


Valentina Markasović

 0009-0005-1899-3818

University of Osijek

## Media and Language as Political Instruments in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*

Original research article

[doi.org/10.17234/9789533792774.02](https://doi.org/10.17234/9789533792774.02)

### Abstract

In real life, as in fiction, political leaders use the media to disseminate their messages to the public. In other words, their speeches and statements are televised to reach the widest possible audience, and the messages they convey are linguistically modeled to suit their political goals. When writing about political discourse in his famous essay “Politics and the English Language” (1946), George Orwell highlights how language is manipulated and kept vague in order to achieve specific political goals. This paper uses Orwell’s observations to examine the political language in two works of Young Adult dystopian fiction—*The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010) by Suzanne Collins and the *Red Queen* series (2015–2018) by Victoria Aveyard. After explicating the use of media in dystopian literature, the paper elaborates on Orwell’s claims and delineates how the villains of these two series employ the same strategies and actively find ways to keep their subjects docile, confused, fearful, and divided. The analysis also shows that the series’ protagonists are not deceived by these lies. Instead, the protagonists recognize the false propaganda, question the regime’s inner workings, and, ultimately, rebel against the system through their own use of media and language.

**Keywords:** Media, language manipulation, George Orwell, Suzanne Collins, Victoria Aveyard

## 1. Introduction

At its core, dystopian fiction ponders upon the possible futures that await us: after some type of a cataclysmic event—nuclear destruction, a total war, or an ecological catastrophe—a totalitarian regime comes into power and either begins or continues to oppress given groups of people. While placing characters into an imagined future, dystopian novels have a great deal to say about the present as well. They often cast light on the happenings in the real world and comment on pressing issues such as racial, gender, economic, and social inequalities. Frequently, dystopias examine the regimes and how they wield power, including the means of subjugating and controlling the masses. One such theme is the political use of media and language, both of which are used to shape and govern the subjects.

Such a political use of media and language is prominent in the widely popular series by Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* trilogy—*Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). The novels focus on Katniss Everdeen and her fight against the oppressive government in Panem, her country (based on the United States of America). Its seat is the Capitol, and the people in power control the common people primarily by annually hosting the Hunger Games, in which twenty-four tributes fight to survive the battle royal. While *The Hunger Games* series has inspired heaps of scholarship, the second series this paper deals with, *Red Queen*, remains academically unexplored, which this article attempts to remedy. The series was written by the American author Victoria Aveyard and consists of *Red Queen* (2015), *Glass Sword* (2016), *King's Cage* (2017), *War Storm* (2018), along with a collection of novellas and additional material titled *Broken Throne*

(2019).<sup>1</sup> Set in North America in a not very far future, *Red Queen* introduces the reader to a world in which people are divided by the color of their blood to Reds or Silvers, whereby the Silvers have super-human powers and the Reds do not. The Silvers are also the ruling class and governors of the Kingdom of Norta. The protagonist is Mare Barrow, a poor Red girl who finds work at the royal palace and is entangled in politics and romance, navigating the court of the villainous Queen Elara and the relationships with two princes, Cal and Maven. Mare's Red blood coupled with Silver abilities makes her a so-called "newblood"; it shakes the foundation of the country based on the oppression of the powerless Reds and encourages a rebellion led by a group called the Scarlet Guard. In both series, the regimes rely largely on media and (televised) political speeches to help them uphold the rule in their respective countries.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the use of media and political language in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* to determine how the regimes take advantage of the media and how closely their use of language aligns with George Orwell's observations. To achieve this, the paper draws on Theodor Adorno's work about the repercussions of televised contents and their hidden messages, Michel Foucault's seminal works on ideology, power, and subjects, and George Orwell's 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language" to explain the use of political language in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*. The paper first contextualizes the use of media in (totalitarian) regimes, such as the ones in the countries of Panem and Norta. After discussing the examples of media manipulation in the two-novel series, the examples of linguistic manipulations, such as presenting lies as truths and using vague and confusing language to hide the true sentiment, will be addressed. Fi-

---

<sup>1</sup> In-text citations will shorten the titles as follows: *Hunger Games* (HG), *Catching Fire* (CF), and *Mockingjay* (M); *Red Queen* (RQ), *Glass Sword* (GS), *King's Cage* (KC), *War Storm* (WS), and *Broken Throne* (BT).

nally, the paper will also show that the young adult protagonists of these two series see through the political lies and work to deconstruct them.

## 2. What the Government Wants You to Think: The Use of Media in Dystopia

Media play a crucial role in upholding dystopian regimes. To reach a position of power and remain there, the regime develops an ideology which is then disseminated by the media. As Louis Althusser explains, the subjects are ruled by the “ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief” (170). Ideology is thus subtly disseminated via social practices, into which it is ingrained. When people consume media, they simultaneously internalize whatever ideology is integrated into specific media products and reproduce it. Ideology thus turns people into subjects or, in Foucauldian terms, docile bodies. A docile body “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” through disciplinary measures (Foucault, *Discipline* 136). According to Foucault, the authorities take “a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (*Discipline* 138). In this way, the ideological transformation of people into obedient subjects allows them to be used as the state desires, and the role of media in this process is uncontested.

While holding the monopoly on what is aired and what is not, the government has the ability to use the media as an extension of its own power to transfer government-approved messages. This can be done both overtly and subliminally. Writing about commercial culture, that is, popular media that people are exposed to and consume on a daily basis, Todd Gitlin notes that “it *relays* and *reproduces* and *processes*

and *packages* and *focuses* ideology that is constantly arising both from social elites and from active social groups and movements throughout the society” (253). In other words, the general public’s media consumption habits influence and shape the media themselves, prompting those in charge to produce more of the same popular content.

