

Analysis of Social Class in the Ballad of Song Birds Snakes (2020) by Suzanne Collins

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Abstract

This study is based on a novel *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* (2020) written by Suzanne Collins, focusing on the social class aspect of the novel. *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is set in a fictional dystopian country of Panem following the life of young Coriolanus Snow. The purpose of this study is to analyse the social class structure in the novel according to the six classes under the Marxist Class Theory. There is an identified gap in the study related to *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* as past researches surrounding the novel mainly concentrated on the original trilogy rather than novel's prequel. This study fills the gap in the study as investigations regarding the issue. Therefore, the social class structure of Suzanne Collins's *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* (2020) is examined in this study. The study approach employs textual analysis and concentrates on the bourgeoisie, proletariat, landlord, petty bourgeoisie, peasants, and lumpenproletariat—the six classes of the Marxist Class Theory—to examine the socioeconomic structure of the novel. The study argues that the bourgeoisie and proletariat concept of class exists in a fictional dystopian country and all social relationships, including political is a struggle over who is in control over society. It is also envisaged that this study would serve as a future source of information on the novel and the Marxist Class Theory based social class structure.

Keywords: Social Class, Marxist Class Theory, Suzanne Collins, Bourgeoisie, Proletariat.

Introduction

Some people are born with a golden spoon in their mouth while others have to settle with dirt spoons. This difference is called social class, the golden spoon represents the higher class whereas the dirt spoon represents the lower class. Social class definition is different based on the person viewing it. The bourgeoisie who lives comfortably most of their lives would view social class as a blessing and even security but to a proletariat, social class is a nightmare (Cohen, 1985). Social class is a reflection of one's position in the social hierarchy which would determine the opportunities that they may or may not receive (Kraus et al., 2009). In order words, social class is what determines whether a person is worthy or not worthy of something, let it be healthcare, invitation to certain social events or even kindness. Kraus et

al (2009), stated that it is implied that community in the lower social class is often associated with a lesser sense of personal control. For example, in India, where caste is something taken very seriously, lower social class is referred to as social trash and is forbidden access to basic human rights (Renanda et al., 2020).

According to the Marxist theory, class is closely related to labour and ownership that eventually lead to capitalism. For Marx, class is a social relationship between the producers and the means of production; a reason behind a capitalist society (Moh Arifin, 2015). Marxist believe that social class is structured rather than placed at random and believes that each class has its own role and acts as an actor in the society (Jessop, 2004). Marxist focuses on class domination in the economy as a tool for control and the means of production (Gingrich, 1999). The society is divided into six different classes; bourgeoisie, proletariat, landlords, middle class, lumpenproletariat and peasantry (Gingrich, 1999).

Bourgeoisie is the owner of the capital and the culprit behind the exploitation of labour power for the expansion of the capital (Gingrich, 1999). Fathoni (2015), as well as Cohen (1968) agreed that social class is looked upon as prosperity for the upper class whereas the poor people would struggle to get equality and the phrase “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” could not be any truer. Other than employing labour, their wealth also came from merchant capital, finance capital and landed capital.

On the other hand, proletariat are the labour power with no other capability other than the ability to work with their physicals and mental. They seek employment from the capitalist-employer to survive and care for themselves and their families (Gingrich, 1999). Thus, it makes it easy for the proletariat to be exploited by the bourgeoisie as they have no other choice but to work hard in order to turn their lives around (Subekti & Prihandini, 2020). However, it is clear that these two classes have very different goals and the two sides of goals are very vital in capitalist society as they are the element, the exploiter and the one being exploited (Gingrich, 1999). Karl Marx stated that capitalism causes man to prioritise money over love and calls this ‘False Consciousness’ where people are led to believe that money is the ultimate goal (Macfarlane, 1986).

In the fiction world, many novels explicitly or implicitly address class conflict and it can be seen in some of the famous works such as *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling and *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. Social class and fiction are related in more ways than one as social class is often critiqued through novels especially in dystopian fictions where class division is clear as crystal. Marxist analysis helps to identify how tensions between different social classes drive the narrative and develop character motivations, making it easier to understand the author’s critique of society. Analyzing a novel through the lens of Marxist theory encourages the researcher to engage critically with the text. It prompts questions about ownership, labour, and exploitation, fostering a deeper appreciation for the complexities of human experience depicted in literature. Therefore, studying literature through this lens can reveal alternative narratives that challenge prevailing societal norms, providing a platform for voices often marginalized in mainstream discourse.

The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes by Suzanne Collins is not an exception to this theme. Set in Panem, two classes in the story live very different lifestyles. The Capitol citizens, which are the bourgeoisie in the story, live lavishly with free education and access to everything they want. The Capitol citizens have this sense of superiority that they are better than the districts and think that they have some kind of ownership over the districts, and to a certain extent, they are not wrong. The districts are divided into twelve as each district specialises in different areas such as masonry, luxury items, agriculture, marine, among many others.

District citizens are expected to work in the given field when they turn eighteen up until they die and whoever dares to question it would be executed. They work hard day and night only to be given food supplies and money that are not even enough for them to live. It is clear that they are exploited in daylight and there is nothing they can do about it (Burbage, 2018). Marx's statement that such inequalities would eventually lead to a rebellion is true as can be seen decades later in the original trilogy.

The author's decision to write such books is to call out the hypocrisy in the current world in such a smart way. Suzanne Collins is an American Author famous for her trilogy, *The Hunger Games*. She had won over 10 awards from the series and released a prequel of the series in 2020. Suzanne is no stranger to war as her father served in the Vietnam War and as she grew older, she became desensitised to it. She got the idea for her famous trilogy from channel surfing through Iraq War news (Babcock, 2020) and with the prequel, *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, she kept the same momentum, speaking out about the same theme.

