

The Genre Merge of Fiction and Dystopian Science Fiction: Suzanne Collins The Hunger Games and Catching Fire

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ABSTRACT

By examining elements of science fiction, utopian literature, and dystopian settings, this article sets out to explore whether *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* can be well categorized as suggested by Peter Fitting in which he used Darko Suvin conclusion in the article “Utopia, dystopia and science fiction “ gathered by Gregory Claeys in the book *The Cambridge Companion of Utopian Literature* (2010) as wither it stands upon a certain genres or shifts towards a merge between genres. This article investigates the genre classification of Suzanne Collins’ famous series, *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, it starts by exploring the definitions of science fiction and fantastic literature, using Todorov’s book *Introduction la literature fantastique* attempting to draw a framework-specific genre such as Si-fi, fantastic, etc. Science fiction offers speculative but conceivable ideas, fantastic literature usually presents the impossible, hence this article dives into the utopian literature genre, as *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* novels present a clear divide between the utopian Capitol and the dystopian districts. It explains the characteristics of utopia, such as an idealized society, clarity of imagination, political influence, and reaction to the present, are considered since it seems problematic to define the genres on their own. Since they overlap between different commodities this creates the problem mentioned above as to how to categorize *The Hanger Games* and *Catching Fire*. By using several academic perspectives but mainly Todorov’s and Fitting’s explanation this results in the examination of the interaction between science fiction and utopian literature. Proposing that utopia may be a sub-genre of science fiction. It searches into the characteristics of science fiction, emphasizing its basis in factual research and technological possibilities. Thus, science fiction contrasts with fantasy literature, highlighting the balance between reality and fantasy within the former. Science fiction authors, such as Suzanne Collins, draw inspiration from contemporary issues to imagine future outcomes, and *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* are a prime example of this practice.

Keywords: *literature, Todorov, English, Collions, Genre Classification, Article*

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Öz

Bu makale, bilimkurgu, ütöpik edebiyat ve distopik ortam unsurlarını inceleyerek, Peter Fitting'in Darko Suvin'in *Utopia, dystopia and science fiction* makalesinde vardığı sonucu kullandığı ve Gregory Claeys'in *The Cambridge Companion of Utopian Literature* (2010) kitabında bir araya getirdiği gibi, *Hunger Games* ve *Catching the Fire*'ın belirli bir tür üzerinde mi durduğu yoksa türler arasında bir birleşmeye doğru mu kaydığı şeklinde uygun bir şekilde sınıflandırılıp sınıflandırılmayacağını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Suzanne Collins'in ünlü serisi *Hunger Games* ve *Catching the Fire*'ın tür sınıflandırmasını inceleyen bu makale, Todorov'un *Introduction la Literature Fantastique* kitabını kullanarak bilimkurgu ve fantastik edebiyat tanımlarını araştırmakla başlıyor ve bilimkurgu, fantastik vb. gibi türlere özgü bir çerçeve çizmeye çalışıyor. Bilimkurgu spekülâtif ama akla yatkın fikirler sunarken fantastik edebiyat genellikle imkânsız sunar, dolayısıyla bu makale *Hunger Games* ve *Catching the Fire* romanlarının ütöpik Capitol ile distopik mntıklar arasında net bir ayırım sunması nedeniyle ütöpik edebiyat türüne ayırmaktadır. Ütopyanın idealize edilmiş bir toplum, hayal gücünün netliği, siyasi etki ve günümüze tepki gibi özellikleri, türleri kendi başlarına tanımlamak sorunlu görüldüğü için ele alınmaktadır. Farklı elementler aralarında örtüşükleri için bu, yukarıda bahsedilen *Hunger Games* ve *Catching the Fire* 'ın nasıl kategorize edileceği sorununu ortaya çıkartmaktadır. Todorov ve Fitting'in açıklamaları başta olmak üzere çeşitli akademik perspektifler kullanılarak bilimkurgu ve ütöpik edebiyat arasındaki etkileşim incelenmiştir. Ütopyanın bilimkurgunun bir alt türü olabileceğini öne sürer. Bilim kurgunun özelliklerini araştırır, olgusal araştırmalara ve teknolojik olanaklara dayandığını vurgular. Böylece bilimkurgu, fantezi edebiyatı ile karşıtlık oluşturmakta ve ilkinde gerçeklik ve fantezi arasındaki dengeyi vurgulamaktadır. Suzanne Collins gibi bilim kurgu yazarları, gelecekteki sonuçları hayal etmek için çağdaş konulardan ilham alırlar ve *Hunger Games* ve *Catching the Fire* bu uygulamanın en iyi örnekleridir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edebiyat, Todorov, İngilizce, Collins, Tür Sınıflandırması, Makale