In discussing “media events,” John Fiske underlines that what is shown in the media “is not a mere representation of what happened, but [that] it has its own reality, which gathers up into itself the reality of the event that may or may not have preceded it” (2). Instead of being true, the media constructs the truth in accordance with the requirements set by those in charge of the program. This new reality is, therefore, frequently crafted so as to suit the needs of the regime. Similarly, Theodor Adorno observes that television shows often “aim at producing or at least reproducing the very smugness, intellectual passivity, and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds” (222). The media programs have a great potential for influencing people because the media messages may be crafted to easily embed themselves into the consumers’ subconscious. These “hidden message[s] may be more important than the overt since this hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be ‘looked through,’ will not be warded off by sales resistance, but is likely to sink into the spectator’s mind” (Adorno 221). Accordingly, the framing of a scene, the editing, the background music and sounds, backdrops, and other elements of the media which are being consumed may influence the viewer just as much, if not more, than the text being spoken.

Importantly, this effect is reinforced by people’s inability to look beyond the messages that are being instilled. Booker quotes Hannah Arendt’s observation that “[t]he ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction . . . and the distinction between true and false . . . no longer exist” (83). The goal of such a

regime is to create subjects who take everything at face value and forgo any deeper meaning.

The same processes of disseminating ideology through the media are observable in dystopian fiction. Societies presented in these texts are ruled by oppressive governments that often utilize the media to achieve their own ends: to present and reinforce desired narratives. That is, dystopian “protagonists are often manipulated and lied to in order to keep society running smoothly” (Basu et al. 4). While Gitlin has emphasized that in the real world, media products frequently depend on what the general public wants to see, in dystopian societies, it is only the powers-that-be that have a say in what is filmed and shown. In these societies, the majority of people do not have the power to express their opinions; instead, the social elites, more specifically, the government, decide everything about the media program, including what type of message and ideology it is spreading. Discussing *1984*, Booker observes that dystopian populations are under “a constant barrage of video propaganda” that establishes and perpetuates the desired ideology (78). In other words, the media programs in dystopian novels are specifically produced to buttress the rule of the oppressive government and manipulate people into obedience. These manipulations start from an early age, when children are first officially exposed to the teachings of the government—in schools. Education is a key building block of an obedient society, as is shown in the following analysis of the education and the consequent lack of media literacy and susceptibility to media manipulation in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss attends school, but her education is narrow in regard to both the subjects the school covers and the skills it develops. Don Latham and Jonathan M. Hollister observe that it is “unlikely that a Capitol-sanctioned curriculum would emphasize the development of information and media literacies, skills often associat-

ed with democracy and empowerment” (36). Instead, education is limited, and the content is strictly prescribed. Students are to blindly accept what they hear instead of being inquisitive and critical. Moreover, what they learn is also limited in terms of the scope of the material. As Katniss proclaims, “Somehow it all comes back to coal at school. Besides basic reading and maths, most of our instruction is coal-related. Except for the weekly lecture on the history of Panem. It’s mostly a lot of blather about what we owe the Capitol. I know there must be more than they’re telling us, an actual account of what happened during the rebellion” (*HG* 50). Clearly, the education in each district is oriented towards the trade in which the district is engaged (for District 12, that is coal mining). The narrowness of the subject, combined with only the selected bits of information about the history of their country that are approved by the government, creates docile children who grow up to be docile adults, thus preventing any thought of widespread rebellion. Information continues to be limited outside of the school system, as is apparent from the lack of knowledge characters display about events in other districts (*CF* 25), all of which precludes any drive for unification in the country. Likewise, in *Red Queen*, Mare claims she is “learning nothing in a classroom full of children” (*RQ* 1). She does not elaborate on the scope of education, but one can infer that they are taught only the basics needed for a life of labor. The masses are deliberately kept in the dark, with some portions of the population not even being literate. As Mare later on adds, “Reds are kept stupid, kept ignorant. It makes us weaker than we already are. My own parents can’t even read” (*KC* 201). This effectively stunts the development of intelligence, including the level of the people’s media literacy. In both cases, the government’s careful involvement in education ensures that their subjects are largely unable to rebel.

This practice allows the space for media programs whose goal is to subtly lull people into complacency. To begin with, the prevalence

of media as a mode of indoctrination and spreading of government-approved messages is clear. In *The Hunger Games*, the people are kept ignorant by prohibiting contact between districts and via Capitol's monopoly over the media (Henthorne Ch. 3). The Games are a mandatory viewing for all the citizens, and even a poor family like Katniss's has a TV, while public screens are also placed around town. Despite frequent power shortages, electricity is always available during the Hunger Games screenings as well as when the government is transmitting a message that is obligatory to watch (*HG* 20, 98). The media in *Red Queen* operate in the same way, with mandatory viewings and public video screens that ensure that the message is conveyed (*GS* 415, *BT* 185).

In both series, the media are not used merely to represent reality. On the contrary, they serve to create it, which is in agreement with what Foucault notes about the performative powers of discourses—that they create “the objects of which they speak” (*The Archaeology* 49). By creating a narrative, the desired story becomes the truth and, in the novels, this is evident in the careful editing of the media content that is arranged so as to propagate a specific notion. The state television of *The Hunger Games* has full authority over the story the government is choosing to present, and the Games are edited to suit the Capitol's desires (Wezner 153). An example is to be found in Peeta and Katniss's Victory Tour in District 11, when both of them veer away from their pre-written speeches. Peeta uses his time on air to donate to the families of their late co-tributes a portion of his and Katniss's winnings, and Katniss expresses her gratitude for all the help she got in the arena with simple yet striking words: “Thank you for your children. . . . And thank you all for the bread” (*CF* 75). However, the wider public never hears these speeches: “[N]eedless to say, the ones we gave in District 11 were edited out before the event was broadcast” (*CF* 88). This means that all that goes on air has been sanctioned by the Capitol



and that, at this point, Katniss has no power to stand against the rigid, impenetrable one-party system, which wants to remove all signs of dissent and free thinking from the media.

