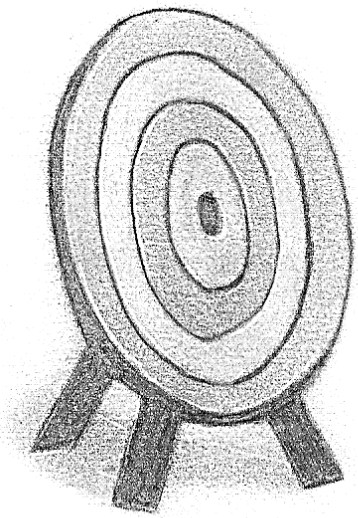
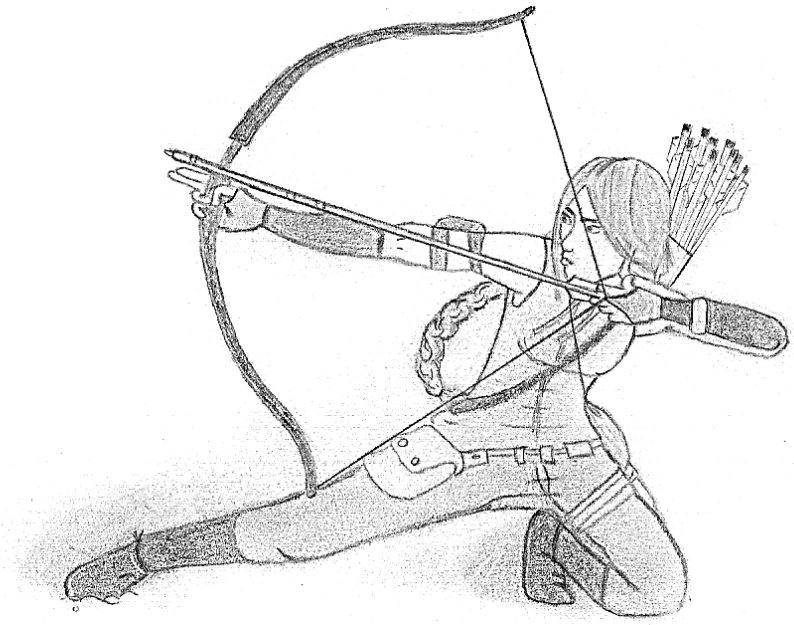
“Girl on Fire”

The Role of Female Protagonists and the Romance Genre in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction





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Introduction

Throughout the years, dystopian fiction has become a well-known and widely-read genre. Simultaneously, the division of the world into typically masculine or feminine matters has changed as well. This same idea applies to literary genres. Science fiction has been dominated by male characters and writers, for instance in books such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* or in television series like *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*. Nevertheless, the more contemporary Young Adult dystopian novels, as a subgenre of science fiction, have seen an emergence of other heroic protagonists, namely girls. These girls, such as Tris in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series or Katniss Everdeen in Suzanne Collin's *Hunger Games* trilogy, are unexpectedly able to exert agency in a genre that initially mainly had male protagonists, and in which female characters were merely supporting those real heroes. In fact, the modern female protagonists use their feminine traits to drastically change the society they live in. While these capacities were usually not given to young women in dominant patriarchal societies, nowadays it has been made possible by the increasing presence of conventions of the romance genre in science fiction, and its subgenre, dystopian fiction. The mixture of the genre-specific conventions results in a change of subject matter of dystopian fiction, but more importantly in a change in role division, for the reason that both genres have a different focus as well, as the focus of science fiction is scientific and technical developments and societal problems, while the focus of romance fiction is romantic behaviour, emotions, and relationships. The presence of love and romance is essentially there in dystopian fiction as a way to create another aspect of the characters' identities, resulting in the female characters becoming more central. 'Romance' is a genre which feminists claim suppresses women by implying that they need a man to be successful. Therefore, the striking paradox of my argument is that it is precisely the romance genre that provides the female characters with a more central and stronger role, and thus with more agency and influence. In

other words, a genre that markets strong women who fight against patriarchal dominance and a corrupt dystopian society needs conventions of the romance genre, a genre criticised by feminists, to centralise the female characters and emphasise their importance.

This thesis will analyse the portrayal of the female protagonist in a popular Young Adult dystopian fiction series, namely Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010), and I will examine how the genres of science fiction and romance have merged together, and what the consequences of this have been. To ensure a thorough analysis that is supported by relevant and substantiating theories, this thesis is divided into two parts. The first part contains thorough analyses of the romance genre, the science fiction genre, and the latter's subgenre, dystopian fiction. The focus is on these genres, for the reason that the text in question fuses these genres, and one of the objectives of this thesis is to place Young Adult dystopian fiction between two seemingly conflicting genres, namely science fiction and romance, in order to show that the characteristics of these two genres have combined. By examining these genres individually, I shall eventually demonstrate to what extent these genres merged together, and what the consequences have been in terms of role division, autonomy, and the establishment of authority.

The second part of my thesis explores the portrayal of the female protagonist in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, to research the extent to which the romance genre and strong female characters have invaded this series, and what the effects have been on the storyline. In other words, the second part will demonstrate how romance in *The Hunger Games* has resulted in the centralisation of a strong female character, Katniss Everdeen, who exerts agency and who is able to use her femininity in order to rebel against and change the government of Panem. This part consists of three chapters, each containing an analysis of one book of the trilogy. The three analyses will demonstrate how the female protagonist in the series has obtained more agency by embracing her own femininity, which has been made

possible by the addition of important characteristics of the romance genre, and how this change in agency, created by the combination of the two genres, enables her to bring down the corrupt government, and create a better place for all Panem's citizens.

Before thoroughly analysing the previously mentioned components of this thesis, it is necessary to briefly discuss genre in general. A genre is category in literature, film, or other forms of entertainment, which is formed by common conventions. According to Martin Gray, "up until the end of the eighteenth century genres were regarded as relatively fixed entities," that were categorised according to similar characteristics (127). In an ever-changing world, however, literary genres are subject to change, which means that the conventions that form genres can change over time and that either a literary genre will change accordingly, or that a certain genre is discontinued while another one is invented. In this thesis, the word 'genre' will be used to refer to "a particular type of literary work that is characterised by a particular form, style, or purpose" (*OED*). 'Genre' will therefore be used as an umbrella term that includes all the subgenres of that particular genre as well. The two genres that are discussed in this thesis are the romance genre and the science fiction genre, which will be used to demonstrate how one of the major subgenres of science fiction, dystopian fiction, is placed between the two genres in order to create strong and independent young female protagonists.

I have chosen to focus on Young Adult fiction, because of my interest in the various books that are marketed under this denominator. In addition, I wanted to focus on books that appeal to teenagers, because I am planning to work with them. Furthermore, I already researched the representation of women in Victorian fiction, and this time I wanted to research female roles in contemporary fiction. The fact that books are classified as Young Adult is crucial, because plot, setting, and characters of the genre are often changed to appeal to younger readers. So whereas romances usually focus on adult women and their everyday actions that eventually lead to romance, Young Adult romances change these tropes and focus

on younger women who, for instance, go to high school and who experience different adventures. The reason that YA books have younger protagonists than those books marketed without the YA label is that the adolescent readers apparently prefer to identify with these characters and their actions, and they can learn from what they do. Contemporary Young Adult fiction has seen an emergence of strong female characters who are able to exert agency and thus become the heroines. Young Adult fiction include fictitious works that have been written for and marketed to young adults and adolescents, though a research conducted in 2012 has concluded that "fully 55% of buyers of works that publishers designate for kids aged 12 to 17 – known as YA books – are 18 or older," with no fixed maximum age. ("New Study"). This age-range is closer to the intention of the authors of Young Adult fiction, who "often define the genre as literature as traditionally written for ages ranging from sixteen years up to the age of twenty-five," which means that books that have protagonists older than twenty-five cannot be regarded as Young Adult (Cart). In reality, however, each work of literature can be read by men and women of various ages, despite the intended audience. Additionally, not only dystopian fiction has a Young Adult variant. In fact, practically all genres can target young adults, though some genres are more appropriate or popular than others. Dystopian fiction is therefore quite suitable for young adults, because this type of fiction focuses on the challenges that the youth face in society. Authors of dystopian fiction aggravate this theme in their works, which is one of the reasons why this subgenre is so appealing to the intended audience.

As this thesis focuses on the portrayal of female characters in dystopian fiction, it is important to establish what is meant by a 'strong female protagonist'. Scholars argue that a strong female protagonist is able to live life, face difficulties, and be successful without the help of a male character or without emulating masculine power. This implies that the help of another female character is allowed, though this diminishes the autonomy as well. The

acquirement of female agency and autonomy, however, is quite a novelty. In literary history, "the great works on the hero […] all begin with the assumption that the hero is male. This prevailing bias has given the impression that in literature and life, heroism is a male phenomenon" (Pearson and Pope *Hero* vii). In fact, Pearson and Pope argue that before the twenty-first and the second half of the twentieth century:

> The journey of the upper-class white male – a socially, politically, and economically powerful subgroup of the human race – is identified as the generic type for the normal human condition; and other members of society – racial minorities, the poor, and women – are seen as secondary characters, important only as obstacles, aids, or rewards in his journey. (Pearson and Pope, *Portraits*, 4)

It is true, however, that women have had great roles in literature, but despite the fact that "women are and have been heroic, [...] the culture has often been unable to recognize female heroism" (Pearson and Pope, *Hero,* vii). For the reason that western society is still primarily a patriarchal society, a female hero is still more oppressed and weaker than a male hero, because "although the experience of male and female heroes is the same on the archetypal level, it differs in important particulars because of the roles and opportunities afforded each sex in western society" (Pearson and Pope viii). Only in recent years have women been able to increase their agency, which is why strong female characters have become increasingly more important in literature as well. The fact that female characters have been able to be more autonomous does not mean that they control other characters; in fact, it means that they have become aware of their own agency with which they can increase their own autonomy and develop their self-awareness. The portrayal of for instance Katniss Everdeen or Tris Prior as the heroes of the *Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* series respectively, is thus, even in a modern-day society, a novelty, and especially in a genre that is traditionally dominated by

men. The popularity of both series shows that readers prefer to reject the notion that "patriarchal society views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life" (Pearson and Pope, *Portraits*, 4). In present-day society, people like to read about female characters who "venture out on the path to self-discovery, while the male characters function in supporting roles" (5). The reversal of the idea that men save the world while women support them is hailed nowadays, though it took a long time for this idea to be accepted this way.

In this thesis, the difference between masculinity and femininity is important, because it is used to see how the characteristics of a 'feminine genre' such as the romance genre have been able to increasingly appear within science fiction, a genre primarily targeted towards men. I will use the terms 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in the socially-constructed sense of the terms. 'Femininity' surrounds a set of qualities, mannerisms, and roles that are typically associated with women. The reason that I focus on the social construction of the term is that it can apply to both sexes, as both men and women can exhibit 'feminine' characteristics (see Dunphy, Wijngaard). These characteristics remain feminine, despite the fact that they can apply to both sexes, because they usually and dominantly apply to women, though there can be feminine men and masculine women. This can clearly be seen in *The Hunger Games*, where the female protagonist initially exhibits masculine characteristics and later on uses her 'femininity' to fool society and initiate a rebellion, whereas the main male character exhibits feminine characteristics throughout the books. In addition, the term is essential in the discussion of the romance genre and the science fiction genre, especially because literary genres are also partly socially-constructed.

I have decided to analyse Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy for various reasons. The fact that the series consists of three books ensures that the main characters are more fully developed and round characters with a longer storyline than those who appear in

only one book, which will result in more detailed analyses of their personalities, their habits, and their motivations. In addition, the series is extremely popular, which makes it intriguing to research the intended audience and the eventual audience of the novels and compare it to the traditional audiences of the romance genre and the science fiction genre, in order to see how the series and the genre are received. Finally, *The Hunger Games* proves to be a remarkable series to research, because it is primarily the male protagonist who shows signs of being romantic, whereas the leading lady initially pretends to be romantically involved in order to win the game and rebel against the society. This role division is of particular interest to my thesis, as it supports the fact that romance makes them more central – makes them more authentic and gives them a more complete character. They are no longer suppressed and marginalised, but instead they are able to let their voices be heard.

