

A Comparative Study of Dystopian Societies in The Giver and The Hunger Games Trilogies

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Abstract

The current study provides a comparative exploration of The Giver trilogy by Lois Lowry and The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins, focusing on their depiction of dystopian societies. The research evaluates key elements such as society, setting, protagonists, conflict, backstory, technology, and climax to identify similarities and differences between the two works. Both trilogies portray controlled, totalitarian societies that initially appear utopian and somewhere down the line turns into an oppressive structure.

The analysis focuses how both authors explore themes of individual resistance, loss of freedom, and the quest for identity through their protagonists—Jonas, Kira, and Matty in The Giver trilogy, and Katniss Everdeen in The Hunger Games. While Lowry emphasizes limited settings and minimal use of technology expanded by supernatural elements, Collins presents a technologically advanced and vividly detailed world.

Despite differences in the style of narrating and world-building, both trilogies share common dystopian features, including strict governmental control, social inequality, and rebellion triggered by moral awakening. The study concludes that although the representation of dystopia differs in each work, more or less both authors convey a similar message about the necessity of change and the importance of individual courage in challenging oppressive systems.

Keywords: Dystopia, Comparative Study, Totalitarian Society, Individual Resistance, Identity, Oppression, Technology, Conflict

In the present study 'Comparative Perspective' the researcher has compared both The Giver and The Hunger Games trilogies with each other in respect with the dystopian world described in it. The researcher has done comparison with the help of the characteristics selected to analyse both the trilogies viz. society, back story, protagonist, destruction, conflict, technology, and climax. Along with this the researcher has compared both the trilogies in general to find out the differences as well as the similarities.

It is a prominent thing in the dystopian fiction that society and its government betray its citizens still few citizens are curious about the way their society works.

While discussing about the settings of both the trilogies, the researcher has found that Lois has given a very limited description of setting. “Dystopian fiction always reduces the world to a “State”, and presents us with the struggle of an individual or a small group against that state.” (Scholes 34)

According to this, both the writers have fit their trilogies in the above characteristics by Scholes, as the Jonas’ community in The Giver, Kira’s village in Gathering Blue, and Matty’s Village in Messenger are presented with a limited area. Jonas, Kira and Matty along with a group of those who have not traded,

struggle against their state.

Whereas The Hunger Games trilogy shows the same picture where once destroyed North America is rebuilt as Panem and divided into thirteen small districts and Katniss along with the rebel team fight against the Capitol.

Both the trilogies are lagging in the description of outside world because their world is limited to their state only. When Jonas starts observing the colourful life from the memories and when he escapes, there we find the description of outside world in the second and the third novel of the trilogy there we find a detailed depiction of the surroundings.

Even in The Hunger Games more focus is given on the meetings of Katniss with various people and her emotional world. There is a detail description of the death arena and District 12, the Capitol has also described through the perspective of Katniss, and in Mockingjay District 13 is described with full details. While comparing the setting in The Giver with The Hunger Games, we find that Lois has given very limited description so comparing the setting; we more clearly understand the situation in The Hunger Games than in The Giver.

The society in The Giver trilogy has shown as utopian at the beginning of each novel. In The Giver Jonas feels that his society is a very good place to live and later he finds out the dystopian characteristics of it. In Gathering Blue, Kira too thinks that the place is very good where she lives but later, she discovers the secrets hidden inside. The same happens in case of Village described in Messenger.

The society described in The Hunger Games trilogy is atrocious. The word Capitol is a homophone of the Capital, even has particular meanings that are money and control over people. Even the word Panem has numbers of interpretations. It describes as it has developed after the natural disasters, and wars. The word Capitol is a symbol of upper class and the people live a luxurious life. In contrast with this the citizens from other districts prepare their children for Hunger Games at an early age as they have to fight to survive and are forced to live an oppressed life.

Both the trilogies face the fear of utopian society because their rulers want a complete totalitarian society. No one is given any freedom so all have to follow sameness which has filled their life with boredom whereas the government achieves control over the population.

While comparing society from both the trilogies, Devin's words become true, "Many dystopian worlds are formulated with utopic ideologies that have seemingly perfect ways of living and running a society, but only for the privileged few in charge." (Devin 03)

It becomes clear that each society has taken birth from some kind of disaster so both are trying hard to create utopian society. The government has strict rules which result into a totalitarian society. Both Lowry and Collins have described same kind of atrocious, uncanny, futuristic society where people are considered as objects and government use them for its profit.

In The Giver trilogy, there are three protagonists Jonas, Kira and Matty. Their entries are very interesting, in first novel only Jonas appears, in second novel two of them Kira and all three are shown together in the third novel. In The Hunger Games trilogy Katniss is the only protagonist.