Interestingly, the Capitol also exhibits proficiency in media manipulation with the scenes that they *do* show but that *appear* unplanned. For instance, when Peeta warns the rebels about an imminent attack on District 13, the camera is suddenly knocked over, showing only a splatter of Peeta's blood on the tiles, and the viewers hear his screams (*M* 150). The purpose of the camera still rolling may be twofold. Firstly, as media can be used to "intimidate the oppressed through gruesome reminders of the repercussions that await any citizen who contemplates rebellion or escape" (Latham and Hollister 39), the sight underlines to the audience what happens to those who fight the system. Secondly, the footage urges Katniss to go save Peeta from the Capitol, which is in accordance with President Snow's actual plan. The President of Panem is, then, manipulating both the general public and the protagonist herself.

Yet, the government is not the only one manipulating the media to obtain favor. To win points with the viewers, Katniss and Peeta's team works to present them as star-crossed lovers. In this, they follow the idea of contemporary reality television shows that "structure interpersonal conflicts and friendships through serial narratives" (Kraszewski 220) with the aim of heightening drama and attracting viewers. When Katniss attempts to reject the act, her mentor points out: "Who cares? It's all a big show. It's all about how you're perceived" (*HG* 164). Katniss is repeatedly learning the lesson that the media is to be manipulated to generate a favorable image, not a true one. Ironically, her staged romance with Peeta "reiterates the spectacle of the games themselves, typifying all that is wrong with the dystopian regime" (Broad 119). That is, the romance develops alongside the Games, emphasizing the drama but also, importantly, drawing atten-

tion away from the real problem—the continuation of the annual child killing. Later on, President Snow demands that Katniss's relationship with Peeta continue even after the show has ended, which marks an attempt of the government to regain the authority over the narrative that is being presented.

In *Red Queen*, Mare's introduction to governmental deceit is initially not conducted with the help of the media. Once her abilities are discovered, she is painted with make-up to disguise her red blood, paraded around, and presented as a lost Silver noblewoman to hide the fact that the Reds can also have Silver abilities. All this is done in direct contact with the gathered nobles, with no media present (RQ 95–100). To keep up the pretense, however, Mare is instructed: “*From now until the end of your days, you must lie*” (RQ 96). The royal family's swift action to cover up the Red girl with Silver abilities, a person whom they rightfully fear may cause dissent and rebellion, and their reliance on lies foreshadow the use of media throughout the series. For instance, the royal family, led by Queen Elara, manipulates the media to present an accidental gas explosion as a targeted attack by the rebel Scarlet Guard on civilians. As Mare protests, “She's beating us without firing a shot or drawing a blade. Words are all she needs” (RQ 273). This highlights how much power the government has in adjusting events and presenting them in a new light.

Another striking example is found at the end of the first novel in the series. Mare, who has joined the rebellion and secretly worked against the Kingdom, is joined by Maven, the younger prince, who pretends he is sympathetic to the rebels. However, the end of the novel reveals his real objective—overthrowing his father, King Tiberias, and his older brother, Cal. Maven fabricates the tale about how Cal, conspiring with Mare, willingly killed the king, although he was forced to do so by Queen Elara's mind-controlling ability. Notably, Maven's narrative is supported by the media. Before the attempted

public execution of Mare and Cal, a security camera footage is shown to the gathered audience (*RQ* 361). The tapes show the murder of the king and, as they are playing with no sound, it is impossible to tell that Cal is being coerced. Additionally, all the moments of closeness between Cal and Mare are broadcast for all to see, making Maven's claim that they are conspirators sound true. Mare observes that "[t]he crowd gasps and murmurs, eating up the perfect lie. Even [her] own parents would have a hard time denying this" (*RQ* 361). Maven's plan is thus heavily supported by the media, both in capturing the footage that contributes to his narrative and in effectively distributing the story to the malleable minds of his subjugated subjects. Even so, Mare trusts that not everyone will fall for Maven's persuasive words: "*And some will believe. The fools. But others will not. Red and Silver, high and low, some will see the truth*" (*RQ* 353).

While the rebel cause eventually gains sympathizers from both the Reds and the Silvers, Maven's lies are shown to be effective. Even Mare, who has herself been subjected to having her image manipulated by the media, takes a long time to begin "read[ing] between the lines. To see the words left unsaid" (*KC* 201), showing how deeply the people are affected by the lack of development of their critical thinking and media literacy. When Mare's speeches are broadcast later on, while she is Maven's prisoner and forced to denounce the rebels, outsiders are shown to believe her words condemning the Reds: "'And [Mare] Barrow isn't a prisoner,' I add. I saw one of her broadcasts myself when I was far upriver, when the Red girl decried the Scarlet Guard and their agenda. She wore jewels and silk and spoke of the king's kindness and mercy. 'She joined up with the Nortan king willingly'" (*BT* 229). Clearly, the people are swayed into thinking what Maven wants them to think, and it takes a significant effort from Mare and the Scarlet Guard to undo the damage enabled by his utilization of the media.

As has been shown, powers-that-be have the ability to adjust the media content to their own liking, primarily by controlling the broadcasts and the editing process. Yet, it is important to note that the spoken messages may hide even more than what is obvious. The analysis will hence focus on the use of language in dystopian media, more specifically in political speeches.

