ASPECTS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN MADDADDAM AND THE HUNGER GAMES: FOOD AND SHELTER

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to offer a comparative analysis of the societies described by Margaret Atwood and Suzanne Collins in their recently published critical utopian trilogies – MaddAddam and The Hunger Games– focusing especially of two intriguing aspects: food and shelter. Both of them can be perceived as essential conditions of survival as well as social indicators being shaped by but also shaping people's motivation, personality and status.

Keywords: economic discrepancy, food, shelter, social hierarchies, social indicators

The critical utopian trilogies, *MaddAddam* by Margaret Atwood (2003, 2009, 2013) and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008, 2009, 2013) open the way to an in depth exploration of two near future American societies and their basic aspects which shape and reshape people's personality, motivation and daily activity and which in turn, are also determined by individual choices and convictions as well as social status and financial resources. Two such aspects are food and shelter and this article focuses especially on them because they can simultaneously be perceived as essential conditions of survival and a good physical and psychological development but also as mutually connected indicators of the human life.

According to Abraham H Maslow, food and shelter represent two basic needs which can be positioned at the bottom of the pyramid (2). The first one is directly responsible of survival; total lack of food and hydration leading to death within a few days. The second one ensures the survival of an individual though it is more related to the idea of protection and comfort. Moreover, both food and shelter are influenced by society and recreate people's existence. In this sense, William Whit claims that food transforms "biological hunger into social indicators of status" (142) and functions as a mechanism which marks interpersonal and group relations as well as stratification and social class. Likewise, shelter is not far from this statement either, because the houses people live in, reflect their life style, preoccupations and believes and contour social stratification.

In *MaddAddam*, most people's diet, just like in contemporary American society, is based on fast food and genetically modified aliments which are created in the Compounds (the rich areas) and aggressively promoted by corporations. Cooking is considered old fashioned, time consuming, and an useless activity. Instead people microwave their meals, pour some hot water over their instant "noodle soup with vegetables [and] chicken flavor" or simply try some tube shrimp paste, tube cheese, ditto mayo and "crackers in a plastic snap-top" (Atwood, *OC* 270) . Likewise, they can order in fish sticks, ("20 per cent real fish"), WyzeBurgers, (made out of "meat cultured on stretchy racks"), or the usual pizza, fries and Coke (Atwood *YF* 214).

As natural calamities and diseases have destroyed agricultural areas and traditional farms, real meat is very expensive. New solutions had to be invented in order to feed the overgrowing population. Thus, in many cases, animal protein is replaced by soy. This explains why Jimmy and

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Crake, Ren and others, usually have "giant soy-sausage dogs", "SoyOBoyburgers" or even "CrustaeSoy" (Atwood, *OC* 70). There are also "little plastic tubs of SoYummie Ice Cream, a HelthWyzer Own Brand, in chocolate soy, mango soy, and roasted dandelion green-tea soy" (Atwood, *OC* 171). Kids can also enjoy "a big slab of coconut-style layer cake" or "Three-Fruit Joltbars", with "the familiar taste of banana oil and sweetened varnish", giving them energy (Atwood, *OC* 70, 276). Obviously, everything is an unhealthy "reproduction" of the food products which used to exist years ago but consumers accept to eat them because they preserve old tastes. Food does not ensure only their survival but also offers them a psychological comfort; as if things have remained the same.

Transformations, however, do not stop here. Sandwiches and pies usually contain pork coming from the Pigoons (pigs with human DNA) raised by the OrganInc Farms. These creatures are used for organ harvesting but after they die, their carcasses enter public consumption. Likewise, ChickieNobs are made out of breast and drumsticks coming from tube fed, "bulblike" chickens invented at the Watson-Crick Institute (Atwood, *OC* 200). They look horrifying as they have no brains, eyes or beaks but a mouth where nutriments are dumped in. Such chickens need no growth hormones as they are genetically programed to develop faster and become chicken breasts in just two weeks. Most people eat them and even get accustomed to their tasteless, expressing no worry about the ways in which such meat is produced or what it could do to their own bodies.

