of political theory and literature; it is rich with intertextual, interdisciplinary allusions. The ecocritical concerns hinted at in the first three books find fuller expression in this book. The heart of the story remains the same—the struggle of an individual to live a meaningful life with some measure of freedom, despite an oppressive, exploitative state. Even so, in its negotiation of powerlessness, and resistance in difficult circumstances, the HGQ is similar to many works of YA fiction. However, what makes the Quartet unique, in my opinion, is its sustained, nuanced engagement with political philosophy. Its sophisticated amalgamation of historical references, and utilisation of multiple generic conventions, all combine in a thrilling, yet provocative narrative, which has made the works bestsellers. I consider the HGQ a testimony to YA literature’s capacity to reflect “vital concerns deeply rooted in the general intellectual, cultural, and political life of an epoch” (Eagleton 107). The Quartet is significant for it invites us to reflect on the ideas and provenance of contemporary governance; it provides not just a critique of contemporary

issues, but a contextualisation, by which to frame resistance against present, and possible future, political and planetary desecration.

The Spatial Gaze

The first section of my thesis is titled “Spatiality and Spatial Strategy in The Hunger Games Quartet”. It approaches the HGQ via a spatial gaze, to investigate the links between, space, territory, and power. Such a study is largely absent in the various critical approaches applied to the Quartet. Spatial studies⁷ encompass a wide variety of approaches, and for the purposes of my study, I use the term to enfold within it the concept of Geocriticism⁸. The effort is to locate space, and writing about space, “within the realm of social practice” (Crang and Thrift 2), and to “probe the human spaces that the mimetic arts arrange...as links between the world and the text” (Westphal 6). Work on Children’s literature or YA fiction, within this field of study has been limited; often the focus is on childhood as a conceptual space, or spaces in children’s literature as “places of play” (Rose 1984). More recent works point out that literature for children provides a “view of space and power relations [that] takes on additional considerations when the person negotiating the space is a child” (Sachiko et al. 10). This would be true within YA fiction as well.

As explained earlier, YA literature is usually studied utilising critical insights applied to children’s literature, largely because in both these literary genres, the protagonist is either a minor, or a very young adult. This is significant because it suggests a category of person not yet fully empowered in the way ‘adults’ are usually empowered in society. One could argue

⁷ Very simply, “both space and spatiality are historical concepts that refer to the relationship between people and things, including other people, on the Earth’s surface. While spatiality is relatively recent, space is a historical concept” (Kobayashi 1).

⁸ Geocriticism refers to “a practice...according to which the reader focuses attention on the ways that literature represents, shapes, or is formed by the real and imagined spaces with which it engages” (Tally 2016 3).

about degrees of empowerment or disempowerment which transcend age, but for now, this remains one essential feature which typifies literature with non-adult protagonists. Spatial studies are concerned not with the age of the protagonist, but obviously, with space. The field of Geo-critical studies, combined with the field of Human Geography⁹ has given rise to Spatiality as an area of research. The focus is an examination of spaces not just in their geographical aspect, but sociological and political aspects as well. Thus, an interest in power structures at play within spaces and places, comes to the forefront, and this has been advanced within literary spatial studies. In fact, Roberta S. Trites, in her ground-breaking work on YA fiction, *Disturbing the Universe* (2000), identifies the core of YA fiction as being concerned with “issues of power” (x). A spatial analysis of the HGQ, especially keeping in view the relationship of space with power, has not been undertaken so far, and my work seeks to fill this gap.