1. Establishing the Boundaries of a Literary Genre

In an ever-changing world, literary genres are subject to change. Apart from the fact that a literary genre can produce various meanings to the individual readers and create significance in themselves in ways that transcend the cultural and political context in which they were created, these societal contexts can have an important impact on a genre and on the literary works that are produced. Aside from the ever-changing interest of the readers, the subject matter of a genre varies according to changes in the world. Modern science fiction, for instance, contains works that deal with inventions that were never thought of in the eighteenth century, or during the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century. According to John Frow, "genre 'acquires meaning' from the kinds of situations it relates to," which means that as long as the social situations change, a genre that deals with these situations will have to adapt as well in order to keep appealing to the changing audience (qtd. in Frow 14). In this thesis, the division between masculine and feminine matters plays an important part, because I will argue that dystopian fiction can be placed between two seemingly conflicting genres, namely science fiction and romance, in order to show that romance in dystopian fiction has resulted in the creation of strong female characters who take agency and who are able to use their femininity in order to change the dystopian society they live in. In agreement with Frow's idea that societal situations are able to have an impact on a genre, the idea that there is still a division of the world into typically masculine and feminine matters can therefore apply to literature as well. In this chapter, I will initially discuss the conventions and the intended audiences of the modern romance genre and the current science fiction genre. Afterwards, I will examine dystopian fiction, the genre of the case study, in order to demonstrate that it can be placed between the two seemingly conflicting genres of romance and science fiction. These analyses will be important to see to what extent the romance genre has infiltrated the science fiction genre, what have been the consequences of that boundary-overlap.

1.1 The Romance Genre

The focus of the modern romance genre has traditionally been on female characters and their interpersonal relationships. People regard romance novels as works written by women, about women, and for women, which is why it is a typical women's genre. In a patriarchal society, such as still exists nowadays, "critical characterization of the romance novel is overwhelmingly negative" (Regis 3). The genre is not taken seriously as it is believed to be too simple to be taken seriously, which is why literary critics claim that it is not real literature. Despite the fact that romantic fiction as a genre is looked down upon, romance has been present in other genres for centuries, and throughout the last decade increasingly more romance conventions have been starting to appear in other genres, in which it is gaining popularity as well. Before studying how the romance genre has been able to infiltrate into the science fiction genre, this section will first discuss the conventions of the genre, its reception, and its intended audience.

Throughout the years, the romance genre has changed immensely, and it has acquired various definitions. Before the term embraced diverse forms of fiction, varying from the Gothic novel to popular escapist love stories, the term referred to the medieval tales of King Arthur and his knights, the long Renaissance romances, or narratives that preferred "allegory and psychological exploration rather than realistic social observation," such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (Baldick 292). These different 'types' of romance fiction demonstrate that the romance genre has existed for a very long period, and that it has changed extensively throughout that period. The abovementioned types, however, are not the ones that apply to the case study at the centre of this thesis. The type of romance that is important to this thesis is the popular escapist love story. These stories follow the view of realism, and, as the term 'escapism' denotes, they are meant to "allow the reader to dwell temporarily in a pleasant world," or to indulge in wish fulfilment and daydreaming fantasies

(Gray 109). These novels are thus meant to be entertaining as a mental distraction from reality, which is indeed why people read this genre in order to relax. The definition that therefore fits the romance genre in the context of this thesis is "a story of romantic love, especially one which deals with love in a sentimental or idealized way" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This definition, however, can refer to two forms of romance novels, for instance romantic fiction published by Mills & Boon and Harlequin Romances on the one hand, and romances such as those written by Madeleine Wickham, Nora Roberts and Jill Mansell on the other hand. The former type is of romantic fiction are often classified as mass-produced paperback romance novels in simple writing that focus on passive women who behave submissively to the main male characters, instead of on a combination of an interpersonal relationship and the development of a female character in society. It is the latter type that is more appropriate in the context of this thesis, because those works address the issues of modern womanhood, including romantic relationships that have to be combined with relationships with family and friends, and the development of the female protagonist in society. The reason why this particular type of romance is most suitable and significant to the case study is that this type is very popular at present time, which results in the fact that this particular type is also changing along with society. In addition, the conventions of the popular escapist love stories are exactly the features that need to be discussed before considering how they can infiltrate other genres.

There are two vital elements that are important to the escapist romance, and the first is the central love story. The love story is certainly central to the plot of the novel, in which two individuals fall in love and work hard to make their relationship work. This is the crucial element of the story, without which the whole work cannot exist, at least within this genre. This element of the plot is similar to that which was used centuries ago in works more aptly

called the ‘courtship novel’. Central to a courtship novel, such as those written by Jane Austen, is the following:

> Its depiction of the entrance of a young woman into adult society and her subsequent choice among competing suitors. The choice is not without its anxieties, however, for one of the unstated conventions of the courtship novel is that the lovers must undergo a traumatic experience, a violent shift from innocence to self-knowledge before their union can be consummated. (Hinnant 294)

Romance novels typically have a similar plot: the two characters meet, there is an initial mutual dislike that gradually changes into the realisation of reciprocal fondness of each other. The problem is then that romantic fiction often tends to be too predictable, which is another reason why certain critics have an aversion to the genre. Nevertheless, not all works contain this exact storyline, though a central love story remains one of the two important elements, which also means that no matter how many subplots are added, the romantic story retains the main focus of the novel.

The second vital element in the romance genre is the “emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending” (RWA). A typical happy ending includes a man and woman, or perhaps nowadays two homosexual individuals as well, which are listed under the subsection ‘gay romance books’, who have struggled to be together and thus eventually end up happily together. The central love story and the happy ending define the book as romantic fiction, which means that “without [these elements] there is an incomplete rendering of the genre” (Regis 22). The presence of both vital elements is actually an important reason why people read these books in the first place. An interesting love story that ultimately ends with a happy ending is something that many readers desire in their own lives, as it provides them with a feeling of comfort and compassion by being pulled into the story and empathise with its

characters. If any of these two elements is disordered or poorly constructed, readers will either stop reading the book, or end the book feeling disappointed. When they read a romance novel, they expect these two elements to be creative and convincing in order for them to be satisfied at the end. These two elements therefore define the romance genre and are extremely important to all romance novels.

In addition to these two vital elements, there are many other characteristics that define the romance genre. These characteristics do not include geographical or historical settings, or the various possibilities when it comes to the kinds of plot, because those features depend on the authors and are therefore extremely numerous (as discussed in section 1.3). Naturally, these characteristics are important to the romance genre, but they principally categorise the type of subgenres, for instance regency romances that are set in the early nineteenth century or contemporary romances that are set after the Second World War. The key features of the romance genre that are essential to the whole genre and all its subgenres mostly concern the characters. Even though characters differ according to the creative mind of the author, genres include distinctive stock characters who have similar roles. In a romance novel, it is especially the female character who plays a central role, and she can be analysed by contrasting her to the main male characters.

The main female characters are often similar in regards to their personal identity. According to Janice Radway, most of the female protagonists are "seventeen to twenty" years old, although older characters occur too (126). The main reason for this usual age range is that a young protagonist has the opportunity to get more out of life than an older one. There are many books, however, that feature female characters in their thirties, for instance in Jill Mansell's, Nora Roberts's or Madeleine Wickham's novels, and these characters are in transition as well, though not from adolescent to adult. Nevertheless, the female protagonist has many decisions to make, as she is still in the prime of her life. Because these characters

lack life experience as well, they are "characterized by childlike innocence and inexperience" (126). The portrayal of younger female protagonists dates to the 1940s, when the heroine had to be a character who had not been previously involved with men in an amorous way. In fact, this depiction already existed before the Victorian Age, in which parents selected the suitable partner for their daughter, whom she had to marry at a young age. Though the female characters nowadays are much more self-controlling, there is yet a preference for female characters of twenty to thirty years old. What remains important is that the character still has a lot to learn, in society as well as in the field of romance and men. This means that the stories can focus on the development of the female protagonist as a successful woman and simultaneously a romantic being.

The fact that the female protagonist is usually a younger character also suggests that she fails to acknowledge her own intelligence and physical beauty. According to Radway, "the initial rejection of feminine ways is […] essential to the plot," because it underlines the focus on the individual's development (124). This development has a central focus in the narrative, and it is a tool to appeal to the audience so they can identify or sympathise with the central character as she grows from a naïve young woman into a successful and romantic being. Charles Hinnant refers to this as a growth "that the lovers must undergo [as] a traumatic experience, a violent shift from innocence to self-knowledge before their union can be consummated" (Hinnant 294). The word 'consummated' in this citation can be used to indicate an important change in the romance genre. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'consummate' in this context as "to make (a marriage) complete by the act of sexual intercourse". In and before the twentieth century, 'consummated' would have indeed meant that the happy ending of a romantic work was a marriage between two characters that was sealed by the act of sexual intercourse. Nowadays, 'consummated' can stand for as much as "giving sexual expression to (love, a non-marital relationship)," as a happy ending does not

necessarily imply marriage anymore. This shows that the genre has changed enormously in past decades. Nevertheless, the development of the leading lady from naïve young woman into a successful and romantic being remains important to the genre.

In addition to having similar personalities, the characters in the genre usually occupy fixed roles, though this convention can be defied as well. According to Vladimir Propp, the characters and the plot are the 'variables' that can change according to the author's story (Selden 68). Though Propp's theory might be questioned, the roles that can be occupied by these characters, however, are relatively constant. The roles of the stock characters in the romance genre are usually an innocent protagonist who is the feminine woman, and the male character who is her hero or best friend. The female protagonist is a working woman, and possesses all the cherished skills that a modern-day society associates with female character, such as the ability to take care of others. Some romance novels, however, "begin by expressing ambivalent feelings about female gender by associating the heroine's personality of activities with traits and behaviour usually identified with men" (Radway 124). This group of female protagonists rebels against their femininity by possessing more masculine traits or by participating in male-oriented activities. This defiance of the customary gender roles differentiates the female protagonist from her traditional counterparts in other romance novels by providing her with an extraordinary fiery disposition, though this diminishes to a certain extent eventually (Radway 123). Still, in this case, the woman can still possess the usual feminine skills, but she suppresses them either deliberately or unintentionally. Nevertheless, the female protagonist then occupies the role of strong independent woman, and the male character is the person she can play off against, a tool that offers exposition of the woman's thoughts and feelings. Both possibilities result in stories in which the female protagonist has to work on herself and her development into a romantic being before she can end up happily together with her soul-mate.

The development into a romantic being is an essential process in the life of the female protagonists. According to Pearson and Pope, "the journey of the hero [can be seen] as dramatizing the human being's inner development toward maturity and psychological wholeness" (*Portraits* 3). This is similar to Radway's point of view, who argues that "the ideal heroine's journey is toward female selfhood," which implies that she has to embrace her own 'femininity' in order to become whole as an individual and thus worthy of the love of a man (124). As a result, the feminine traits eventually prevail in the protagonist's development, which shows that women can be strong by merely embracing their femininity, instead of adopting 'masculine' traits to endure the pressure of a patriarchal society. On this note, Radway argues:

> despite a continuing refusal to acknowledge the significance and potential consequences inherent in her rapidly maturing body, the ideal romantic heroine is considered by everyone else, including the hero, to be an extraordinary example of full-blooming womanhood. (126)

This quotation, however, also implies that a woman needs to be feminine in order to be successful in the eyes of others. In addition, it suggests that a female protagonist can only be romantically awakened by accepting her feminine traits; in romance fiction this awakening is initiated by the male character who eventually becomes her romantic partner. This implication is problematic in the eyes of feminists, which is also why they often look down on the genre. According to them, the implication arises that the women in the romance genre can only develop into successful beings when they are assisted by a male characters. Though it is not a bad thing to be aided by others, feminists suggest that women, of course, do not need men to realise themselves. In the modern-day society, this assumption results in aversion among feminists when it comes to romantic fiction, and therefore results in a dislike of the whole genre.

