POLITICAL DYSTOPIA IN SUZANNE COLLINS’ THE HUNGER GAMES

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ABSTRACT

The study deals with the aspects of political dystopia in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. The objective of study is to describe the aspects of political dystopia occur in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. The data were analyzed by identifying the statements found in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. The findings show that there are five aspects of political dystopia occur in the novel. The five aspects are: a) Totalitarian Government, b) Political Repression, c) Dehumanization, d) Restrictions of Freedom, e) Oppression which Led to the Rebellion. From those aspects, it is concluded that political dystopia occur in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games.

Keyword : prose, novel, science fiction, political dystopia

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INTRODUCTION

The Background of The Study

There are many factors that can make the story of a novel interesting, such as theme, plot, characters, and genre. One of the significant factors is the genre of the novel. Most people love story which is connected with their real life. Most of teenagers love romance stories as well as most of kids love fantasy stories. The reason why they love them because the stories they read are relevant with their real life.

Most authors of novels are inspired by the life around them including social, economic and political issues. These aspects often become the main theme of a story. For example in the novel 1984 by George Orwell, the main theme in this novel is political issue at that time. There are direct parallels between the book and the political issues at that time; one of them is totalitarian regime. In writing the work, Orwell was influenced and inspired by totalitarian regimes of the time, including Hitler's Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. As Dieterle (2003: 3) states that 1984 deals with the parallels between the societies described in George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 and the society of the German Democratic Republic. Stuver (1998: 5) also states that 1984 outwardly protest current politics and leadership. 1984’s communism emulates the dreadful reality of Stalin’s communism.

A critique of social, economic and political issues in literature called as dystopia. Dystopia is the opposite of utopia. Utopia is the creation from human imagination that believe utopia as a solution of the imperfect world. What cuts across these different realms—realms that trade in different kinds of (bio)value—is the potential for human beings to overstep our bounds, to believe that we can remake the planet in the name of perfection, to believe that we can create utopia (Dunlap, 2012: 12).

Darvish and Najjar (2011: 101) states that when the utopian writers tried to depict an endless happy society to human, the dystopian writers saw through their plans and found the risk of tyranny and oppression. According to Baccolini and Moylan (2003: 5), the authors of dystopia fiction tend to use future dystopias to internalize present problems and provide a critique of political, social, and economic structures. The writer of dystopian novel could think further beyond the future. They create
problems of political, social, and economic structures of human world in order to criticize the political, social, and economical system in the present.

Suzanne Collins is one of many dystopian authors who are afraid of the probability of bleak and terrible future as a result of the war and violence. Suzanne Collins said she drew her inspiration for the Hunger Games from imagining a cross between the war in Iraq and reality TV, after flipping through the channels one night and seeing the juxtaposition between the coverage of the war and reality TV programming (Wilson, 2010: 271).

The writers of dystopia get their inspiration from experience or they see it from the reality. Dystopian images of the near future can no longer avoid the burden of their own inevitability. As the famous writers of dystopia, Ray Bradbury and John Brunner said that they were not trying to predict the future of dystopia but to prevent it. George Orwell, the writer of the famous dystopian novel, 1984 also stated his fear of future tyranny as in the dystopian fiction. The near universal assumption of such fiction is that dystopia has already arrived, in embryo, and that its progress to maturity is unavoidable (Claeys, 2010: 278-279).

*The Hunger Games* is a novel about a sixteen years old girl, Katniss Everdeen who lives in a post-apocalyptic nation of Panem where it was once known as North America. She lives in a dystopia society which then leads her to the rebellion to the totalitarian leader.

*The Hunger Games* as one of many dystopian novels give us an overview of the bleak and terrible future due to the human actions itself. Dystopia presents different vision from the perfect utopia to make people nowadays realize that there’s a possibility of this future can be happened someday. Dystopian literature is important to empower the reader to be inspired to make a difference to be better people. As Claeys (2010: 141) stated that utopian and dystopian works focus almost entirely on social critique, leaving it up to the reader to imagine what a world without these injustices and inequalities would look like. The writers of dystopia try to give a vision to the readers the possibility of different future, human have choice whether to choose what kind of future would they have, it all depends on the human itself. So there we have it, an impending dystopia, yet some utopian possibilities. We humans are given the power of choice. It will be more than interesting to see what ones we make (Miller, 2006: 7).
The writer is interested in analyzing the dystopian aspects in The Hunger Games. This is because The Hunger Games reflects the dystopian aspects in its story, including the political, economy, and social aspects but the writer will only focus on the political aspect because the political issues in this novel are more dominant than other issues.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study was conducted by using descriptive analysis with qualitative method, by analyzing political dystopia found in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. According to Moleong (2006: 6), qualitative method is a research method which is intended to describe the social phenomena concerning with subject of research such as behavior, opinion, attitude, and so forth. It means that descriptive research is used to establish the existence of phenomena by explicitly describing them. The qualitative method refers to research procedure which produces descriptive data: people own language, or spoken words and observable behaviors.