In the first chapter of this section, I address the issue of spatiality in YA fiction, and I draw upon insights gleaned from deploying a spatial approach to the spaces and places found in the HGQ. The contrast between the impoverished District 12, and the decadent Capitol, the delicate harmony found in the wooded spaces, the places both public and private, which are found in the HGQ, provide ample ground for spatial critique. I consider these spaces and places as extremely important narrative choices, loaded with signification. In the descriptions of these fictive places, resonant with an imperial past, in the naming of the real-world location of Appalachia, I contend that Collins lays out a landscape which draws attention to the past, present, and possible future; she does so by drawing upon historical and political discourses, embedded within her descriptions of the places found in the HGQ. Spaces and places emerge as arenas for the operation of power within the HGQ. I argue that a spatial

⁹ *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (2009) defines it as “a major field of geography that is centrally concerned with the ways in which place, space, and environment are both the condition and in part the consequence of human activities” (350).

view aids in a deeper understanding of power relations at work, not just within the fictive world of the narratives, but outside of it, too. Thus, in my thesis, I move from a spatial analysis in the first section, to a questioning of power, and ideas of Social Contract in the next section. The concept of sovereignty, especially in a personal form, is the focus of the final section, wherein I return to the idea of ‘space’, as linked to the concept of personal sovereignty

In my spatial study of the HGQ, I utilise Human Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s definitions of, and distinctions between, space and place, as delineated in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). I also draw upon Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia”, (1986) and Edward Soja’s “thirdspace” (1996), along with Henri Lefebvre’s notion of space as a social construct (1974), to explore linkages between space and power. Various places and spaces in the HGQ, from Katniss’ home and the meadow in District 12, to the Games arena, and Capitol are navigated in this section, to investigate the idea of spatiality on the HGQ.

In the second chapter of the first section, “Strategy and Tactics in the HGQ”, I turn to Michel de Certeau’s insightful delineation between strategy and tactics, drawn from his study of spaces and the operation of power, governmental or social, within spaces. Tally perceptively juxtaposes Foucault’s concept of the panopticon alongside de Certeau’s suggested resistance to surveillance through the everyday and the ordinary (Tally 2012 128). My spatial reading of the HGQ builds upon this suggested matrix of Foucault’s panopticon, and de Certeau’s ideas of ‘strategy’ ‘tactics’, and ‘resistance’, to explore the many “spatial stories” which emerge in the HGQ. I read the tension between the Capitol forces, and the district dwellers as a struggle not just for control of space and resources, but also as a battle for power, as an assertion of sovereignty on both sides.

The next chapter, “Of Space, Sovereignty and Sacrifice Areas”, continues to trace the connection between space, and the exercise of sovereignty, building on Agamben’s arguments (1998, 2003) about bare life, sacrifice, and zones of exception. Agamben references German thinker Carl Schmitt¹⁰ often in his formulation tracing the linkage of space and sovereignty. I follow this chain of thought to suggest that the concept of territory necessarily encapsulates and leads to the exercise of sovereignty in its the bio-political aspect. This then covers both land and bodies in its sweep; the economic and political implications of such an exercise of sovereignty is indicated in the idea of resource ‘management’, as indicated by Carl Schmitt. Agamben explores this idea as he argues for an understanding of ‘spaces of exception’, and in my reading of the HGQ, I employ these concepts to situate the lives, bodies, and spaces of the HGQ as within the ambit of sacrifice and ‘sacrifice zones’.

In this first section of my thesis, I argue that Collins’ spatial strategy continually reveals her concern with issues of governance, forms of conflict, and justice. This is made obvious through her choice of placing District 12 within the real-world location of Appalachia, one of the only actual geographical areas named in the Quartet. This spatial specificity in the HGQ is significant given the history of resistance associated with this mountainous region; the resistance has been against both governmental forces, as well as corporate power, and thus is the ideal location for a critique and questioning of concepts such as sovereignty, justice, violence, and personal agency. These are the issues which are highlighted through an examination of the places within the fictional world of the HGQ, which obviously have a resonance in the real world outside of the novels.

¹⁰ Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) is often reviled as a Nazi ideologue but is also acknowledged as a political thinker and strategist. He is best known for his work, *Political Theology* (1922), *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), after which came *The Concept of the Political* (1927). In 1938 he published a study of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. He continued to publish throughout his life.