The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes was published on 19th May 2020, it follows the young Coriolanus Snow who is known as President Snow in the original trilogy. It took place 65 years before the rebellion in the trilogy of *The Hunger Games* (Vento, 2020). The readers are introduced to a new character named Lucy Gray Baird, the female tribute of district 12. After her arrival at the Capitol, her and among other tributes were placed in a cage, in the Capitol Zoo. (Regan, 2020). Part I of the novel is focused on the 10th *Hunger Games* which resulted in the banishment of *Coriolanus Snow* in Part II of the novel. He works as a peacekeeper in District 12, where Lucy Gray was from.

The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes forces the readers to really sit and think of the actual things happening in the world. The different treatment based on their social class in the book and how the districts are seen as more of a property rather than actual citizens and human beings (Regan, 2020). The discrimination the district faces is another reflection of the real world and Suzanne Collins succeeds in writing it down in the book masked as entertainment and fiction.

There is an identified gap in the previous work related to *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collins. The theory surrounding this story mainly focuses on the original trilogy *The Hunger Games*. Arifin (2015), studied Social Class and Class Struggle in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. The writers focus on the events from the main trilogy and the revolution that happened in it. Other than that, the economics aspect has been dissected by Jeffrey Cleveland, Kim Holder and Brian O'Roark (2016), in *The Economics of The Hunger Games*. Even capitalism has been written by a few authors; Muhammad FadhlyThahir, Fathu

Rahman and Mustafa Makka (2018) wrote on *The Reflection of The Global Capitalism System in Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games* whereas Egawati and Safitri Hariani (2022), wrote on *The Effect of Capitalism in Suzzane Collins's Novel The Hunger Games*.

However, research done on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is rather insufficient but there is no doubt that some of the prior frameworks are important and a foundation worthy of recognition. However, an investigation in terms of social class is needed. Previous recorded work done on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is by Oleksandr Bessarab titled *The Novel The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes by Suzanne Collins: Problematics and System of Characters*. Other than that, most authors are more inclined to write about the review of the novel or an overall analysis.

An investigation of this issue is vital as it is the main reason for the writings of this book and the original trilogy. Previous framework perspectives need to embrace contemporary research in social class and related fields to provide a stronger fundamentals basis and understandings of the issue. Moreover, past frameworks and thesis place their focus on capitalism, redemption and the problematic characters. It does not cover perspective on social class. Social class plays a huge role in the novel and is one of the reasons behind the creation of the game. Sandwell (2023), stated that the game was created by Casca Highbottom while intoxicated and was submitted by Crassus, Coriolanus' father. The purpose of it is to keep the district under the leash as a reminder of who is in charge. *The Capitol* is the bourgeoisie in the story and all twelve districts are undeniably the proletariat. The districts are treated poorly, unfairly and cruelly; the hunger games tributes are children, just like the Capitol kids but they are treated as such. Therefore, this research will focus on the social class and in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*.

There are two research objectives; the first one is to study the social class structure in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collins and the second one is to analyse the social class in the novel using the Marxist Theory. Thus, achieving the first research question what are the social class structure in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collins and how to analyse the social class in the novel using the Marxist Theory.

The significance of this research on social class in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collins is to fill the gap in the study as there is almost no research on the novel compared to the abundance of research to the original trilogy, *The Hunger Games*. Therefore, by writing about it, the gap would be filled. Other than that, research on social class would allow other writers and readers to understand the importance and the severity of this subject. It would hopefully open a door for other writers to write about the genre, both academically and creatively. Not only would it be beneficial for the industry but it will also be an eye opener for the society regarding the subject as the topics discussed in both *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* are no small issues.

This study analyses the social class in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collins using Marxist Theory. Catering to six types of social classes under Marxist Theory by Karl Marx which are bourgeoisie, proletariat, landlords, petty bourgeoisie, lumpenproletariat and peasantry in the novel.

Literature Review

Literature Review is an important part of research as it is to make sure that the research topic is relevant and has not been studied and written by anyone before. Social class is not a foreign genre in research as there is a lot to write about based on this one topic. However, social class based on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is quite a clear field as only a handful of researches had been done about this since it came out a couple of years ago. Therefore, it proves that writing on this topic is important to fill in the obvious blank area in the genre.

Marxist Theory

A thesis titled *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology* written by Bob Jessop in 2004 at University of Oxford touches on Developments in Marxist Theory in chapter one. Jessop stated that Marx focuses power on its relation to class domination in capitalist societies as he tends to assume that all forms of social power are temporary and only good while it lasts. Jessop stated that Marxism's approach to power is linked to class relations in economic class domination, political class domination and ideological class domination.

Marxist approach to power came to four interests, 1) Power and class domination, 2) The mediations among economic, political and ideological class domination, 3) The social relation between the limitations and contradictions of power and 4) The role of strategy and tactics. These interests show both strength and weakness of Marxist Theory as Marx tends to ignore other aspects of domination such as patriarchal, ethnic, hegemonic masculinity, territorial and among many others. Therefore, because of the lack of focus in other areas, Marxist approach overlooked lots of flaws in the planning.

Social Class in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

Even though there is no research about social class on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, there is plenty of research on social class based on the original trilogy. In 2015, Heidy Putri Permatasari wrote a journal titled *Social Class and Poverty in American Society in The 2000's Era as Seen in Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games Novel*. While this research talks about social class, its focus is on the American society especially in the 2000's era. It specifies in the introduction how the influence of economic inequality plays a big role in this issue. The reason why the author chooses the economic inequality to focus on is because of the huge gap between the rich and the poor is because the United States of America is one of the countries with the biggest gap of economic inequality in the world.

There are three classes stated by Heidy Putri Permatasari (2015), the upper, middle and lower class. The upper class is clearly *The Capitol* with its power, luxury and superiority complex. *The Capitol* is the central city of the State of Panem. The stark difference between Capitol and the districts is by the way they dress as fashion plays such an important role in their society or rather fashion is their identity. The author concludes how social class and discrimination are the cause of poverty in the society.