The sources of data was taken from Suzannes Collins’ The Hunger Games as the primary data and related book and references which are connected with the political aspects of dystopian fiction as the secondary data in completing this study.

In this study, the writer collects data through documentary technique. Documentary technique is used to collect the data of this study. Documentary technique means reading all references, studying, and analyzing some references related to the study. First, the writer reads Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games to understand the content of the novel. Second, the writer collects the references concerning the study especially about political aspect of dystopian fiction. Then, the writer identifies the data in accordance with the political aspect of dystopian fiction. The last step is selecting the data based on the problem of the study i.e. the political dystopia found in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games.

The data was analyzed by descriptive technique that finds the material about political dystopia in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games, by the following techniques. Firstly, identifying the political dystopia that the writer found in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. Secondly, analyzing the data based on the classification which refers to
the political dystopia found in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. After that, categorizing the data into two; the dystopian aspects especially the political aspect and the political dystopia found in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

*Data Analysis*

The data of this study were obtained from the clauses found in the novel. This study found that there are five aspects of political dystopia occurs in Suzanne Collins’ novel, *The Hunger Games*. The five aspects are: Totalitarian Government, Political Repression, Dehumanization, Restrictions of Freedom, and Oppression which Led to the Rebellion.

- **Totalitarian government**

  Based on Cernak (2011:12), there are six aspects of totalitarian government and most of them can be found in *The Hunger Games*; single party government is controlled by a dictator or ruling regime, secret police employ terror tactics to control citizens, government controls the mass media through censorship and propaganda, armies and weapons are controlled by the ruling regime, and a central ideology controls every aspect of citizens’ lives.

  - Single party government is controlled by a dictator or ruling regime where in the state of Panem, there is no democracy. Capitol, the ruling city of Panem is the only single party government in Panem. As it is shown in this following quotation “...about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called the Capitol.” (The Hunger Games/Chapt.1/pg.6). Instead of using the word “lead”, Katniss Everdeen, the main protagonist character and also the narrator of the story, used the word “rule” to describe the leadership of Capitol. it means that Capitol controls almost every aspects of citizen’s life. Capitol do not only lead Panem but also rule it just like what a totalitarian government do.
• Secret police employ terror tactics to control citizens. The secret police which are those who are raised by Capitol to do all what the Capitol orders are called the Peacekeepers. The Peacekeepers also often do the punishment in public in order to employ the terror to control the citizens through their fear. As it is shown in this line: “They whip you and make everyone else watch,” says Rue. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.15/pg.202).

• Government controls the mass media through censorship and propaganda. Capitol controls the citizen through the mass media which are television and books. Mass media and schools are primarily used for the sake of Capitol. It can be seen from this line: “...when they’re airing the Games or some important government message on television that it’s mandatory to watch” (The Hunger Games/Chapt.6/pg.80).

• The government maintains central control of the economy. Capitol controls every aspects of Panem including the economic. Capitol imposed very strict laws in the economy aspect. Every district should work hard and produce goods for Capitol and left nothing for the districts. People in the districts are forbidden to consume and enjoy their own production. It causes starvation and poverty has become a common thing in the districts as it is shown in this following line: “I’d have thought, in District Eleven, you’d have a bit more to eat than us. You know, since you grow the food,” I say. Rue’s eyes widen. “Oh, no, we’re not allowed to eat the crops” (The Hunger Games/Chapt.15/pg.202).

• Armies and weapons are controlled by the ruling regime. Armies and weapons are forbidden in the districts because it will lead to the rebellion and Capitol tries so hard to avoid the possibility. So that, for those who are caught producing, distributing, or selling weapons for the purpose of inciting the rebellion will get the most severe punishment. People who try to start or inciting a rebellion will get the death penalty. It is shown in this line: “My bow is a rarity, crafted by my father along with a few others that I keep well hidden in the woods, carefully wrapped in waterproof covers. My father could have made good money selling them, but if the officials
found out he would have been publicly executed for inciting a rebellion” (The Hunger Games/Chapt.1/pg.5).