Epigraphs in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*: The Linear and the Circular

The richness of historical allusions and intertextuality in the series, is greatly enhanced by the fourth book; the epigraphs in TB explicitly draw attention to political and literary traditions, as well as their interconnections. In the second section of my thesis, I follow the sequence of the five quotations which are selected by Collins as epigraphs to *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Selected lines drawn from well-known works by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley are placed in chronological order. The sequence suggests that each quote has links with each of the books; but it also suggests a circular connection between all the books, and quotes, since the Quartet itself circles back in time with the fourth book. Both a linear, and a circular reading of the quotes is possible, of course.

Most importantly, the choice of the quotations, and their sequential placement invites us to read the narratives of the HGQ as a space which traverses and explores the concepts of war and just-war, notions of justice, and ideas of freedom and sovereignty. The fourth book indicates an approach to these issues and concerns through a critique of Social Contract theory, the state of nature debate¹¹, and the idea of sovereignty. It also critiques our understanding of ideas about science and progress, and the connection between society and the individual.

The epigraphs indicate and encapsulate the main themes of the HGQ, and highlight a concern with issues of violence, hunger, survival, war, justice, rebellion, freedom, and liberty. The choice of the epigraphs suggests a critique of the role of governance, and the relationship

¹¹ Put succinctly, “state of nature...describes the ‘natural’ condition of mankind and refers to philosophical assertions regarding the condition of humans before social factors are imposed” (Suicmez 1936). Mark Somos and Anne Peters, in *State of Nature: Histories of an Idea*, (2022), clarify that though the phrase is “effective legal fiction” (2), it is also a powerful philosophical, political, and legal concept, invaluable when “thinking about liberties, rights, and obligations” (3).

between individuals and the government; it also leads to a questioning of the relationship between humankind and the world of nature¹². The epigraphs, in their movement from an invocation of Social Contract theory to the suggestion of a potential monstrous presence, suggest an exploration of the idea of sovereignty, governmental and individual. Hence, in this section, I explore the Quartet's engagement with Social-Contract theory, which enfolds within itself the issues of sovereignty, and justice. These are central concerns within the narratives; Collins' avowed interest in Just-War theory within the trilogy (Leviathan 2018), changes form after the publication of the fourth book in 2020.

I argue that the concept of sovereignty, though never explicitly mentioned by Collins, or spelt out in the narratives, is nevertheless a core concern suggested in the Quartet. It is the thread which binds the narratives of the HGQ together. The idea of sovereignty, in its various shades of meanings, leads to an investigation into ideas of imperialism, democracy, governance, personal liberty, justice, and ecological balance, explored in the four books of the HGQ. The epigraph page in TB, opens with the first of five quotations, which reads

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common Power
to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre;
and such a warre, as is of every man against every man.

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, 1651 (TB 1)

The lines invoke a connection between power and war; the natural world, and man, are inherently violent in Hobbes' worldview. The necessity of curtailing it forms the basis for Hobbes' argument for a strong, sovereign power. The quote fits well with the situation of the

¹² In her book, *What is Nature* (1995), Kate Soper dwells at length on the complicated shades of meaning the word 'nature' embodies. However, she offers a working definition, which is that "nature refers us to the objects of study of the natural and biological sciences; to issues in metaphysics concerning the differing modes of being of the natural and the human; and to the environment and its various non-human forms of life" (2). She distinguishes it from all that is man-made, the artificial, and the cultural. The most exhaustive treatise on this subject remains H.G Collingwood's *The Idea of Nature* (1945)

first book, HG, where the plot revolves around the violence and struggle for survival in the Arena of the Hunger Games in Panem. In the fourth book, we return in time, to a Capitol which is recovering from the ravages of war against the rebel colonies; the book traces the establishment of this Hobbesian logic in the mind of the young Coriolanus Snow. Snow is President of Panem when Katniss Everdeen is ‘reaped’ for the Games, and Katniss eventually turns rebel against Panem and Snow, as the trilogy proceeds.