However, the author does not use the Marxist Theory in her research unlike a thesis titled *A Marxist Analysis of Social Classes and Exploitation of the Lower Class in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games*, written by Jennifer Cristy Rimum in 2013 at Satya Wacana Christian University. Jennifer stated that the study is important because it is crucial for the past, present and future to show that social class has always been unfair and it is something

that exists in the society with or without the awareness of the citizens. Using the school of thought founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, she linked social and political issues to the economic power of the rich showing how power could easily influence society. Jennifer mentioned the two main classes which are bourgeoisie and proletariat and how each plays a big role in the society and while it is important for the society to have some form of structure, the structure in *The Hunger Games* simply causes more harm than good.

Social Class in Literature Using Marxist Theory

A thesis titled, *Social Class and Discrimination in the Harry Potter Novels* was written by Anna Guðjónsdóttir (2014), from University of Iceland. Using Marxist Theory, this thesis focuses on the last five books of Harry Potter where the social class are explored as well as focusing on the differential treatment between the superior groups and the minority in the novel. Anna stated that with the Marxist Theory, the example of proletariat and bourgeoisie are evident in the novels as those in power are given negative impressions whereas the lower class are seen struggling to find their place in society. Out of six general types of social class according to Marxist Theory, the author stated that there are at least three types of classes seen in The Harry Potter novels; slavery, capitalist also known as bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Anna highlights that Marxist Theory gives better focus on the impact as the people are placed according to money, connection and power. She is not the only author who touches on social class as a thesis titled *Factions as Social Classes in a Divergent novel by Veronica Roth (Marxism Study)* was written by Hosmawati and Endang Suciati in 2018 at Pesantren Tinggi Darul Ulum University. The authors stated that Marx viewed capitalism as a structure filled with flaws and according to Marx, capitalism is an exploitation in disguise.

Hosmawati and Suciati stated in the beginning of the novel, Abnegation is introduced as a group of people who devoted their life in helping others but throughout the novel, there are several hints thrown here and there about their power-hungry behaviour. Whereas Erudite is more upfront about their superiority and uses it to their advantage to overthrow Abnegation. Thus, it is clear that Abnegation and Erudite are the bourgeois in the novel as while they are indeed different, they both possess wealth and power to control other factions. Differ to Dauntless, Candor and Amity who are all can be considered as proletariat as they all work for Abnegation and Erudite.

Dissecting social classes and discrimination in dystopian novels are simpler as the division of classes is usually the go-to structure in it. However, the theme can also be seen in other genres such as classical romance. Mira Andrea Putri, Syamsul Bahri and Rita Suswati wrote a research about *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen titled *Social Class in British Society in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice using Marxist Theory*. During the setting of the novel, marriage is the most important thing that could affect one's social hierarchy and Jane Austen is criticising the effect of social rank on marriage where rank and status are prioritised rather than love and happiness. The authors of this research also mentioned that this novel shows the effect of social class on marriage and vice versa. The authors stated that social class created chaos around human's life and affected the system of ownership, structure of authority and the cultural aspect of life.

These are just a few examples of social class using Marxist Theory, there are a lot more of these covering other aspects of social class. However, a study of social class on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is yet to be found. Therefore, an analysis of social class on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is crucial to fill in the gap left in the research field.

Research Design

Research design is the outline of research methods and techniques used to perform research and, in this analysis, qualitative research is the one most suitable to use to ensure that the objective of the research is achieved. The collection of data from various sources will be used in a sense of making sure that the information is valid and accurate, at the same time using textual analysis to analyse the novel, *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collins. Moreover, using the Marxist Class Theory by Karl Marx, this study will be focusing on the types of social class. There are six social classes according to Marx as explained in the introduction.

Bourgeoisie is the capitalist and the exploiter and based on *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, the powerful people in the Capitol such as the headmaster, the head game maker including those who like to flaunt their money to stroke their ego are the ones that fall under this category. These people are not afraid to use others as long as their position and power remain on the top in society. More often, they like to use what they have as a tool to keep them in their comfort zone, not accounting who they have to sacrifice along their way. In simple words, the proletariat are those who are exploited by the bourgeoisie.

They are most of the people in the districts. Aside from being used for their manpower and hard work, they are also being used as entertainment. They are treated as an object rather than an actual human being. Although they are large in number being the source of all luxury in the society, the proletariat holds little to no power over themselves, much less anything else.

Petty bourgeoisie and landlords fall under bourgeoisie in the upper/ middle class category. While the powerful people in the Capitol fell under bourgeoisie, the rest of them are petty bourgeoisie. They are not in a position to exploit the society but they are a group of people who have workers for their daily lives such as housemaids and drivers. On the other hand, landlords are often those who are in the districts with a little more power than the rest of the district's citizens. The other two classes, lumpenproletariat and peasantry, fall under proletariat in the lower/ working class category. Marx mentioned lumpenproletariat as the society scum as they are often described negatively and would be today's representative of the homeless and peasantry is not mentioned much as it is deemed to be non-threatening as a single unit and only would pose threat if they manage to work together as a group.

