

# **THE PORTRAYAL OF HOPE VERSUS HOPELESSNESS IN THE FACE OF CALAMITY: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF HUMANITY**

**Do not copy**

## **ABSTRACT**

The meaning of power for human beings can be translated or perceived into various meanings depending on the kind of situation involved. Power in itself may be abstract and elusive when it comes to defining it or putting a purpose to it, but it won't be out of place to state that it is both an indescribable and indispensable feeling. And why is that? This is because power is a kind of feeling that gives a person the sense of being; the sense of validation; the purpose of existence; a guarantee of protection and survival; and lastly that ever goading sense of being at the top of one's game, command chain or amongst one's kin. It is well-known that having a good grip on all or most of these benefits will consciously transform into a sense of power in any human or animal. And with that sense of power usually comes the ideal appearance of order, authority, calm, progress, and a rather false or genuine appearance of togetherness. But the most important question here is that what would eventually happen if the majority of the human population loses that grip on all the comfy benefits power brings them by the hands of a sudden catastrophe? There is really no need to guess that the resulting answer to that would be the disintegration of all humanity's previously held sense of order, authority, peace, progress, morals and most importantly the true sense of togetherness or unity. The previous laws and order formerly holding those senses of power in place would no longer be respected and the

**Do not copy**

Do not copy

resulting response from humanity would be total chaos and disunity.

The two literary texts that are being used as references in this thesis have perfectly portrayed these scenarios. While, at first, there would be a total breakdown of morality and order in the event of a global catastrophe, the presiding government or an emerging one would want to restore its own kind of authority back no matter the cost. However, this kind of authority usually falls into two categories: a version of authority that would absolutely be authoritarian by the presiding government or an unruly and far more brutal authority that would be formed by rabid groups of humans. The two dystopian novels, *The Road* by McCarthy Cormac and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, brilliantly illustrate that no matter which way of authority the human society eventually falls to in the face of an apocalypse, the battle of survival will always be based on how much humanity would succumb to hope or hopelessness.

This thesis is aimed at analysing the thematic references of both books in relation to how hope and hopelessness shapes us in the face of dictatorship and brutal anarchy in the wake of a global disaster.

Do not copy

## **THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOPE VERSUS HOPELESSNESS IN THE HUNGER GAMES AND THE ROAD'S THEMATIC REFERENCES**

The hunger games is a novel set in a sci-fi and dystopian world where the world was being ruled by an authoritarian government. There was a hint in the novel on how food and

Do not copy

other vital resources have become drastically depleted due to natural disasters. However, unlike the case of McCarthy Cormac's *The Road*, which was set in a totally post apocalyptic and desolate world, *The Hunger Games* was focused more on the power of love, unity and defiance in the face of tyranny.

Do not copy

The authoritarian government of Panem can be said to perfectly symbolize hopelessness through iron rule, a deliberate isolation and impoverishment of the vastly poor population as against the protagonist Katniss Everdeen that symbolized hope through defiance against tyranny, youthful hope, love and sacrifice. The interpretation of the story pointed out how Katniss, who was initially caught in the web of the brutal hunger games the government have been using to quell any spirit of rebellion, gradually became their nemesis. Her character was the perfect heroine symbolizing hope and fighting back against the oppressive government as evident in the Mockingjay bird outfit she wore later in the book and movie, and also the breast pin of the same bird she was given by Madge during her debut as a Tribute.

Do not copy

## **THEMATIC REFERENCES**

- The theme of the vast divide between the poor and rich: This was graphically displayed in the ways Katniss kept trying to fathom the sheer amount of opulence and plenty she witnessed while being camped in the capital as compared to what she had gotten used to back home. Poverty, as viciously utilized by the capitol, has always been one of the major tools used by the majority of totalitarian governments even in real life. This was illustrated in George Orwell's famous book, *1984*. And whilst using poverty and the deliberate

Do not copy

Do not copy

monopolization of vital resources to reduce the people to starving and hopeless proles, such a government would then introduce diversionary activities like manipulated national lotteries, dangerous sporting events, vice-promoting social media programmes, etc., to further numb the mind of the already impoverished masses. This was perfectly exemplified in the concept of The Hunger games which was quite similar to the gladiator games of ancient Rome where people fight to the death in an arena for the hopes of a free future.

However, Katniss's character empathically portrayed that there can still be hope for someone who grew up in extreme poverty to effect a tidal change that would rise against poverty oppression and the vicious manipulation of the ruling class. This was achieved through her fighting and loving spirit.

