

Shedding a Persona; Coriolanus Snow's Descent into Madness
during *A Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*

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Abstract

This thesis delves into the intricate narrative of Suzanne Collins' 2020 novel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, and examines the portrayal of natural elements, specifically potatoes and roses, in shaping the protagonist's Bildungsroman journey and eventual degeneration into madness. Understanding the representation of natural elements in literature, especially within the context of popular media, is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on how contemporary authors utilise traditional literary tools to craft complex narratives. Secondly, it underscores the significance of modern authors in shaping literary discourse, and contributing to the evolution of literary genres. Finally, it offers insight into broader societal themes and environmental concerns, providing a lens through which to analyse contemporary issues. There remains a gap in the research regarding the nuanced portrayal of natural elements and their symbolic significance in the modern Bildungsroman protagonist's character development. Previous analyses have often overlooked these elements or failed to explore them in depth, leaving room for a more comprehensive investigation. This thesis aims to address this gap by answering the research question: How does *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* employ wild growing versus cultured natural elements to represent the protagonist's journey towards mental degeneration, in an ironic twist of the Bildungsroman protagonist journey? The research employs a qualitative approach, analysing key scenes involving potatoes and roses to elucidate their symbolic significance. The thesis argues that Collins' adept use of these natural elements serves as a metaphor for the protagonist's internal turmoil and societal pressures, ultimately leading to his descent into madness.

Introduction

In modern literary analysis, incorporating popular media is essential for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary societal dynamics and cultural narratives. Despite often being seen as entertainment for the masses, works of popular media such as novels, films, and television shows possess significant literary complexity that warrants scholarly examination. However, their pervasive presence in mainstream culture may lead to their dismissal in traditional literary analysis. Suzanne Collins' 2020 novel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, serves as a compelling example of the depth present in popular media. Through an exploration of this novel, we can uncover profound insights into human psychology, cultural norms, and existential themes, enriching our understanding of both literature and society. By delving into the complexities of its themes and character developments, we gain valuable insights into contemporary societal issues and human experiences. This essay aims to explore how *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* depicts the contrast between wild growth and cultured natural elements to illustrate the protagonist's journey towards mental degeneration within the Gothic framework, presenting an ironic twist on the Bildungsroman archetype. But first, let's clarify some key terms.

The Bildungsroman, a time-honoured literary genre, guides the protagonist through adolescence's trials, fostering personal development and maturity. While recent scholarly descriptions of the Bildungsroman are limited, Jerome Hamilton Buckley's seminal work *Season of Youth* (1974) sheds light on its essential elements. *Season of Youth* examines the 'coming-of-age narratives' of several traditional Bildungsroman novels, using these examples to illuminate essential aspects of the genre. Buckley introduces his book by describing the Bildungsroman as a narrative of "all-around development of self-culture," wherein protagonists consciously strive to refine themselves through lived experiences (13). This journey typically entails a transformation in beliefs and values as the protagonist navigates the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Integral to the Bildungsroman is the notion of "self-culture," emphasising the deliberate cultivation of one's character, which often leads to the protagonist's artistic self-expression through various creative endeavours. As Buckley elucidates, the English Bildungsroman protagonists

frequently emerge as artists, channelling their newfound insights and sensibilities into creative endeavours (14). However, not all protagonists fit this artistic mould.