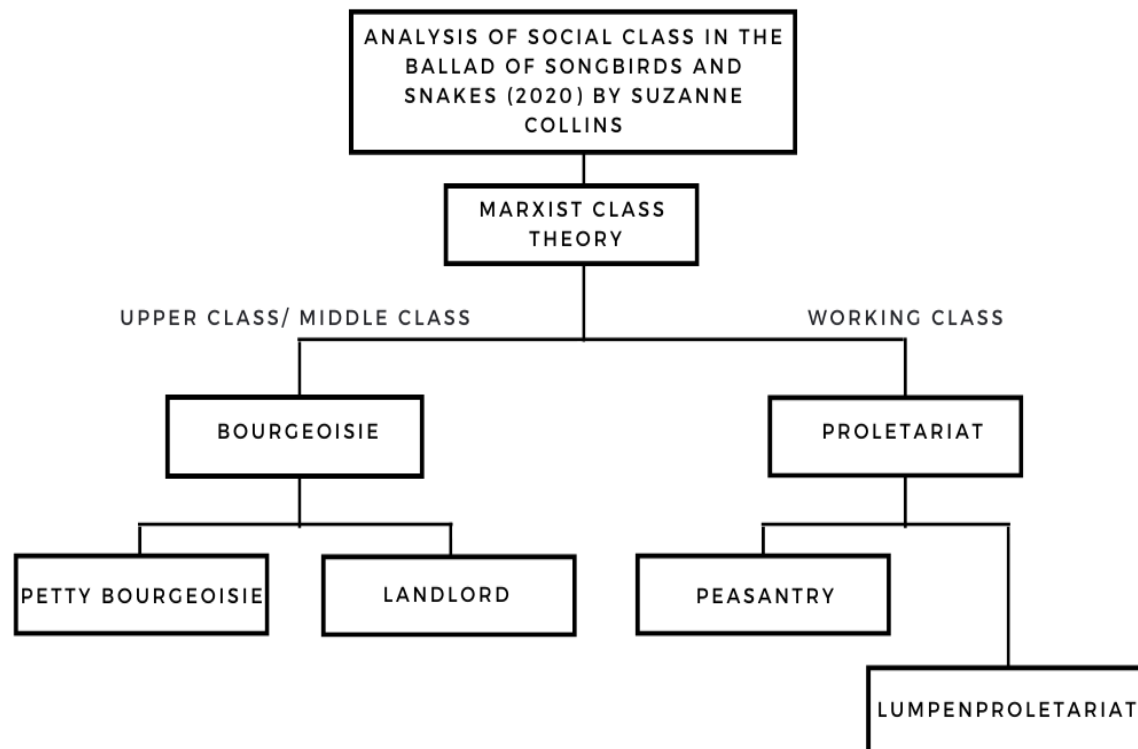


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Analysis

Research analysis is very important as it is the main body of a research and serves the purpose of answering the research question thus justifying the research objective. In the novel *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collin, it is undeniably clear that the social class structure in the Capitol plays a huge role in each of the character's life. It decides which circle they get to surround themselves with, decides their current fate and especially their future. Those who understand this will try their hardest to not fall down the food chain and if they did fall, they will find a way to survive as best as they could.

Social class structures are known to be divided into three categories, upper class, middle class and working class (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014; Heidy Putri Permatasari, 2015). According to Frod (2010), this structure is often determined and controlled by power and it is important to study and observe how such structures were created, maintained and enforced. In relation to *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, one's hierarchy is often determined by money, influence and social circle.

The Social Class Structure in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020)

The depiction of upper class, middle class and working class in the novel are clear in the citizens' lives in both the Capitol and districts. As stated by Guðjónsdóttir (2014), those who are placed in the working class are in the lowest place of the society and are often seen as a mere slave by both the upper and middle class. Citizens in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* are no different than those who are higher up the hierarchy; they often treat the lower class as if they are no different than an animal. This is why those who are grouped in the lower class are tied closely with the upper class. Their daily activities, their freedom and even their

speech are all controlled by those in the upper class. Thus, it is sensible to explore how they are being treated first as opposed to the oppressor.

However, the case is different for the middle class, in order to understand them, a discussion of both upper and working class must be held first because they do not fit in either upper class or lower class (Hayes, 2024). Middle class are always in a state of being comfortable but yet not too comfortable to a point where they feel secure in their lives. They are working class with a bit more freedom and power given to them by the upper class. In the end, the middle class are tied to the upper class just as much as the working class are.

Working Class

Working class is a label for the ones who are at the bottom of the society, they are often treated as if they have no human rights owed to them. In *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, people in the districts are those who belong in the lower class category and at the bottom of the food chain. From the start of the novel, they are being treated not like human beings but like animals.

Avoxes

..watching garbage trucks operated by Avoxes – tongueless workers made the best workers, or so his grandmother said – humming down the streets, emptying large bags of discarded food, containers, worn household items.

(p.7)

This paragraph mentioned a group of workers called Avoxes and they are described in an inhumane and nonchalant way indicating that it is completely normal in their society. The tongues of Avoxes workers are cut off in a way to strip them of their freedom of speech which would make them a good slave, the ones who do not and cannot speak. Later on in the novel, Avoxes are mentioned a couple more times, giving the reader further details of these tongueless workers' lives. Aside from being slaves to the citizens of the Capitol, Avoxes are also being used as lab rats, giving hints on how low their rank is in the social hierarchy of the novel. Their body is mutilated and biologically modified by scientists and being completely stripped off of their human rights.

...found himself in a ghoulish section of the lab where the glass cases housed humans with animal parts grafted to their bodies. Tiny feathered ruffs around their necks; talons, or even tentacles, in place of fingers; and something — perhaps gills? — embedded in their chests. His appearance startled them, and when a few opened their mouths to plead with him, he realized they were Avoxes.

(p.11
5)

In the real world, less than a century ago, slavery was still in practice and they were treated inhumanely and according to Halam (2018), black slaves, both men and women endured merciless beatings, being forcefully separated from their family and were seen and treated as property in the eyes of society and law. Thus, their voice and opinions were meaningless and therefore would be treated as such. Slaves were also being used to fulfil their owners' sexual desires, no matter the gender and they were often being auctioned naked for sale

and black women especially were seen as a mere lustful being (Halam, 2018). According to BBC (n.d.), in Antigua, up until 1723, it was legal to kill slaves as the slaves' fate were entirely up to the owners. Similarly to the Avoxes, as they are owned by the Capitol, their voice and lives do not matter in the slightest. Other than the Avoxes, citizens in the districts also suffer their own battle as they too are treated poorly by the Capitol.

Tributes

Tributes are children who are chosen to be a part of the annual game, *The Hunger Games*. A game where 24 children are chosen, two from each district to fight one another until the last one standing to be crowned as victor. However, before the inhumane game even started, the tributes are treated horribly as to show the difference between their status.

The Peacekeeper yanked her down and she landed hard, barely catching herself with her bound hands. Then he reached into the car and dragged out a boy who looked about ten years old but had to be at least twelve and hauled him onto the platform as well...

(p.41)

They were transporting the tributes in livestock cars, and not very clean ones at that.

