

## PHILOLOGY

**UDC 8**

**DOI 10.56378/OBSJ20231001**

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**Bibliographic Description of the Article:** Bessarab, O. (2023). The novel “The ballad of songbirds and snakes” by Suzanne Collins: problematics and system of characters. *Innovations in scientific, technical and social ecosystems [Scientific journal]*, 7, pp. 16–31. doi: 10.56378/OBSJ20231001

## **THE NOVEL “THE BALLAD OF SONGBIRDS AND SNAKES” BY SUZANNE COLLINS: PROBLEMATICS AND SYSTEM OF CHARACTERS**

**Abstract.** *The Purpose of the Study* is the theoretical substantiation of the problematics and the system of images in Suzanne Collins's novel “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes”. **The Research Methodology.** The research was based on the text of the author's novel and scientific works by leading scholars. These sources became the empirical basis of the study. The purpose of this article was achieved with the help of the research methods used (descriptive method, semantic and semantic, comparative, mythopoetic analysis, method of direct observation, method of interpretation, method of discourse analysis), as well as research methods (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, etc.). **The Scientific Novelty** is that it provides a comprehensive analysis of the issues and image system of Suzanne Collins' dystopian novel “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes” using the basics of archetypal hermeneutics. **The Conclusions.** The work of the American writer of the twenty-first century, Suzanne Collins, has caused a wave of interest in her work, especially after the film adaptation of the Hunger Games novels. The prequel to the series of books is the novel “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes”. This article identifies the main issues of the work (totalitarianism of state power, devaluation of human life, violation of human rights, and the confinement of a person in a prison of the mind) and analyzes the system of images through the prism of archetypal hermeneutics.

**Key words:** *problematics, system of images, archetype of Persona, archetype of Shadow, archetype of Child, archetype of Animus, archetype of Spirit, hermeneutics.*

## РОМАН “БАЛАДА ПРО СПІВОЧИХ ПТАШОК І ЗМІЙ” СЮЗАННИ КОЛЛІНЗ: ПРОБЛЕМАТИКА ТА СИСТЕМА ОБРАЗІВ

**Анотація.** Мета дослідження полягає в теоретичному обґрунтуванні проблематики та системи образів роману Сюзанни Коллінз “Балада про співочих пташок і змій”. **Методологія дослідження.** Для здійснення дослідження використовувалися текст роману авторки та наукові роботи провідних науковців. Ці джерела стали емпіричною базою дослідження. Мети дослідження вдалося досягти з допомогою таких методів дослідження: описовий метод, семантико-смисловий, порівняльний, міфопоетичний аналіз, метод безпосереднього спостереження, метод інтерпретації, метод дискурс-аналізу, а також прийомів дослідження: аналізу, синтезу, індукції, дедукції тощо. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що здійснено комплексний аналіз проблематики та системи образів антиутопічного роману Сюзанни Коллінз “Балада про співочих пташок і змій” використовуючи основи архетипної герменевтики. **Висновки.** Творчість американської письменниці XXI століття Сюзанни Коллінз викликала хвилю зацікавленості до її творчого доробку, особливо після екранізації романів про “Голодні ігри”. Приквелом до серії книг став роман «Балада про співочих пташок та змій» в даній статті визначено основну проблематику твору (тоталітаризм державної влади, знецінення людського життя, порушення прав людини, замкнутість людини у в’язниці розуму) та проаналізовано систему образів крізь призму архетипної герменевтики.

**Ключові слова:** проблематика, система образів, архетип Персони, архетип Тіні, архетип Дитини, архетип Анімуса, архетип Духа, герменевтика.

**The Problem Statement.** The work of the famous American writer of the twenty-first century, Suzanne Collins, has aroused a wave of interest among contemporary scholars who consider the author's artistic method to be superficial and primitive. Most

studies focus on superficial criticism and analysis and thus neglect the literary analysis of her works. Among the author's works, special attention should be paid to Suzanne Collins's modern dystopian novel-prequel "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes", which contains a multilevel poetics.