In Suzanne Collins' 2020 novel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (hereafter referred to as TBOSAS), protagonist Coriolanus Snow undergoes a significant philosophical, not artistic, transformation regarding maintaining peace. Set ten years in the aftermath of a devastating war, the novel follows Snow's coming of age amidst the tumult of the Hunger Games – a brutal spectacle where 24 selected children fight to the death. As the narrative unfolds, Snow plays a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of the Games into a nationwide spectacle, complete with betting and sponsorships. Coriolanus, a newly coined mentor in the 10th Hunger Games, finds himself thrust into a daunting role: to ensure the survival of his tribute, Lucy Gray, amidst the harrowing spectacle of children fighting for their lives. As a teenager from a once-affluent family now fallen on hard times, Coriolanus grapples with the stark reality of his family's post-war destitution. Despite their dwindling resources, they cling desperately to the façade of opulence and prestige that once defined their status. Despite the condensed timeline of the novel, spanning roughly two months, Snow's character undergoes substantial development. Drawing from Buckley's analysis of the Bildungsroman, Snow's childhood and adolescence is characterised by uncertainty and moral ambiguity. His demeanour vacillates between condescension and naivety, reflecting a transitional phase fraught with inner turmoil, reflecting what Buckley describes as a "space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted..." (1). Moreover, Snow's persistent façade of superiority, despite his lack of material wealth, underscores his yearning for excess and power – a theme resonant with Bildungsroman protagonists navigating societal expectations, particularly in the upper classes (Buckley 20), which Snow hereditarily belongs to. Throughout the narrative, Snow grapples with his limitations and embarks on a transformative journey, in line with the Bildungsroman tradition.

The journey that Snow embarks on, navigating a world determined to hinder him at every step, is not only a narrative of external challenges but also a profound exploration of his internal struggles. As Snow strives to succeed in this hostile environment, his mental state undergoes a noticeable deterioration, mirroring the themes of degeneration prevalent in Gothic literature. Chapter three of this

dissertation will delve deeper into how Snow's inner monologue reflects this decline in mental health; however, it is important to first understand the concept of degeneration. This literary device is a staple of Gothic literature, particularly popular during the Victorian era, serving as a stark contrast to Darwin's theory of evolution. In this literary tradition, degeneration depicted a regression of humanity towards a more primitive state, as described by Kelly Hurley in *The Gothic body* (2006). Typically, this manifested physically, as seen in characters like Dracula's hairy and animalistic palms, or Mr. Hyde, with his atavistic behaviour and appearance, not caring for society's norms and expectations. Hurley described this phenomenon as the human subject being "continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (3).

Within the narrative of TBOSAS, Snow's journey embodies this theme of degeneration as he confronts the inherent animalistic tendencies within himself and society at large. Initially rejecting the notion of innate beastliness in humans, Snow's experiences in life-threatening situations gradually erode his ideals, leading him to accept and even embrace the darker aspects of human nature. This transformation reflects Hurley's assertion that the degenerated human "labours to maintain (the illusion of) an autonomous and discrete self-identity" while simultaneously succumbing to primal instincts when faced with adversity (4). Snow's character presents a compelling dichotomy, meticulously upholding the façade of a poised and affluent young man while harbouring a darker, more violent side beneath the surface. His descent into violence and manipulation, driven by a primal instinct for survival and dominance, mirrors the themes of degeneration prevalent in Gothic literature. In this way, Snow's journey serves as a haunting reflection of humanity's regression towards its primal instincts, encapsulating the timeless struggle between civilization and savagery.

I. Digging deep; symbolism in potatoes

You might wonder; how do vegetables contribute to our understanding of Snow's deteriorating mental health? Symbolism plays a pivotal role here, extending beyond imagery for the reader, to encompass the characters' perspectives. As we delve into this character study of Coriolanus, his perception of potatoes become a lens through which the reader can understand his worldview. This essay, in addition to connecting the Bildungsroman with gothic elements, will also draw from Holmes Rolston III's insight on nature in Yellowstone National Park to enrich the analysis. Rolston's essay, "Natural and Unnatural; Wild and Cultural," (2001) delves into the dichotomy between cultivated and wild elements in nature. He challenges the notion of some scholars, which is that wilderness is solely a human construct, arguing that it embodies uncontrolled, untamed aspects of the environment (269). This understanding is pivotal to the difference between Snow's cultivated roses and Lucy Gray's wild swamp potatoes, reflecting their perspective positions in the novel's world. Rolston's perspective informs our examination of Snow's evolving perception of wilderness, particularly in how it intersects with poverty and societal hierarchy.