The science fiction genre is not the only genre one can classify *The Hunger Games and Catching Fire* given the fact that Suzanne Collins is well known for her genre merge within her literary work and although there is the Si-fi elements we cannot ignore the Dystopian elements as well and question the genres and its relationship with one another. In order to explore genres first by providing an analysis of the genres and the novels starting with Si-Fi or science fiction which can be classified as part of the fantastic literature genre, the literary work reflects reality or an era of society alongside fiction. Because of the common properties most would answer that Si-Fi stands under fantastic literature and both are connected, but it is still a case of discussion. In order to understand and conclude if it is a genre or a sub-genre, we need to define science fiction and fantastic literature along with providing an analysis for other sub-genres such as the dystopian genre as well. Todorov explains the fantastic as a mode in *Introduction la littérature fantastique* (1973) as a hesitation experienced by a human who is only familiar with the natural laws of nature but then is faced with a supernatural event. This leads us to the Todorov scale, however, alongside the Todorov explanation we cannot disregard the sub-genres for the Si-Fi itself if we ever proved that there is a genre on it, one of the possible sub- genres is Dystopian genre. Which drives our attention towards the bass of both genres and to question which one is demonstrated in *The Hunger Games and Catching Fire*.

Tzvetan Todorov demonstrated the fantastic definition in *Introduction la littérature fantastique* (1973), he explained the elements which creates the fantastic itself the uncanny and the marvelous as bordering on another and even overlapping in certain instances. Furthermore, these two elements and elements in between are related to the reader's hesitation period. Todorov explains the period between the uncanny (real) and the marvelous (fantastic) as the hesitation period which is created by the perception of the reader and sometimes the protagonist is included within this period of uncertainty. The text shifts between the Todorov scale as long as it is not determined by the readers imagination and wither it crosses the rules of nature law. Todorov argues that the fantastic requires three completed conditions, the text must allow the reader to consider the world in which the characters created as a living world then the reader should experience the theme of questioning (the hesitation). In other words, not being sure what is the reality of the text since it drafts between the real and fantastic and finally, the reader must decide on which side the text maintains.

Todorov then provided a closer definition between the two main elements mentioned earlier, he structured the Todorov scale which consists of four elements: primarily The uncanny which means the real, in other words, the real refers to the known world nature of rules, the kind of rules that are understandable and normal to the humankind and then follows the fantastic- uncanny. This refers to the explained fantastic, this means that during the hesitation period, the reader stops being unable to explain but once the fantastic element can be explained it shifts to be fantastic – uncanny. The shift occurs which leads to the fantastic being drifting to the supernatural theme and tends to be closer to the pure marvelous is called the fantastic – marvelous. Finally, when it's no longer questioned wither its real or completely fantastic and the themes tend to be pure supernatural is called the marvelous according to Todorov in *Introduction la literature fantastique* (1973).

Science fiction was classified by several categories, some academics analyzed it as a sub-genre and some called it a genre on its own but, according to Edward James and Farah Mendelsohn they defined and analyzed the science fiction as part of literature that is less than genre. In *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003), along with their explanation of the Fantasy literature *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012) it is argued that the plot elements which is an expected and the readers will be expecting what happens next rather than how it happens. In order for Si-fi to be recognized by the reader as a part of the genre, the reader can identify the main theme of the book, relying on the explanation presented in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003). For example when reading one book which is a romance, and it will explain the plot under the scoop of the romantic genre, since it is known what a romantic story should be like. Hence, it will be easily identified but that is not always the case in the Si-Fi genre. Another element that changes in the Si-fi work is the metaphors. The meaning becomes literal Fantastic Literature which suggests that what was basically an imaginative idea and most likely to be impossible. For example the flying brooms in J.K Rolling Harry Potter series. The invention of a world that is also just a matter of any imaginary thought whereas Si- fi hints towards the fantasy of science but it is only a matter of research, time and technology that may lead to making that fantasy reality. On the other hand Si-fi is not the impossible, but rather a possibility. In relation to the discussion Walter Scott presented in his essay “On the supernatural in fictitious Composition