Despite the fact that the romance genre is often looked down upon and regarded as poorly-written rubbish, and even though most of the books are written by authors from English-speaking countries, the genre is extremely popular throughout the world. According to the Romance Writers of America, an association to advance the professional interests of career-focused romance writers, "romance fiction generated $1.438 billion in sales in 2013," which made it the "top-performing category on the best-seller list". In this survey, romance fiction included all contemporary romance novels, published by for instance Harlequin, Ballantine, and Penguin, from the erotica romance novels to the modern courtship novels. Compared to other genres, "romance fiction was the largest share of the U.S. consumer market in 2012 at 16.7 percent" (RWA). The statistics suggest that the genre is very accessible to people, and this public accessibility is actually the main argument critics use to reduce the popularity of the genre. Literary critics are of the opinion that the romance genre is so popular because it is simplistic nonsense about relationships, which results in easy accessibility and thus popularity, as the reader does not have to be extremely intelligent to understand the books and therefore they can be read by everyone. It is beneficial for the authors and publishers of romance fiction that the audience, or at least a great extent, is indifferent to the contempt expressed for the genre by literary critics.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the romance genre is mostly targeted towards women, which makes it a predominantly feminine genre. In fact, "women make up 91 percent of the romance book buyers, and men make up [the remaining] 9 per cent" (RWA). In the United States, most of these buyers are "aged between 30 and 54 years," which is interesting, as the female protagonists are significantly younger (RWA). Nevertheless, younger people also read romance novels, though they are usually interested in the Young Adult subgenre of romance, which is geared towards adolescent readers between the ages of sixteen to twenty-five. There are various reasons why women, and the small number of men, choose and like to

read romance novels. One of the reasons, which also applies to other genres, is that "romance reading is pleasurable" (Radway 119). The audience reads it for pure entertainment, but also for relaxation. A more specific reason is that people read romance novels because they like to identify themselves with the protagonist, hence the escapist novels. The works offer a possibility to readers to step outside of themselves, and into a different world or a different character. This is a figurative escape, in which the reader is able to "identify with a heroine whose life does not resemble their own in certain crucial aspects" (Radway 190). The figurative escape is thus similar to the Freudian wish-fulfilment idea, which means that the reading of romantic fiction satisfies an acknowledged or unconscious wish through the act of identifying with a fictional characters and therefore experiencing certain events in a sort of daydream. This results in a very satisfying feeling that is experienced by reading a romance novel. In contrast to this type of escape, there is also the idea of reading for literal escape, which means that the readers take a break from everything that they are going through and forget about their own problems. This final reason offers an escape from everyday life, in which women feel the oppression in a patriarchal society. This escape only works when they read a romance work in which the women are strong and set off against male oppression, otherwise they would just escape to a simulacrum of the real-life society. By reading well-written and convincing romance novels, the female audience can be inspired to take agency in their own lives and acquire a fresh look on life.

Some feminist researchers, however, believe that romance novels are not pro-feministic at all. According to Pamela Regis, "critical rejection of the romance novel emanated from the wave of feminism that arose in the 1960s" (3). This resulted in the idea that there is a coexistence between the women's movement and the popularity of romance fiction, because both received a major boost in the twentieth century. According to Radway, however, the researchers believe that "the coincidence of the romance's increasing popularity

with the rise of the women's movement must point to a new and developing backlash against feminism" (19). In fact, some third-wave feminists believe that authors of romance novels are attempting to fight against the women's movement, as romance fiction is regarded as anti-feminist. For instance, in a heterosexual-focused romance, the ending usually undoes the autonomy that the female protagonists held onto or has developed throughout the novel, as she eventually becomes subordinate to the man. The idea that the female protagonist needs the love of a man to become his equal resigns her to the domestic sphere of society, and therefore it seems as if romance novels "desire to see feminist tendencies succumb to the power of love" (Radway 124). This idea of the feminists eliminates the whole prospect of having feminine agency in romance, because then the man and woman should be equal at the end of the narrative, since equality between the man and the woman is the key to have a romance novel that is satisfying to feminists. The ideological understanding of feminism in a work of literature, however, greatly depends on the exact type of romance novel. In most romance novels nowadays, the relationship, or even the marriage, between man and woman are not necessarily about subordination or inferiority, but about mutual equality. In addition, the feminists ignore the whole idea of love and the fact that human beings need to love and to be loved in order to develop themselves, which is not necessarily a case of subordination or weakness. There is not necessarily a clash between 'romance' and 'feminism', however, as there exist regular romance novels in which the female protagonist is indeed a strong and independent woman who is not at all dependent on the male character. Even though it eventually all depends on the author and the type of fiction, it also depends on the type of reader whether or not they are willing to notice the positive feministic elements that are present in the works of romance. The romance genre can help women in a patriarchal society find their own strength.

1.2 The Science Fiction Genre

Though American society and gender roles have changed throughout the years, science fiction has not been very susceptible to that change, at least in consideration of gender roles. Despite the fact that the genre has "often been called 'the literature of change', for the most part it has been slow to recognise the historical contingency and desire, about gendered behaviour and about the 'natural' roles of women and men" (Hollinger 126). In fact, the genre has held on to the societal role division that existed decades ago, and because it has been slow to recognise the important changes in reality, works of science fiction still use that specific view of society and the accompanying gender divisions. As a consequence, the focus of the science fiction genre has traditionally and dominantly been on male characters. In a patriarchal society, which still exists nowadays, the genre is very popular among men. In fact, research has revealed that "romance is marketed towards girls and women […], while fantasy and science fiction targets boys and men" (Blackford 59). Women are not really emancipated in the genre, as the female characters that appear in the works "are frequently perceived as 'the other' and as such they are subject to discrimination and marginalization," without a specific purpose other than to support and maintain the male characters and be their focus of desire (Gilarek 221). The fact that gender roles within science fiction have not changed much over the years can be attributed to the fact that the interest in characters and personal relationships are not vital for the genre. On this note, "the social roles played by women and men *as women and men* are ahistorical, that they will remain largely unchanged even in the distant future" (Hollinger 126). Nevertheless, literary works are often not genre-fixed, which means that a book can contain elements of several genres. This is also the case for the romance genre and the science fiction genre, even though these two genres seem like each other's opposites. Before studying how the two genres have intertwined, this section will first discuss the science fiction genre, its conventions, and its intended audience.

Even though the genre is centuries younger than the romance genre, the history of science fiction is quite difficult to trace, because scholars disagree about its origin. Despite the fact that there is no agreement regarding the exact beginning of the genre, it is certain that "in the seventeenth century writers began producing speculative fictions about new discoveries and technologies that the application of scientific method might bring about" (Stableford 15). The relatively short but debatable history of science fiction makes it difficult to establish one all-encompassing definition, especially because "the term 'science fiction' resists easy definition" (Roberts 1). In addition, one set definition does not apply to all works of science fiction as science fiction includes a large variety of subgenres, and individual authors give their own twist to their works. Nevertheless, the various definitions of the genre all contain unifying themes and they bring key elements to light. One of the definitions of science fiction is that it is "literature about the imaginary marvels or disasters created by scientific and technological discoveries and inventions of the future" (Gray 258). This definition demonstrates that works of science fiction can be positive works that focus on invented phenomena as a result of scientific or technological development, as well as negative works that concentrate on the disasters that science and technology can cause. In addition, the word 'imaginative' differentiates science fiction from realist fiction, which indicates that it is not the purpose of science fiction to reproduce the experience of living in a world that the reader can recognise as his own (Roberts 2). Baldick's definition offers one additional important aspect of the genre, as he states that science fiction is "a popular branch of prose fiction that explores the probable consequences of some improbable or impossible transformation of the basic conditions of human existence". This description suggests that within science fiction human beings still play a central role, though the subject matter has certain consequences for the conditions of those humans or for their society. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a more complete definition, by stating that science fiction is "fiction in which the setting and

the story feature hypothetical scientific or technological advances, the existence of alien life, space, or time travel, etc., *esp*. such fiction set in the future or in an imagined alternative universe". The variety of possibilities within this definition reveals that the genre contains various subgenres. For this thesis, dystopian fiction as a subgenre of science fiction is very important (see section 1.3). "Science fiction is a form of [literature] that often draws upon earlier kinds of utopian and apocalyptic writing," and this utopian aspect is nowadays often turned into the opposite, dystopian fiction, which therefore serves as one of the bigger subgenres of science fiction (Baldick). This subgenre opposes utopian fiction and focuses on a society in which life is undesirable and as bad as possible. For the reason that the focus of this thesis lies on dystopian fiction, the next section will continue to discuss dystopian literature.

The exact setting of a work of science fiction depends on the specific text, but usually it includes a setting such as a parallel universe, space, or the earth in the future or in an alternate past. In addition, though works of science fiction can differ considerably, the genre has unifying themes, such as alternative intelligences, extra-terrestrial life, alien languages, a variety of possible futures, different ways of travel, etcetera. According to Adam Roberts,

> most of the [science fiction] novels are narratives that elaborate some imaginative or fantastic premise, perhaps involving a postulated future society, encounters with creatures from another world, travel between planets or in time. In other words, science fiction as a genre or division of literature distinguishes its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live: a fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature. (1)

The genre has therefore two important central points: on the one hand, the technological and scientific development, and on the other hand, imagination rather than reality. There are many other genres, however, that rely on the imagination and confront reality. "The crucial

separator between science fiction and other forms of imaginative and fantastic literature [is] the 'novum'" (Roberts 6). The 'novum' is something new and different, and a "science fiction text may be based on one novum," such as H.G. Wells's time machine (6). The genre differentiates itself from other genres by its emphasis on newly developed inventions and "the systematic working out of the consequences of a difference […] or a novum" (6). These themes form the basis of the various subgenres. For instance, dystopian fiction focuses mainly on the societal problems that have been caused by technological and scientific development, often in the far future. It certainly depends on the exact work and subgenre how the events and themes are discussed, because the abovementioned conventions can all vary according to culture of the author or the audience, the period in which the work is written, and the purpose of the work. Nevertheless, the setting and themes clearly distinguish science fiction and its subgenres.

Aside from setting and themes, the most important elements of the science fiction genre, at least for this thesis, are the characters. Depending on the individual works, the typical characters of science fiction include aliens, robots, mutants, and other humanoid characters that possibly arise from future evolution. Despite the fact that science fiction, having a speculative nature, is not primarily interested in human individuality, but rather in ideas – though these ideas are evidently seen through the impact they have on human beings – science fiction is a genre that principally targets men. Male characters have dominated in number, as well as acquiring the best and most heroic roles, and they have therefore acquired the most agency as well. This is primarily because "patriarchal society views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life. Men change the world, and women help them" (Pearson and Pope, *Portraits*, 4-5). There are therefore not many central female characters portrayed in the works, and those that are created only "tended to play supporting roles as the 'others' of men – emoting bodies to their reasoning minds and nature to their

culture. Only rarely have women been represented as subjects in their own right" (Hollinger 125-26). After the second wave of feminism, which occurred in the early 1960s, the genre of science fiction had to adapt to the changing roles in society. From that wave of feminism onwards, women's roles in science fiction were questioned, and because society is able to influence literature, the political and technological changes of society that concerned gender roles infiltrated science fiction. This resulted in changing roles of female characters in the genre and additionally, female authors, such as Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler, started to question the division of gender in society by having women as the central characters in for instance *Kindred* (1979) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Female characters obtained more varied roles in science fiction, especially in works written by female authors, which is why the genre started to attract more female readers as well. These female characters are not necessarily masculine, nor are they stereotypical women. Whereas they were supportive, though marginalised, props in the beginning, they started to cooperate with men, though they still cannot function without the male characters. As a result, the genre remains dominantly masculine.

1.3 The Blurring of Genre Boundaries: Dystopian Fiction

A work of literary fiction is never really genre-fixed. In fact, according to John Frow, a story always contains elements from various genres (14). However, this idea can also work in an opposite manner. Instead of a work containing elements that derive from different genres, literary genres can fuse together to create a new and different subset to which literary works can belong. This is the case with current dystopian fiction that is targeted towards young adults: the subgenre of science fiction incorporates specific elements essential to the romance genre, which results in the mixing of gender traits of a masculine and a feminine genre. This is why it is possible to place dystopian fiction in between the masculine science fiction and

the feminine romance genre. This section will focus on the main differences between the two genres in order to demonstrate how the romance genre has infiltrated the science fiction genre and what the consequences have been.

As stated in section 1.2, dystopian fiction takes place at "an imaginary place […] in which everything is as bad as possible" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The degree of 'bad', however, depends on the perspective in the book. For instance in the *Hunger Games*, life in the Capitol is excellent, whereas the districts are the places where everything is as bad as possible, as they have to work extremely hard to provide different resources and supplies for the Capitol, but they receive nothing in return. A work of dystopian fiction therefore needs a place where the condition is good or at least not as bad as elsewhere, or an image of how society could be, because that difference serves as a contrast and thus as a perspective to see that life can be better. Dystopian fiction became a subgenre of science fiction during a time in which novels such as *1984* and *Brave New World* were published, both of which had male protagonists, who were supported by women. "*Brave New World* was [in fact] the first widely-read dystopia in English" (Rabkin 107), though "dystopia is very much part of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century mindset" (Mourby 16). Dystopian fiction was, just as science fiction, a genre with dominantly masculine features as well. Nonetheless, the presence of romance, feminine characteristics and autonomous female characters within this subgenre has truly increased throughout the past decades. In fact, there seems to be a simultaneous movement of the depiction of more female protagonists and the rise of romance in the genre. This leads to the fact that this particular feminisation of dystopian fiction is still a very young process, which only started in the later twentieth century. The main characteristics of both the romance genre and the science fiction genre came together in dystopian fiction to create the best of both worlds. The female characters take agency by using and exploring their own femininity, and eventually they are able to instigate a societal change, such as Katniss

Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* and Tris Prior in *Divergent.* The clear presence of conventions of the romance genre, especially those particularly applicable to the female characters, has resulted in the fact that women in dystopian fiction are centralised and therefore enabled to increase their own autonomy. This provides them with a liberty that they were not usually given in science fiction, and cannot necessarily find in current patriarchal societies. As a consequence, the role division, tone, structure, and audience of the dystopian subgenre of science fiction has changed. After all, "a genre is never defined solely by its constitutive set of functions, but by interaction," which means that as long as society as well as a literary genre itself changes, literature will never become a fixed entity (Berger 9).