Analysing the quote "the cabbage began to boil, filling the kitchen with the smell of poverty" (Collins 8), offers insight into Snow's Bildungsroman journey as a narrative of youthful education. In the Bildungsroman tradition, protagonists embark on a quest for personal growth and self-realization, often shaped by their socioeconomic background. The boiling cabbage, with its evocative scent of poverty, serves as a sensory reminder of Snow's family's economic hardships. The act of boiling cabbage, a simple and economical meal, fills the kitchen with a scent that evokes memories of financial hardship. This sensory experience is significant in the context of Snow's Bildungsroman journey, as it exposes him to the harsh realities of economic inequality and challenges his preconceived notions of privilege. The juxtaposition of the boiling cabbage against the backdrop of Snow's cultivated environment highlights the intrusion of poverty into his carefully curated world. In the Capitol, where opulence and extravagance reign supreme, the scent of poverty disrupts the illusion of prosperity that Snow strives to maintain. This clash between the cultivated and the impoverished reflects the broader societal tensions within the narrative, where the Capitol's affluent elite coexist alongside the impoverished

districts. Rolston's perspective on cultivated elements as invasive species further accentuates the significance of the boiling cabbage in Snow's narrative. Just as invasive species disrupt natural ecosystems, the scent of poverty disrupts Snow's cultivated persona, threatening to expose the vulnerabilities lurking beneath his affluent facade. This conflict between cultivation and intrusion underscores Snow's internal struggle to reconcile his social identity with his socioeconomic reality, adding depth to his Bildungsroman journey.

Transitioning to the second quote, we encounter a striking dichotomy between the cultivated elegance of Snow's Grandmother's rose, and the modest aroma of potatoes. As Collins writes, "He felt grateful for his grandmother's rose, as his warming shirt was giving off a faint scent of potatoes and marigolds" (Collins 13). The rose symbolizes refinement and social status, starkly contrasting with the scent associated with poverty. Snow's appreciation for the rose reflects his yearning for symbols of wealth and prestige, despite his humble circumstances, and his attempts to hide his family's financial struggles. The practical use of potatoes to starch his shirt underscores the resourcefulness necessitated by poverty, where every scrap is utilized for survival. These scenes occur early in the narrative, highlighting Snow's initial struggle with economic adversity as he strives for recognition and success. The starching of his shirt and the presentation of his grandmother's rose symbolize his aspirations for social mobility and validation, setting the stage for his transformative journey throughout the novel. This connects to Buckley's insight into the Bildungsroman genre, where the defining attributes of childhood experiences shape the trajectory towards maturity. As Buckley observes, "Every moment of childhood suffering leaves some trace which blends itself 'irrevocably with the firmer texture of our youth and manhood'" (Buckley 94). Snow's early encounters with poverty and societal expectations leave lasting imprints on his character, influencing his growth and development as he navigates the challenges of adolescence and beyond. This mirrors the themes found in George Meredith's novels, as elucidated by Buckley (65), where the progression from childhood to adolescence is depicted as a learning process for life. In Meredith's works, emotional struggles and pivotal experiences shape the individual's path toward maturity, leaving lasting impressions on their journey.

Towards the end of TBOSAS, Coriolanus accompanies Lucy Gray to District 12, where she introduces him to new experiences, such as day trips to a nearby lake her family frequents. It's during one of these outings that a significant scene unfolds:

Coriolanus wondered if he meant it to be decorative, like the Grandma'am's roses, but she immediately examined the roots, from which small tubers hung. "Little too early yet." "Yeah," Clerk Carmine agreed. "For what?" asked Coriolanus. "For eatin. In a few weeks, these will grow into decent-sized potatoes, and we can roast them," said Lucy Gray. "Some people call them swamp potatoes, but I like katniss better. Has a nice ring to it." (Collins 435-436)