- The theme of love and sacrifice: Love has always been the best symbol of hope, respect for life and the overall meaning to the good and progressive part of humanity. Katniss's love for her family was evident when she tried to always protect and feed them in a rough environment despite being too young for that. Also, Katniss's love for her younger sister, Prim, made her to put herself as a hunger games tribute in her place. Despite the fact that she faced a high probability of being killed in the hunger games, she just couldn't bear to see her younger sister being called to be a tribute.

Also, Peeta, who had long developed a love interest in Katniss and equally happened to be her tribute partner, displayed the power of love in how he saved Katniss's life several times during their trials in the hunger games. He had long before that saved Katniss and her family from imminent starvation

Do not copy

when he had defiantly given her two loaves of burnt bread despite his mother's insensitive objections.

Some other characters like Katniss's father and some among the tribute showed how true love and sacrifice can be formidable against tyranny and hopelessness due to the hope and unity it brings.

**Do not copy**

- The theme of schadenfreude: Schadenfreude is a German term for the malicious enjoyment someone derives from witnessing or seeing the misery, suffering or misfortune of somebody else. This is a terrible psychological state that is unfortunately present in so many among humanity. It is a fact that most people, if given the power or means, would never want anyone to question their actions and to always have people be slaves to them at all times as proof they relish in their suffering. A leader with a dictatorial regime within a controlled nation and a brutal gang leader happily terrorizing others perceived as weak within a lawless society are practically the same. The only difference here is that the violence and oppression being perpetrated against the weak and helpless masses is finely portrayed and justified with heavy propaganda than the other.

The schadenfreude mental state highlights how bad the base forms of many people can be when left unchecked. The pleasure the governments, the individual elite and the controlled masses derived from watching kids and teenagers fight themselves to death in a televised game is a typical example to this. Also, the rich and opulent gleefully use their positions to torment the poor as evident in several scenarios in the movie and book. This mental state is equally happening in

**Do not copy**

## Do not copy

modern societies where the poor is being used as the target of mockery, derision and pretentious charities.

However, Katniss and characters of like minds were able to consistently use their fighting spirits and youthful hope to deny the oppressive capitol government that satisfaction. She and Peeta's fire dress outfit, her Mockingjay dress and chest pin, and their unconventional wins during the hunger games trial totally displeased the government and hence why she was later labelled as a rebellious character and threat to authority.

- The theme of hope and progress through the younger generation vs the draconian, fearful and retrogressive ways of old: Hopelessness, just like love, fighting for justice, sacrifice, etc., is a very noticeable message in the story. Hopelessness was perfectly symbolized in many characters in the dystopian novel. Some examples include:

- \* Katniss's mom who almost gave up on life after her husband's death, thereby leaving the immense burden of family responsibilities on her young daughter.

- \* Haymitch's drunkenness is another symbol of hopelessness despite his fame and success of being the only surviving tribute from previous games. He mostly drinks himself to stupor probably in order to drown away the haunting memories of having to kill his colleagues in a brutal game that never seems to end for the younger generation.

- \* Peeta's insensitive mom and other well-to-do adults within and outside District 12 deliberately use their selfish actions to make poor people and children feel hopeless. While they only want the best things for their kids, they could barely give other poor children and people around them the food they

Do not copy

throw away. They would rather give their leftovers to animals than use them to feed starved children and people.

However Katniss and other people like her tenaciously fought back by clinging to life through foraging, hunting and even fighting to win in the games so as not to succumb to starvation. Also, Katniss's messages of defiance and public display of her courage through her bravery in the games and her brilliant Mockingjay dresses all symbolized a youthful revolution against an older generation choking them with fear, oppression and hopelessness. This further made more and more people to fight by her side as the story progressed. In the end, after a long journey of trials and battles, Katniss eventually won against the seemingly impenetrable force of the capitol—something even the combined forces of the districts couldn't do before.

Do not copy

## **THEMATIC REFERENCES OF CORMAC'S THE ROAD**

Unlike The Hunger Games storyline, The Road is far more desolate, depressing and emotional. Though The Hunger Games equally portrayed enough themes of hope vs hopelessness in its storyline, the action-packed scenarios and fast paced activities revolving around its main characters were able to give its readers and those that watched its movie a healthy amount of distraction from the undertone of misery present in its story. But on the other hand, The Road was indeed a more personal mixture of misery, sadness, hopelessness, gory violence and the vicious murder of

Do not copy

Do not copy

innocence all rolled into one roaring train that would effectively come crashing down on the emotions of anyone reading it, especially for the first time. The movie of the book was graphically and excellently acted by its actors whose portrayal further touched one's inner conscience due to their loneliness in a vast, brutal and desolate world.