- A central ideology controls every aspect of citizens’ lives. In totalitarianism, the totalitarian government may disseminate an ideology in the state. Cernak (2011:13) states that an ideology might be a political belief such as communism or fascism. In the novel, it is found that Capitol try to disseminate the ideology of their totalitarian leader, President Snow. Snow has strict ideology in ruling Panem, as it is shown in this following line: “And even though the rules were set up by the Capitol, not the districts” (The Hunger Games/Chapt.1/pg.13).

- **Political Repression**

  Political repression in *The Hunger Games* is implemented by the Capitol Government. Capitol repressed the citizens in the districts in order to put down the rebellion. Capitol uses the formal apparatus of the state in repressing the citizens of Panem to achieve their goal for their political purposes. Capitol uses the Peacekeepers to spread the terror to the citizens of the districts. They spread the terror by threatening to punish those who break the law in a terrible way and to reinforce these terror, they will not hesitate to punish people in public. Almost every punishment is done publicly. They prefer to punish people in public so that everyone can see what terrible thing they can do to everyone.

  If the Gamemakers want to punish me, they can do it publicly. Wait until I’m in the arena and sic starving wild animals on me. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.8/pg.104)

- **Dehumanization**

  Dehumanization is often found in dystopian fiction. In the novel, dehumanization is reflected by The Hunger Games itself. It can be seen from how Capitol uses The Hunger Games as a cruel way to control the citizens in the districts to avoid them from doing a rebellion. The Hunger Games is a television show where each district should provide two children, one boy and one girl, from the age of twelve until
eighteen years old and put them in an arena and let them kill one another until there is one victory.

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.1/pg.18)

- **Restrictions of Freedom**

  Freedom is almost impossible for people in the districts. There are many restrictions imposed by Capitol in order to keep the districts in line. Everything that they do or say should support the Capitol rather than vice versa. Talking something bad about Capitol is forbidden. If they are caught talking something bad about Capitol, they will be punished or imprisoned.

  “District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety,” I mutter. Then I glance quickly over my shoulder. Even here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.1/pg.6)

- **Oppression which Led to the Rebellion**

  There are two things that Katniss did during The Hunger Games which is considered as a rebellion, showing her affection to the other tributes in arena and planning to commit a suicide with one of the tributes.

  In The Hunger Games, tribute is forbidden to show their affection to other tributes. They have to act cruelly and inhumanly in the arena. They have to kill one another to survive. But Katniss breaks this rule and show her affection to the other tributes, Rue and Peeta. Rue reminds her of her little sister, Primrose. When Rue died, Katniss feels so angry to Capitol. She looks for a way to get revenge. Finally, she makes Capitol ashamed by showing her affection to Rue.

  I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can’t own. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.18/pg.236-237)

  In the end of The Hunger Games, Capitol suddenly changes the rule. At the first, they let two tributes from the same districts to be the victors but at the end of the game, when there are only Katniss and Peeta left, suddenly they change the rule and force
them to kill each other. It made Katniss gets angry because Capitol only make fun of them and treat them as a toy. It made Katniss plan to suicide with Peeta to prove that they are not part of the Capitol’s games and they don’t own them. Finally, The Gamemakers declare both of them as the victors because The Hunger Games should have a winner and if they lose the victor the Gamemakers will be punished by Capitol. It can be seen by the following quotations below:

Yes, they have to have a victor. Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers’ faces. They’d have failed the Capitol. Might possibly even be executed, slowly and painfully while the cameras broadcast it to every screen in the country. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.25/pg.344)

But this made Capitol angry; they thought Katniss has dared to violate the rule that Capitol had made. Capitol have a thought if a girl from the poorest district can violate their rule, there will be a probability that other districts will do the same will then lead the districts to the rebellion.

“Listen up. You’re in trouble. Word is the Capitol’s furious about you showing them up in the arena. The one thing they can’t stand is being laughed at and they’re the joke of Panem,” says Haymitch. (The Hunger Games/Chapt.26/pg.356-357)

- The Relationship between Suzanne Collins’ Backgrounds and Her Novel, The Hunger Games.