Hobbes, in his political theories, advocates for a social contract whereby individuals cede their sovereignty to the sovereign ruler, in return for peace, security, and well-being. For him, the state of nature is violent and chaotic; unchallenged authority is imperative to establish order. This view is held up for questioning in the HGQ, which presents to the readers a situation where the all-powerful state establishes order but ignores the welfare of its citizens. The narratives hint at the dangers inherent in the rise of a security state which crushes individual rights and the sovereignty of the citizen, and instead assert its supreme sovereignty with impunity.

The quotation which follows is drawn from John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* (1689). Collins’ choice of lines by Locke presents to us a worldview in which the state of nature, and the ideal of governance, are very different from the grim view which Hobbes holds. The second epigraph states

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...

John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, 1689 (TB 1)

Unlike Hobbes, Locke does not believe in an inherently violent state of nature; in fact, he advocates that reason is the primary ‘law’ by which order is maintained. Most significantly he

propounds the idea that all men are equal, and have a claim to independence, even within the world of nature. The primary good which he advocates is the preservation of “life, health, liberty, or possessions”. Quite clearly, in Locke’s conception of sovereignty and rule, a sovereign power is expected to respect these principles, and governance is meant to provide an environment which betters the human condition, which provides security of both land, and body, to the individual citizen.

In the second book, CF, the political awakening of Katniss is brought about by her acknowledgement of the extreme injustice around her. Though she realises that it is not she alone who suffers, she is too scared of the Capitol’s power to act on her anger. It is only when Snow proclaims that the rules of the Quarter Quell recall all former victors to the arena again, as a reminder of “the power of the Capitol” (CF 172), that her rage boils over. Her victory tour has made transparent to her the extent of exploitation and injustice wrought by the Capitol upon the districts. She is forced to question the meaning of her individual life and liberty, even as she yearns for a measure of independence, for a life of security and peace. It is this yearning for a state where “life, health, liberty” are respected which ultimately leads her to rebel in the third book.

Collins chooses as the third quotation, Rousseau’s most famous line, which states

Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 1762 (TB 1)

Rousseau’s best-known line speaks of contradiction inherent in man’s existence as a social animal. Rousseau believes in man’s essential, inherent foundation being in nature; but he needs, in equal measure perhaps, an enriching network of social connections. In his book, as in his other works, Rousseau investigates the idea of the social contract, which he feels governments have failed to honour; he voices his anger at the limits imposed by governments on the life and liberty of the citizenry, especially when they give little back in terms of

security and well-being. In Rousseau's opinion, these restrictions placed by the state violate a natural, personal sovereignty, a sort of fundamental freedom granted by the very fact of human, natural existence.

The HGQ also locates the idea of the Social Contract within arguments about the state of nature. The concept of freedom as granted from birth, as existing even before a civil society comes into being, also necessarily prompts an enquiry into what precedes the social setup in society. The argument advanced in the HGQ, is that a belief in what constitutes the state of nature is the basis for belief in what the social contract, and sovereign power, ought to be. TB explores this idea most fully, in comparison to the other three books. Rousseau's assertion that there is a 'natural goodness' in humanity is especially relevant; though the idea is hinted at in the conversations that Katniss has with Peeta and Gale, the significance is made obvious in TB. In the fourth book, Collins has Lucy Gray echo these words towards the close of TB, in a conversation with Coriolanus, which makes clear that their attitudes to the world of nature, to the concept of humanity, are at sharp variance.

Furthermore, in Rousseau's philosophy, the emphasis on emotion and feeling, is also significant; he argues that feelings are an innate basis for morality, given that natural man has a propensity for natural goodness, and that emotions form an innate basis for moral judgement (Claes 1990). The Romantic turn in literature picks up and builds on the valourisation of the natural world; it also centres the place of emotion in human life, prioritising it over cold, logical thought. A similar idealisation of the world of nature and of emotional existence, is also glimpsed within the narratives of the Quartet. Lucy Gray and Katniss are very different as characters, but share an intimate, innate connection with the natural world, a relationship which Coriolanus, and in fact, anyone from the Capitol, seems to lack altogether.