(p.41)

...the Peacekeepers were tossing two half-starved children onto the platform. The girl broke front tooth on the platform, while the boy received several sharp kicks upon landing.

(p.43)

These are a few examples of how the tributes are being treated. Even though they were chosen to compete in an arena with their lives as trades for entertainment for the sick minded people in the Capitol and were walking to their death, not an ounce of kindness was shown. According to Karlsen and Nazroo (2018), aside from power and money, geographical factors play an important role in social structure too as those who came from places with lesser quality, overcrowded and less pleasant job offers are most likely to sit at the lower rank of social classes. In the novel, it is stated that hierarchy exists even among the districts; the districts with 'richer' income jobs or located nearest to the Capitol suffer less than the districts that are located far away and doing 'dirtier jobs' such as districts 12, coal mining.

The better-fed, more Capitol-friendly districts of 1 and 2 produced more victors, with the fishing and farming tributes from 4 and 11 also being contenders.

(p.21)

District 12, the smallest district, the joke district, with its stunted, joint-swollen kids that always died in the first five minutes, and not only that . . . but the girl?

(p.22)

Basic human rights are hard to come by and even if they are graced with luxury, it is not without evil intention (Regan, 2020). As stated by Tanabe (2020), the tributes are only given food because Coriolanus Snow voiced out that if they are low in energy, they would not fight

in the game and would only die out of starvation before the game even begins. It is evident that the majority of the Capitol only see the districts as property and just another thing that they own (Regan, 2020). This automatically puts the Capitol citizen in the upper-class category because when a group of people are being oppressed in a social hierarchy, it is logical to assume that there is also a group of oppressors in the same society.

Majority of these oppressors belong in the upper-class category and in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, it can be said that the oppressor is referring to the Capitol.

Upper Class

According to Magdoff and Foster (2023), the upper-class category often relates to exploitation of the lower class. It can also be seen in part I of the novel when students of the academy immediately search for the strength of their tributes that can be used to their advantage.

Capitol / Children of the Capitol

After the war between the Capitol and the districts, a lot of wealthy families lose their assets but a lot of them are still pretending to be unaffected by the war as they understand the power of status and will do whatever it takes to keep it for however long they could. The Snow family are one of them and for appearance' sake, Coriolanus Snow is determined to do whatever it takes to win the scholarship so that any secret they keep behind closed doors would stay behind closed doors.

...but his brain spun with the repercussions of landing Lucy Gray Baird. She was a gift, he knew it, and he must treat her as such. But how best to exploit her showstopping entrance? How to wrangle some success from a dress, a snake, a song?

(p.30)

Even from Coriolanus' thoughts alone, readers are able to see how he sees Lucy Gray as just another thing to possess and own (Regan, 2020).

Here in the Capitol, it was a given that Lucy Gray belonged to him.

(p.172)

It had been better to have her locked up in the Capitol, where he always had a general idea of what she was doing

(p.410)

On the reaping day, people in the Capitol live their lives luxuriously and drink until they pass out whereas the districts' parents are worrying about the fate of their children. The children of the Capitol are even raised to understand that people in the districts are not human beings but rather, animals; one kid outwardly refers to the tributes as animals.

A self-important little girl marched up beside them and pointed to a sign on the pillar at the edge of the enclosure. "It says, 'Please don't feed the animals.'"

“They’re not animals, though,” said Sejanus. “They’re kids, like you and me.”

“They’re not like me!” the little girl protested. “They’re district. That’s why they belong in a cage!

(p.64)

It shows that their superiority complexes are encouraged from a young age and parents would do anything to maintain their rank at the top of the hierarchy (Bessarab, 2023). According to Rananda et al (2020), the upper class would have more opportunities in terms of occupation, education and living conditions, this is why those who are in the upper class try their hardest to not fall down their rank and those in the lower-class fight for equality. After the war, a lot of people in the Capitol lost their wealth and Coriolanus Snow is one of them; Along with his cousin, Tigris, they are clever at hiding the fact that they are no richer than those in the districts. Tigris, who works in fashion works tirelessly to make sure Coriolanus could display wealth on the reaping day and it even suggests in the book that she might even go as far as selling her body for the sake of it.

And what on earth would she possess worth trading for it? Only one thing — herself —

(p.4)

Snow is excellent at using his charm to fool others knowing that the only thing he now possesses is his father’s war story. He plays the card all too well and often plays with words to show that his family is not affected by the war at all. It can be seen when he lightly implies that he has maids, further showing that House Snow is still just as mighty as it once has been.

“Well, that explains why they remind me of the maid’s bathroom,” Coriolanus responded, drawing a chuckle from her friends. This was the impression he fought to sustain. A reminder that he was the rare person who had a maid’s bathroom

(p.16)

However, he is not the only one who is faking his wealth in the Capitol as it is implied that even one of the teachers also is doing the same and it can be assumed that they are not the only ones in the Capitol that are wealthy only on the outside. This shows not only the importance of being at the top of the hierarchy but also the efforts it took to maintain the position.

Middle Class

Between the upper and the lower classes, there are certain people who do not fit in either category but instead they fall under the middle category. They are neither wealthy or too poor and Hayes (2023), stated that the middle class enjoy a little more advantage than the lower class and often work a higher paying job such as managers and professionals in their respective fields. They may not be able to afford luxurious life daily but there are some perks that they can enjoy even when it comes with a certain price tag. For example, they may have their own house, but with a mortgage, they are able to buy a car, but with a loan and they are able to send their children to college but with debt (Hayes, 2023).

Peacekeeper

In *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, the middle class are those who work for the Capitol but with their own freewill and a little bit of luck. For example, most of the peacekeepers, especially the commander, are in the middle-class category; they are not oppressed and could enjoy a bit of perks. In part II, it shows that the peacekeepers are able to celebrate birthdays and enjoy finer alcohol compared to the lower-class citizens.

“It’s my birthday today.”

“Yes, I helped unload some whiskey for the party,” said Coriolanus.

“Usually a good time. Try and enjoy yourself.” Hoff stood up and extended his hand.”

