

CLASSICAL ELEMENTS and MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES in *THE HUNGER GAMES*

© Sophie Mills, University of North Carolina, Asheville.

ABSTRACT

Suzanne Collins' trilogy, *The Hunger Games* has been one of the great publishing phenomena in Young Adult literature in the last five years and the trilogy has also piqued the interest of professional scholars, resulting in some interesting critical readings of Collins' work. Although articles routinely mention the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and the Roman gladiatorial games as one of the multiple influences on the world imagined by Collins in her work, no article has yet focused exclusively on these classical and mythological motifs or has discussed them in any great depth.

This article explores the multiple resonances of mythological paradigms (the Theseus myth being but one of these) and of gladiatorial practices in the first novel of the trilogy, *The Hunger Games*. I argue that although the classical and mythological references are not the only influences shaping the book (the most dominant being that of the conventions of reality television), when examined carefully, they are actually more important and numerous than critics have realised. In popular culture, Rome is a paradigm of a society that "fell", so that it is a negative role model and potential warning for current western society. Collins' combination of motifs of the modern and ancient worlds in the imagined dystopian future of *The Hunger Games* is thus one more manifestation of modern anxieties about the fragility of our society. For teachers of the ancient world, however, who always need new ways to present classical subjects afresh for their students, this book may offer useful ways into the ancient world.