The deep connection of humans with the world of nature is stressed in the penultimate quote, which is an extract from Wordsworth's poem "The Tables Turned", in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). The extract from the poem reads

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
 Our meddling intellect
 Misshapes the beautiful form of things;
 We murder to dissect.

In Wordsworth's sorrow at "Our meddling intellect" which "Misshapes the beautiful form of things; /We murder to dissect", we can discern a sharp turn away from Hobbes' idea of a violent state of nature. Instead, Wordsworth condemns the human mind and the capacity for violence, which is manifested in the desire to control or desecrate nature. Wordsworth's attitude is as far removed from the Hobbesian contempt for nature, as is possible. The Romantic adoration, and idealisation of the natural world, is coupled with sorrow for the human capacity to 'misshape' and 'meddle'. These lines indicate a distrust of the idea of science and progress, which interferes with natural processes, and further, destroys a human connection with nature. It immediately makes the reader think of the hybrid monsters created in Volturna Gaul's laboratory, and her malevolent attitude to the world of nature. Her deep belief in the essential brutality of nature, and human capacity for violence become the tenets which Coriolanus takes to heart. The quote thus suggests that it is not just the natural world which is corrupted and defiled by 'meddling intellect'; humans too are shaped into votaries of violence by a combination of intellectual influences, on one hand, and seemingly rational, personal ambitions, on the other hand. The transformation of Coriolanus into President Snow, under the tutelage of Gaul is clearly indicated in this quotation.

The presence of the final and fifth quotation, drawn from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) had prompted speculation that another book would follow. This has been confirmed

recently. The new book to be published in 2025, is also set in the past. It traces the journey of Haymitch from victor to mentor, and ostensibly also traces the rise of President Snow. The quote in TB hints at the early ‘promise of virtue’ shown by the creature brought into the world by Victor Frankenstein, which is subsequently twisted into evil by the “loathing and scorn” heaped upon the creature by society. The lines chosen by Collins are

I thought of the promise of virtue which he had displayed on the opening of his existence, and the subsequent blight of all kindly feeling by the loathing and scorn which his protectors had manifested towards him. (TB1)

Snow’s transformation into a despotic, manipulative ruler is perhaps implied in these lines. It perhaps also hints at the changes wrought in Haymitch, Katniss, and Lucy, due to their experience in the capitol, and the arena. Even the violence which Lucy Gray and Katniss exhibit in the games arena hints at the power of social and political circumstances which influence the action of individuals and destroys their innate ‘natural goodness. The quote invites us to question the role of society in the creation of the monster figure; it also pushes us to question the quality, the traits of ‘monstrosity’, of evil, which may be ambiguous, or in flux, at any given point in society.

It is a lesser-known fact that Mary Shelley had a deep, life-long interest in Social Contract theory (Beenstock 2016, Botting 2018). Thus, it is fitting, in a sense, that Collins ends her epigraphs with Mary Shelley’s lines. The series of epigraphs take us from Social Contract theory, via Hobbes and Locke, to Rousseau; we transition via Rousseau, to literary figures, which is not surprising given his influence on the Romantic movement. Implicit perhaps is a critique of Enlightenment ideals as well, and a questioning of discourse which prioritises rationality and progress; instead, the HGQ seems to argue for a repositioning of the status accorded to emotions, feelings, and a harmony with nature, as being equally important for human society. The novels, with their persistent enquiry into concepts of justice and

goodness, also perhaps advocate for a measure of fundamental liberty, and the right to choose how one's life is lived. This right and this freedom, the narratives suggest, lies beyond and above any kind of governmental control over life and land. Perhaps the HGQ argues for recognition of an innate sovereignty of the self.