Coffee is also affected. A HelthWyzer subsidiary develops a new bean which is resistant to weevils and can be grown on huge plantations and be automatically harvested. This discovery reduces the businesses in the field, condemns coffee collectors to extreme poverty, triggers riots and massacres. As in the case of the pork pies and ChickieNobs, clients accept to drink Happicuppa coffee or iced Happicuppuchinos, without showing any concern regarding their quality, the health complications they might cause or the socio-economic issues already created. In Atwood's trilogy as well as in real life, people seem heedless regarding the things they eat or drink. Although they are told about the ways in which certain food products are created and their consequences most of them continue to consume them.

Financial power and social stratification have, nevertheless, a significant impact on food consumption. Top people afford natural and sophisticated dishes. The lunch Crake and Jimmy have together at a five-star Rejoov restaurant exemplifies this every well. The former takes the kanga-lamb, ("a new Australian splice that combined the placid character and high-protein yield of the sheep with the kangaroo's resistance to disease and absence of methane-producing, ozone-destroying flatulence") while the latter orders the raisin stuffed capon (Atwood, *OC* 290). Accustomed with the flavour of the ChickieNobs, this dish had for Jimmy a wild taste. Likewise, the two of them have real oysters, and "real Japanese beef, rare as diamonds", costing a fortune and drink real Campari and real sodas or smoking cocktails (Atwood, *OC* 287). Rich gourmets can also have dinner at the Rarity, a restaurant specialized in serving endangered-species. This happens far from the public eyes and is especially reserved for key club members but made huge profits and as Toby knows "one bottle of tiger-bone wine alone was worth a neckful of diamonds" (Atwood *YF* 29).

Privileged students from Watson-Crick Institute are offered "real" food which tastes "fantastic" especially in comparison with that from Martha Graham Academy, which is "beige" and looks like "rakunk shit" (Atwood, *OC* 184). They eat real shrimps instead of the CrustaeSoy and real chicken, though Jimmy suspects them to be ChickieNobs. The cheese seems real though

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it is actually a vegetable, and zucchinis are a newly created species. Chocolate, coffee and beer are also tasty and heavy and real.

Real food, lacking genetic mutations, hormones, preservatives and artificial flavours, is indeed something special and expensive. Ordinary Compounders can buy such products only on special occasions and such events create a lot of enthusiastic remarks. Jimmy remembers that at his father's wedding with Ramona, the bride announced that the cake was "All Real Ingredients" and that there were "Lots of cackling over the fresh eggs" (Atwood, *OC* 174). People are nostalgic about such ingredients and some voices would always say: "Remember hamburger chains, always real beef, remember hot-dog stands?" (Atwood, *OC* 61). Food preserves and reactivates their memories of a long gone world, of a better time.

Poor residents living in the Pleeblands are on the other hand, encouraged to consume fast-food and cheap bio-engineered products in large quantities. As long as they do not get sick fast, they are the perfect clients of the corporations which produce and aggressively promote such food. Most of the penniless Pleebs have really limited food choices and usually a SecretBurger, a Coke or a beer and a Joltbar save their day. SecretBurgers, however, compared to WyzeBurgers, represent the worst type of food someone could have. Their ingredients are shrouded in mystery and no one really knows or wants to know what animal protein is in them. Basically they can contain anything from "cat fur" or "a mouse tail" to a "human finger-nail" (Atwood *YF* 31). Atwood provides a sharp critique of the fast-food industry and the worldwide chains of restaurants such as McDonald's and KFC, but even more than that, she makes problems much more visible. Although it may seem hilarious that customers do find such things inside their burgers and news programs constantly talk about such incidents as well the danger caused by fast food.