Mary Shelley ‘s *Frankenstein*” in the book *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003) stressing on the fantastic characteristics should be rare, brief, indistinct yet philosophical reasoning and moral truth. Science mainly means facts research and the ability of finding answers to these ideas in real life facts which lead us to technological fantasy, this theory was first connected with the utopian fantasy. The suggestion of the futuristic science development and if it is a matter of just a probability or a possibility. In early ages the utopian fantasies took scientific and technological evolution in consideration, yet the role was minor, and the center was focusing on social, political fantasy. As the first writer who suggested such aspect, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003) includes Edgar Poe who wrote in his earliest poem “Sonnet - to Science” about the universe naturality through astronomical view which we can say that was the first look on the main idea of Si-Fi and the future inventions. *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley can also be considered as a great example of human nature and scientific development but into a new example *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*.

So, what is the genre for Suzanne Collins novels *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* are written by Suzanne Collins in 2008, is a dystopian novel which is a sub-genre of science fiction portrays an oppressive society or other social control mechanisms. The story revolves around the narrators struggle for survival but playing a death game created by the government which concludes with the death of all the contributors except one character. Katniss, the protagonist, symbolizes hope and rebellion when she refuses to play by the setup rules, therefore this action reflects the theme of power. The novel according to Burke in her article “Reaping Environmental Justice through Compassion in *The Hunger Games*” (2015) explains the young adult literary movement, its characterized by its emphasis highly important issues written in a form of fiction that is suitable for young adult. Suzanne Collins wrote *The Hunger Games* projecting food and hunger issue by creating metaphors such as the protagonist Katniss which seems to be a metaphor, her way of survival and her district situation along with the main theme of the novel which is the games but within that Burke explores the genre it itself. In order to explore the meaning of some metaphors provided in both novels, one of the first metaphors used in *The Hunger Games* is the fence. The fence that separates the district and its horror life from the woods which are filled with life and greens and animals that

Katniss used to go and hunt trying to stay alive. This metaphor made the speculative fiction nature become obvious therefore, the uncanny between fiction and reality appeared. Collins states that she “strongly believe[s]” that the novel is in fact a speculative fiction genre even although we can see dystopian genre as well, but the question hunts the reads during the whole novel until the end.

From a different perspective Jen Scott Curwood adds a seminar discussing the relationship between the novel and its readers. He explains in his article “The Hunger Games”: Literature, Literacy, and Online Affinity Spaces” (2013) the effect that *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* created among students and fan-fiction lovers. Curwood starts by explaining the reason behind young adults love towards science fiction which includes their connection towards the disbelief feeling and imaging a new different world also because science fiction provokes the readers reality but containing social conditions and personal struggles bonds the relationship between the text and the reader. Hence, allows young adults to own a personal meaningful contact with literature by advertising the development of comprehension abilities.

Curwood seminar consists of demonstrating several students action and reaction to the two novels *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* , their explanation to the themes and metaphors along with the meaning of the used technology within *The Hanger Games*. The technological items and themes allowed students to own a new idea and relate their social reality with the novel, the televised games in *The Hunger Games* shed light on the food issue around the world in a technological form. This means while reading the novel we can understand that the districts were behind in terms of the technological improvements. Therefore , the Capitol which is the power center that includes all the luxury lifestyle and advancements only installs the huge projectors in every district just so they can see the games happening and watch their children trying to survive so they can win the games in the end and have a better life. The way of including technology in the novel within a society that knows nothing about it and in addition to the development of technology even our real world didn’t reach yet creates the science fiction genre element.

As a part of exploring Young Adult fiction which contains a combination of elements similar to the elements found in the adult genre, Philip Stoner

offers an analysis of the characters in *The Hunger Games and Catching Fire* under the study of YA fiction. Stoner's article "Dystopian Literature: Evolution of Dystopian Literature from We to Dystopian Literature:

Evolution of Dystopian Literature from We to the Hunger Games the Hunger Games" (2017) demonstrates the "Self-Exploration" element, he suggests that this element contributes to creating YA fiction. The scene relayed in the book shows Katniss, as part of her trying to find her own identity such as the scene when she was projected to the sponsors of the games in *The Hunger Games*. This specific part includes all contributors to show their surviving skills and try to convince the sponsors that they can be the winner there for sponsors might help them during the games in a form of aid or food. Katniss continuously felt annoyed and disgusted by the need for her to be done in order to find a sponsor hence, this part projects the personal identity struggles in society that Collins tries to show.