From Social Contract to Forms of Sovereignty

A fundamental tenet of Social Contract theory involves the concept of sovereignty. The early 20th Century, with an emphasis on globalisation and free trade, seemed to have made this an antiquated concept. However, events of 9/11 brought the term back onto the centre stage of political theory. The security state, and a suppression of civil rights, emerged almost as the standard basis of governance¹³ around the globe. A consequent state of anxiety induced by the events, and government responses to it, found expression in every form of discourse, political or artistic¹⁴.

The sovereignty of the state, and its protection, is now almost routinely invoked by governments to implement measures which often impinge on the freedom and sovereignty of the individual citizen. I argue that the narratives of the HGQ lead us to question the idea of Social Contract, and its operation within contemporary governance. Central to this

¹³ The US response to 9/11 involved global military mobilization and came to be known as 'The War on Terror'. Alex Houen notes that "the war's spread...has seen the conflict assume various modes of combat and militarization...media war, lawfare, new military weaponry and technology" (2), and the inevitable "buttressing of state sovereignty" (4). He observes that the effects have extended into "social and cultural life" (3). Within this "matrix of war...is the condition ...for rendering citizens suspects...as a biopolitical terrain...on the assumption that [they] may...pose a security threat" (Vivienne Jabri 239).

¹⁴ The effect on 9/11 on art and literature, especially in the USA, has been extensively studied; notable names include Jill Bennett 2012, Susan Faludi 2007, John Gray 2011, Joseph Natoli 2007, John Markert 2011, Guy Westwell 2014, among a host of other critics and thinkers.

questioning, lies the idea of sovereignty, of the individual, and of the state. The Quartet seems to advocate a restoration of individual sovereignty, the fundamental basis for social contract.

In the first chapter of the third section in my thesis, I touch upon the provenance of the term ‘sovereignty, its history, and also its relevance to the idea of American Independence. Clare Finkelstein, in *Sovereignty and the New Executive Authority* (2019) asserts that the term has been revitalised after 9/11, after decades of oblivion. She explains that

Ever since the Westphalian Era the concept of ‘sovereignty’ has emerged to be one of the truly important foundational ideas in history, helping define the authority of a ruler, the internal and external legitimacy of his power, and the norms governing the relationships among often-competing sovereigns... The concept is venerable, complex, and fluid, and carries extensive descriptive and proscriptive weight. (vii)

Undeniably, the idea of sovereignty is central to the concept of Social Contract theory; it forms the bedrock on which mutual agreement between state and citizen is premised. Hence, it is useful to trace the connection between the HGQ’s overt invocation of Social Contract theory, its less visible, but significant evocation of the concept of sovereignty. I argue that the HGQ’s covert questioning of the idea of sovereignty is prompted by post 9/11 global and local political transitions. The rise of the security state, and the ‘war on terror’ has eroded civil and human rights, in unprecedented ways; the sovereign right of the state seems to have superseded the right of the individual. The HGQ’s critique of Social Contract theory, and ideas of sovereignty, possibly provides perspective on the struggle between the state and the citizen, which is a central concern in the novels.

Collins has spoken of her interest in Just-War theory, presented in her novels; she has also questioned the legitimacy of the rebellion by the districts, as seen in MJ (Levithan 2018). Sovereign power is often expressed through the right to wage war, and it is noteworthy that in

the HGQ, rebellion and struggle for authority, are expressed in a civil war-like situation. The Capitol's complete and absolute control over territory, resources, citizens, which is tightened after a failed rebellion by the districts, can be read as an interrogation of the security state apparatus, and the consequent erasure of civil rights. The obvious economic disparity between the Capitol and the districts raises pertinent questions about justice in resource sharing; the dangers of unchecked capitalist consumption, and environmental degradation in the Anthropocene, are also indicated as concerns in the HGQ.