Poverty is not an excuse for people to rely on fast food and other cheap low quality products. Atwood shows very clearly that in many cases, food is a matter of personal choice. Some people living in the rural areas, just like Toby and her parents would do some shooting and have some delicious deer or squirrel stew. Likewise, various vegetarian cults such as the God's Gardeners militate for a healthy diet and an environmental friendly life, planting fruit and vegetables on the rooftops of abandoned buildings and doing a lot of recycling. The members of this cult think that "meat of any kind was obscene" and that consuming it is like killing their Souls or eating their own relatives (this was not far from reality if we take into account SecretBurgers) (Atwood *YF* 60). In order to protect nature and their bodies from unhealthy food, Gardeners try to "spare [their] fellow Creatures" and avoid eating "anything with a face". Instead, their daily meals includ: beans and other vegetables from the Garden, lentil pancakes,"Pilar's Pickled Mushroom Medley", dry soybits or vegy patty, slices of soybread topped with the elderberries and the honey, considered to be a delicacy, (Atwood *YF* 87). Some of the gardeners also eat pigeon's eggs, though this is quite a controversial thing. Eggs are "potential Creatures, but they weren't Creatures yet: a nut was not a Tree" (Atwood *YF* 132). Due to this way of thinking Gardeners could eat them but them before "joining its protein to [theirs]", and thank mother pigeon for her gift (Atwood *YF* 132). As Gardeners prepare for the "waterless flood" (an apocalypse) they teach their children survival skills which include hunting and eating their pray (Atwood *YF* 4). Zeb shows them how to find "survival food in times of pressing need" and make them eat small chunks of meat during his Predator- Prey Relationship demonstrations, though this seems a repulsive thing to do for most of them (Atwood *YF* 123). In short, for Gardeners, food is not only endowed with a pseudo-religious significance but is valued for its role in survival. It does not have to be a product meant to feed people and maintain them alive so that they could

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buy more products and maintain society functional but it has to ensure their life balance and help them evolve from a spiritual point of view. For them bodies and souls are connected and treating the first well, means saving the souls as well and vice-versa.

In *The Hunger Games*, privileged people enjoy a great variety of foods that they usually take for granted. Unlike Compounders who deeply appreciate and spend a lot of money on 'real' food (which have no mutations, preservatives or chemical flavours), or on rarities (meat coming from endangered species), Capitol people have the chance to eat natural delicious food all the time. Large menus including "a thick carrot soup, green salad, lamb chops and mashed potatoes, cheese and fruit, a chocolate cake" or "mushroom soup, bitter greens with tomatoes the size of peas, rare roast beef sliced as thin as paper, noodles in a green sauce, cheese served with sweet blue grapes" never seem to miss (Collins *HG* 42, 74). In the eyes of an impoverished girl who has starved for most of her life, such as Katniss, everything looks delightful and extravagant but also revolting. She cannot stop thinking that one meal like that "would keep my family going for a week" and that drinking a simple glass of orange juice, for instance, would be considered a great event by her family (Collins *HG* 53).

Capitol people do not have to work or make a special effort in order to get all this food. Cinna, for instance, just pushes a button on the side of the table and lunch comes up from the bottom of the table being automatically assembled. As usual this looks delightful and extremely tasty: "chicken and chunks of oranges cooked in a creamy sauce laid on a bed of pearly white grain, tiny green peas and onions, rolls shaped like flowers, and for dessert, a pudding the color of honey" (Collins *HG* 63).Yet, this makes Katniss realize how expensive and difficult to purchase all these things are. Back in the districts, such a meal requires days of hunting, gathering and trading, and its final result would be just "a poor substitution for the Capitol version" (Collins *HG* 63). Indeed, Capitol people can afford any gastronomic extravagance and unlike their counterparts from the Compounds, they do not eat all of these dishes behind closed doors. Instead they broadcast their lavish banquets and reveal their culinary frenzy in an ostentatiously way.

Everything you can think of, and things you have never dreamed of, lie in wait. Whole roasted cows and pigs and goats still turning on spits. Huge platters of fowl stuffed with savory fruits and nuts. Ocean creatures drizzled in sauces or begging to be dipped in spicy concoctions. Countless cheeses, breads, vegetables, sweets, waterfalls of wine, and streams of spirits that flicker with flames…[The] first table, … has twenty or so soups, … creamy pumpkin brew[s] sprinkled with slivered nuts and tiny black seeds… clear green broth[s] tasting like springtime, and … frothy pink soup[s] dotted with raspberries. (Collins CF 75)

In this case, food has nothing to do with the satisfaction of a basic need of survival or that of a personal pleasure. It becomes a symbol of power. Capitol residents have such abundant and exotic parties because they can simply afford them. Moreover, when they cannot eat anymore they apply an old Roman practice and drink a special liquid that causes them to vomit. Wasting food is also seen a sign of status power. Rich people do it because they can always afford buying or eating more. Such banquets make Capitol people seem a sort of god-like figures and give them a great advantage over the starving population from the districts; the later becoming more and more aware of their bitter situation.