The obvious difference that arises from combining the two opposing genres is the seeming disparity in gender. Whereas heterosexual romance is marketed towards women and therefore primarily has female protagonists, science fiction is still primarily targeted towards men, having mainly male characters. As established in the first section of this chapter, "feminist reading […] is not just reading *about* women; it is reading *for* women" (Hollinger 126). Women read science fiction, though there are fewer female readers than male. Women like to read dystopian fiction, however, because those works are radically different and much more exciting from their everyday lives. In addition, dystopian works more often include strong female characters than science fiction. Dystopian fiction thus appeals to both a male and female audience as well, as it represents characters of both sexes and it is written by male as well as female authors. So whereas science fiction is more intelligent, while romance regarded as simple, and because science fiction is valued over romance in a patriarchal society, the audience of dystopian fiction is nevertheless a combination of both.

Aside from a difference in audience, there is a fundamental conflict concerning the focus of both genres. Romance fiction focuses mainly on interpersonal relationships, emotions and feelings, and sexual connections. Science fiction, on the other hand, is primarily

preoccupied with science and technology, intelligence, and even power. Dystopian fiction connects the central points of both genres, as love and romance introduce the human element into the world of ideas and politics. Still, science fiction is the denominator of this subgenre, because the focus remains on societal problems in a corrupted society. Romance, however, is not just a subplot, and instead of a small appearance, romance has gained more importance. In the *Hunger Games*, as well as in other Young Adult dystopian works such as the *Divergent* series, romance has intertwined, which means that without the addition of romance, the storyline would be entirely different or even collapse. In other words, the presence of romance and elements of the romance genre are important for the advancement of the plot. In the *Hunger Games*, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, the romantic plot is woven into the main story of Katniss's attempt to survive the 74th Hunger Games, and simultaneously aids the rebellion against Panem's government. In the *Divergent* series, people are divided into five factions by their personal characteristics. These factions eventually collapse when the whole society is involved in a war. Tris is completely involved in this war, and this involvement also included her relationship with Tobias, a young man she meets in the faction that she decides to join. In both series, and in other Young Adult dystopian novels, a traditional romantic pattern is included in the otherwise dark dystopian narrative, not simply to give the story a positive tone, but to create different and more realistic characters.

The structure of the works that belong to both genres are also different. In most works of romantic fiction, the structure is relatively similar. The story starts with a mutual dislike between the innocent female protagonist and the male character, usually either a masculine, fearless guy, or a shy geek-like figure, which then gradually changes into mutual fondness, and eventually ends happily after the woman has accepted her feelings and her feminine characteristics, and the male has finally confessed his feelings to her. Science fiction, on the other hand, does not have such a rigid plot structure, even though it has many subgenres,

which leads to the expectation that those categories all have firmly fixed conventions and structures. This is not the case, as the structure of the book very much depends on the author and the storyline. Dystopian fiction, however, does have quite a fixed plot structure. The society usually seems ideal or manageable at first, but turns out to be horrendous and life seems unmanageable. The main protagonist, male or female, realises the problems in the society and decides to either escape it or attempt to change it, though this often does not work. In the *Hunger Games*, the female protagonist, and all other characters that live in the poorer districts, are aware of the terrible living conditions in Panem, though out of fear for the Capitol they decide to live in silence. Only when these living conditions become worse, do the characters try to fix it, by rebelling against the absolute authority. In addition to this, the romance plot is present, as Katniss initially dislikes Peeta, but eventually starts to grow fond of him. The absence of a repeated pattern in the science fiction genre is present in *The Hunger Games*, in the way that the usually fixed structure of the romance genre is now very different than it would be when the series really belonged to that genre. The combination of the genres results in a very interesting plot structure, which is similar in most works of dystopian fiction, though it still depends on the exact type of work. It offers something unique compared to what came before in both romance and science fiction independently.

As a result of the difference in focus and structure, there is also a dissimilarity between the mood and tone of the genre. For the reason that romance fiction centres on interpersonal relationships and has to have a positive ending, the genre as a whole is very positive in nature. Romance is thus much more realistic and positive in nature. The tone of science fiction, in contrast, is much darker as it often contains much more violence and negativity. In consequence of the merge of the two genres, dystopian fiction combines both moods and tones. The dystopian worlds are the extreme consequences of a previous downfall. Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, for instance, is set in a post-apocalyptic version of Chicago, whereas

Suzanne Collin's *Hunger Games* takes place in the oppressive nation of Panem. Both series relate dark and violent events, though these works of Young Adult dystopian fiction tends to end sort of happily, which is in contrast to previous dystopian fiction, in which it ends badly for either the society or for the characters, or even for both. Nevertheless, it is only logical that, in contrast to romance, not all characters can have a happy ending. Though the genre is not realistic, it is accurate owing to the fact that some characters must have an undesirable outcome, which is typical in science fiction. This means that despite the addition of the romance genre, the female protagonist does not necessarily have a happy ending after she has embraced her femininity and saved society. Nevertheless, she will be in a better state than she was initially.

The final difference between the two genres is the portrayal of female characters. As a result of the blending of romance and science fiction, dystopian fiction portrays female protagonists who are "associated with empowerment usually destined for men in the form of activity and perceived agency" (Firestone 213). This means that these protagonists have masculine traits that are typical of the science fiction genre as well as feminine traits that are typical of the romance genre. The addition of conventions of the romance genre, especially the feminine characteristics, has resulted in the fact that the female protagonists are depicted in a more realistic way than without any changes in the characteristics. The absence of femininity in the characters preserves the idea that only masculine characteristics have an important value, and therefore that only men can be important and authentic characters. Having romance and female protagonists in dystopian fiction therefore results in the addition of a different aspect to the characters' identities, as the genre combines the societal problems of science fiction with the interpersonal relationships of the romance genre. For the reason that dystopias remain a subgenre of science fiction, the societal problems are the main focus, but the romance has infiltrated the genre nonetheless. The characters now have to busy

themselves with both society and their own personal feelings and relationships, making the characters more realistic, and negating the idea that only male characters are able to attempt to change a corrupt dystopian society.

The centralisation of female protagonists consequently results in the addition of more romance in the genre. It is practically inevitable for women in an originally masculine genre to not fall in love. Just as the genre of romance itself, the characteristics of the genre and of the female characters are considered to be feminine and therefore society considers them to be weak. In current Young Adult dystopian fiction, however, these characteristics become their greatest strength. In contrast to the romance genre, the female characters are mostly concerned with saving civilisation and fixing a broken society than with fitting into certain gender norms and being busy with falling in love. Romance is part of the story, but it is usually only part of the subplot, being a minor objective in the primary goal of the leading lady. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, however, the conventions of the romance genre become increasingly important until the point that the romance plot fuses with the dystopian plot. Though anti-feministic values, such as "female passivity in romantic relationships, [and] reinforcement of domestic values" do not occur in the trilogy, it is a striking paradox that the romance genre is necessary to ensure the centralisation and therefore an increasing autonomy of female protagonists (qtd. in Regis 5). This contradiction will be further demonstrated in the following three chapters.

There are various reasons that have enabled the increase of romantic conventions in science fiction. For once it can be because of the popularity of the trilogy. This popularity has resulted in the adaptation of the books into films, which causes the attraction of more fans, and therefore subsequent works within this genre may appeal to a larger audience than before. Aside from the fact that more girls still read, whereas most boys prefer to play games, adding a female character to an appealing dystopian fiction narrative is partly for the appeal to a new and larger audience. In addition, the increase can also be enabled by new ideologies of

adolescents. All genres can be targeted towards young adults, but dystopian literature for teens only surged in popularity during the last few decades. An aspect that makes it appealing to the readers is the emergence of the heroic protagonists that seems so unlikely in works connected to science fiction, namely the female hero. These characters have the power and the opportunity to cause a stir, mostly because it still is a novelty to have a female character as the powerful protagonist, as "patriarchal society views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life" (Pearson and Pope, *Portraits*, 4). For example, in 73 years of Hunger Games, no one has ever had the power, will, or opportunity to instigate a rebellion, whereas Katniss Everdeen initially does this without really intending to. Within Young Adult dystopian fiction, however, the gendered characteristics that have been brought into the genre by romance fiction are still considered to be weak. Nevertheless, these characteristics are actually the greatest assets these characters have in order to change society. This claim will be supported by a case study of *The Hunger Games*.

Moreover, the possibility of the incorporation of romance into science fiction is also supported by the increase of female authors in the genre. Dystopian fiction, like science fiction, was initially primarily written by male authors. In the nineteenth century, for instance, well-known dystopian literature was only written by male authors, namely Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Anthony Trollope, and Samuel Butler. In the early twentieth century, a few female authors started to write dystopian fiction as well, for example Gertrude Barrows Bennet, who wrote her stories under the pseudonym Francis Stevens, and who was considered to be "the woman who invented dark fantasy" (Hoppenstand x). The number of female authors started to increase throughout the twentieth century, and nowadays, there are almost as many female as male dystopian writers, including names such as James Dashner, John Maher, Justin Cronin, as well as Suzanne Collins, Veronica Roth, Lauren Oliver. According to Amanda Firestone, "Young Adult authors continually add to and push the

boundaries of existing fiction subgenres" (211). Considering this and the fact that each author brings his or her own view of society into his works, it is only a logical result that female authors include what they are claimed to know much about: romance and femininity. In any case, the incorporation of romance in science fiction, which has resulted in a very specific kind of dystopian fiction, offers something unique compared to what came before in both romance and science fiction independently. The next chapters will demonstrate the consequences of the incorporation for the female protagonist and the society in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*.

2. *The Hunger Games* – The Girl on Fire and the Boy with the Bread

"Remember, we're madly in love, so it's all right to kiss me anytime you feel like it."

(Collins, *Hunger Games*, 306)

In recent years, Young Adult dystopian fiction has seen an increasing presence and development of strong female characters who exert agency and who are able to use their feminine traits in order to change the corrupt dystopian society. Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series demonstrates this change, even though it has been marketed as science fiction, dystopian fiction, adventure story, and action novel. Nevertheless, important elements of the romance genre have certainly been incorporated in the stories, seemingly as a minor storyline, though in reality as an important component that influences the characters and therefore the main plot that focuses primarily on the Games and the societal pressure in Panem. This chapter will analyse the gendered traits of the romance genre in the first instalment of the trilogy, in order to demonstrate that these characteristics create a different aspect of the characters' identities, which results in more prominent and autonomous female protagonists than previously in dystopian fiction.

The first instalment of the trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, focuses on a dark vision of the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem that governs part of North America at an unspecified time in the future. The Capitol is Panem's political centre, which is a utopian city located in the former Rocky Mountains, from which the rest of the nation is governed. The remainder of the nation is divided into twelve districts, once thirteen, and each of these districts provides a different kind of resource for the Capitol, for instance coal, wood, and bread. The districts are

forced to live under the corrupt power of the Capitol after the Dark Days that occurred 73 years prior to the events of the first book. As a consequence of the districts' uprising against the government, the Capitol invented the Hunger Games as an annual event with the intention to punish the citizens of all twelve districts for their aforementioned rebellion, and to remind them all of the consequences of rejecting and fighting against the government's authority (Collins, *HG,* 21). In the Games, each district randomly selects one male and one female candidate, after which these 'tributes' are forced to appear in a live television fight to the death. This means that all twenty-four contestants enter the arena, but only one will survive. Katniss and her family live in district twelve, which is the provider of coal and moreover the poorest district. The trilogy centres on Katniss, the events that happen to her when she is forced to enter the Hunger Games, and the personal change she experiences during and after those Games. Eventually she instigates a revolution, while simultaneously dealing with the consequences of the Games and her relationships with two boys who are both in love with her, Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark. Nevertheless, the Games and the societal pressure of the Capitol are the main focus of the books, though the romance elements play an important role.

