Rebellion and Conflict in Dystopian Fiction

By Lachlan Knell

Dystopian fiction is a reflection of society, and is often a product of the time that it was written. They have developed from depressing statements about horrible futures with no hope for change into modern dystopian fiction which allows the development of the society and portray its ability to change, in a more natural development. The two dystopian fictions being discussed are, \*The Hunger Games\* released in 2013, directed by Gary Ross, and *Harrison Bergeron*, written by Kurt Vonnegut in 1961. Through the use of characterisation both of the selected media have explored acts of rebellion and conflict. They both position the reader to perceive the rebellious acts against the current government, or society, as positive things. However, they both explore the impacts of rebellious actions and how they can be misconstrued by a government, or poor rebellious icons in order to turn people against them. Both of the stories being discussed have used characterisation and symbolism to exemplify their points of view. Vonnegut has tried to convince people that Harrison's rebellion was doomed to fail because of his selfish nature. While Ross has shown the collateral damage that rebellious actions can cause, even with the best intentions.

The text *Harrison Bergeron*, by Kurt Vonnegut, uses the character of Harrison and his symbolism to display acts of rebellion. Harrison should be the perfect man, he is immensely powerful and extremely intelligent, however he is shown to be immature and impatient, causing Vonnegut to cause him to fail his rebellion against a Totalitarian regime. Vonnegut portrays this in this passage "He stamped his foot and the studio shook" (Kurt Vonnegut, 1961) Vonnegut uses this immature action to exemplify Harrison's character, as it represents him in a similar vein to the Greek gods, who are also widely portrayed as overgrown, very powerful children. Vonnegut's use of characterisation and symbolism positions the audience to view Harrison as unfit to rule and could potentially be even worse than the current government. This assists Vonnegut's beliefs, as he is trying to portray that power corrupts all, and that because Harrison is powerful he has become a terrible human being, emulating what he is seeking to destroy. Through the use of characterisation and symbolism, he is portraying that the power that Harrison would gain from his rebellion against the society would make him a worse ruler than the current government.

In the film the Hunger Games, directed by Gary Ross, the character of Katniss Everdeen is used as a symbol for the oppression of the Capitol and as a rebellious icon. Katniss has been portrayed as extremely rebellious and cold to people she doesn't know, especially earlier on the movie. However, Gary Ross has used the scene of Rue's death to change the audience's opinion on Katniss to make her more humane, with her covering her body in flowers and sending her off with a three finger salute. The flowers, which symbolise the youth and innocence of Rue, exemplify Katniss' selfless nature and how much she cares for people that are close to her. This positions the audience to feel sorrow for the death of Rue, and pride in Katniss for taking explicitly selfless actions, even when she could potentially be killed for staying in the same place after a fight. Ross has chosen to use quick cuts in order to show other characters reactions to her actions, with special emphasis focused on District 11, with the shots emphasising the panicked nature of the rebellion, alluding to people filming on smartphones during disasters. Through the use of Characterisation, symbolism and editing Ross has portrayed Katniss as a heroic symbol for resistance against the Capitol.

Through the use of Characterisation and symbolism both Kurt Vonnegut and Gary Ross have expressed their views on themes of rebellion and conflict. Kurt has shown his belief that power is an inherently corrupting force, and has tried to exemplify this with Harrison, by showcasing his selfish nature, and just wants to take control of the government. However, in contrast Katniss is selfless and heroic and is shown to be a force for good against the dystopian government. In conclusion the ability for Dystopian fiction to comment on the issues present in our society is extremely popular and it helps to explain these problems when looked at after taking a step back and re-examining.