Impoverished citizens such as those living in District 12 are usually deprived of food and subjected to famine. Starvation though it is never officially admitted, makes its victims every day: orphans or children from larger families, workers injured in the mine accidents, or helpless old people. As Katniss unveils: "you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in

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the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body" (Collins *HG* 26).

Starvation comes as a great punishment, yet, even here, in the districts, people have a different position regarding food; a position which is always deeply influenced by the social status they have. The small merchant class that caters to officials and Peacekeepers, afford being a little choosier. The mayor usually buys strawberries (a delicatessen), the baker trades for squirrels while the Head Peacekeeper loves turkey and closes an eye when it comes to illegal hunting. As always, privileged categories can take advantage of their position and afford better food and conditions. On the other hand, the poor from Seam, such as Katniss and her friend Gale, have to risk their lives in order to bring food home. They cross the electrified wall and go hunting, fishing and gathering eatable roots and fruit in middle of the woods. This way they can make sure that their families will not suffer from hunger. Moreover, such people cannot afford being choosy or waste anything. Therefore, ingenious cooks such as Greasy Sae try to use all the ingredients they have in order to produce something eatable. A wild dog soup called beef or a "winter specialty" containing "mice meat, pig entrails, and tree bark" have long ceased disgusting people (Collins *HG* 43).

Social discrepancy regarding food is also exposed by the tesserae system. This requires poor children to subscribe their names in order to get "a meager year's supply of grain and oil" and consequently increase their chances to be selected for the annual Hunger Games, a horrifying reality show (Collins *HG* 11). As previously mentioned in subchapter six, those with a better financial situation are not forced to ask for extra tesserae and therefore their chances to participate in the Hunger Games are slim. In this case food or actually the lack of it becomes a means of exploitation and terror.

It is also important to underline that *MaddAddam* and *The Hunger Games* do not focus only on the way in which food is affected by class and economic power but also on the way in which it influences interpersonal relations. In this sense, those who are able to provide for their families feel superior and even patronize the members who depend on them. Adwood's trilogy depicts a dispute between a Compound husband and his wife which emphasizes this type of attitude. The man says that it is him who is paying and putting the food on the table and that the woman is "hardly in a position to take the high ground" and judge him (Atwood, *OC* 55). This type of attitude says a lot about traditional gender roles and the fact that as long as husbands act as providers and implicitly as the heads of the family, women have to obey them, having no authority. In Collis's novels, Katniss, however, acts very man-like, hunting and bringing fresh meat to her mother and sister. In a way she replaces her father but it is actually her skills and courage which help her become a provider for her family. This shows that the interaction between those who bring the food home and those who depend on them is not that much a gender issue but more a problem of power superiority.

Both *MaddAddam* and *The Hunger Games* prove that food satisfies not only a basic need of survival but also translates based on economic discrepancy, social hierarchies, and provider roles. They sound a warning signal regarding the danger of fast food, aliments with genetic mutations, preservatives and chemical flavours and food wasted underlying the fact privileged categories will always have better meals and conditions while the less fortunate ones will face worse problems and suffer from starvation. Food can be an illusory comfort, a recollection of a better time, a symbol of wealth and power while the lack of it can conduct to animalism, horror and death. Nevertheless, the trilogies also underline the fact that eating is a personal choice. Despite the aggressive promotion of fast food or the schizoid politics leading to famine, people

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can still choose whether to obey or do everything possible to improve their food customs even it this means growing their own vegetables or going hunting. Keeping in mind Adam One's teachings that "hunger is a powerful reorganizer of the conscience", people should try to overcome their weaknesses, improve their diets and ensure their survival (Atwood *YF* 31).

Along with food, having a shelter represents another basic need which motivates people and influences their personality. A roof over their heads, a bed to sleep in, a place to take refuge in and consider it home offers people stability, and the chance to evolve and focus on other priorities. On the other hand, being homeless or a refugee cripples them from an emotional point of view, making them long for a place of their own.