This interaction underscores the contrasting perspectives of Coriolanus and Lucy Gray regarding nature. Coriolanus's perception is tainted by societal norms, viewing nature through the lens of wealth and status. His initial reaction to the plant's potential for sustenance reflects his ignorance of its practical utility, stemming from his privileged upbringing. In contrast, Lucy Gray approaches nature with a pragmatic mindset, recognizing its resources for survival and finding beauty in its simplicity. Her familiarity with the environment allows her to appreciate its intrinsic worth, devoid of human constructs. Rolston's insight further illuminates this contrast, as he highlights the distinction between culture and nature. While humans are part of nature and possess natural attributes, their lives are distinct from those in the wild. Rolston emphasizes that humans deliberately shape and rebuild the environment to suit their needs, underscoring the transformative power of human intervention in nature (Rolston 267). This perspective underscores the difference between Coriolanus and Lucy Gray's views of nature, as Coriolanus fails to recognize its intrinsic value beyond human constructs, while Lucy Gray embraces its offerings with humility and appreciation.

II. Roses and excess; the illusion of opulence

In this chapter, we delve into the symbolic significance of roses and the theme of excess, drawing insights from Rolston's exploration of the differences between nature and wildness. Rolston's distinction between exotics and invasives frames the societal dynamics in Suzanne Collins' novel. The scene in question, where Snow presents Lucy Gray with a rose in the Capitol, is rich with symbolism that reflects the tension between cultivated beauty and the harsh realities of poverty:

[...] she reached out and delicately plucked a petal from the flower in his hand. "When I was little, they used to bathe me in buttermilk and rose petals," she said in a manner that, despite the unlikeliness of her claim, seemed totally believable. She ran her thumb over the glossy, white surface and slipped the petal into her mouth, closing her eyes to savor the flavor. "Tastes like bedtime." (Collins 42)

Snow's gesture of offering the rose symbolizes his attempt to project an image of wealth and sophistication, drawing from the allure of cultivated beauty. However, Lucy Gray's response challenges this facade, as she delicately plucks a petal from the flower and reminisces about her past indulgences. Her actions suggest a deeper understanding of the transient nature of luxury, contrasting with Snow's superficial display of opulence. Snow's grandmother's hoarding of roses exemplifies the human tendency to cultivate and control the environment, creating artificial constructs of beauty and luxury. Snow's use of roses as a symbol of status further reinforces this idea, as he seeks to assert his social standing through material possessions. Additionally, Lucy Gray's subtle manipulation of Snow reflects Rolston's concept of invasives as entities that disrupt the natural order. By challenging Snow's perception of wealth and privilege, Lucy Gray disrupts the societal hierarchy and asserts her agency in a world dominated by superficiality. Rolston's assertion that "wildness refers to a world outside the human sector" (268) highlights Lucy Gray's connection to nature and her rejection of societal norms. Likewise, his explanation of invasives as entities that enter by unlawful force (270) parallels Lucy Gray's subversion of Snow's attempts to control and dominate her. Through an analysis informed by Rolston's insights, we gain a deeper understanding of the scene's thematic

resonance and its implications for the characters' development. The juxtaposition of cultivated beauty and natural authenticity serves as a powerful commentary on the illusions of wealth and the enduring resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

One might explore the symbolic significance of roses beyond mere opulent splendour or a means to inspire awe. Fred Botting's discourse on neoclassical views of nature's beauty in his chapter "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture" (2012) sheds light on how nature was once valued primarily for its orderly appearance, with irregularities seen as aberrations. This historical perspective resonates with Snow's grandmother's hoarding of roses and Snow's use of roses as symbols of social status, reflecting attempts to impose control on the natural world. However, the Gothic revival prompted a re-evaluation, transforming mountains from perceived abnormalities into "temples of Nature," sources of wonder and spiritual inspiration. This shift parallels Lucy Gray's affinity for the wild, emphasizing her rejection of societal norms in favour of embracing untamed beauty. Botting further explores the sublime as a profound experience evoking awe and hinting at the divine within nature. This perspective aligns with the idea that the sublime transcends mere sensory stimulation, offering a spiritual connection that resonates deeply with human consciousness. The notion that the sublime provides a glimpse of the divine, echoes longstanding beliefs in deistic philosophy, which presents a distant, transcendent God who created the universe, but does not directly intervene in its workings.