**The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches.** The literature on Suzanne Collins' work is superficially covered in scholarly and critical literature, as almost all scholarly research has been devoted to the author's Hunger Games trilogy, but the 2020 novel "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" has been ignored by scholars. Suzanne Collins's work has been studied by: I. Kapustian, Y. Myza, E. Asanov, E. Frankel, I. Ihnatova, E. Lekarevych, O. Haiduk, N. Zalesova, A. Hudilina, N. Shchytova, A. Gurduz, I. Aleshchenko, M. Schaub, and E. Safonova.

Recently, the creative path of the twenty-first century writer has attracted the attention of not only beginners but also experienced scholars, and a new group of «scientists» deserves special attention – the so-called "home philosophers" and "armchair critics" who produce as many reviews and articles as the professional circle of literary critics.

**The Purpose of Publication** is to analyze the problematics and the system of images in Suzanne Collins' novel "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes". The realisation of this goal involves solving the following tasks:

- to analyse the problematic of the author's work;
- to consider the system of images in the novel "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes".

**The Main Material Statement.** The main problem that is raised on the pages of Suzanne Collins' novel "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" is the *totalitarianism of the state power*,

which is a reptilian system of control. The main purpose of this state system is to comprehensively control the civilian population through elements such as peacekeepers (an army of pawns), hunger (widespread in the Districts) and fear (which never leaves almost all the inhabitants of Panem).

Indeed, the novel describes a very difficult and neglected situation and clearly shows that the authorities have no intention of providing the population with the basic conditions for a full life. This brutal state apparatus seeks to have comprehensive power over everyone, but not for the harmonious spiritual development of all residents. That is why people in the Districts don't live and enjoy life, they simply exist and survive.

The dystopian novel also includes elements of science fiction. "The Mockingjay" were genetically created by the Capitol, these birds functioned as recording devices and were later released. After they got out of the Capitol's control, they began to take actions that were directed against the government. These actions of the ruling circles raise the problem of using *living beings for dubious purposes*. In the case of animal life, the end doesn't always justify the means, as nature always prevails over arrogant people.

Another key issue raised in the novel is the *devaluation of human life*, especially children's lives. In general, a ruthless state apparatus will do anything to maintain its undeniable advantage (the elite and the citizens of the Capitol). And while this is certainly bad, it is easy to explain. After all, the needs of state domination don't require a large number of "service persons" to serve the needs of state domination.

Indeed, the majority of protesters will turn against a small number of Capitol residents, discrediting them in possible future

uprisings and wars. Likewise, the children of the Districts may one day rebel against the government (even with more zeal than their parents). Why wait for this moment, because it is better to let them kill each other in the annual Hunger Games. This is a means of control and fearmongering. People are intimidated and their basic needs, such as food, are restricted to keep them from organising various actions against the authorities. Because hungry people will only think about how to save their families from starvation so that they don't die in the near future. So, the feeling of fear of the authorities and the Hunger Games, and constant hunger confirm the next problem – *disrespect of human rights*.

The Panem government disregards all recognised and important human rights, but there are two basic rights that allow the people of the state to «improve» - the right to study and work, while other rights are completely abolished. Music and concerts will later be banned, as well as the right to freedom of speech. Thus, the novel shows that the authorities of Panem value silence, unquestioning obedience, and efficiency. Therefore, we are presented with a state of an ideal dystopian system, where great importance is attached to *material values*, and human virtue and dignity are devalued, which causes the reader to be indignant and disgusted. A striking representative of these qualities is Coriolanus Snow, who will later betray his close friend, Sean Plint, who will be hanged by the authorities. Selfishness, cruelty, arrogance, self-confidence and complete indifference to humanity lead Coriolanus Snow to inevitable success in the political arena, but never bring him true happiness.

The next problem of the novel is that people are *in a prison of the mind*.

The world surrounding the characters in this novel is designed to hide simple truths. As a result, the inhabitants have to create or find situations in which they can feel comfortable and at home. And, interestingly, such comfort is the true “law of unity” and the reality where all people of the World should exist.

Songbirds are free, calm and peaceful, while Serpents, on the contrary, try to separate and push everyone apart. These statements are confirmed by the existence of 12 Districts with very different standards of living, the indescribable power of the Panem government. In “The Hunger Games”, the residents of the Districts are «treated like animals» through “educational manipulation”, so that the residents demonstrate predation, anger and cruelty just to survive.