Katniss Everdeen initially behaves as a masculine teen, and nothing points to the fact that she might be affected by the increasing presence of romance conventions. Already on the second page it becomes evident that she is the sole breadwinner of the family, as she relates that she tried to drown a cat that her sister brought home because "the last thing [she] needed was another mouth to feed" (4). Providing food for the family is stereotypically a man's job, whereas the woman takes care of the children in the family. After her father's death in a mine explosion, and her mother's mental breakdown, Katniss became responsible for bringing in food at the age of eleven. As a result of the poverty in District Twelve, the best way to get food is to go hunting, "even though trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries

the severest of penalties" (6). In this perspective, providing food in order to take care of her family is a masculine action, especially the manner in which she does this, namely by going into the woods illegally and hunt with her bow, using male strength. This initial description therefore portrays her as "the essential American soul [who] is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer" (Lawrence 65). In contrast to romance novels, in which female protagonists often rebel against their femininity by possessing more masculine traits or by participating in male-oriented activities, Katniss does not consciously choose to adopt masculine characteristics, such as providing food, her hunting-skills, and her absence of expressing emotions, because "the skills [she] learns and hones are a result of living in a home where there is no longer a male provider" (Firestone 213). In a poor district, only the hard-working people will survive, and therefore "she is unable to behave selfishly" and spend time doing enjoyable activities, let alone focusing on romance, which is impractical in a district where survival is the main priority (213). Usually, women in science fiction, as mentioned in 1.2, are dependent on men. This is why Katniss's behaviour conflicts with the usual behaviour and role of women in such books as a result of her duty to provide for her family. Nevertheless, the absence of a male figure has resulted in Katniss adopting more masculine traits as the sole provider of the family, and therefore a decrease in the presence of feminine traits.

Despite the fact that automatically suppressing feminine traits is a result of the living conditions, the romance genre is definitely present in the creation of more authentic characters. The combination of genre-specific traits results in characters who display a combination of various features. In addition to her masculine side, Katniss displays female traits by taking care of her little sister, Primrose, and her mother as well, and by cleaning the house, cooking dinner, helping Prim with her homework, etcetera (Collins, *HG*, 4). After her father's death, her mother had a mental breakdown, and therefore failed to carry out the most important duty of a mother, which is to take care of her children. In Katniss's eyes, her

mother is weak, because she neglected her children at the moment they needed her the most. The fact that Katniss had to take over the responsibilities of both her parents at the age of eleven, shows the protagonist's double character. On the one hand, she is the masculine figure in the family, as she provides them with food and some money by hunting and selling game. On the other hand, she is simultaneously the feminine mother figure, taking care of her little sister and even her mother. The main difference between these aspects is that hunting is something that she does deliberately, whereas her nurturing skills are an intuitive response, as she automatically takes care of her loved ones. This double character already shows the combination of gender-specific characteristics, which it is very clear throughout the rest of the novel as well, and she will later actively use this gender-difference to her advantage.

The focus of the romance genre is on the female protagonist, and as a result of its presence in Young Adult dystopian fiction, these protagonists play a central role in this genre as well. In *Hunger Games*, this central role is triggered by Katniss volunteering for her sister, and then emphasised by the necessary romance strategy (discussed below). The Reaping, the event where the tributes are randomly selected, also underlines Katniss's responsibility for her sister. Despite the minimal chance that Primrose will be chosen, she is indeed the female contestant of District Twelve (18). Nevertheless, another citizen of the same district can volunteer to take the selected tribute's place, and that is exactly what Katniss does. She risks her own life in order to save that Prim's, so that she will at least be safe for another year. This act of self-sacrifice and protection is both masculine and feminine. Men, as wage earners of their family, are the ones that protect their family in all circumstances. Women, on the other hand, would do everything to make sure that their children are safe. This action therefore shows Katniss's compassion for her sister and her strength by sacrificing herself. She de-emphasises her own femininity out of love for her sister, and consequently places herself at the centre of attention.

As mentioned in 1.2, female characters in science fiction have a marginal role, because "the androcentric character of patriarchy inherently confines women to the fringes of society (Gilarek 221). This means that within that genre there is no careful attention for physical appearance, which initially applies to the *Hunger Games* as well. In the district, Katniss was never occupied with her clothing and appearance, for the reason that once again survival has the highest priority. After the Reaping, however, she is obliged to look nice and behave like a lady. Every person in the Capitol is flamboyant in their appearance, and this is also expected of the tributes, because the more beautiful they look, and the nicer they behave, the more people will sympathise with them and therefore sponsor them with food or medicine during the Games. The addition of gendered conventions thus results in an added interest for physical appearance, though for the reason of pleasing society, not the protagonist. Katniss's stylist, Cinna, wants the audience to "recognise [her] when [she] is in the arena … Katniss, the girl who was on fire" (Collins *HG* 82). Only the dresses make Katniss feminine, but Cinna added "a little synthetic fire" (81) to show her bravery and strength, and to give her "a great advantage [as] no one will forget [her]" (85). In the romance genre, as discussed in section 1.1, the female protagonists are usually not aware of their physical appearance. This is exactly the case in the *Hunger Games*, especially because the citizens of the districts never had any reason to care about their appearances. Nevertheless, the Games are forcing Katniss to become more feminine and become more aware of her beauty and her feminine traits than she has ever been. The romance genre conventions are not only used to make Katniss a central character, but they are also clearly included in the plot.

The romance genre is essentially present in the addition of a love story, one of the two main elements of the genre, and this romance story functions as plot development and underlines Katniss's central role in the story. Before the Games commence, each tribute has a live televised interview, and during Peeta's interview, he unexpectedly declares his love for

Katniss, by stating that the special girl he likes came there with him (159). Backstage, Katniss reacts by attacking Peeta. According to her, "he made [her] look weak," considering that "Peeta has made [her] an object of love. Not just his" (164-165). In her eyes, being loved shows weakness and vulnerability, because it makes her submissive to men. This idea conforms to the opinion of feminists about romance novels, as they believe the romance between a man and woman makes that woman subject to the man. However, according to Haymitch Abernathy, the mentor of District Twelve's tributes, Peeta made Katniss look desirable, which is not a bad thing considering her obvious loathing of the Capitol and the people that live there (164). Pretending to be in love will be advantageous to Katniss, because it will make her look more appealing and approachable – two important feminine traits – which is why the people of the Capitol will sponsor her and help her during the Games. Just as providing food to survive is priority in District Twelve, survival is the main priority in the Games. Romance is unique, which is why it makes Peeta and Katniss very interesting for and popular among the viewers, because they have never experienced this before, and they know a moral dilemma is coming as only one can survive. This whole romance strategy results in the fact that Katniss is now completely centralised as character, and she has to become much more feminine than she has ever been, as she is now the most interesting female tribute and she needs to convince people of their love story. From rejecting femininity in order to survive, romance and the feminine characteristics that belong to it become Katniss's greatest weapon in her strategy to survive. This romance story is thus gradually interwoven with the dystopian plot.

According to Regis, "all romance novels contain [several] narrative elements," of which a barrier between the two protagonists is "the conflict" (14). This barrier is present in the *Hunger Games* too, for instance the societal problems in Panem, and the fact that only one tribute can survive. These barriers keep Katniss from focusing entirely on the romance

strategy. At one point in the Games, however, the rules are suddenly changed: instead of one, "both tributes from the same district will be declared winners if they are the last two alive" (Collins *HG* 295). The Gamemakers altered this rule deliberately to make a dramatic alteration at the end. Katniss sees an opportunity to win the games, and she forms an alliance with Peeta. The fact that they are now together as allies means that Katniss will be forced even further to embrace her feminine traits of nurturing and compassion in order to make the people of the Capitol believe in their romance. Katniss finally realises that "if [she] want[s] to keep Peeta alive, [she's] got to give the audience something more to care about. Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home together. Two hearts beating as one. Romance" (316). She has come to the realisation that she needs to act as though she is in love more convincingly in order to be able to win the Games. The barrier is not completely removed, though the female protagonist has found a way to survive. The masculine method of hunting for survival has changed into the romance genre way of surviving, namely by embracing femininity and be in love. Instead of hunting for food and supplies, she has to act in love and even kiss Peeta in order to survive. The barrier in the romance plot can thus only be destroyed by romance.

According to the conventions of the romance genre, "the reluctant heroine must figure out exactly how she and others are going to survive" (Firestone 213). This convention is present, though while Katniss is forced to pretend to be in love, she has to be reminded of the romance strategy. Peeta tells her to "remember, we're madly in love, so it's all right to kiss me anytime you feel like it" (306). Being romantic certainly does not come naturally to Katniss. However, when the rule regarding the victor is suddenly changed back after Peeta and Katniss are the last couple left, she is fully aware that she can use the pretence of loving Peeta as an excuse to rebel against the Capitol and authority. If they cannot win together, they will pretend to not want to win at all:

> I spread out my fingers, and the dark berries glisten in the sun. I give Peeta's hand one last squeeze as a signal, as a good-bye, and we begin counting. "One." Maybe I'm wrong. "Two." Maybe they don't care if we both die. "Three!" It's too late to change my mind. […] The berries have just passed my lips when the trumpets begin to blare. (418)

From never having thought about rebellion before, not even knowing the real truth to the Dark Days, and from having difficulties with being romantic, Katniss suddenly uses romance to be rebellious and exert power over the Gamemakers, all in order to come out of the Games alive (50-51). Though they both win the Games, the act of rebellion through love has serious consequences for the two star-crossed lovers, especially because rebellion does not go well with the authoritarian power of the Capitol.

The hero of dystopian fiction needs to act with the community's wellbeing in mind, and this applies to Katniss as well. She "must act according to what will ensure her survival, as well as that of the community she's surrounded herself with" (Firestone 217). It is therefore logical that the citizens of the Districts become aware that there are possibilities to undermine the government's control as a result of Katniss's rebellion. As a consequence to this convention of dystopian fiction, the romance traits have to be held onto. Katniss has successfully deceived the citizens of the Capitol during the Games, but the districts and President Snow are not convinced. Therefore, she has to keep up the romance act and behave like a lady in love to convince the people of the fictitious love, because if she fails to convince them of her love for Peeta, the people in the districts will see her as the symbol for the rebellion, which makes her responsible for instigating a new uprising. Haymitch warns her about the consequences for her actions immediately after the Games:

> Listen up. You're in trouble. Word is the Capitol's furious about you showing them up in the arena. [...] Your only defense can be you were so madly in love you weren't responsible for your actions. (Collins *HG* 433)

Katniss does want to fight against the unjust government of Panem, though openly defying authority will be dangerous. By obeying them to continue the pretended romance with Peeta, the President will not suspect her motives, and Katniss will keep her family safe. The Games may be over thanks to the romance strategy, but pretending to be in love turns out to be the only defence Katniss will have against the power of the Capitol. This example illustrates that the romance conventions have deeply infiltrated the work, so that the dystopian plot now refers to the romance plot and the accompanying conventions.

A real romance novel needs a happy ending, as it is "the one formal feature of the romance novel that virtually everyone can identify with" (Regis 9). Young Adult dystopian fiction also has a tendency toward happy endings, though there is a negative note included in the ending as well, because the subgenre naturally includes conventions of science fiction. Initially, the *Hunger Games* seems to have a romantic ending, as Peeta and Katniss both win the Games, and can return home together. An important characteristic is, however, that "when the heroine chooses freedom, she chooses the hero [and] the happy ending celebrates this" (Regis 16). This characteristic underlines the absence of the real happy ending, because for Katniss, the whole romance part was only an act, as she used it to bring the Games to a good end and "did what it took to stay alive, to keep [them] both alive in the arena" (Collins *HG* 453). Both the heroin and hero are freed, but the female protagonist does not choose the male protagonist. Nevertheless, the fact that both characters survived the Games is already a happier ending that usual in science fiction or dystopian fiction, due to the impact of the presence of the romance genre.