In the second chapter, I trace the forms of sovereignty glimpsed in the four books; the forms presented vary from the Hobbesian idea of absolute, unchecked power to a more attenuated, personal manifestation of sovereignty. I focus my attention on the characters of Coriolanus Snow, Katniss Everdeen, and Lucy Gray; however, characters such as Peeta Mellark, Gale Hawthorne, and Alma Coin are also brought into the discussion. I argue that the character's attitude and relationship with nature is an important marker of the form of sovereignty they represent. The character of Lucy Gray is significant in marking a transition and providing a connection between these two forms. She seems to represent a manifestation of individual sovereignty, as valorised by the Romantics, who were deeply influenced by Rousseau's philosophy. This form is manifested fully in the character of Katniss.

In this chapter, I approach sovereignty through the lens of Rousseau's philosophy. I dwell on Rousseau's concepts of freedom, and sovereignty, which seem to drive the vision of the narratives. Daniel Cullen perceptively points out that "Rousseau's democratic vision squints towards natural freedom...his political project is the re-creation of a condition of independence within a regime based on popular sovereignty" (5). This is precisely what the ending of the Quartet advocates, in closing with a picture of Katniss and her family. At the close of MJ, Katniss and Peeta have reclaimed both land and life, and Panem is freed from the clutches of a despotic power.

In my analysis of the characters in HGQ, I argue that Rousseau's concepts of the 'natural man', and the related ideas of amour de soi and amour propre, helps us understand the main characters and their delineation. Laurence Cooper explains that in Rousseau's scheme of thought,

amour de soi is an utterly benign psychic force. [It] seeks self-preservation and well-being...actively benevolent in post-state-of-nature natural men...the source of conscience and compassion. The second kind of self-love is quite different, however...amour propre, which is the dominant form of self-love in average civilized men, is relative...though not always and inevitably vicious, it usually is. (13)

In TB, the young Coriolanus exhibits a marked hatred for the world of nature; and is driven by the need for glory and wealth. Under Gaul's tutelage, he embraces the most extreme form of sovereign power. He is obsessed with control, driven by vanity; he comes to embody Rousseau's principle of a perverted amour propre. This is manifested in his ability to commit cold-blooded murder as he rises to power, and finds its fullest form in the despotic, cruel, and unjust rule when he is President Snow, later in life. On the other hand, Katniss and Lucy, guided by their deep connection with nature, display amour de soi, and amour propre, without their instincts being defiled by the social pressure to seek glory and wealth.

In the final chapter, I return to Rousseau's idea of 'natural goodness', and discuss its centrality to the narratives of the HGQ, which seem to propose an instantiation, a push towards the idea of personal sovereignty. Joel Feinberg utilises a "territorial metaphor" (5) and explains that "the concept of personal sovereignty...[proposes that] an autonomous individual is viewed as analogous to an autonomous state" (52), with "discretionary control of body, privacy, landed property...the right to make choices and decisions" (54). These are precisely the kinds of autonomies invaded by security state apparatuses, displayed in the most extreme form in the dystopic state of Panem. In my reading of the HGQ, the narratives push

for a radical rethink of the idea of Social Contract, and advocate for a much-needed restoration of balance between the sovereignty of the individual, and state sovereignty. The well-being, the freedom, and rights of the individual, the citizen, is placed front and centre; this is evident in the ending of the Quartet which presents a scene of natural restoration, of care, of family life, of a reclamation of selfhood.

In the final analysis, the critique of Social Contract theory, and the implied appraisal of the concept of sovereignty seen in the HGQ, marks a deeply involved, contemporary engagement with concepts of governance. The HGQ impels readers to review ideas of science, progress, and development, which alter or devastate the natural world; such devastation, the Quartet implies, is ultimately deeply inimical to humanity as well. In the Quartet's evocation of history-Roman, and American- lies a warning to avoid the mistakes of the past, and to forge a future based on principles of a respect for nature, of equity and shared resources, and most importantly, due regard for personal sovereignty.

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