### 3. “Make Lies Sound Truthful”: Language Manipulation in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*

Language is one of the platforms that totalitarian dystopian governments use to establish and reaffirm their ruling positions. It helps to spread ideology and create docile, Foucauldian subjects. Language in totalitarian regimes was one of Orwell’s great preoccupations. He “was particularly keen to recognize the importance to the totalitarian mind of the control of language” (Quinn x). He emphasizes this in 1984, *Animal Farm*, and, significantly, in his 1946 essay “Politics and the English Language.” According to Quinn, that particular essay “stands as a key document in the movement for ‘linguistic plainness,’ the effort to purge English prose of pretentiousness and cant” (265). Orwell is criticizing the trends he observes in the way English is spoken, specifically in formal, political circles. The essay is referring to the use of pretentious long words and verb, noun, conjunction, and prepositional constructions, as well as the passive voice for the sole purpose of “pad[ding] each sentence with extra syllables” (Orwell, “Politics” 130). For example, simple words are switched for phrases—*exhibit a tendency to* instead of *tend to*. By cramming in unnecessary words, a simple sentiment may be turned into an over-complex sentence, and the core meaning is thereby obscured. Often, words that are used are of foreign, Latin or Greek, origin, with the aim of sounding scientific. This particular strategy could easily be misused because it lends credibility to manipulated facts or outright lies. Finally, “stale

metaphors, similes and idioms,” according to Orwell, “save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague” (“Politics” 134). This means that neither the speaker nor the audience feel that they need to analyze these general, widely applicable phrases on a deeper level to gain insight into what they actually indicate. Instead, they are accepted at face value. Orwell concludes that “[p]olitical language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (“Politics” 139). This approach to language results in misinformation and manipulation that keep the people ignorant and pliant.

This line of thinking translates well into dystopia, in which governments do everything they can to control language and media messages. For example, in *Animal Farm*, the pigs gradually introduce changes into the initial commandments and manipulate others into thinking the original ones are still preserved and followed. In *1984*, in “probably the best known and most overt example of this kind of dystopian control of language” (Booker 80), language itself is modeled to suit the government’s needs. It is designed to shrink the people’s ability to express themselves, but it also works to prevent them from thinking. The novel propounds that language is inextricably intertwined with the people’s ability to think. As Booker observes, “Dystopian governments tend to focus on language not only because it is a potentially powerful tool with which to control and manipulate their subjects but also because language may harbor powerfully subversive energies” (81). Thus, to be able to control people, their language must be kept in check, too. When designing Newspeak, the government in *1984* approves of or deletes words, keeping the creativity to the minimum.<sup>2</sup> Deleting words from a language is effective because “if you

---

<sup>2</sup> Contradictorily, *1984* presents a language distinctly characterized by its reliance on the concrete, with all abstractions being excised from Newspeak (Spencer Kingsbury 112). At first glance, the regime here has accepted the essence of Orwell’s proposals

don't have the word available for an idea, you have trouble thinking of it. Or *for* it or *against* it—it isn't quite there" (Tibbetts 164). It seems as if removing signifiers of abstract concepts removes the ability to ponder upon the signified. If the people do not have the words to express their dissent or to think about it, their dissent effectively ceases to exist. These are some of the ways that the regimes in these novels "keep control of the people by systematically denying them a sense of reality" (Tibbetts 163). Many of them are evident in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*.

### 3.1. "I Could Set This World on Fire and Call It Rain": Manipulation and Vagueness of Speech in the Novels

As evidenced, the manipulation of media programs entails the Hunger Games being abundantly broadcast, along with everything preceding and following them—the reaping, the interviews, the victory tour, and so on. Likewise, *Red Queen* showcases how much the editing of video footage influences the final media product. Yet, the media offer another element that is under the oppressive government's control—the televised speeches. The villains in these novels manipulate the media by overtly lying, bending the truth, and using vague language, includ-

---

in "Politics and the English Language," rendering his propositions totalitarian. However, it could be said that the novel shows the other extreme of political language – the exaggerated plainness as opposed to the flowery style. The ideal is somewhere between these two sides of the spectrum. Speaking specifically about foreign words, Orwell himself hedges that his observation does not "imply in every case preferring the Saxon word to the Latin one, though it does imply using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one's meaning" (135). Understanding this in a more general sense, he is not in favor of blindly insisting on plainness but argues for a mindful use of language. Importantly, he underlines that words should be chosen with meaning in mind (138), highlighting that words must never obscure the meaning. From this, it is clear that Orwell's idea of direct language as presented in "Politics and the English Language" does not condone the language that removes the ability of people to think independently, as happens in *1984*. The plainness he proposes has instead been twisted into another tool of the regime.

ing clichés and foreign phrases, much in accordance with what Orwell has written about.

While the majority of media manipulation in *The Hunger Games* comes in the form of heavy editing of events and attached programs, the series also provides some examples of political speeches shown in the media. In the first two novels, the majority of the media content is in the form of entertainment—interviews and clips of the tributes. When Katniss and Peeta say something the Capitol disagrees with, they simply edit it out, and the population never sees it. In the final novel, during wartime, the media are used as a platform for the Capitol's endeavors to extinguish the rebellion: "It's always the same. War footage. Propaganda. Replaying the bombings of District 12. An ominous message from President Snow" (*M* 23). The repetitiveness instills the message that the government will ultimately prevail in the conflict with the rebels and serves to discourage the public from supporting the rebel cause. Before analyzing some of Snow's wartime speeches, it is useful to look at how the government has kept the people in check through the narrative about the Hunger Games.