The type of shelter, just like that of food is deeply influenced by the socio-economic status people have. As previously shown, privileged classes can have more and better conditions while the inferior ones have less or even nothing. This situation is also reflected in the way in which classes acknowledge and express their needs. The poor will be satisfied with less while the rich will always need more. *MaddAddam* and *The Hunger Games* explore people's need for a shelter and the ways in this influences their lives. The distorted societies they depict do not allow characters to own their houses, to keep them for the rest of their lives and to pass them to their children or to regard them as their homes. Thus, Compound and Capitol citizens are equal to those living in the plebeians or in the districts. Owning a house or anything else is just an illusion. Characters can lose everything at any time. They can be easily forced to move and readjust.

The Compounds and the Capitol are technologically advanced and luxurious. The residents of these cities enjoy a comfortable and extravagant life but everything around them is artificial and constraining. Compound houses are big, confortable and built in "fake" Georgian, Tudor, Italian Renaissance, or French provincial styles, with indoor or outdoor swimming pools, gyms, tennis courts. Inside, all furniture is usually referred to as "*reproduction*"; a word that Jimmy, the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, understood only later in his life (Atwood 24). Each item is just a replica of an original supposed to exist somewhere or that has once existed. Just like the food products Compound people eat, which are nothing more but artificial substitutes of some long gone aliments, the elements forming their private spaces are simple copies lacking inner value. Such reproductions are meant to preserve the illusion of stability, and convince enthusiastic Compounders that things are kept safe and unchanged. Eventually, everything turns out to be harmful and unreliable and people get depressed, alienated.

Corporations own everything and people are forced to move frequently depending on their working places. Jimmy and his family as well as many other Componders have to do this thing. When they stop representing any interest for their employers they lose their houses and income and are forced to change places. This is exactly what happens to Ren and her mother after Frank the head of the family is kidnapped and his formal corporation does not bother to pay for his redemption. In this case, Ren cannot afford finishing her studies at Martha Graham Academy and ends up working as a prostitute, while her mother, Lucerne, finds herself a nice old gentleman who can support her financially. Moreover, if Compounders rebel against the system and leak important information, they lose everything including their lives, becoming "cat food" or SecretBurgers (Atwood, *OC* 180).

The role of a shelter is not only to offer protection but also stability; to become a home. This may however be very problematic. Owning nothing and moving systematically, Compounders find it difficult to personalize an assigned house, to get attached to or invest it with emotional value. Jimmy remembers that when he was just a baby his mother made efforts to transform their Cape Cod house from one of the Modules into a nice home for their family. There

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were personal objects all around the place, such as pictures of him, with dates and everything. Such attempts cease to take place after the family move into the Compounds and his mother finds everything around is artificial and depressing. Jimmy and his father try to stay as far away from their new house as possible. Just like Jimmy, Ren has to leave her early childhood home. In this case however, there is a small difference. Ren was born in the HelthWyzer Compound and forced by her mother to grow up in the Pleeblands among the God's Gardeners. Being very young she cannot really remember her life in the Compound but she imagines that her "real house" is back there, that her pink bedroom really belonged to her and that her parents' routine is what stability means (Atwood *YF* 63). Coming back to the HelthWyzer Compound she discovers that "nothing felt right" and that the house and everything around was "faux marble", and "reproduction antique furniture, and the carpets". In other words "none of it seemed real" (Atwood *YF* 207). Her father, Frank, keeps her room unchanged but she herself is not the same little girl anymore. Thus, furniture and curtains look shrunken and too young for her. The plush animals she used to play with have dead glass eyes (Atwood *YF* 207). Her old home is definitely not as she has expected it to be. The general atmosphere depresses her and makes her feel like a shadow.

Compound houses do not only feel strange but induce a feeling of estrangement as they are studded with microphones and visited by spies; the CorpSeCorps infiltrate themselves in these private spaces, making them dangerous and constraining. The purpose of a shelter is not only to satisfy a physiological need but also to offer protection and refuge; to be– as Bachelard puts it– a "shell" where the tenant can retreat (8). The place has to resonate with the tenant's personality. Otherwise he/she becomes vulnerable and depressed.