Considering Snow's gesture of presenting Lucy Gray with a rose, Botting's insights deepen our comprehension of the scene's dynamics. The contrast between cultivated beauty and natural authenticity becomes palpable. While Snow's grand gesture initially captivates, Lucy Gray's innate connection to nature ultimately eclipses it. Her defiance of societal norms serves as a poignant reminder of nature's sublime power. Lucy Gray's rejection of Snow's notions of wealth and privilege embodies the sublime, disrupting established hierarchies and showcasing human resilience in adversity. Thus, the scene emerges as a testament to the sublime potential of the human spirit, transcending artificial constructs of beauty and social status.

III. Snow falls; madness blooms

Within the narrative of TBOSAS, Coriolanus Snow's journey towards successful adulthood appears to be impeded by his gradual descent into madness. Brewster's examination of madness, in "Seeing Things; Gothic and the Madness of Interpretation," offers valuable insights into understanding Snow's psychological unravelling within the context of the novel. Brewster challenges us to question whose perspective defines madness (481), urging exploration of the narrative from multiple angles. In TBOSAS, madness is not merely a clinical condition but rather an integral aspect of the narrative that requires interpretation from the reader. As the novel follows Snow's point of view, his growing mania is viewed as quite natural. The reason for this may be that Snow's descent into madness reflects the reader's desires and interpretation, which Brewster argues is an outlet for "the exaggerated development of natural passions of human nature" (482). The dichotomy between the "sane" interpreter and the "mad" narrator is a central theme in TBOSAS. As readers, we are compelled to engage with Snow's narrative, grappling with the nuances of his increasingly erratic behaviour. As we delve deeper into the novel, we are confronted with the unsettling truth that madness is not an external force to be conquered but a deeply ingrained aspect of the human condition, lurking just beneath the surface of our consciousness. This truth echoes the philosophical theory presented to Snow by his teacher, Dr. Gaul, suggesting that human nature contains animalistic and murderous traits lying just beneath the surface. This chapter will explore this theory further with this quote:

Furious, he turned this way and that and finally blasted the woods in a full circle, going around and around until his bullets were spent. He collapsed on the ground, dizzy and nauseous, as the woods exploded, every bird of every kind screaming its head off while the mockingjays continued their rendition of "The Hanging Tree." Nature gone mad. Genes gone bad. Chaos. (Collins 504)

In this excerpt from *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (TBOSAS), Coriolanus Snow's pursuit of Lucy Gray escalates into a frenzied display of violence and chaos amidst the surrounding woods. Snow's unleashed fury and mania are palpable as he spins in circles, firing his weapon into the skies, evoking an

overwhelming sense of madness. Hurley's analysis in *The Gothic Body* sheds light on the significance of the mockingjays in this scene, portraying them as a product of Capitol mutations—a natural negative phenomenon that Snow vehemently despises. These mockingjays, descendants of Capitol jabberjays mating with local mockingbirds after the war, symbolize an unsettling deviation from Snow's controlled and perfect world, unsettling him with their ability to thrive against all odds. While Snow suspects Lucy Gray of supernatural abilities due to her connections with nature and snakes, *TBOSAS* is not inherently a supernatural novel; rather, it explores themes of scientific achievement and Gothic elements, blurring the line between the natural and the supernatural (Hurley 17). The scene also aligns with Hurley's exploration of Gothic fiction, characterized by excessively violent and overheated language, which serves to evoke horror and trauma. Snow's descent into madness is vividly depicted through fragmented sentences and a palpable sense of urgency, reflecting his deteriorating mental state. The slowing of his usually quick-witted mind creates a disjunction, highlighting the theme of mental degeneration and mania (Hurley 4). The abbreviated sentences often create a sense of urgency and depict a short time span. However, in this setting, it seems more natural to take longer breaks between the thoughts, as if they are made of molasses. This slowing down in a mind that is usually so quick-witted creates a sense of the ruination of Snow as a human, and generates narrative disjunction as he struggles to find himself or his own identity. This serves as a perfect example of mental degeneration and mania, reflecting a disorder of rage and feverish thoughts. Our interpretation of Snow's madness, as prompted by Brewster's analysis, further enriches our understanding of his psychological unravelling within the narrative, urging us to explore the story from multiple angles and grapple with the nuances of his increasingly erratic behaviour.