The first novel opens with the introduction of the Games, and Katniss shows awareness of how they are coded "as a festivity, a sporting event" (*HG* 22). It is clear that the media is presenting the regime's version of reality. This approach is supposed to mollify the common people and make them comply with the annual bloodbath. Moreover, the Games serve as a reminder of what happens if someone dares to rebel. The government even goes a step further by trying to convince the people that they should be thankful. In line with Orwell, the language contributes to the "defence of the indefensible" (Orwell, "Politics" 136). The Capitol is trying to assure the people that the annual murders are somehow good for them: "It is both a time of repentance and a time for thanks" (*HG* 22), says the mayor of District 12 in a televised speech taking place at the Reaping. This message op-

erates on two levels. Firstly, the Games explicitly warn against any thought of rebellion. As Katniss explains, “Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. ‘Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you’” (*HG* 22). Simultaneously, the Games seem designed to indoctrinate the people into liking the oppressive system that they live in. They should be thankful for the gifts that the winning District receives throughout the following year and thankful for living in such a generous country. On top of that, if the message that they are guilty is drilled into the minds of people, it follows that they must be punished. Ultimately, the regime’s propaganda about the Games is also convincing the people that they should be thankful that they are graciously being punished only once a year, with only two dozen people being killed each year. Thus, by manipulating the media and holding speeches that consciously and subconsciously propagate devotion towards the government, the regime stays in power.

In *Red Queen*, the villains are notorious for bending the truth in their public speeches. As the novel progresses, it becomes obvious that “[t]he truth doesn’t matter. It only matters what the people believe” (*RQ* 343). In a distinctly Orwellian fashion, Maven aptly demonstrates this by saying: “The truth is what I make it. I could set this world on fire and call it rain” (*RQ* 353), echoing *1984*’s O’Brien and his statement “Whatever the Party holds to be truth, *is* truth” (261). Maven’s control of the media allows him to utter a blatant lie as the unvarnished truth. While fighting for a city called Corvium, the rebels note that “King Maven has been careful with the Corvium narrative. He paints everything here as terrorism, not rebellion. Anarchy. The work of a bloodthirsty, genocidal Scarlet Guard” (*KC* 218). Significantly, the word used is *narrative*, indicating that the version of the events he presents through media is an invented story, rather than a true account of the events. Yet, much like Maven’s manipulation of



media footage that he edits into a story he desires while twisting video evidence to support it, his speeches rely on truths that he inverts to fit his narrative. According to Mare, Maven is skilled at spinning “twisted half-truth . . . into propaganda” (KC 409). For example, when he captures her, Maven forces Mare to lie about how the Scarlet Guard is an evil organization fighting not for equality but for the supremacy of the Reds over newbloods and Silvers: “I was forced to serve them as a spy, to follow their orders, and to facilitate their infiltration of the king’s court” (KC 89). While Mare’s inner circle and the Scarlet Guard know that she was not forced into serving the Scarlet Guard, it is true that she acted as a spy. This speech works primarily to persuade the general public into siding with the regime, but it also contributes to sowing discord among other rebels, who would know she was a spy but not whether she acted out of her own will.

Finally, the villains in both *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* deliberately use vague language to sway the masses to their side. As Quinn puts it, such language “is fatally compromised by its preference for persuasion rather than truth” (267). The governing figures employ cliché phrases and purposefully veil what they mean by using a needlessly complicated register. Aimed at creating a reality they desire, these stock phrases are evident in examples from President Snow’s and Queen Elara’s speeches:

We almost went extinct fighting one another before. Now our numbers are even fewer. Our conditions more tenuous. (M 29)

Their goal is to harm innocent civilians, Silver and Red, to incite fear and hysteria. (RQ 134)

Terms such as *numbers are fewer* and *innocent civilians* are stock phrases that do not require a deeper inspection. As Orwell says, these “ready-made phrases . . . will construct your sentences for you—even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent” (“Politics” 135). Clearly, these regimes and the populace, presented as a whole, are painted as

victims under the attack of villainous rebels. The sentiments are accepted uncritically by the people who hear these messages—President Snow’s message is heard by all of Panem, while Queen Elara is here speaking to a gathering of nobility, but the effect is the same. The message of the regime’s innocence is being conveyed and ingrained.

Besides the stock phrases, the above examples also include “pretentious” words such as *tenuous* and *incite*. As has been said, according to Orwell, such words of foreign origin serve to further hide one’s meaning. The impact is heightened because the intended audience, in President Snow’s case at least, probably does not know the meanings of these words. Further speeches provide more examples of words whose meanings may be completely inaccessible to the vast majority of the people listening to the media messages:

Snow plows forward, saying that clearly the rebels are now attempting to disrupt the dissemination of information they find incriminating, but both truth and justice will reign. (*M* 149)

We are a kingdom on the brink, threatening to shatter under the weight of war and terrorism. It is my solemn duty to prevent this from happening, and save us from the horrors of whatever anarchy the Scarlet Guard wishes to instill. . . . My own brother corrupted by the insurrectionist forces. . . . I pledge my life to eradicating the Scarlet Guard, in any way possible. (*KC* 194-95)

In his televised speeches, President Snow is speaking of *dissemination* of *incriminating* information, whereas Maven vows to *eradicate* the *anarchist*, *insurrectionist* forces. Keeping in mind that most of the people in their countries get little to no education, these Latinate words probably do not call forth a corresponding image in the people’s minds. As Orwell observed, this is a strategic use of “phraseology [that] is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them” (“Politics” 136). For example, when Maven promises to eradicate the terrorists, he means he is going to kill every rebel that he can. The neat, distant *eradication* does not, to the uneducated masses, evoke im-

ages of bloodshed and executions. Yet, these words sound “important,” giving credibility to President Snow and Maven, and their goals of truth, justice, and the readiness to lay down their own lives to save the country.