Protagonists from The Giver trilogy Jonas, Kira and Matty get the reality of their world and want to change it. It is not that much easy to do, so they feel as if they are trapped. Jonas, Kira and Matty are shown different than other citizens as they are gifted by the supernatural powers. They observe the society keenly and try to get the answers of their questions. All three protagonists are shown kind and generous with all heroic qualities.

Suzanne's protagonist is sixteen years old girl, Katniss Everdeen. She is the face of the revolution. Collins

has described her as moody, demanding, and bossy. She rejects her world which is less ordinary. Sometimes she has shown as knocking the person down who expresses his love for her, or sometimes shooting an arrow at a panel of judges before the games begin. Even threatens her mentor with a knife, when she does not like his views, and sometimes feels nostalgic about her past. Sometimes emotional and confused about her love feelings about Peeta and Gale. Collins has made her both a murderer and a victim. As both the trilogies have accepted utopian ideologies and want to take its advantage, they want their citizens to live in limitations and which gives birth to a self-searching protagonist.

Many dystopian worlds are formulated with utopic ideologies that have seemingly perfect ways of living and running a society, but only for the privileged few in charge. These limitations are significant for any population but they become increasingly important to overwhelmed, self searching teenagers. (Devin 03) In this case both the trilogies are fit in the words of Davin.

Lowry has shown various types of conflict in her trilogy. Conflict between man verses man, man verses society, and sometimes protagonists face the inner conflict. In *The Giver*, focus is given on the inner conflict of Jonas, in *Gathering Blue* conflict between weak and strong is focused and in *Messenger* conflict between good and evil is deeply expressed.

In *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne has also focused on conflicts such as man verses man, man verses society, and so on. But the prominent conflict that has found in all the three novels is conflict between the protagonist and the atrocious government.

Both *The Giver* and *The Hunger Games* trilogies have shown too many conflicts. As conflict is the main reason for the destruction, it automatically results into dystopia. Each story develops through various serious types of conflicts that destroy the natural world of protagonist, so he or she lives in a dystopia.

Next, we will compare these trilogies about the back story. Lowry has provided a very significant back story to each of the novel from the trilogy. *The Giver* has a back story of their ancestors and of climate control, and explosion of population. In *Gathering Blue*, Lowry has delineated the history of ruin through the robe. In *Messenger*, there is no particular back story so Lowry has given back history of those strangers who have entered the Village.

Suzanne too has provided a back story to each novel from her trilogy. *The Hunger Games* has a back story of destruction of North America and reconstruction of it as Panem. One more back story of the *Hunger Games* that is once District 13 rebel against the Capitol and gets defeated in it hence *Hunger Games* starts to recall the other districts not to rebel. Every year the history has been told by the president. In second novel Suzanne has disclosed the history of Mockingjay birds. In the third novel there is no specific history given so Suzanne has created such situation where Katniss becomes nostalgic and recalls her past which is nothing but a back story.

So, there is a great similarity between Lois and Suzanne in case of providing backstories.

While comparing *The Giver* with *The Hunger Games* in case of technology, great difference has been found. In *The Giver* technology is used to show sameness, climate control, and to keep a constant watch on the people. In *Gathering Blue* no such use of technology is described even in *Messenger*, we find very less use of technology.

Whereas in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, society described is totally based on advanced technology. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy cameras are everywhere for the constant surveillance. The arena is a piece of ground where many dangerous situations are created with the help of technology. A train with a high speed of 200 miles per hour is described in the novel. In *Catching Fire* very high-tech arena is described which is designed clock wise and every hour the tributes have to face a new danger. In *Mockingjay*, strange

creatures are depicted which are the combination of human and lizard, tracker jackers, jabberjays, and mockingjays, this all shown bad use of technology.

After comparing the perspective of both the writers towards technology, we find that these trilogies are perfectly fit in the explanation given by Scholes,

Most twentieth-century writers have been seen no way to get beyond the enslavement to technology, and we thus find a series of distinguished dystopias that predict a dismal future for humanity. Some writers, however, have tried to get beyond this doom by postulating psychic growth or an evolutionary breakthrough to a race of superpeople. (Scholes 174)

According to this, the first part of the quotation explains those writers who make excessive use of technology and literally goes beyond the enslavement which no doubt leads them towards an uncanny future and Collins' The Hunger Games trilogy perfectly fits in that. Whereas the second part of the quotation suits to Lowry's The Giver trilogy because as Scholes has mentioned few writers replace technology by super natural power, Lowry has done the same. She has not used technology much in comparison with Collins whereas she has given uncanny supernatural powers to each of her protagonist. So, Lowry's protagonists use their supernatural powers to fight with the society and Collins' protagonist uses technology.