In the intense scene from *TBOSAS*, Snow's violent outburst reflects not only a mental decline, but also a profound disruption in the natural order. His frenzied actions resonate with Holmes Rolston III's concept of exotics, which describes entities both fascinating and potentially perilous. Rolston's notion that humans are the true "exotics" (271) is evident in Snow's attempt to assert dominance over the wilderness, mirroring the broader human inclination to manipulate and control nature. The scene's portrayal of the mockingjays, descendants of Capitol mutations,

underscores Rolston's assertion that human intervention can lead to unforeseen consequences, disrupting the delicate balance of natural ecosystems. Rolston's observation that transforming nature into something humanized may spell its demise (274) finds resonance here, as Snow's actions symbolize an attempt to subdue the untamed wilderness to fit his own desires. The depiction of nature as "gone mad" and genes as "gone bad" reflects a profound sense of disorder, echoing Rolston's exploration of the potential consequences of human meddling in the natural world. As Snow grapples with his unravelling sanity amidst the chaos of the woods, the scene serves as a stark reminder of the unpredictable and often destructive power of human influence over nature.

In contemplating Snow's descent into madness within the framework of the Bildungsroman genre, Buckley's insights add another layer of complexity to the narrative. The uncertainty surrounding the protagonist's future, as highlighted by Buckley (23), serves to intensify the sense of foreboding and unease that pervades the story. Unlike most traditional bildungsroman narratives that offer a clear resolution or moral growth for the protagonist, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* leaves readers grappling with ambiguity. As Snow navigates the tumultuous landscape of his own psyche, the open-ended nature of his journey raises profound questions about the nature of humanity and the possibility of redemption. This uncertainty further underscores the themes of mental degeneration and mania, inviting readers to confront the darker aspects of human nature and the existential dilemmas that accompany them. Additionally, Buckley's assertion that the protagonist's journey may speak to broader aspects of humanity (7) resonates deeply with readers, inviting them to project their own experiences and desires onto Snow's narrative. Thus, the interpretation of Snow's descent into madness becomes a deeply personal and subjective experience, shaped by readers' own prejudices and wishes, echoing the complexities of human existence portrayed in the novel.

Conclusion

In our exploration of Suzanne Collins' "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," we have embarked on a journey through the complexities of human nature, societal hierarchies, and the fragility of the human psyche. Approaching this work not merely as popular media, but as a piece of literature rich in symbolism and thematic depth, has allowed us to unearth profound insights into contemporary societal dynamics and existential themes. At the heart of our analysis lies the juxtaposition between wild growth and cultivated natural elements, serving as a lens through which to examine the protagonist's journey towards mental degeneration within the Gothic framework, presenting an ironic twist on the Bildungsroman archetype. Through the symbolic significance of potatoes and roses, we have traced Coriolanus Snow's evolution from a young man driven by societal expectations and material aspirations to a character consumed by his descent into madness.

Drawing from the insights of scholars such as Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Kelly Hurley, and Holmes Rolston III, we have contextualized Snow's narrative within broader literary traditions and philosophical inquiries. The Bildungsroman genre, with its emphasis on personal growth and moral development, provides a framework for understanding Snow's turbulent journey through adolescence and into adulthood. Hurley's exploration of Gothic literature and madness sheds light on the psychological unravelling of Snow's character, as he grapples with the darker aspects of human nature lurking beneath the surface. The frenzied violence depicted in the novel's climactic scenes serves as a stark reminder of the unpredictable and often destructive power of human influence over nature. Meanwhile, Rolston's insights into the distinction between cultivated and wild elements in nature enrich our understanding of Snow's conflicted relationship with the natural world. Through his interactions with Lucy Gray and his observations of the Capitol's decadence, Snow confronts the inherent tension between human civilization and the untamed wilderness. In contemplating Snow's descent into madness within the broader context of modernity and societal upheaval, Buckley's insights into the Bildungsroman genre offer a nuanced perspective on the protagonist's journey. The open-ended nature of Snow's narrative invites readers to confront the uncertainties

of human existence and to grapple with their own interpretations of morality and redemption.