The eradication of rebels is doubly important because the rebels are always presented as terrorists. Like other dystopian villains who work towards a degeneration of the human capacity to think and who achieve this through the “dissemination and subversion of language” (Spencer Kingsbury 108), the *Red Queen* regime makes sure to choose their words carefully:

*Terrorism, anarchy, bloodlust*, those are the words the broadcasts use when describing the Guard. (GS 164)

Not once does he say the word *rebel* or *revolution*. The Scarlet Guard are always terrorists. Always murderers. (KC 195)

Following Orwell, if the word does not appear or exist, the ability to think about the concept itself is also non-existent. Therefore, the word *terrorism* is pushing the word *revolution* to the margins, and out of existence, too. Choosing to present the rebels as terrorists not only turns them into villains but also prevents others from thinking about joining the cause. Maven is insisting on the connotations of violence and unprovoked attacks instead of calling these people rebels or revolutionaries. In this way, he is obscuring the idea of rebellion and preventing people from getting the idea that there is something to rebel against in the first place. Thus, the public sees the Scarlet Guard as terrorists threatening their lives instead of as revolutionaries trying to create a better world. As has already been said, the people are prone to accepting the images and messages at face value: “[Maven] knows how to use his appearance to his advantage. . . . It works on his country, the people spoon-fed his lies and painted-on innocence. Reds and Silvers outside his court lap up the tales. . . . A juicy story, a lovely piece of gossip for people to latch on to” (WS 49). The media appearances,

combined with the carefully constructed speeches, lend his rule and prosecution of the rebels a sense of justice, lend his rule and prosecution of the rebels a sense of justice and legality.

#### 4. "If We Burn, You Burn with Us": Recognition and Resistance through Media

Despite the efforts of villains in these novels and their skillful use of political language, the protagonists, Katniss and Mare, as well as their rebel groups, see through the lies and manipulations. Unlike in canonical dystopias, such as *Animal Farm* and *1984*, where the endings see the main characters resigned to the status quo, *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* allow their protagonists to become heroes. While dystopian novels warn about bleak futures, they also, especially those intended for a young adult audience, provide some hope for solving present and future problems, thus highlighting "the possibility of utopian change even in the darkest of circumstances" (Basu et al. 3). The reason for this lies in the nature of young adult literature. The aim of the young adult dystopian protagonist is "to assert their own identity by recognising and more or less successfully subverting the oppressive world around them" (Pataki Šumiga 107). Accordingly, young adult protagonists operating within a dystopian setting are able not only to recognize the truth of the regime but also to actively work to dismantle it. Seelinger Trites locates the tension in young adult novels in "discursive contrasts" and claims that the protagonists must learn "to discursively negotiate their place in the domination-repression chain of power" (52). In other words, the protagonists navigate the issues with, for example, the government and the church while learning the language of these institutions. For Katniss and Mare, this means learning and effectively using the language of the media.

To begin with, Katniss undergoes a significant change over the course of the trilogy. Initially, she is aware that the media cannot be trusted, which Latham and Hollister find peculiar (36) since the socie-

ty she lives in goes to great lengths to prevent people from developing critical thinking, as is evident from their education. However, she is not interested in uncovering the truth. She is preoccupied with the practicalities of surviving: “Whatever the truth is, I don’t see how it will help me get food on the table” (*HG* 51). Katniss’s situation proves how successful Panem’s regime is—the less time people have to spend at leisure and the fewer means to think critically they possess, the lower the chances of rebellion. Yet, the nature of the young adult dystopian protagonist is closely connected with rebellion, specifically, fighting against the “aspects of society that seem fundamental and unchangeable” (Fitzsimmons). This means that the protagonists may learn from the regime itself and take advantage of it. Writing about Katniss in particular, Kelly Welzner notes that her knowledge of the inner workings of the oppressive system, the “panopticons, disciplinary structures that use surveillance and spectacle for control and punishment, allows her to manipulate and exploit those very mechanisms” (148). Katniss is aware of the “micro surveillance” (Murray and Ouellette 5), which is ubiquitous in reality television, where the contestants are constantly filmed, even when they do not know it. Her knowledge of Panem’s use of media enables Katniss to craft her own image, making a point to control her facial expressions, general demeanor, and behavior in the arena (*HG* 42, 49, 220).

Initially, she manipulates the media image only to ensure her survival in the Games. By pandering to the Capitol and audiences’ wishes, Katniss establishes herself as the most popular contestant in the Games and a likely winner, thus escaping death in the arena. Later, Katniss’s use of media evolves into a rebellion against that very system. This is evident in the scene that is arguably the turning point for Katniss and her compliance with the world order (Welzner 155)—the death of her friend Rue. Rue is a young girl whose demise devastates Katniss and propels her on the path of standing up against the Capi-

tol: "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" (*HG* 286). Aware that the cameras must show the dead tributes being lifted from the Arena, Katniss arranges flowers around Rue, making it clear that the two girls were friends despite the Capitol trying to pit them against one another by placing them in the Hunger Games.

Rue's funeral flowers mark Katniss's rebellion, but also inspire a more widespread movement against the government. At this moment, Katniss is perhaps not aware of the revolutionary potential of her actions, but her act is clearly that of defiance. As in other young adult dystopias, a "small teenage rebellion becomes the spark for a larger societal rebellion that eventually brings down the ruling power" (Fitzsimmons). Following this, other contestants follow Katniss's lead and attempt to use the Capitol media against the Games and the system. During interviews before the next Hunger Games, the victors join hands in an overt show of unity in the face of Capitol, which wishes to see them slaughter each other (*CF* 311). In an attempt to prevent more damage, the cameras stop transmitting the feed, tacitly admitting defeat.