(p.476)

Mayor

Aside from the peacekeeper, the mayor of each district also can be put under this category because while they are still born in the districts, they enjoy certain perks others are not granted. While owning or even being able to travel by car is a luxury, the mayor and his family are able to do just that and it shows that if you are willing to work for the Capitol, some things may work in your favour.

A trio of vehicles slowly made its way down the dirt road toward the gallows. Out of the first, an old car that would’ve been classified as luxury before the war, stepped District 12’s Mayor Lipp, followed by a middle- aged woman with dyed blonde hair, and Mayfair...

(p.349)

Other than that, the mayor and his family also often live in a better house than the rest of the districts and to a certain extent is respected by the peacekeeper in a way where their well-being matters a little more than the rest. In the novel, Mayfair, the mayor’s daughter was given a free pass on multiple occasions because of her behaviour. Whereas, a small mistake or disagreement could cause others beating, getting whipped or even hanged, her behaviour gets excused a lot.

“Should we tell her parents?” asked the other.

“What’s the point?” said the first. “You know how the mayor is. Somehow her traipsing around at night will be our fault. I can do without a lecture.”

(p.372-373)

The excerpt suggests that the peacekeeper had been blamed before for Mayfair’s behaviour. Other than that, it can be assumed that because of the mayor’s position too, his daughter is excluded from the reaping because one of the mayor’s jobs is to pick a name from the bag and it is unlikely that he would read his daughter’s name even if he did pick hers. This is the reason why in the novel, the mayor is considered to be in the middle class because while he is not wealthy, he is also in a position where he does not have to worry about the Hunger Game; this is a luxury itself. Aside from the special few in the districts, the middle-class category also exists in the Capitol.

Academy Professors, Designers and Journalists

The teachers in the academy, fashion designers and reporters in the books are the example of the middle-class citizens in the Capitol. They are neither exploiting the poor nor living an extra luxurious life as they would either work for themselves or just trying to live life after the war.

“Oh, Coriolanus,” Satyria drawled as she waved him over. “Here’s my star pupil.” He gave her the expected kiss on the cheek and registered that she was several glasses of posca ahead of him. Really, she needed to get her drinking under control, although the same thing could be said for half the adults he knew.”
(p.15)

Fabricia Whatnot, a woman as ridiculous as her name but with a certain talent for derivative fashion. Whether the trend was feathers or leathers, plastics or plush, she could find a way to incorporate it at a reasonable rate.
(p.6)

“Oh, hi there. Are we on television?”
The Capitol reporter, a young man eager for a story, leaned in hungrily. “We certainly are.” “And who might you be?” she asked. “I’m Lepidus Malmsey with Capitol News,” he said, flashing a grin.
(p.52)

According to Hayes (2023), the middle class is more similar to the upper class rather than the lower class in a sense where most are able to live comfortably enough without worrying about the next meal for the safety of themselves. Even in the novel, the middle class seems to be in a state where they can get by daily without much worrying and even prefer to associate with upper classes category rather than lower class and just like how in India, they consider the lower class to be dirty and lesser than them (Meilyana Indi Renanda et al., 2020).

The Application of Social Class in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* using Marxist Class Theory

According to Marx, forming a class structure in one way or another has existed long before the term ‘social class’ has been used and it is one of the most important and significant theory on social class and structure. Even back in the ancient world, there used to be a form of social structure. Gingrich (1999) stated that there are six branches of social class in Marxist Theory. They are bourgeoisie, proletariat, landlord, petty bourgeoisie, lumpenproletariat and peasantry. Bourgeoisie are the ones with the utmost power as they control not only the economics but also the capital as a whole. Proletariat are the root of the labour power and work under the order of bourgeoisie in an exploitative social relationship.

Landlords are an upgrade from the proletariat as while their body, energy and time are not directly exploited by the bourgeoisie, they are still working for the bourgeoisie with a guise that they have more control over themselves. Other than that, petty bourgeoisie refers to the shop owners, artists where they often own a small property but still have to work themselves to sustain it. Lumpenproletariat’s equivalent of today’s society is the

homeless where in Marx's opinion are not big enough to create any social influence. Last but not least, peasantry is a class where they would form a certain number of people and work together as a unit to create a cooperative movement.

Bourgeoisie

In *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* by Suzanne Collin, bourgeoisie is clearly depicted by those who are in power, especially those who live in the Capitol. However, it is not to say that everyone in the Capitol is a bourgeoisie as in order for a specific group to be classified as such, there are several criteria that they must adhere to. According to The Economics Times (2024), bourgeoisie are the capitalists who will use every medium to attain their power, let it be from the religious aspect, financial or even educational. As stated by Blakeley (2023), Marx viewed bourgeoisie as the one who controls the ins and outs of production in a capitalist society and in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, the one with the most power and control is the President and the Head Gamemaker.

President Ravinstill

Although President Ravinstill himself is rarely mentioned in the novel, the few, five times, he was mentioned shows that he is indeed a man in power and is not shy to use it to his advantage. The very first time he was mentioned, it was on the day of the reaping right after the singing of the Capitol anthem.

The seal dissolved to show President Ravinstill, his hair streaked with silver, dressed in his prewar military uniform as a reminder that he'd been controlling the districts long before the Dark Days of the rebellion.

(p.23)

President Ravinstill's opening speech was broadcasted around the country and he wasted no time to remind everyone who the country belongs to by wearing his military uniform. He also went on to recite a passage from Treaty of Treason as a reminder to all the districts of the Dark Days of the rebellion. The idea is to punish the districts for rebelling against the Capitol and instead of punishing everyone involved in the rebellion, the bourgeoisie decided to kill their children instead. The districts have no choice but to participate as the threat of what happened to District 13 hung over their heads.

Their sprawling complex, blocks and blocks of factories and research facilities, had been bombed to dust. District 13 had been nuked, and the entire area still emitted unlivable levels of radiation.