In "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" (TBOSAS), Suzanne Collins intricately weaves themes of disillusionment into the narrative, mirroring the complexities of the modern world. Through the protagonist, Coriolanus Snow, and the dystopian society in which he resides, Collins explores various forms of disillusionment that resonate with contemporary societal dynamics. Economic disillusionment is a prevalent theme in TBOSAS, as Snow confronts the harsh realities of poverty and inequality in the districts. Despite his privileged upbringing, Snow's family falls on hard times, forcing him to confront the stark disparities between the affluent Capitol and the impoverished districts. This economic disillusionment fuels Snow's ambition and ruthlessness as he seeks to escape the constraints of poverty and ascend the social ladder. However, his pursuit of wealth and power ultimately leads to moral compromise and ethical decay, underscoring the hollow nature of material success. Moreover, TBOSAS explores the disillusionment with the state of the environment and humanity's role in its degradation. The novel's dystopian setting is characterized by ecological devastation and environmental degradation, reflecting contemporary concerns about climate change and ecological collapse. Snow's interactions with nature, particularly his encounters with the mockingjays and the swamp potatoes, serve as poignant reminders of humanity's destructive impact on the natural world. This environmental disillusionment underscores the fragile balance between civilization and nature, highlighting the consequences of human hubris and exploitation. On a personal level, TBOSAS delves into the theme of disillusionment with one's aspirations and beliefs. Snow's journey towards self-realization is marked by moments of profound disillusionment as he grapples with the disconnect between his ideals and the harsh realities of the world around him. His gradual descent into moral ambiguity and ethical compromise reflects the disillusionment inherent in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, where youthful idealism collides with the complexities of the real world.

Approaching "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" (TBOSAS) through the lens of a modern Bildungsroman offers a compelling perspective on society's evolving attitudes towards degeneration and moral decay. Traditionally, the Bildungsroman genre portrays the protagonist's journey towards personal growth

and moral enlightenment. However, in the modern context presented by Suzanne Collins, this journey takes on a darker hue, with protagonist Coriolanus Snow embodying the complexities of a morally and mentally degenerating character. In Victorian literature, society harboured a mortal fear of degeneration, viewing it as a regression towards a more primitive and uncivilized state. This fear manifested in Gothic literature, where characters often grappled with the looming threat of moral decay and societal collapse. Fast forward to the present day, and society's attitude towards degeneration has undergone a subtle yet significant shift. Instead of fearing degeneration, there exists a sense of abject fascination with it—a morbid curiosity that stems from a desire to confront and understand the darker aspects of human nature. Snow's descent into madness serves as a poignant commentary on the fragility of the human psyche in the face of existential uncertainty. As he grapples with the harsh realities of his world, Snow's mental stability unravels, mirroring the anxieties and insecurities of contemporary society. In this sense, the modern Bildungsroman presented in TBOSAS speaks to our collective unease in an era defined by social, political, and existential unrest. The evolution of the Bildungsroman genre to embrace morally and mentally degenerating characters reflects a broader cultural shift towards embracing complexity and nuance in storytelling. No longer satisfied with simplistic narratives of heroism and virtue, readers are drawn to characters who grapple with moral ambiguity and existential dilemmas. In this way, TBOSAS serves as a reflection of our contemporary anxieties and desires, offering a nuanced exploration of degeneration and moral decay in a world defined by uncertainty and unrest.

Ultimately, "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" transcends its status as popular media to emerge as a thought-provoking exploration of human nature, societal decay, and the quest for identity in a world fraught with uncertainty. By delving beneath the surface of its narrative, we uncover layers of symbolism and thematic complexity that challenge us to reconsider our preconceptions and engage with literature in new and profound ways.

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