Over the course of the rest of the series, the people of Panem witness the propaganda war between the Capitol and District 13. That is, the war between the regime and the rebels is waged not only literally but also through propaganda, with "both sides realizing that control over this medium of communication means control over reality" (Wezner 153). While recognizing that all warring sides need to utilize such language during times of duress to pacify, encourage, or influence people, Orwell "was never very happy with the compromises with truth and the verbal trickery that he was sometimes asked to employ" while working for the BBC during the Second World War (Quinn 266). Similarly, Katniss, accepting the role of a figurehead for

the revolution, is not blinded by idealism and actually recognizes the same modes of media presentation in the rebel District 13 that marked the Capitol programs: “They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances—as if that doesn’t sound horribly familiar—and all I have to do is play my part” (*M* 12). Moreover, the entirety of the propaganda videos is “based on a fundamental lie . . . one that Katniss is aware of from the start: she is no rebel leader, even though she plays one for the cameras, Coin reserving all real power for herself” (Henthorne). The government of District 13 does not hesitate to use the same methods of distorting and airbrushing reality into an image that suits their own needs of creating a popular figure who will appeal to the masses and prompt them into a rebellion. To achieve this, Katniss is given lines to say in propaganda videos. Yet, when she tries to deliver the proscribed slogan “People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice” (*M* 80), she ultimately fails because of the stilted phrasing. It is unclear what the rebels want people to do, where this fight should take place, or what they should dare to do. The phrase *hungering for justice* is both a cliché and too vague because there is no clear objective or an outline of what this justice should look like. The issue is solved when “the stale line agonized over by the rebels’ team” is replaced by Katniss’s “rallying cry born of her outrage” (Eskin 187). Akin to Orwell’s recommendation to let “meaning choose the word, and not the other way about” (“Politics” 138), Katniss, in the spur of the moment and while at the front lines and not in a production studio, comes up with a genuinely moving motto: “You can torture us and bomb us and burn out districts to the ground, but do you see that? Fire is catching! And if we burn, you burn with us!” (*M* 119). Katniss is drawing on real experiences of torture and bombing, and, by pointing to the real battlefield behind her, she is pointing out the truth. Fire is indeed catching, and the metaphor for revolution

is not a veiled, obscure one, but a palpable one. Therefore, while both groups rely on similar modes of disseminating messages and on convincing people to join the cause, the general public is finally exposed to more than one narrative and is able to decide whom to side with. Moreover, Katniss's honesty and the simplicity of her pleas largely contribute to District 13 being able to win people over. Ultimately, it is Katniss's care for the rebel cause, as well as her clever use of media and language, that ignites the rebellion and continues to fan its flames.

As is the case with Katniss at the beginning of her story, "the protagonist's main concern is with the survival of her or his closest friends and family" (Fitzsimmons). Likewise, Mare's primary focus is to keep her family afloat financially and to somehow avoid being conscripted for the perpetual war with the Lakelands, Norta's neighboring country. When she picks the pocket of Cal, the Nortan prince, who then offers her a job at the palace (*RQ* 46), this measure is simultaneously a way out of financial ruin and out of conscription. Yet, Mare's time at the court swiftly reveals her powers as well as the operations of the rebel group. Her deal with the king ensures that her brothers will be brought back home from the frontlines and her best friend, Kilorn, will not be conscripted (*RQ* 88). Nonetheless, Mare recognizes that her personal struggles are only a fraction of the injustice suffered by the Reds, who are pointlessly dying in a war between Norta and the Lakelands that was engineered to keep the population numbers down and make the people obey. Mare is thus set on the course of rebellion, as well. Despite her new proximity to the Silvers, which allows her an insight into the truth and the extent of their manipulations, Mare is not yet free of the political manipulations. She believes Maven is on her side, but he then betrays her, as explained above. While inside the palace and serving as the spy for the Scarlet Guard, Mare's acts are limited to the acknowledgement of media lies. She joins the manipulation in so much that she goes along with the pretense of being a Silver



noble called Mareena, but she does not make use of the media other than that. Because of this, her ability to navigate media and politics does not seem to be as proficient as Katniss's. Still, it should be kept in mind that Mare's position is, at this point, vastly different from Katniss's, as her primary function is to be a spy. Had she overtly rebelled and disobeyed during media events, her status as a spy, as well as the whole rebellion, would have been imperiled. Only after Mare and Cal escape the execution, can she, as the first publicly acknowledged newblood in Norta, serve as a figurehead of the revolution, just like Katniss. From then on, there is no need to manipulate the language or the media, but rather, there is a need to tell the simple truth and expose Maven's side of the story as a carefully fabricated narrative. Unlike in *The Hunger Games*, the rebels' speeches in *Red Queen* do not use vague language that obscures the meaning. Instead, the speech written for Mare is straightforward and speaks directly to the viewers' experiences: "Unlike the Silver kings, we see no division between ourselves and other Reds. We will fight for you, and we will die for you, if it means a new world. Put down the ax, the shovel, the needle, the broom. Pick up the gun. Join us. Fight. Rise, Red as the dawn" (GS 400). The speech communicates its message in simple terms familiar to the people, unambiguously inviting them to fight, telling them how to do that and with what goal in mind. The slogan *Rise, red as the dawn* has been established early on during the rebellion, and it too conveys the clear message that the Red-blooded people should rise up in order for a new era (day) to begin. It could be argued that the language of the Scarlet Guard is so accessible because they differ from the government in District 13. In *The Hunger Games*, the latter is revealed to also be corrupt, and it makes sense that their way of using the media is closely aligned with the Capitol's mode of media manipulation. In contrast, in *Red Queen*, the Scarlet Guard keeps a moral high ground by