(p.17)

But 13 had vanished in a nuclear puff of smoke, along with the Snow fortune. Nothing remained, and any thought of re-upping the rebellion was pure stupidity

(p.347)

Dr. Volumnia Gaul

"To who? She's the Head Gamemaker," he said. "She works directly with the president.

(p.125)

Other than President Ravinstill, the Head Gamemaker, Dr. Volumnia Gaul is also depicted as a bourgeoisie in the novel. She is the mastermind behind the annual Hunger Games and the one who overlooked the mentorship programme featuring the students of the Academy.

In the beginning when Coriolanus Snow fell into the zoo with the tributes, Dr. Gaul does not seem like she minds at all putting the kids into a cage.

“Hippity, hoppity.” Dr. Gaul grinned. “How was the zoo?” Then she was laughing. “It’s like a children’s rhyme. Hippity, hoppity, how was the zoo? You fell in a cage and your tribute did, too!”

(p.58)

She even laughs as if it is just a joke, showing that she indeed has no remorse with what is happening to the tributes. It is evident that Dr Gaul is treating them as if she owns them and they are entirely her slaves, playing her games. According to Jackins (2022), slave owners have this mindset where their ownership over the slave does not stop at manual labour but extends to the point where the entirety of the slave belongs to them, even their body and rights; it is to say that if the owners decide that the slave should no longer be allowed to live, then so be it. Dr Gaul however likes to play with her subject while they are alive.

He lay awake the rest of the night, thinking of the snakes, and her skin, and the glass cases of Avoxes with their gruesome animal modifications in Dr. Gaul’s lab.

(p.148)

In *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, it is mentioned a few times how Avoxes were treated in Dr. Gaul’s lab. Their bodies were mutilated and modified on top of the tongue that were cut off. While her treatment of these Avoxes is not publicly known, Dr. Gaul has not gone above and beyond to hide it either. Coriolanus Snow easily stumbled into the modified Avoxes during one of his visits to the lab.

What if she’d transformed into a snake entirely? That was silliness, but Dr. Gaul’s lab had been so sinister that his mind went to extremes. A paranoid thought nibbled at him.

(p.181)

What Coriolanus saw in the lab terrified him for good as he cannot help but let his mind wander off to the what ifs. This shows that Dr Gaul has a terrifying enough reputation that enables her to have a good grip on those around her; which brings back to the previous point where stated that bourgeoisie will use anything that they can to keep their power.

Proletariat

Another important key in Marxism is the proletariat, they are the one who contribute to the majority of the labour power (Gingrich, 1999). According to Magdoff and Foster (2023), the bourgeoisie are the ones who set the ground rules and expectations; they have the power

to fire and hire anyone, anytime they feel like it and in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, it is evident in the way that the Capitol could easily pick 24 children from their homes every year to have them fight one another to death.

The District Citizens

There would be twenty-four tributes, one boy and one girl from each of the twelve defeated districts, drawn by lottery to be thrown into an arena to fight to the death in the Hunger Games.

(p.14)

Even among the twelve districts, there are some who are favoured depending on what they provide for the Capitol. As stated by McCormick and Hedash (2023), District 1 produce luxury items, District 2 manufacture weapons and train peacekeepers, District 3 specialise in electronics, District 4, located near the shore, are fishing districts. Other than that, District 5 produces electricity, District 6 focuses on the transportation industry, District 7 supplies lumber as the area where they live is surrounded by trees. The uniforms for the peacekeepers are made in District 8, who focuses on the textiles industry while District 9 produces grain for the country. District 10 conquers livestock industry, District 11 focuses on agriculture and last but not least District 12, the poorest district manages the coal mining industry.

Despite working hard at what they are assigned, the districts are poor and are not in good condition as all the products are sent to the Capitol and in return, the districts are paid very low wages. However, some districts live more comfortably than others as they are favoured more by the Capitol. Those districts are District 1, District 2 and District 4, being located closer to the Capitol meaning that they are more well-fed rather than District 12 which are often overlooked and looked down on even among the districts.

The way the Capitol citizens view the districts are no good either, when the tributes arrive at the Capitol for the game, they are locked up in a monkey cage in the zoo. Although they were only there for a few days, the treatment they received from both adults and children was inhumane. Referring back to that one girl who refers to them as animals.

A self-important little girl marched up beside them and pointed to a sign on the pillar at the edge of the enclosure. "It says, 'Please don't feed the animals.'"

(p.64)

Landlord

Marx mentioned landowners as one of the classes in Britain; they own lands and profit from it and depending on their approach, some landowners are able to move up the hierarchy. While landowners do not directly enforce labour, the land that they own may contribute to it in one way or another (Gingrich, 1999). Although there are no landowners in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* as the lands belong to the Capitol, there are some groups of people that fell under this class category. These groups are given some sort of authority over a small section of land and they use it to benefit them in any way they can.

Mayor Lipp

As the capitol could not possibly oversee each district personally, they assigned a mayor in each district to do the dirty works for them and Mayor Lipp is the only mayor the readers are introduced to in the novel. However, by the snippets of scenes he or his family are in, it is clear that while they are no Capitol born, they certainly enjoy a lot of perks that the district could only ever dream about.

Out of the first, an old car that would've been classified as luxury before the war, stepped District 12's Mayor Lipp, followed by a middle-aged woman with dyed blonde hair, and Mayfair, the girl Lucy Gray had targeted with the snake on the day of the reaping.

(p.349)

Commander Hoff

Other than the Mayor, Commander Hoff, whose land was the peacekeeper, also fell under this category. While in his original district, he may not be much in power, in District 12 where he is stationed, he has a sliver of power and is able to enjoy more than others. Similar to the Mayor, he is able to travel with cars and later on he is able to throw a big birthday celebration and pay performers to sing at his birthday party.

Commander Hoff and a half dozen officers emerged from a second car, which sported a fluttering flag of Panem on the hood.

(p.349)

However, the little flag on top of the car would forever serve as a reminder that there is always someone bigger on top of him, someone with more power. It shows that while he can play leader all he wants, at the end of the day, both him and the mayor are only puppets doing its masters' bidding.