The gendered characteristics of the romance genre and the essential love story are definitely present in *The Hunger Games*. Many characteristics, such as the central love story, the centralisation of the female protagonist, and other gendered traits, are crucial for plot development. The combination of gendered traits is most prominent in the personality of the female protagonist; Katniss is neither a true romance protagonist, nor the marginal woman in science fiction. There are two reasons for romance in *The Hunger Games*, and both these reasons have contributed to the fact that the female protagonist has become more central. The first reason for the addition of romance is to survive. By embracing her feminine traits, such as compassion, vulnerability, and beauty, and by consequently fulfilling the expectations of the Capitol, Katniss ensures that she will be helped by sponsors during her time in the Arena. Additionally, she is aided by Haymitch and Effie to convincingly fake the romance, so that people will sympathise with her and Peeta. The second reason for the presence of romance is to rebel. Katniss sees the pretended romance between herself and Peeta as an excuse to feign a double-suicide, which would leave the Gamemakers without a victor. As a result of the necessary romance elements, the usual gender roles are switched. In *The Hunger Games*, Peeta needs to help Katniss to be convincing as a girl in love, while she remains capable of her own strength and in touch with her emotions, whereas in romance novels usually the female protagonist has to help the male protagonist become a suitable lover. Katniss is forced to embrace her feminine side to be liked by the citizens of the Capitol, in order to save her own life and Peeta's. This chapter also poses the aforementioned paradox, as the results suggest that a genre that markets strong women who fight against patriarchal dominance and a corrupt dystopian society needs conventions of the romance genre, a genre criticised by feminists, to centralise the female characters and emphasise their importance. The next two chapters will analyse the other books, to research whether the romance genre remains interwoven with the books, and to see if the aforementioned paradox is indeed posed.

3. *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* – The Star-Crossed Lovers

"I really can't think about kissing"

(Collins, *Catching Fire*, 152)

The Hunger Games – Catching Fire is the second instalment in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, and it was published in 2009 as a sequel to *The Hunger Games*. The book continues approximately six months after Katniss and Peeta have won the 74th Hunger Games, and the book contains three important events. The first is the Victory Tour, which is a tour through all the districts in descending order, the Capitol, and the victor's district as last. This tour is televised, and on the one hand it celebrates the triumph of the most recent victor, though on the other hand, it is "the Capitol's way of keeping the horror fresh and immediate" (Collins, *CF*, 4). The second focus is on the Quarter Quell, which is a special version of the Hunger Games that takes place every twenty-fifth anniversary. It is defined as "a glorified version of the Games to make fresh the memory of those killed by district's rebellion" (207). In the second book, the seventy-fifth Hunger Games are held, in which "the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors" (208). Because District Twelve only has three victors, two male and one female, Katniss is forced back into the arena. The third part therefore concentrates on the Games, though this year everything will be very different, as the government's ultimate objective is to increase fear in the districts and kill the desire for rebellion. All the events in this book ensure that the importance of the pretended romance of Katniss and Peeta increases significantly and consequently Katniss's confusion about her relationships with Gale and Peeta grows rapidly as well. *The Hunger Games* –

Catching Fire has no time to dwell on the repercussions and psychological after effects of the previous Games, as the real game is already about to begin.

Though the central focus of the second book remains on the societal problems in Panem, the presence of romance and gendered traits has increased even more in *Catching Fire*. The main reason for this increase becomes clear when President Snow, the head of Panem's government, personally visits Katniss. Snow reveals that his "problem began when [Katniss] pulled out those poisonous berries in the arena" at the end of the Games in book one (Collins, *CF*, 24). The government and most people in the districts saw her act of intending to eat the berries as an act of rebellion. President Snow tells Katniss that she "provided a spark that, left unattended, may grow to an inferno that destroys Panem," (27) with which he wants to make Katniss aware that her pretended romance has made her the Mockingjay, the symbol of rebellion and therefore the ultimate example to Panem's citizens (466). According to Snow, Katniss convinced the people in the Capitol, but she failed to convince the citizens of the districts, who saw her act with the berries as an act of defiance, not as an act of love. Other citizens now see an ability to incite an uprising with the intention of a revolution, in order to collapse the system. Snow's solution to prevent a rebellion is to blackmail Katniss into convincing "everyone in the districts that [she] wasn't defying the Capitol, that [she] was crazy with love," so that the districts' hope and desire for an uprising is crushed (34). In the first instalment, Katniss already had difficulties with being feminine and acting as if she was in love, but President Snow's demand puts even more pressure on her now to accomplish, and thus save the people that she holds dear. Whereas Katniss and Peeta's "romance became a key strategy for [their] survival in the arena," it has now become their key strategy for survival outside of the arena as well (10). "According to the [romance] genre conventions, the focus of the narrative is the love story building between the main characters, and while this often is problematized by outside events, it remains the central driving force of the plot" (qtd. in

Firestone 211). In science fiction and dystopian fiction, the central focus is on the plot regarding the societal problems. The increasing presence of romance and gendered traits, however, has resulted in the mingling of the storylines, and the love story is now as important as the plot about the societal pressure and the upcoming rebellion.

In addition to the necessary intensification of the romance strategy, the female protagonist's gendered traits play an increasingly important role too. According to Firestone, "Katniss [is] passive-aggressive, making decisions only when forced to by others" (Collins, *CF,* 209). This is not entirely true, however, as Katniss also makes decisions when she is emotionally affected, showing her femininity through compassion and the display of emotions. During the Victory ceremony in District Eleven, the two victors share the sorrow of the districts' losses and they are forced to express their supposedly sincere thanks to the Capitol that brought them together, in order to convince Snow of their good intentions. After the compulsory speech, however, Katniss acts genuinely and expresses her affection for Rue, by revealing how much she loved Rue and how she is deeply touched by her death. When Katniss acts sincerely and shows genuine affection and love, the consequences are extremely disastrous. As a consequence of her showing compassion and to her horror, the Peacekeepers shoot an old man and two others, who showed rebellious behaviour by instigating the sign of respect, and chaos ensues in the district. This incident demonstrates that when she fakes love, she is rebellious; when she shows actual love, she is rebellious as well. Romance is supposed to be the key strategy for survival, but as a result of its presence in dystopian fiction, it only makes things worse. The fact that things go wrong when Katniss shows her genuine feelings by automatically embracing her feminine traits, implicitly shows that in dystopian society, and thus in dystopian fiction, displaying those feelings are dangerous to the self, and that this genre is thus not a safe and usual place for romance and femininity.

A different narrative element in romance fiction is the eventual betrothal of the two lovers, as the ultimate act of love. This element is also present in *Catching Fire*, though it is only to diminish the imminent rebellion and to advance the plot. In order to convince Panem's citizens that what they did in the arena was not intended to be rebellious and settle the dispute between Katniss and President Snow, they announce that they are going to get married. In romance fiction, marriage was the ultimate happy ending of a novel, in which man and woman were mutually equal (see section 1.1). Nowadays, a happy ending is not necessarily defined by marriage, though it remains one of the ultimate events of a romance novel. In science fiction, marriage is not an important event, nor is it often present in a work of that genre, if at all. In *Catching Fire*, the impending marriage is not entered into out of love, but as a scheme of Katniss and Peeta to convince people of their love. Unfortunately, the whole marriage scheme is not enough, and the citizens are not persuaded enough to give up their hope for a rebellion (91). The Girl on Fire, who sparked the hope amongst the districts through rebelling against the Capitol by pretending to be in love, has been unable to keep people from defying the governmental system of Panem by working even harder to be in love in order to diminish the rebellion. Despite the fact that the marriage is not a true romantic element, it still functions as a crucial device for plot advancement.

In romance fiction, "the central conflict is always about the love relationship between the hero and the heroine" (qtd. in Regis 22). In Young Adult dystopian fiction, it has become one of central conflicts, along with the societal problems. Additionally, in this trilogy, there is not only a conflict within the relationship between Peeta and Katniss, but also between Katniss and Gale. Whereas heterosexual romances for adults usually focus on "one woman-one man" relationships, though there are many exceptions, Young Adult fictions are more often characterised by their love triangles, for instance Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight,* P.C. Cast's *House of Night*, and L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* (Radway 123). The presence of

the love triangle in the *Hunger Games* demonstrates that love has become a significant element in Young Adult dystopian fiction. Previous to the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss and Gale were very close friends and hunting partners, but the Games changed everything for Katniss, Gale, and Peeta, as it completely altered the course of their lives. The pre-Games Katniss probably would have married Gale eventually, but the recent Katniss is probably not able to, because of the romance strategy that has to be continued after the Games as well. Katniss realises that "it wasn't just a strategy for Peeta [and that] it was nothing but painful for Gale" (Collins, *CF*, 10). Gale, however, is still in love with her, though everything is complicated after the Games: "I'm sure plenty of people assumed that we'd eventually get married even if I never gave it any thought. But that was before the Games. Before my fellow tribute, Peeta Mellark, announced that he was madly in love with me" (10). The couple that was previously dependent on each other for survival is separated because of the consequences of Katniss's experiences in the Games. Before and after the Games, defining love and making decisions about personal relationships is too difficult for Katniss when survival itself is at stake. Katniss's strategy in the Games made her aware of her own feminine characteristics and strengths, and of love, whether it be real or pretended. At the moment, however, the addition of romance genre conventions has resulted in confusion for Katniss. In addition, the relationship conflict has brought her more complications than pleasure and security, which causes the female protagonist needing to focus on relationship problems as well as societal problems, which demonstrates the mixture of the romance and science fiction genre.

As discussed in chapter 2, the addition feminine traits results in more authentic characters and thus in the placement of the female protagonist at the centre of Young Adult dystopian fiction. One of the traits that causes this centralisation is compassion, shown in the self-sacrifice of Katniss. In *Catching Fire*, just as in book one, there are yet again various instances in which Katniss thoughtlessly intends to sacrifice herself. One instance is during

the Games, when she wants to save her sister after hearing her scream, which shows that even despite all she has been through, she remains focused on protecting her loved ones:

> That's when I hear the scream. So full of fear and pain it ices my blood. And so familiar. I […] forget where I am or what lies ahead, only know I must reach her, protect her. I run wildly in the direction of the voice, heedless of danger, ripping through vines and branches, through anything that keeps me from reaching her. From reaching my little sister. (409)

The whole reason that Katniss went into the Games back in the first book was to protect her sister. Katniss sacrificed herself for Prim, and here she is doing the same thing all over again, with no thought for herself. As discussed in chapter two, this act is feminine as well as masculine. At a previous point in this book, however, Katniss sacrifices herself when she discovers that Gale is being beaten by the Head Peacekeeper. She jumps in between them in order to stop the violence. In romance as well as in science fiction, it is usually the female protagonist who is saved by the male character, or who is aided when she is stuck in a dangerous situation. Here, though, Katniss takes blows from the whip in order to save one of the male characters. Her affection and friendship for Gale are the decisive elements that makes Katniss put herself in danger in order to save Gale, as an intuitive response to prevent him from being hurt. In other words, her love for Gale, a characteristic from the romance genre, ensures that she intuitively finds the strength and courage to save a male character, something that does not happen in science fiction, as discussed in section 1.2. As a result of the presence of the romance genre and the creation of more realistic characters due to the addition of romance characteristics, the female protagonist has been able to save a male character in the dystopian *Hunger Games*. This is "in many respects an improvement on the passive" female protagonists that used to occur in dystopian and science fiction," enabled by

the presence of gendered characteristics and other conventions of romance genre (Firestone 213).

According to Regis, an additional narrative element is the "point of ritual death [which is] the moment in a romance novel when the union of the heroine and the hero seems completely impossible" (14). This element in present in all three books, and in *Catching Fire*, it can be found in the announcement of the Quarter Quell. The announcement states that the tributes will be reaped from the existing pool of victors, meaning that Katniss, as sole female victor of District Twelve, will be forced into the arena again (Collins, *CF*, 208). As a result of Peeta's desire "to protect Katniss," he volunteered when Haymitch was selected at the Reaping (213). The point of ritual death is therefore once again that both Peeta and Katniss will enter the Arena, though only one can become the Quarter Quell's victor. Despite the point of ritual death, they keep up the star-crossed lovers act, which makes the Games more tragic for the Capitol audience, though it also fuels the rebellion in the districts. The element demonstrates that whatever scheme the government devises, the presence of elements from the romance genre in *The Hunger Games*, for instance Katniss cheating ritual death by the intended double suicide, has had lasting effects on the events that happen in *Catching Fire*. The female protagonist has triggered the desire for change, and this burning desire will not easily be extinguished.