never turning evil, and their speeches exhibit their honesty and dedication to the cause.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis has shown that in both *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* the media and political speeches play major roles in upholding the ruling, oppressive regime. First of all, the media are a platform through which people are indoctrinated into the desired ideology. The effect is heightened when the media are completely controlled by the party in power, which is the case in these dystopian novels. Put simply, until the rebel groups appear, the media shows only the government-approved programs, designed and edited to perpetuate the status quo. Relating to media consumption, the education given to children in dystopias is under strict governmental rule, and historical fact is either obscured or manipulated. Furthermore, schooling does not encourage critical thinking, which means that most people in dystopias are not equipped to interpret media messages. The lack of the apparatus to read between the lines turns the vast majority into docile subjects. These subjects will uncritically consume the images represented in the media. These images include the narrative of the Hunger Games spectacle being a time of thanks, the feigned relationships, such as the one between Katniss and Peeta, an imaginary lost noblewoman played by a common Red girl, or the fabricated story of how a king was murdered by his firstborn. The people also accept what is said in political speeches and do not examine what the offered linguistic expression may be hiding. Both series show that language can be used as an extension of the government, which employs it to shape people's thoughts and prevent rebellion by keeping them misinformed and not allowing room for original and critical thinking. The governments, thus, model their language to suit their needs. In addition, both of these dystopian series reflect the postulates about manipulation and

vagueness of language as observed by George Orwell. The oppressive governments sometimes use language unfamiliar to the masses that is intended to keep them in the dark. Sometimes they fall back on cliché phrases, the repetition of which invites no further examination of what has been said.

Nevertheless, not everyone is lulled into complacency. The protagonists of *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* are capable of thinking for themselves, and they do not passively embrace “alternative facts” that are the product of language misuse and abuse. Katniss and Mare learn to navigate the media messages and question the regimes, which inevitably leads them to rebel against the system. To make their messages reach the wider populace, they usurp the very platform used by the oppressive system—the media. In coining their messages, people dedicated to the rebel cause strip the political language of its vagueness and complexity, reaching instead for the directness and simplicity hailed by Orwell. This use of language is ultimately shown to be far more effective, as the regimes are overthrown in favor of a new, honest, and fair order.

### Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. “How to Look at Television.” *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1954, pp. 213–35. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1209731>. Accessed 14 Feb. 2024.
- Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. (Notes towards an Investigation).” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 127–86.
- Aveyard, Victoria. *Broken Throne*. Orion Books, 2019.
- . *Glass Sword*. Orion Books, 2016.
- . *King’s Cage*. Orion Books, 2017.
- . *Red Queen*. Orion Books, 2015.
- . *War Storm*. Orion Books, 2018.

- Basu, Balaka, et al. Introduction. *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, edited by Basu et al., Routledge, 2013, pp. 1–15.
- Booker, M. Keith. *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Greenwood Press, 1994.
- Broad, Katherine R. “The Dandelion in the Spring’: Utopia as Romance in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* Trilogy.” *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, edited by Basu et al., Routledge, 2013, pp. 117–30.
- Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. 2009. Scholastic Children’s Books, 2011.
- . *The Hunger Games*. 2008. Scholastic Children’s Books, 2011.
- . *Mockingjay*. 2010. Scholastic Children’s Books, 2011.
- Eskin, Catherine R. “The PR Wars: *The Hunger Games* Trilogy and Shakespeare’s Second Henriad.” *Of Bread, Blood, and the Hunger Games*, edited by Mary Pharr and Lisa Clark, McFarland & Co., Publishers, 2012, pp. 179–89.
- Fiske, John. *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*. Revised Edition. U of Minnesota P, 1999.
- Fitzsimmons, Rebekah. “Exploring the Genre Conventions of the YA Dystopian Trilogy as Twenty-First-Century-Utopian Dreaming.” *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, edited by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson. E-book, UP of Mississippi, 2020.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, 1972.
- . *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1995.
- Gitlin, Todd. “Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment.” *Social Problems*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1979, pp. 251–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/800451>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.
- Henthorne, Tom. *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012.
- Kraszewski, Jon. “Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: Mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV’s *The Real World*.” *Reality TV: Remaking Televi-*

*sion Culture*, second edition, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, New York UP: 2009, pp. 205–22.

Latham, Don, and Jonathan M. Hollister. “The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the *Hunger Games* Trilogy.” *Children’s Literature in Education*, vol. 45, 2014, pp. 33–46, [link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-013-9200-0](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10583-013-9200-0). Accessed 27 Mar. 2023.

Murray, Susan, and Laurie Ouellette. Introduction. *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, second edition, edited by Murray and Ouellette, New York UP: 2009, pp. 1–20.

Orwell, George. 1984. Penguin Books, 2008.

—. “Politics and the English Language.” *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Volume IV: In Front of Your Nose, 1945–1950*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, Secker & Warburg, 1968, pp. 127–40.

Pataki Šumiga, Jelena. *The (Ab)Use of the Body in Contemporary Anglophone Dystopian Novel*. 2023. University of Osijek, PhD Dissertation.

Quinn, Edward. *Critical Companion to George Orwell: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. Facts On File, 2009.

Seelinger Trites, Roberta. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. U of Iowa P, 2000.

Spencer Kingsbury, Melinda. “Orwell’s Ideology of Style: From ‘Politics and the English Language’ to 1984.” *Journal of Kentucky Studies*, vol. 19, 2002, pp. 108–13.

Tibbetts, A. M. “What Did Orwell Think about the English Language?” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1978, pp. 162–66. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/357304](https://www.jstor.org/stable/357304). Accessed 27 Mar. 2023.

Wezner, Kelly. “‘Perhaps I Am Watching You Now’: Panem’s Panopticons.” *Of Bread, Blood, and the Hunger Games*, edited by Mary Pharr and Lisa Clark, McFarland & Co., Publishers, 2012, pp. 148–57.