Suzanne Collins is the author of The Hunger Games. She lives in Connecticut with her family. Her father is an Air Force officer who was sent to many wars, including the Vietnam. Her father often told her about the condition and the effect of war. (http://www.biography.com/people/suzanne-collins-20903551).

Because of her family background, especially her father, she was interested in the topic of war and violence and the effect of both to the human and society. She concerns about the condition during the war and the effect of the war to the human itself. In The Hunger Games, she continues to explore the effects of war and violence on those coming of age (Collins, 2008).

Dystopian writers have a strong vision about a bleak and dark future as the cause of war and violence. As a dystopian writer, Collins has a far vision about the impact of the war and violence. Dystopian fiction is a tool to tell the readers to be more aware of dystopian nightmares that possibly happen in the future. Whether recovered through
dystopia or not, however, what is important is the use of utopia, and dystopia, today – a use that perhaps utopia shares with literature and the imagination. We need utopia, as we need literature, because we still need to imagine better or worse worlds, and through those to think critically about and act upon our own world to change it (Baccolini, 2006:4).

According to Reynolds (2011:4) in his journal “Games, Dystopia, and ADR”, perhaps the current popularity of the Hunger Games, and of dystopian works in general, reflects similar anxieties about law today: the inhumanity of judicial-coercive machinery, the apparent unaccountability of state and corporate actors, the failure of political imagination despite the desperate need for political reform, and the threat (or promise) of order imposed through state-sponsored violence.

Suzanne Collins expects that readers would come away with “questions about how elements of the book might be relevant in their own lives. And, if they’re disturbing, what they might do about them” (Wilson, 2010: 295).

**Research Findings**

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins is a novel with the genre of political dystopia. There are five aspects of political dystopia that has been fulfilled in The Hunger Games. They are: totalitarian government, political repression, dehumanization, restrictions of freedom, and oppression which led to the rebellion.

The analysis shows that Suzanne Collins, like most of the other dystopian authors, tends to use excessive depiction in describing the future of dystopia. She describes the dystopian world as the horrible, bleak, dark, and miserable future in order to warn people especially the readers that the possibility of this future might be happened someday. Collins also described that the cause of these nightmares is nothing but the humans itself. The bad traits of humans are the cause of dystopian future and the authors of dystopia already knew about this possibility. That is why the authors of dystopian fiction try to warn people through their works.
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

After analyzing the data, based on the novel “The Hunger Games” written by Suzanne Collins, the writer concluded that:

Firstly, political dystopia is occurred in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. There are five political aspects of dystopia that is found occur in The Hunger Games. First, totalitarian government in which the country in the story is led by a ruling city, Capitol. The dictator in the Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games is President Snow, a leader in the Panem country who lead the country in a totalitarian way. Second, political repression in which the Capitol repressed the citizens in the districts in order to make them submissive and obedient towards the Capitol. Third, dehumanization in which reflected by The Hunger Games show itself where humanity is prohibited by Capitol. Fourth, restrictions of freedom in which Capitol restricted the citizens’ freedom through the strict rules in order to make the districts in line. Last, oppression which led to the rebellion in which the main protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, rebels to the Capitol because of the oppression she had from Capitol.

Secondly, Suzanne Collins, as one of many dystopian writers, would like to convey that dystopian fictions are happened to criticize and satirize the world. They tend to describe dystopian future as a bleak, dark, horrible, and miserable future. It is because they have vision of future further than others. Their fears of a bleak future due to human actions make them try to describe if human act very badly in the present then there is a possibility of future they will get is a dystopian future. It can be seen from The Hunger Games that Suzanne Collins describes the future as a tragic place which is caused by none other than the human himself.

Suggestions

With reference to the conclusions, there are some suggestions needed to be considered. Some suggestions are:

Firstly, for the students especially English Literature students are expected to know and understand about the dystopian fiction, especially The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins. Dystopian fiction is expected not only as an entertainment for the
readers but also as a lesson for a better tomorrow by inspiring the readers with the possibility of dystopian future might happen if war and violence as the result of human action itself continues to happen. Dystopian fiction provides the perfect outlet for this by exaggerating the problems of today in an author’s view of a possible tomorrow.

Secondly, this thesis can be used as an additional matter for other researchers who are interested in dystopian fiction especially political dystopia and as a material for further study which is related to dystopian aspects especially the political aspects in dystopian fiction.
REFERENCES