Thus, there is a complete disregard of *the law of human unity and subordination to the will of Saturn*, which is the main problem of the dystopian novel “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes”.

This is where the snake system of domination and perception takes place, aimed at destroying confidence in one's limitless capabilities and creating a wide gap between people. And the wider the gap of misunderstanding of reality, the weaker people become and the more they submit to the «education» demanded by the authorities. In her novel, Suzanne Collins turns Seyan Plint into a child who tells the truth. He openly challenges the regime and speaks out against its false views, ideas and intentions. However, it is the «children» with the truth on their lips that the snake power doesn't like, so they organise an annual sacrifice ritual called the Hunger Games. The main goal of the snake power is the *mental slavery of citizens*. Mental slavery involves certain ideas and judgements of people. In this context, they carry a «heavy cross» and drag their miserable existence along. Even if they are defeated,

they have two ways out, but they don't always remember this because they don't believe in their unlimited possibilities.

To break out of a mental prison, you have to start with believing in yourself, for example, like the Hunger Games winner Lucy Gray Baird, and her example is proof that you should never give up. Because the inner strength of people is incredibly strong and powerful, even stronger than the power of the state, including heartless tyrants and their cruel slaves. Meanwhile, unfortunately, people eventually get used to such participation and prefer a passive stance instead of trying to change something.

The last issue addressed by the author of the novel is the theme of love, but it is revealed in a somewhat unusual way, in the form of a question, namely: *love and who is capable of it*. Indeed, in the novel we see that both songbirds and snakes have "love", but it is, to put it mildly, radically different. Whereas birds can love unconditionally no matter what, calculating snakes either love for something or don't want to love at all.

Coriolanus Snow, a representative of the snake family, had a strong desire to possess Lucy Grey as an object, but he never loved her, he was proud of her and enjoyed being around her, but that was it. He was not in a position to do anything for her. Because she was his mentor, a rather weak game character that he controlled in The Hunger Games, but he didn't know how strong she was.

Of course, because spirituality is not inherent in snakes. "Besides, love is harmful – it makes a person stupid and vulnerable. If he does marry, he will choose a woman who cannot touch his heart. Most likely, he will choose a woman whom he will hate, so that she cannot manipulate him like Lucy Grey. No jealousy, no weakness" (Collins, 2020).



Obviously, as strange as it may sound, this novel is a dystopian genre with elements of science fiction, depicting a future that has already come or will come soon. However, perhaps at the moment, reality doesn't seem as deadly as Suzanne Collins portrays it in her work. However, if we take a closer look, analyse the problems in the novel and compare them with reality, we will inevitably realise that we will soon face changes that we don't want to notice yet.

Next, let's look at the system of images and symbols, but let's start with the manifestation of archetypal personalities according to the theory of C. G. Jung. It should be remembered that Carl Gustav Jung, unlike Sigmund Freud, considered a work of art not as a symptom of a mental disorder, but as an image of the author. Possessing all the qualities and characteristics of the living element of water, the author revives the powerful charge of the work, passing it through the prism of his multifaceted perception. This is exactly the «aftertaste» that remains after studying the so-called Jungian theory of imagery. In fact, Carl Gustav Jung advocates the reconstruction of the archetypal content of the image, the main “archetypes of personalities” include:

- *The Archetype of the Mother*, this archetype-personality symbolises the collective unconscious in the human psyche, as well as its origins,

- *The Archetype of the Child*, according to Jung, symbolises such an aspect of the life of the human psyche as the awakening of individual consciousness, the separation of the individual psyche from the collective unconscious. This archetype is manifested in the image of a character who is the carrier of the central event: a hero or an anti-hero.

– *The Archetype of the Persona (or Mask)* symbolises the false realisation of the personality, namely the role with which a person identifies himself or herself in the process of socialisation. In a literary work, this archetype is realised, as a rule, in the images of characters-doubles of the central character, whom he imitates or from whom he tries to distance himself (Meletinsky, 2000).