According to the story, earth was drastically damaged and scorched by an unmentioned apocalyptic occurrence which instantly snuffed out civilization, almost all plant and animal lives, including humanity. It was so bad that even the world's governments soon fell into disarray for there was no tangible amount of resources they can use to control the remaining hapless population on earth. The Earth's sky got completely covered with a thick, dirty cloud which effectively blocked out the sun for days on end. And as a result of all this, people soon gave in to their base and truly violent desires in the quest for survival and be on the top of the food chain. Roving brutal gangs and cults began cannibalizing those who are too helpless to defend themselves. It even got so bad that women were being captured and enslaved to birth babies and children that were meant to be consumed as meat for sustenance. And thus it was in the middle of all the blood-curdling chaos that a boy and his sick father began an overly risky and depressing journey to a bleak and uncertain future of a sanctuary.

The harrowing events that followed in the book clearly portrayed the innocent boy's psyche being harshly exposed to the true form of humanity when it lacks power, orderliness, food and other resources to survive while his father's physical and mental health gradually declined. The more they were exposed to other people's brutality and monstrous behavior,

Do not copy



the more the dad lost hope in humanity and the feelings of extending help to others. He soon became overly paranoid, cold and violent towards other humans be it young or old. However his young son was still able to keep his innocence and thought that they themselves can still give people hope that he totally believed in despite the desolation around them. Though the suffering father sadly passed away when they finally got to their destination, he was still able to give his son hope by allowing him to live on without using the last bullet reserved for suicide on him. And in the end, the boy fortunately came across a family who still believed in hope and the good morals of their humanity.

Do not copy

## **THEMATIC REFERENCES**

- The loss of innocence vs the personal will to keep it: It is most common that humans tend to throw their morals, good side and body control under the bus once there is a breakdown of law, drastic shortage of vital resources, etc. Kids could either become more brutal as learnt from their adults or parents, or through joining gangs. Yet despite all his young mind had seen and the negative teachings of his dad, the boy still kept hoping and believing that they'd get to their destination and will hope in humanity.
- The theme of selfish sense of self preservation vs making sacrifices to help others: It is understandable that the boy's dad was only looking out for their protection and survival. And with the rare luck of finding some food at a farmhouse after losing theirs to roving gangs, he firmly believed that whatever food they've gotten is for them alone and foolish to waste it on another person who might turn against them.

Do not copy

However, the boy firmly kept to his believe even after when an old man collected food from them and wasn't grateful as earlier warned by his dad.

- The theme of selecting between lesser or greater evils to survive.

Do not copy

- The theme of totally losing hope in the future through the horrid cannibalism of babies and young children vs selecting to starve to death: One of the strong themes of hopelessness expressed in the story was the brutal cannibalism adults resulted to. And not only that, they were so fallen into depravity that they began to breed kids for consumption. This highlights in gory details the rapid descent of humans once they agree within themselves that they could no longer believe in a future for the younger generation, or that the earth would eventually heal and hence preserve what is left in the present for the unborn generation. On the other hand, there are people like the father, the kid and the family that adopted him towards the end who would rather starve to death than lose their hope to depravity and selfish sense of survival through the cannibalism of their young ones or other people. They firmly believe that earth would surely be better and heal if humans are willing to do better.

Also the total lose of hope in the future and a better humanity was portrayed by his dad who kept treating other humans needing their help harshly due to intense paranoia and mistrust. His son kept countering that by believing and trying to extend his hand of kindness to who clearly needed it without thinking only for himself.

Do not copy

## CONCLUSION

Humans are the only creatures in existence capable of exhibiting both the extreme acts of brutality to themselves and other creatures, and the same time do good deeds that would make angels cry in joy. What is most significant in the analysis of all the themes from both books is that once we begin to lose our innocence or the believe in helping others in exchange for our own selfish preservation, the end result would only be chaos and total decimation in the end.

There is a reason why many concerned people are calling for climate change reforms, the non-hypocritical push for lesser nuclear weapons, the protection and preservation of the earth's environment, and most importantly the laying down of good morals and progressive ideas and positive legacies for the upcoming generations. Indeed, it is correct to point out that life is a continuum and will always be full of challenges from time to time. But does that mean the next thing to do is to succumb to being lower than the lowest animals in the face of disaster? Nope. These two books have consistently shown why hope is the progenitor of believing that life is precious. And with that hope sure comes the sense of true love, selfless sacrifice, the will to fight for justice and a good cause, and most importantly the will to preserve our sense of innocence. This would in turn guarantee that the morals to put in check our likely fall into insanity are consistently taught and passed on from generation to generation.