The article "The Genre of Science Fiction" (1969) by Virginia F. Berit defines science fiction as a "Speculative Fiction" influenced by Robert A. Heinlein definition, which means whatever the results seem to be as part of the fantasy they are not and are facts rather than fiction. It is hard to form a very clear definition on Si-fi as the story elements like events and sittings might be realistic, but also never to forget the fancy and fanciful which refers to the fantastic events within the nature border so reality within unreality. *The Hanger Games and Catching Fire* includes the element of Dystopian Society which means the setting of Panem, a postapocalyptic North America, is a hallmark of dystopian science fiction. It portrays a future society that is oppressive, divided into districts, and ruled by the Capitol which is defined by many definitions that Berit divided it to, prophetic, descriptive of social impacts of science, set in a novel wither it was imaginative, possible fantastic and situation.

The main concept of Si- fi is the question of what if? That includes the future and the past as time travelers and the possibility to go back and change the past to create a better future, so it is in fact an imaginative idea and only remains an idea in real life. What really separates Si-fi literature from fantasy literature seems to be the structure of Si-fi which was a balance between the reality and fantasy the plot might be imaginative, on the other hand sittings and time most likely be holding the fact element. On the other hand, in fantasy literature the overall is based on the fanciful and requires no realistic factor. Berit states that authors such as Suzanne

Collins take their inspiration from knowledge and their understating of the present time and use fiction to include the future of the past, in *The Hunger Games and Catching Fire* Collins imagined the future outcome for the present issues.

This necessitates us to take a closer glance into Utopian literature aiming to investigate and understand what genre we can classify *The Hunger Games and Catching Fire* Gregory Claeys the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010) book gathered several articles discussing the Utopian literature starting with Fatima Vieira's article "The Concept of Utopia". Vieira suggests four characteristics to define the idea of utopia. Claeys demonstrates four characteristics, initiating the imagined society first, meaning the good place which is a society created by a subjective ideology hence, the place which is filled with nothing but good and positivity and any part that is the opposite of that should be cut off. In example to that in *The Hunger Games and Catching Fire*, the Capitol is considered as the ideological place with a perfect community and great power far from the districts reality which is nothing but poorness and slavery therefore, the creation of the games comes in. The second characteristic is the literary structure, in which the imagination element has been purified meaning that many texts including the utopian perspective have been cut out. The third characteristic the definition that takes into account only the political utopian which the function of utopia that takes into consideration the influence on the readers. Finally, the definition in which utopia is seen as a reaction towards a certain life and the desire for a better one and as result to these characteristics Vieira concludes that we can define utopia as a matter of reaction towards a specific present in an imaginative frame.

The element of imagination within utopian literature and how it connects with the Si-fi genre, taking into account the technological development as demonstrated above but adding to it the display of political and imaginative societies reflecting a hint of reality which creates the relationship between Si-fi genre and utopia genre. Claeys then presents in his selective articles collection the article by Peter Fitting "Utopia, dystopia and science fiction", he refers to a definition by Darko Suvin in which he states that science fiction is "literature of cognitive estrangement" and suggests that Si-fi is in fact a genre since themes such as space travel and science development are the highlight of the genre. Suvin then demonstrates two sections to prose literature which are "Naturalistic" and "Estranged" and he states:

“SF is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (p. 49).

Suvin describes utopia as a sub-genre of Si-fi, he adds that Science fiction is not just an instrument to predict what the future might be, but it is a form of literary work to present our world using an effective distorting scoop. Following this idea and the possibility of imagining a future world utopian fiction was born because if we can form of writing where we can imagine a future advanced world why not imagine a better future developed society using our real present pain. Fiction was born. When it is possibility to imagine a future advanced world and form a writing where that world is a possibility. Therefore, the relationship between science fiction and utopian fiction emerged and also that is why Suvin suggests that utopian genre is a sub-genre to science fiction genre.