– *The Archetype of the Shadow*, according to Jung, means a repressed part of the psyche, that is, its content that for one reason or another didn't enter consciousness but was suppressed. Moreover, the Shadow doesn't necessarily symbolise a person's ability to commit an evil, bad act.

– *The Archetype of the Anima* is an element of the male unconscious, namely the unconscious ideas of a man about a woman, which are formed in the male psyche under the influence of maternal attitudes and assessments. Animas can have both positive and negative effects on a man's psyche and life. Positive animus in literature finds its manifestation in the images of female characters who set men in tune with true values and open the way to their inner self.

– *The Archetype of the Animus* is an element of the female unconscious that determines the image of a man that was formed in the female psyche under the influence of the father.

– *The Archetype of the Spirit*, in Jung's system, symbolises the highest spiritual synthesis in the human psyche (synthesis of the conscious and unconscious) and the optimal self-realisation of the individual. In literature, this archetype finds expression in the images of wise mentors, whose support the hero turns to in a difficult moment of his life. The archetype defines the structure of the image of a supernatural person: a saviour, a king, a prophet, a ruler, a saint.

– *The Archetype of the Loneliness* is the archetype of the fullness of human potential and the unity of the individual, a kind of organising principle that has the following functions: to integrate, unite, and push an infinite number of possibilities to the centre of the psyche, and thus create a state of greater psychological integrity (Meletinsky, 2000).

Carl Jung's hermeneutic strategy of mythological and literary images is to identify the archetypal content of a particular aspect of the human psychic life or self, relevant for its representation in images. We propose to examine the state of archetypes in the most prominent and vivid characters of Suzanne Collins' dystopian prequel novel “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes”.

The first protagonist, *Coriolanus Snow*, is the carrier of the central events, in whom the *archetype of the Persona*, or the Mask, is manifested in detail. In the process of socialisation, Coriolanus demonstrates qualities that significantly distinguish him from his real-life anti-hero behaviour. In fact, he is a born manipulator with a «noble face» who carries the image of a cold, obsequious, compliant and «ad nauseam» polite representative of the capitalist elite. The public perceives him as such, but they are all wrong. “Coriolanus is not interested in love or career, but in the opportunity to get a bonus and a cushy, quiet position as an official to move papers from place to place...” (Collins, 2020).

He has no pious good intentions. He doesn't live but tries to survive in the circumstances. The ability to show empathy and compassion, to act selflessly and honestly, and find a way out is in the *archetype of the Shadow*.

This was partly influenced by the *archetype of the defenceless Orphan Child*, who had to cope with all the trials on his own. For this reason, Coriolanus cancels out the *archetype of*

*the Anima*, which was able to be fully realised in love with Lucy Grey Baird. It should also be noted that Coriolanus Snow will never achieve the development of a full-fledged *archetype of the Spirit*, because wisdom and superiority are not inherent in him. "Born to crawl", Coriolanus will never be able or willing to fly, because the *archetype of the Persona (Mask)* will forever be embedded in his essence and will become a trigger for the birth of a specifically reptilian *archetype of the Loneliness*, which will only exhale icy coldness, cruelty, and indifference.

The next character we are considering is *Sejan Plint*, the exact opposite of Coriolanus Snow. This natural bird, a fighter for the embodiment of justice and kindness in life, will demonstrate his rebellious *Child archetype* until the last moment of his life. Sejan is uncomfortable living in the current conditions, although he has the right to live in the best conditions of the "golden cage", but this cage is "capitol", "lifeless", "dead". He has lost himself in society, and at the Academy, where Seyan Plint studies, no one understands him, almost everyone thinks he is strange, and he has no intention of conforming to anyone's criteria. "Poor Seyan is an easy prey for all sorts of scoundrels" (Collins, 2020); "...he doesn't want to use the money he made in the war, it is a matter of honour for him" (Collins, 2020); "He wants to achieve everything in life on his own" (Collins, 2020).

Seyan had the makings of the *Spirit* and *Loneliness archetypes*, but since he opposes the norms of society and refuses to associate himself with a certain systemic community, he doesn't develop the *Persona (Mask) archetype*. It is thanks to this archetype that a person has the opportunity to integrate into society and be a cog in the machine. However, Seyan didn't have a developed archetype of the Mask (as, for example, Coriolanus

Snow and Lucy Grey). In turn, he refused to be an integral part of the System, for which he was accused of treason and then executed. In this way, Sistama makes it clear to the other birds their path: either to obey or to lose their chance for life (as they say, a choice without a choice).