The increasing presence of the romance genre starts to have a more important role in *Catching Fire* than merely adding more feminine characteristics and ensuring more authentic characters and therefore a central role for the female protagonist. Initially, the romance elements were used to survive the events in the dystopian plot. In *Catching Fire*, however, these elements have deeply penetrated that plot, so that the storyline concerning societal problems starts to trigger more characteristics and therefore feminine traits, whether intentionally or not. Most of the selected tributes are outraged and feel betrayed, because

"victors are out of the reaping for life. That's the deal if you win" (211). The scheme to emphasise the Capitol's power by showing "to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol" has drawbacks for the Capitol, which is that the selected tributes will overtly show their disagreement with Panem's authority before and during the Games, and that will only fuel the rebellion in the districts (212). In fact, the tributes "begin to join hands [and] all twenty-four or [them] stand in one unbroken line in what must be the first public show of unity among the districts since the Dark Days" (311). Peeta tries to let the Games be cancelled by telling a deliberate lie, namely that "a brief time [together with Katniss] is better than no time […] if it weren't for the baby" (309). As a result, "it sends accusations of injustice and barbarism and cruelty flying out in every direction" as the audience wants the Games to be cancelled (309). Though the Capitol will never cancel this Games, the other goal of the lie is to make the audience sympathise with Katniss, so that she will have sponsors in the arena in order to increase her chances of survival. Simultaneously, this lie places Katniss into the most difficult feminine role, that of wife and mother. In the *Hunger Games*, embracing her feminine characteristics was her method to survive the Games. In *Catching Fire*, this method is taken one step further, in which her maternity is intended to convince the Districts that a pregnant 17-year old cannot be any threat to the Capitol. At the same time, however, it is the best way to rebellion, as Peeta provides Katniss with the ultimate chance to survive the arena. This example demonstrates that the characteristics are not only increasingly important to the plot development, but also that the romance plot and the dystopian plot are starting to combine.

Each romance novel needs a recognition of the hero and heroine that they love each other (Regis 27). In the trilogy, it has been obvious that the male protagonist was in love with the leading lady. Throughout the books, he has declared his true feelings overtly, which already shows a different perspective to the male character, since the displaying of emotions

and the declaration of feelings is a feminine characteristic. In *Catching Fire*, however, the pretended romance between the star-crossed lovers becomes more authentic, because Katniss begins to realise that her feelings for Peeta become more genuine. As discussed in section 1.1, female protagonists in romances need to be 'awakened' by the main male protagonist of the story. Though there was not a mutual dislike for one another, Katniss certainly needed to be made aware of her true feelings towards Peeta. As Katniss says, "the sound of his voice twists my stomach into a knot of unpleasant emotions like guilt, sadness, and fear. And longing" (Collins, *CF*, 17). Throughout the previous events, Katniss had too many other priorities to admit her feelings as "it [had] too much competition to ever win out" (17). She continues to repress them to a certain extent, but the thought that she will not survive these Games gives way to the presence of romantic feelings for Peeta. Once the Quarter Quell has started, Katniss turns to Peeta for physical comfort, as they become aware that their time together is coming to an end. The pretended romance between them gradually changes into real love, and when Katniss kisses Peeta now, she becomes full of passion for him. She realises that "only one person will be damaged beyond repair if Peeta dies," and that is herself (425). The recognition of love is one of the ultimate elements in romance fiction, though in dystopian fiction it is an element that can and will become an obstacle in the protagonists' pursuit of a happy ending.

In order to eventually come to a happy ending, a romance novel needs an instance in which the heroine "cheats ritual death, symbolically or actually, and is freed to live" (Regis 15). This instance occurs in *Catching Fire* as well, at the moment when Katniss has discarded the whole method of using love as a way to survive:

> We star-crossed lovers of District 12, who suffered so much and enjoyed so little the rewards of our victory, do not seek our fans' favor, grace them with

> our smiles, or catch their kisses. We are unforgiving. And I love it. Getting to be myself at last. (Collins, *CF*, 255)

This citation demonstrates that Katniss and Peeta, along with several other tributes, have put aside their attempt to silence the rebellion, and have embraced the fact that they will start to actively rebel against the Capitol. This is why some of the tributes have formed an alliance in the arena in order to rebel against the government, who has changed her and the others into killers. As Haymitch told her, she has to "remember who the enemy is [...] That's all" (456). Her ultimate act in the arena is then to actually cheat ritual death and defy the Capitol by shooting an arrow covered by a wire into the air in order to destroy the force field around the arena, enabling the rebels from outside the arena, such as Haymitch and Plutarch Heavensby, the Head Gamemaker, to save her and some of the other tributes. This act can be seen as the ultimate act of bravery, as it could have killed her. Though the characteristics of the romance genre have become increasingly important in *Catching Fire*, and they are starting to combine with the dystopian plot, the main focus remains on the societal problems in Panem. In the first novel in the sequence, love and romance were primarily used to aid survival, and then as a way to rebel. In book two, love and romance were initially used survive and tone down the rebellion, and then completely put aside in order to focus on the rebellion, as Katniss states that she "really can't think about kissing when [she's] got a rebellion to incite" (152). It would not be dystopian fiction, however, if the female protagonist's survival would be that easy, which means that she is freed for now, but the consequences will be severe.

The previous element of cheating ritual death thus ensures that, once again, the book does not really have a happy ending. The positive part is that Katniss survived her previous act of rebellion, and she is saved by Haymitch and Plutarch in a hovercraft, as their plan was all along to save the rebelling tributes (465-466). They explain that saving Katniss was their goal from the beginning, because she is the Mockingjay, "a creature the capitol never

intended to exist [and therefore] they hadn't anticipated its will to live" (112). For the reason that Katniss caused the desire that lead to rebellious behaviour in the districts, the rebels made her their symbol, meaning that "while [she] live[s], the revolution lives" (466). The negative part of the ending is that Peeta "was picked up by the Capitol" (467) as a way to "use him against [Katniss] like bait (468). Once again, her romance with Peeta, this time more genuine than before, and the fate of Panem are brought together. During the last instalment, Katniss will have to focus on the uprising and uniting the citizens of Panem in order to overthrow the government, while at the same time being concerned about Peeta, and what is happening to him in the Capitol. As mentioned in section 1.3, characters in Young Adult dystopian fiction are more realistic, because they have to balance relationships and societal problems, just as people do in real life. This certainly applies to Katniss, who "popular opinion has elevated […] to a modern feminist heroine" (Firestone 209). This time, however, combining the societal problems and her relationship with Peeta will become her biggest and most difficult task, as both are on the verge of collapsing.

In *Catching Fire*, the presence of romance and gendered features has significantly increased when compared to *The Hunger Games*. In book one, gendered traits and romance were primarily used to survive the Games and to rebel afterwards. In the second book, the central love story is used to survive after the Games and tone down the rebellion, and then completely put aside in order to focus on the imminent rebellion. In fact, all the events in this book ensure that the pretended romance of Katniss and Peeta becomes gradually more important. The romance strategy that was used as a method of survival has triggered hope for change in the districts, which develops into a true rebellion in *Catching Fire*. The presence of romance elements, such as the recognition of feelings, the point of ritual death, and the conflict concerning personal (romantic) relationships, also demonstrates that the increasing presence is gradually resulting in a mixture of storylines. This means that the romance

narrative is not only a small subplot to advance the dystopian plot, but the dystopian plot regularly triggers specific elements of the romance genre as well. It all demonstrates that the presence of romance in *The Hunger Games* has had lasting effects on the events that happen in *Catching Fire*.

4. *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* – The Long-Lasting Lovers

"I must have loved you a lot"

(Collins, *Mockingjay*, 269)

In *Mockingjay* (2010), both the political situation in Panem and Katniss's relationships with Gale and Peeta reach a culminating point, as the book continues where *Catching Fire* ended. In the previous two books, Katniss fuelled the rebellion, but now that District Twelve has been destroyed and allies have been captured, she becomes one nation's hope. As the Mockingjay, it is her duty to be the representative of the rebellion directed at the Capitol, where they have captured Peeta at the end of *Catching Fire*. It is their intention to use him as a tool to damage Katniss, because "in the Capitol, [she is] the one they're scared off now" (Collins, *Mockingjay*, 258). Most of the rebels have been brought to District Thirteen, the district that everyone believed to be destroyed after the Dark Days, but which actually still exists below the ground. From there, they lead the rebellion, and they ensure that Peeta is eventually saved. Unfortunately, he suffers memory loss due to 'hijacking' in the Capitol, which makes him very dangerous, especially because the government set him against Katniss. As a result, she has to combine her duties as the Mockingjay and her troubled relationships with Gale and Peeta, as well as the mental consequences of having experienced the Games twice. *Mockingjay* is the final instalment in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, and as the ultimate ending, it will bring the social and political situation in Panem and Katniss's confusion concerning her relationships to a resolution.

In Young Adult dystopian fiction, the romance genre is primarily present in that it has given the opportunity to create more authentic and complete characters, who have been given new aspects to their identities. In fact, the first two books have been leading up to the ultimate centralisation of the female protagonist as the symbol of rebellion. In *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, Katniss was forced to use the romance strategy to show that she was in love with Peeta. In *Mockingjay*, however, her central role is to act as the symbol representing the rebellion against the corrupt government of Panem. Laura Miller argues that "in contrast to the Capitol, the rebels won't force her to perform". That is exactly what they do, however, especially as she is also obligated to continue her pretended romantic feelings for Peeta. Plutarch's remark that she is allowed to have an off-camera relationship with Gale is therefore very offensive, especially because Katniss believes it implies:

> that I could so readily dispose of Peeta, that I'm in love with Gale, that the whole thing has been an act. […] The very notion that I'm devoting any thought to [who] I want presented as my lover, given our current circumstances, is demeaning. I let my anger propel me into my greatest demand. "When the war is over, if we've won, Peeta will be pardoned." (Collins, *Mockingjay*, 47-48)

It is ironic that it is actually harder to show that she is really in love than to fake it. Nevertheless, Katniss's feminine actions that are supposed to confirm her romantic feelings for Peeta are still not convincing enough. As a result, her function as Mockingjay is the most difficult one yet, because she has to convince not only the Capitol of her genuine affection for Peeta, but her own allies as well. And in addition to that, she also has to unify the districts of Panem in a rebellion against the corrupt Capitol. The addition of romance elements and gendered traits, which became necessary when the female protagonist volunteered and consequently became a tribute in the 74th Hunger Games, has ultimately resulted in the

centralisation of the female protagonist. Additionally, the dystopian plot concerning the rebellion and the plot about the central love story and personal relationships are gradually mixing into one.

As discussed in section 1.3, dystopian fiction combines the central points of both the romance genre's concern with emotions and relationships, and science fiction's interest in technological advances and political problems. Both points of focus are combined in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* as well, though they come to a climax in *Mockingjay*. Not only do the political situation in Panem and Katniss's relationships with Gale and Peeta both reach a culminating point, they intermingle as well. Katniss's duty as the Mockingjay has mentally separated her from her feelings for both Gale and Peeta. As a result, Gale becomes unbearably bitter and jealous, and in his behaviour he is the complete opposite of Peeta. The latter still loved Katniss despite the fact that she pretended her feelings for him, whereas the former hunting-partner is angry at her for being confused, refusing to acknowledge all the previous experiences and difficulties that Katniss has faced. In addition, Gale wants to win the rebellion by force, as he plans to drop bombs and blow up the districts that do not cooperate, before doing the same to the Capitol. Katniss and Gale have a completely different perspectives on how to lead the rebellion. In this perspective, Suzanne Collins is actually fusing the political situation of Panem with Katniss's relationships. Katniss is similar to the citizens of Panem, who need to overthrow the corrupt government that has been oppressing them since the previous uprising. In addition, Katniss has to refuse to be a part of Gale's anger towards the Capitol and his plan to use violence to win. As a result, Katniss realises that

> What I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go

> on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that. (453)

The choice Katniss has between Gale and Peeta has become more than just a hard choice in a love triangle. Due to the intertwining of societal pressure with the difficulties experienced within personal relationships, it has become a reflection of an ideological confrontation. This confirms that the romance genre has not only included gendered traits, but that the point of focus has finally joined that of the science fiction genre.