After having various types of twists and turns, story comes to its climax. In The Giver, Jonas escapes the society and story ends. In Gathering Blue, Kira struggles to reveal the secrets of her society and in Messenger, Matty sacrifices his life and story ends.

Whereas in The Hunger Games, Katniss and Peeta are ready to eat poisonous berries to kill themselves instead of killing each other and suddenly both are declared as winners. In Catching Fire, when Katniss does the explosion and destroys the arena; readers believe that she will be killed as a punishment but suddenly the rebel team pulls her out of the forced field. Even in Mockingjay, Prim dies in the battle field because of which readers think that Katniss will take revenge. Even, Katniss has planned to kill President Snow but she kills President Coin and President Snow dies of illness. In all three novels Suzanne has pulled the protagonist till the climax and sudden unexpected end is shown.

While analysing both the trilogies, the researcher has found that the use of symbols and metaphors is very less. Both the authors are having the same army background; both the writers have got inspiration from their army background so that we can find example of a dying soldier in The Giver trilogy and use of words such as refugees, rescue team, hovercraft, explosives, and highjack in The Hunger Games trilogy. The army background has helped them to make their protagonist to fight like a true warrior.

While discussing about the titles of both the trilogies, The Giver and The Hunger Games are named after the first novel in the respective series. The title of the second novel in The Giver trilogy is Gathering Blue and Catching Fire is the title of the second novel of the The Hunger Games series, the word giver and hunger form first title and the words gathering and catching from the second novel ends with same syllable. Whereas the word gathering and catching means to collect something; and 'ing' form shows continuation and as Gathering Blue and Catching Fire are the second link in the selected trilogies, it is very apt that they are showing link between the first and the third novel with continuous form in both series. Even titles of the second novel from both the trilogies consist of two words gathering and blue and catching and fire. While discussing about the third title in both the series the researcher has found a deep similarity between two different titles of two different trilogies of two different authors. Messenger is the third title of The Giver trilogy and Mockingjay is the third title of The Hunger Games trilogy; both titles start with letter 'M'. Both titles are consisting of only one big word, with four syllables used as symbol for the protagonist.

In The Giver trilogy Leader declares Matty a real messenger even in the last novel of The Hunger Games trilogy Katniss becomes a face of rebel and becomes a Mockingjay. So, there are great similarities between the titles of both the selected trilogies.

The trilogies do have similarities more than differences. In case of protagonist, Jonas, Kira, Matty and Katniss are very sensitive characters. They love their family and are ready to do sacrifice for it. These characters are shown unhappy and restless because of their societies. They all are fighting against their society to gain their rights, freedom, and their identity. All protagonists are compassionate about their society which make them restless and they choose to rebel.

All the three protagonists from The Giver trilogy and Katniss from The Hunger Games trilogy understand that utopia is good to imagine and never truly be realized. Jonas at the end of The Giver, Kira at end of Gathering Blue, Matty at the end of Messenger and Katniss at the end of The Hunger Games series learn the differences between good and bad. It means so called utopia turns into dystopia which is destroyed by the protagonists of both the trilogies.

Another similar thing has been found in case of a minor character from both the trilogies. Rosemary from The Giver and Rue from The Hunger Games are the minor characters who died at the young age and their death gives inspiration to the protagonists to rebel. In both the novels these two girls die due to the cruel traditions of the society. Rosemary has got selected as receiver of the memory but soon she finds out the cruelty of the rulers so she asks for mercy killing and in The Hunger Games, Rue also has got selected as one of the tributes, she is murdered by other tribute in the arena.

The previous Giver from The Giver loves Rosemary as his daughter and Katniss too loves Rue as her younger sister. So, both Giver and Katniss are very much hurt because of the death. The previous Giver helps Jonas to escape the society with Gabe or else Jonas is not able to do this alone. Katniss too helps the rebellions to fight against President Snow.

It is the coincident that both the trilogies have the same source to start rebel. The source is young girls and their names also start with the same letter 'R'. Both Lois and Suzanne have described Rosemary and Rue as a minor character with a great importance. They become a milestone in the way of the major characters to rebel against the society.

Overall trilogy of both the writers is similar and like most dystopian writers, both promote individual's resistance to totalitarianism while depicting dystopian societies. But their representations of these societies are very different; this fact is responsible for the popularity and sale of it.

Through these comparisons it becomes clear that both Lois and Suzanne have used all these characteristics which the researcher has chosen to define the dystopian world in the selected trilogies.

The above discussion over comparisons between Lois Lowry's The Giver trilogy and Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games trilogy comes up with a statement that the two dystopian worlds are presented in two different ways which has more similarities than the differences. This is the only reason that both Lois Lowry and Suzanne Collins have given the same message through their selected work that change is a need of today's world.

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