The next character is *Cusk Highbottom* (the headmaster of the Academy), who is distantly reminiscent of Sejan Plint. If Coriolanus Snow is a perfect copy of his father, the beautiful Xanf Snow, then Sejan Plint was somewhat similar to Headmaster Highbottom. As a drunkard in his youth, Casca Highbottom invented the Hunger Games for fun, but he was not going to make it happen; he was “helped” by Beauty Xanf Snow.

After these events, the Director Highbottom's *archetype Persona (Mask)* will be called “Eternal High”. Having created his «Frankenstein» under the influence of the *Shadow archetype*, he will gradually begin to morph, which will affect his *archetype of Loneliness*, which will appear from time to time in a state of sleepwalking. Without morphing, this bird, which is already very weak, will no longer be able to “fly” and feel calm, and the previously impartial *archetype of Spirit* will disappear forever, and the reptilian system will learn to “crawl”. The Shadow archetype is manifested in the passion for morphing, and, of course, this will replace the cruel reality for Highbottom, but it will also create a sense of powerlessness, submission, humility in the *archetype of Spirit and Loneliness*.

The next character, who, with her mere appearance, brings huge waves of immense fear, is *Dr Volumnia Gall* (the lead administrator of the Hunger Games, the founder of the Capitol's experimental weapons department; she holds the positions of scientist, military officer and teacher). “This woman set snakes on

Clemency for fun. She obviously enjoys watching others suffer, and she expects the same from others" (Collins, 2020).

She is the embodiment of the chaos she tries to control. All her secrets become clear from one Volumnia Gall's *archetype of Persona*: she doesn't hide her snake-like nature or her sarcastic and cynical jokes. And this frightens everyone even more. Her holy prejudice that all people are cruel from birth shows us that Dr Gall's *archetype of Loneliness* represents the presence of catastrophically destructive functions that affect her inadequate psychological state.

There is no need to talk about the *archetype of Spirit* here, since Volumnia Gall "develops" only within the framework of her «serpentarium»; she doesn't even intend to perform pious acts, which in turn requires spiritual roots, which she does not have. All of this suggests that, as the creator of the degenerate serpents, Dr. Gall reveals her inherent serpentine traits through the *archetype of the Shadow*, which completely absorbs her personality.

The last character we will look at is the charming songbird, *Lucy Grey Baird*. Although she is only 16 years old, she is clever, cunning and wise, as Director Highbottom correctly observes, as if she were 35 years old. As a talented artist and a bright singer, the Lucy Gray Persona archetype is realised. As for the *archetype of the Loneliness*, it develops accordingly: at the age of 16, Lucy Grey is already an established personality with her own precise and intelligent beliefs.

In addition, she is kind, sincere, and strives to be free and happy, which gives us reason to talk about the high level of development of the *Spirit archetype*. We also note the fact that Lucy Gray is very fond of children, she finds a common language with them very easily, which indicates her respectful attitude to the

*archetype of the Child*, which appears on the surface of a strong psyche. Lucy Gray is a ray of sunshine amidst the gloomy circumstances of an unjust existence. In the face of low human actions and vile trials of life, Lucy Gray doesn't lose herself – she remains true and finds the strength to resist.

Since Carl Gustav Jung is convinced that the product of creativity “grows in the soul” of the author, “like a tree in the soil from which it takes the juices it needs”, we can assume that the prequel to “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes” appeared on the surface of Suzanne Collins' collective unconscious for a reason.

**The Conclusions.** Of course, there is no doubt that the novel is a kind of authorial message. But the novel is neither the result of conscious activity nor the author's personal unconscious. After all, a work can have many hermeneutical interpretations, and in further research we will consider in more detail the peculiarities of the poetics of the novels of the famous American writer of the twenty-first century, Suzanne Collins.

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*The article was received 25/04/2023.*

*Article recommended for publishing 26/09/2023.*