Unlike the Compounders, Pleebs own their homes but their documents value nothing. Toby, for instance, remembers her previous life in the semi-country where her parents had a white frame house with ten acres of trees around it, populated by squirrels, deer and the first green rabbits. Their life there was hard but definitely much more pleasant and the family had a special bond. However, as corporations extend their power and developers make pressures to buy the land, Toby's father is forced to give up their home and sell it for almost nothing. The loss of this place is a great blow for the whole family which slowly begins to crumble. This is a usual thing in the Pleeblands . Although they own their homes, people cannot quietly enjoy them and feel safe as they can easily lose them because of real estate interests, work shortage and bank debts as well as various natural calamities such as floods or droughts. From this perspective, all citizens, no matter whether they live in the Compounds or in the Pleeblands become very vulnerable.

In *The Hunger Games*, there is not too much information regarding the connection Capitol citizens have with their homes or the ways in which they satisfy their need for protection and stability. It is however implied that all these extravagant people can enjoy their magnificent buildings with plush furniture and all sort of sophisticated appliances, as long as they remain placid and obey their dictator. From this point of view Capitol people seem very similar to Compounders. It is curious, however, that even President Snow does not seem to own his luxurious mansion with a garden with white roses. Splendid in any aspect the gardens offer Snow the status of a god. Yet, he can live there and enjoy all wealth and glory as long as he is the state head of Panem. By the end of the trilogy the Presidential Palace becomes his prison as rebels invade and Alma Coin takes power.

At the opposite pole, in the districts, people face a similar situation because they can have a shelter over their heads only if the officials assign them one. According to the law, a newly wedded couple is usually given a place to stay and form a family. If one of them dies, as

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happened to Katniss's father, the rest of the family can still keep the house. Children, on the other hand, cannot inherit the houses of their parents. If the members of the family rebel against the state they lose everything they including their lives. Likewise, their houses can be easily destroyed by the bombardiers of the Capitol. Old images of burned districts from the Dark Days enforce people's vulnerability.

It is important to underline that unlike previous categories who find it difficult to transform their houses into homes and get attached to them, people in the districts, such as Katniss, can do that. After winning the Hunger Games, Katniss's status changes. She is assigned a larger new house in the Victor's Village and moves there together with her family. However, she is the only one who goes back and continues to use the squat little place where she was raised. As she confesses:

To me, it's my real home. … I allow myself a few minutes to sit in the kitchen.… I mourn my old life here. We barely scraped by, but I knew where I fit in, I knew what my place was in the tightly interwoven fabric that was our life. I wish I could go back to it because, in retrospect, it seems so secure compared with now, when I am so rich and so famous and so hated by the authorities in the Capitol. (Collins *CF* 4)

Her childhood house is as Bachelard argues, her "first cosmos", her "group of organic habits"(viii). It is full of memories, objects that belonged to her beloved father, things that remind her of a less complicated stage of her life. Although life there was not easy as she was struggling to survive, and help her mother and little sister, this place offers her a sort of psychological comfort that she cannot retrieve in her new house despite of its "warm glow of life," lit windows, smoking chimneys and brightly coloured decorations (Collins *CF* 11). Though it is cold and empty now, Katniss still considers it her home and frequently goes back to in an attempt to rediscover herself, to recover from the traumatic events she had to go through during the Hunger Games, and to come to peace with her new condition. Her old home does not help her transcend to a state of reverie as Bachelard would say (11), but to regain her vital energy and reconnect to reality.

People's need for a shelter is translated in both trilogies as a need for security and stability. Having no place that they could really own, characters do not feel entirely fulfilled or comfortable. The houses privileged classes live in are glamorous but cannot be transformed into real homes and cannot offer the inner peace these people are looking for. They are artificial, fake and end up by constraining their tenants. The impoverished classes who are used to owning less have a stronger bond with the places they live in. Moreover if they get to keep them longer as it happens with Katniss, they can retreat within these spaces, find old memories, recover and reconstruct their personalities.

Along the novels written by Margaret Atwood and Suzanne Collins, readers are invited to meditate upon food and shelter and rediscover their important roles in human survival, physical and psychological as well as social development; roles which are so often taken for granted. The authors draw a warning signal regarding the artificiality of the contemporary society, making reference to fast-food, lab-created products or flavours, and architectural or furniture reproductions. Nowadays, more than never, people should become aware of the fact that food and shelter can reflect emotional involvement and provide memories, body and mental health and that the proper management of these elements relies of individual choices more than on economic or social status.

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