Petty Bourgeoisie

According to Marx, petty bourgeoisie is a mix between bourgeoisie and proletariat in a way that they do own some properties enough to keep them afloat but at the same time, they do not have the capacity to have a line of workers like bourgeoisie. Therefore, petty bourgeoisie may have to do some work themselves in order to survive (Gingrich, 1999). After the Dark Days, a lot of wealthy people from the Capitol took a huge hit, financially. This left a lot of petty bourgeoisies in the Capitol. One of them being the main character, Coriolanus Snow.

Coriolanus Snow

Coriolanus Snow, or rather, the Snow House, was impacted hugely by the war as they lost the majority of their wealth because of a bad investment during the war. This causes them to live in poverty masked by few remnants of what they had back in the days.

He needed to eat a large bowl of the anemic stuff, and drink every drop of broth, to prevent his stomach from growling during the reaping ceremony. It was one of a long list of precautions he took to mask the fact that his family, despite residing in the penthouse of the Capitol's most opulent apartment building, was as poor

as district scum.

(p.3)

They are able to hide the fact that they are no richer than district 12 citizens only because they own a huge penthouse and keep up the pretence that they lose nothing during the war. Coriolanus' charm and Grandma 'am roof garden definitely play a huge role in the disguise.

Coriolanus thought about his grandmother's roses, which were still prized in the Capitol. The old woman nurtured them arduously in the roof garden that came with the penthouse, both out of doors and in a small solar greenhouse.

(p.38)

Coriolanus works hard to conceal the truth as he understands the importance of staying at the top of the hierarchy and harbours a dream of becoming a president one day. It leads to him working his best to win a massive prize by joining a mentorship program with the tributes of the *Hunger Games*.

Mentoring in the *Hunger Games* was his final project before graduating from the Academy in midsummer. If he gave an impressive performance as a mentor, with his outstanding academic record, Coriolanus should be awarded a monetary prize substantial enough to cover his tuition at the University.

(p.13)

Lumpenproletariat

Different from the previous four classes discussed, lumpenproletariat is the modern day equivalent of the homeless as Marx describes them as the society's scum and pose no threat to the class structure (Gingrich, 1999).

Avoxes

Team Lucy Gray was well represented by young and old, male and female, and even a handful of Avoxes — but they didn't really count, having been brought along to hold signs

(p.279)

In the novel, Avoxes fall under lumpenproletariat as they are not seen as human and are treated as such. 'They didn't really count' shows how little the district views Avoxes as. However, their treatment does not only stop at how they view Avoxes. To make it worse, they also treat Avoxes horribly and not at all like other human beings. All Avoxes are tongueless as their tongues were cut off once they turn into Avoxes and those who are unfortunate enough to end up at Dr. Gaul's lab would be mutilated physically for the rest of their lives.

Avoxes — tongueless workers made the best workers, or so his grandmother said...

(p.7)

The Capitol citizens see body mutilation as something that is acceptable and reflecting to the real world, this is not far fetched because not so long ago when slavery was still in practice, body mutilation is actually not an uncommon event. The Romans used to castrate their slaves to make them more desirable and slaves who are castrated are usually sold at higher price compared to those who were not (Babin & McGrail, n.d.). The reason for the higher price is because those who are castrated are driven less by sexual acts therefore, making them better at getting something done. Another example, during the Red Sea slave trade, African women who were sold in the Middle East as sex slaves were castrated to ensure purity (Barber, 2023). These slaves are mutilated against their will just like the Avoxes.

Peasantry

Marx believed that those who fall under peasantry are those who are disorganised and are unable to make a huge impact alone but rather more powerful in a group (Gingrich, 1999). Peasants are those who are tied to a specific lord and in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, it is well-known that the districts are tied to the Capitol in every way possible.

Rebels in the Districts

One rebel in the districts who are tired of living their life tied to the Capitol poses no threat; however, a group of rebels who work as a unit could and might leave an impact. In the novel, the rebels do not feel the need to fight back for the society but they do want a sense of freedom for themselves. Which led them to make a decision to flee the country and live in the wild.

Wants us to go north. He thinks there's people up there. Free people. Says we'll find them and then come back for the others. He's piling up supplies, not sure with what.

(p.440)

Billy Taupe along with many others manage to pull up a plan despite some among them ending up getting hung in the hanging tree, their desire to be free surpass their doubts.

Billy Taupe knelt on the ground, a pile of clothes and a few books beside him. He was talking rapidly as he scraped out some kind of picture in the dirt. Periodically, he'd gesture, pointing this way and that.

(p.389)

In the end their whole escape plan failed as they turned against one another in desperation; and they were back to square one. This shows that Marx' opinion on this class is not wrong as they are in fact a disorganised class of people that would only work if they are united.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social class in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* is evident between the Capitol and the Districts, among the district's citizens itself. There are some differences in terms of lifestyle, treatment and even sense of superiority. The districts in general are proletariat, living harshly, starving and avoiding death in every turn and compared to the bourgeoisie in the Capitol, who lives a lavish lifestyle and at the very least are not starving to death. The in

between is where the rest of the social classes from Marxist Theory fell through; landlords, petty bourgeoisie, peasantry, lumpenproletariat.

Bourgeoisie in the novel are President Ravinstill and Dr Volumnia Gaul, as they abuse their power to control the districts, whereas proletariat in the novel are the tributes; they are used as some kind of entertainment in the eyes of the Capitol. Landlords and petty bourgeoisie are similar although not the same; they both had to work under the bourgeoisie to keep up with their lifestyles but the difference is that the landlords have a piece of land that they profit from.

Other than that, peasantry are those rebels in the districts and as Marxist describe, this social group posed little to no threat to the capital as they are unable to do anything significant and in *The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*, it is evident when the rebel turns against one another in the end. The last group of people, Avoxes the slave, fall under lumpenproletariat. They are at the bottom of the food chain, having zero rights in their name and entirely belong to the bourgeoisie and in this case, to Dr Volumnia Gaul.

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