Caroline E. Jones provides analysis to *The Hunger Games Trilogy* characters and what do symbolize for in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, her article “Changing the World: Faces of Rebellion in Suzanne Collins’s Hunger Games Trilogy” (2016). She starts by explaining the complexity of Panem society and the definition to the word Panem means a piece or bit of bread in Latin language. Looking at the entertainment act which the Capitol forces calls it The hunger games each narrative and action in the games refer to its connection with the meaning of the dystopian sub-genre. For example the modes of hunger which Collins suggests two kinds of that triggers Katniss the main protagonist in the first novel *The Hunger Games*, first her “Hunger of Loss” as Jones refers to which reflects Katniss lack of father figure in her life, she is hungry for the person whom offered hope of a better life and added joyfulness element. She misses the ability to learn from him about nature and its creatures and also preventing her family from falling apart. The second hunger Katniss experience is the actual physical hunger, since her father’s death and her mother’s depression food was something extremely hard to find and therefore she realizes that she needs to find ways to keep her sister, her mother and herself alive and that’s when she starts the hunting process and improving her surviving skill which is shooting arrows.

Jones includes the main narrator’s analysis labeling characters with specific names as previously mentioned including Gale, Katniss friend which Jones

referred to Gale as “The Frustrated Rebel Hero”. The frustrated rebel-hero refers to the characters who show the heroes actions with words rather than actions, such heroes want to act because they understand the injustices of the system, but they also know that they are in the system to deep to the point they can’t act without suffering the consequences which they can’t undo in the future. Gale is presented through the lens of Katniss, she understands the system and its cruel unfairness yet she believes that she can’t do anything about it but then comes Gale who knows the possibilities of change and therefor, demonstrates the hope for Katniss as an example to that in *Catching Fire* which is the second novel in the Trilogy. After the rebellious have already been made he turns to Katniss on her: “That’s why we have to join the fight! ... What about the other families, Katniss? The ones who can’t run away? [...] It can’t be about just saving us anymore. Not if the rebellion’s begun” (p. 100) .

Caroline E. Jones also included a character analysis of Peeta, one of the protagonist, in which she suggests that he has his own way of rejecting the Capitol and that makes him “The Pacific Resistor”. The Pacific Resistor suggests the hope for the main character as a mode of resistance but in his own form and shape, which although he never wanted to be a part of the games when he found himself in it choose to play passed on his own terms and rather than killing the other contributors he choose to survive rather than harm, and duo to his self-integrity Peeta created his own philosophy to resist the Game makers without losing his integrity. The privileges in his life were the reasons which motivated him to see hope and finding hope which differentiates him from Katniss. He tries to explain this to Katniss the night before the Games begins in the first novel *The Hunger Games*:

“I don’t want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I’m not [... though] when the time comes, I’m sure I’ll kill just like everybody else. I can’t go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to ... show the Capitol they don’t own me. That I’m more than just a piece in their Games.” “But you’re not,” I say. “None of us are. That’s how the Games work.” “Okay, but within that framework, there’s still you, there’s still me,” he insists. “Don’t you see?” (141142).

Jones concludes her article by explaining that although The Hunger Games Trilogy includes a dystopic structure it still contains the idea of hope, it starts with the hate that Katniss holds for her society and her rejection towards moving forward as well as being a mother at some point she ends up being the opposite of that. The hope that did not exist at the beginning

was there for her. These novels *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* shows the meaning of power and its effect towards oppression and it entreats modern fantasy literature taking to consideration that it is the base for creating the literature of social unrest and such fiction also made the modern dystopian young adult fiction possible.

Conclusion

Along this article several analyses have been demonstrated in aims to highlight and to investigate the genre of *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* and despite the many elements which suggests that it is dystopian fiction and other elements prove otherwise which are presented within the articles discussed in the article such as the happy ending and hope in some scene for a better life. To separates dystopian fiction from science fiction can be tricky at some times and to state its completely YA fiction can also be misleading and so, looking into the structure the Suzanna Collins built her famous novels and looking into the metaphors within Katniss actions also including the themes and the plot itself which starts with the battle of needing to free and able to live a life better than provided until the end that concludes the real better life which is the self -exploring and identity discovery. *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* lands under the Dystopian Science Fiction genre, also referring to the si-fi as a genre on its one and the dystopian genre is in fact a sub-genre for Si-Fi genre. Thus, putting in consideration the Tzvetan Todorov scale that according to the definition it provides all fiction goes under the fantastic literature shaping a form of a hierarchy, later on the Trilogy lands on the uncanny definition because of its elements which were real and understandable and that what also created the genre which we concluded.

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