The main barrier between the female and male protagonist is the memory loss of the latter. In romance fiction, "the recognition that fells the barrier" is necessary before the two lovers can work towards a happy ending (Regis 27). In *Mockingjay*, this recognition is shown when Katniss realises she truly cannot function well without Peeta by her side. As a result, the rebels understand the importance of Peeta's recovery, which is why they work hard on his mental improvement. As soon as Peeta becomes a smaller threat to Katniss, seeing that he no longer physically attacks her, Katniss tries everything in her power to help him recall their past. As discussed in 1.1, the female protagonist in a romance plot needs to be awakened to embrace her feminine traits by the male character in order to be able to love. In *Mockingjay*, Suzanne Collins has reversed this convention of the romance plot, for the reason that Katniss is now the character who needs to aid Peeta in his process of retrieving his ability to love Katniss. In order to reach this goal, they play a game, in which Peeta expresses something that he believes and asks whether this statement is "real or not real" (Collins, *Mockingjay*, 316). As a result, his real memories slowly come back to him, and at one point he even realizes that he "must have loved [Katniss] a lot," when she tells him about their experiences together (269). Their time together in order to bring back Peeta's memories is also a chance for Katniss to answer questions more honestly than ever before. She finally shows her true emotions to Peeta, when after a question "more words tumble out. […] Then I [Katniss] dive into my tent

before I do something stupid like cry" (317). Her genuine display of emotions brings her closer to Peeta, and when Peeta says "You love me. Real or not real?" Katniss is able to "tell him, 'real'" (453). The mental hijacking as a result of the rebellion is ultimately the only tool that can reconcile Katniss and Peeta, and bring them closer than before.

As discussed in 1.3, it is typical to science fiction that some characters must have an undesirable outcome, in order to emphasise the realistic treatment of rebellion and war. This also applies to the *Hunger Games* trilogy, in which the events are coming to a climactic conclusion. Throughout the rebellion, Katniss has been able to put aside the aftereffects of the Games, but her sister's death near the end of *Mockingjay* leaves an emotional pain that Katniss is unable to bear. Prim was the reason for Katniss to take over the role of her father and mother, so that she could grow up without having to be concerned with survival. Prim was also the reason that Katniss went into the Hunger Games in the first place. As Peeta tells Gale, the latter could not volunteer because he "had to take care of her [Katniss's] family. They matter more to her than her life" (384). The experience of loss leads to Katniss comprehending everything that has happened to her: "There's much pain but there's also something like reality […] Gradually, I'm forced to accept who I am. A badly burned girl with no wings. With no fire. And no sister" (409). For a large part of her life, Katniss was Prim's protector, her mother and father in one. After her sister's death, she no longer has any of those roles. Nevertheless, Katniss is eventually able to let this incident make her stronger, because she has nothing to lose now. She lets her emotions fuel her anger, which ensures that she continues to carry out her final task as the Mockingjay.

Aside from the barrier encountered and felled in the romance plot, the dystopian plot still has a barrier, namely the societal problems in Panem. Now that Katniss has resolved her relationship troubles, she can focus entirely on her final task. From the beginning of *Mockingjay*, it has been clear that Katniss would be the one to execute President Snow, for the

reason that she is the symbol for the entire rebellion, and therefore she is allowed take revenge for all the horrible things that he has inflicted upon the whole nation. Throughout the rebellion, however, she has had problems with Coin, the leader of the rebels. She lied to Katniss in order to manipulate her into cooperating with them. In addition, Coin convinced the rebels to organise one more Hunger Games, though now with the children of the Capitol, with the intention to make up for the loss of the districts' children. Katniss is against this whole method of rebellion, because a war should not be won by a group that does not intend to change anything except the balance of powers. Katniss argues that "nothing has changed [and] nothing will change now" (432). As Firestone argues, "Katniss makes reactive decisions," which means that she acts decisively when she has no other choice (216). In this instance, "she realises that she can actually be an inspiration to people," and change the fate of her country one final time (Firestone 209). As a result, Katniss lets herself be led by her own feelings and she shoots and kills President Coin instead of executing Snow. This final act of rebellion once again underlines the fact that Katniss has been a strong female character throughout the whole trilogy. This last task shows her ability to be influential, as Panem most likely would have followed a similar trajectory under the leadership of Coin. In this particular Young Adult dystopian fiction series, Suzanne Collins has shown that one person can have the strength to entirely change a dystopian nation, and that this person can just as successfully be a woman.

At the end of *Mockingjay* both the political upheaval and Katniss's love life are completely resolved. A story of dystopian fiction, however, is often frequently unresolved, even if the protagonist is able to escape or fight successfully against the dystopian government. In other words, a story of dystopian fiction will deal with individual characters who live in a dystopian society and who are discontented with their government, and they will probably rebel, but they eventually fail to change anything (Roberts). In the final instalment

of *The Hunger Games* series, this is not the case. The downfall of the dystopian government is instigated by Katniss's rebellion that originated from her romance strategy, and that results in the fact that the rebels have successfully changed the society. The romance genre thus intertwines with the typical dystopian narrative, in that the former demands a happy ending. The happy ending concerning the society of Panem is triggered by the female character, and the ending regarding Katniss relationship with Peeta stems from the female protagonist's strength as well. Ever since her father's death and her mother's subsequent breakdown, survival was always Katniss's priority, and even after winning the Hunger Games, survival remained the main focus. Now that survival is no longer priority number one, Katniss can finally pursue happiness through a relationship with Peeta. Additionally, her genuine romance with Peeta makes her a better person, it makes her less rough, perhaps even less masculine, and more loving. Since there will be no more Hunger Games, Katniss is even convinced to start a family with Peeta. This whole development in character demonstrates that Katniss has been able to bring about a change in Panem by inspiring the citizens to fight against injustice. After this violent and intense struggle against the corrupt government, she is also finally able to enjoy her well-deserved freedom. The only unhappy note present in the ending is that Peeta still occasionally suffers from his hijacking and that Katniss dreads the prospect of her children finding out about their parents' involvement in the Hunger Games and the subsequent war, though it was hardly their fault. The trilogy therefore ends by combining the conventions of the genres, and it leaves the reader with a completely resolved ending of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. As a result, the female protagonist is not only able to let her own voice be heard, but her centralisation gives her the opportunity to speak for all the citizens that were suppressed and marginalised within the dystopian society.

In *Mockingjay*, events are brought to a climax. The conventions of the romance genre, such as the recognition of love, and the breakdown of the barrier between the lovers, have

increased so much that the romance plot fuses with the dystopian plot. Whereas Katniss had to balance the rebellion and the political situation on the one hand, and her relationships on the other, in *Mockingjay*, these two elements are brought together. Katniss is concerned with relationships with Gale and Peeta while simultaneously agreeing to be the symbol of rebellion, and trying to unify the districts of Panem in a rebellion against the oppressive Capitol. The romance strategy was again necessary to survive, though it eventually let Katniss realise that she did not need anything but herself to inspire the citizens of Panem to rebel and fight against the injustice caused by the absolute government in the Capitol. The romance genre ultimately centralised the female protagonist by giving her identity a different aspect within the dystopian genre.

Conclusion

In recent years, Young Adult dystopian fiction has seen the development of strong female characters who have become autonomous, who exert agency, and who are able to use their feminine traits in an attempt to transform a corrupt dystopian society. While these capacities were usually not given to young women in dominant patriarchal societies, nowadays it has been made possible by the increasing presence of conventions of the romance genre in science fiction, and its subgenre, dystopian fiction. This increasing presence has resulted in the fact that the female characters in particular have become more central to the plot. In science fiction, the male characters have a much more dominant and important role than women, whereas in romance fiction, female characters are the central point of focus. For the reason that dystopian fiction is classified as a subgenre of science fiction, it might be logical to assume that the male characters have the most prominent role in these works as well. Nevertheless, dystopian fiction, just as most other genres, has often included a romantic element, for instance the love affair between Winston and Julia in Orwell's *1984*, though it depends on the individual text to what extent this element has been important. In Young Adult dystopian fiction, however, the romance storyline is even more important than it has ever been within the genre. As a result, I contend that the conventions of the romance genre regarding the role of characters have merged with those science fiction conventions that were usual in dystopian fiction. The increase of gendered traits from the romance genre in Young Adult dystopian fiction has truly enabled the creation and centralisation of more independent and stronger female characters.

On the surface, it seems as if the combination of the gendered traits of science fiction and romance only results in conflicts within the dystopian plot, primarily because the genres have a completely different focus. The authors of Young Adult dystopian fiction, however, have combined these points of focus to create more realistic characters who are able to

balance societal problems with personal relationships. In other words, the presence of love and romance is actually there to create another aspect of the characters' identities. Additionally, the presence results in a more complex and complete portrayal of female characters in a formerly stereotypically masculine genre, where these women now have more varied roles and a wider range of characteristics available to them. The male characters have simultaneously been subject to change as well. Previously, they were the ultimate heroes of the science fiction stories, and they were in fact entirely masculine. With the addition of romance characteristics, the men are enabled to show more feminine gendered traits, such as emotions and love, and the romantic involvement with the female characters can be more detailed now. Instead of focusing on one element only, both the male and female characters combine societal pressure with personal relationships, and this enables them to change roles. The combination of the gendered characteristics of science fiction and romance has therefore indeed given rise to male characters who are allowed to pursue relationships and romance, and to stronger and more independent female characters who can fight against the corrupt dystopian society.

The greater realism in depicting the female protagonists, most importantly their ability to balance the struggles with a dystopian society and the pursuit of romantic relationships, makes them appealing and interesting to the readers. This new appeal in part accounts for such female characters being more regularly used in contemporary Young Adult dystopian fiction. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Katniss Everdeen is clearly neither perfect, nor courteous or heroic, and she repeatedly cannot control either herself or the situation she finds herself in. When she acts out of sincere love or emotions, she often causes her own tragedies. The fact that in each book, things go wrong when Katniss shows her genuine feelings by automatically embracing her feminine traits, implicitly shows that the dystopian society, and thus dystopian fiction, is not a safe and usual place for romance and femininity. Nevertheless,

she is a strong female protagonist who is able to help others and to bring about a change to Panem and its citizens.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss, as a more masculine character, with her hunting-skills and her lack of emotions, initially became a central character because of her self-sacrifice for her little sister. As a result, she had to embrace her feminine traits, such as compassion for others and a more socially acceptable feminine attitude and clothing style, in order to be capable of pretending to be in love with the intention to survive. Eventually, she uses that same romance strategy as an excuse to defy the government and survive the Games. The romance conventions and gendered were thus mainly necessitated by the romance strategy that was used in order to survive the Games, and to justify the ultimate act of rebellion. As a result of the ensuing rebellion in the districts, Katniss had to act more convincingly in *Catching Fire*, with the purpose to prove the districts that her romance with Peeta was sincere. This means that the presence of romance and gendered features thus significantly increased when compared to *The Hunger Games.* The events in the second book, for instance the Victory Tour and the Quarter Quell, ensure that the pretended romance of Katniss and Peeta became more important as well. Additionally, the presence of gendered elements, such as the recognition of feelings, and the conflict concerning personal relationships, also demonstrates that the increasing presence is gradually resulting in a mixture of storylines. In *Mockingjay*, all events are brought to a climactic end. Katniss was forced to combine being in love with agreeing to be the symbol of rebellion, with the intention to unify the districts of Panem in a rebellion against the Capitol. The romance strategy was again necessary, though Katniss eventually realised that her most important weapon to inspire the citizens of Panem to rebel against corrupt government was herself. Compared to the first two books, the conventions of the romance genre, such as the recognition of love, and the breakdown of the barrier between the lovers, have increased to such an extent that the romance plot has fused with the dystopian

plot. The characteristics that created a more authentic female protagonist have ultimately made her the most central character to the trilogy. Though initially not fitting into the patriarchal society as a strong and independent young woman, she changed from being suppressed to being the symbol of the rebellion. The centralisation of the female protagonist, triggered by the presence of the romance genre, has enabled her to let her voice, and the voices of those she represents, be heard. The case study of the *Hunger Games* trilogy has thus demonstrated that Katniss Everdeen, the Girl on Fire, was able to incite a rebellion by pretending to be in love when suddenly revealing the poisonous berries. It also demonstrated that she was forced to keep up the act in order to survive after the first and during the second Games, and that she was finally able to embrace real love when there were no longer any other priorities. Suzanne Collins has shown that love can emerge from a need to survive, that even in a dystopian society, there can be a better future, and that a female protagonist can aptly be capable of bringing about a change in a dominant patriarchal society.

There is thus indeed a striking paradox to my argument. In chapter one, I explained that some feminist researchers deemed the romance genre as un-feministic due to the fact that the female characters are ultimately subordinated to the male characters, and owing to the implication that women cannot be successful without a man. It is therefore indeed ironic that it is exactly that genre that is used to provide the female characters in dystopian fiction, a genre that was once dominated by men, with a more central role, and consequently more agency. This thesis has thus shown that the romance genre is much more than just a genre that contains simplistic nonsense. In fact, it has demonstrated that the romance genre and its presence in the Young Adult dystopian fiction genre can help women in a patriarchal society find the ‘Girl on Fire’ in themselves, and let their voices be heard.

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