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雪之墮落 :《飢餓遊戲前傳：鳴鳥與游蛇之歌》中效益主義反烏托邦的正當化敘事

Snow Falling: Legitimating Narratives of Utilitarian Dystopia in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*

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It has been a long journey since I first read *The Hunger Games* series at the age of twelve. The twelve-year-old me had never imagined that I would return to this dystopian story one day as a researcher rather than a reader. When I submitted my thesis proposal on the series to apply for my master's program in my senior year at NTNU, it truly felt like a dream—as if the younger me, who once saw the world through the lens of dystopian narratives, was finally being heard.

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摘要

本文探討《飢餓遊戲前傳：鳴鳥與游蛇之歌》中主角科利奧蘭納斯．史諾在後叛亂末日危機背景下，如何運用效益主義的正當化論述合理化其決策行為。以彌爾的效益主義理論與李歐塔對「宏大敘事」的批判為理論基礎，分析科利奧蘭納斯如何以威權手段在重建中的社會中調和道德、控制與生存的問題。本文聚焦主角個人成長的三個關鍵面向：其家族在都城中衰敗的地位、擔任第十屆飢餓遊戲導師的表現、以及擔任第十二區維安人員的野心。透過文本細讀，呈現科利奧蘭納斯如何將有利於自身的行為包裝為「為了大眾利益」的道德選擇。

本論文主張，科利奧蘭納斯所採取的效益主義並非出於真正的倫理關懷，而是一種為了奪回權力與地位，精心計算過的手段，旨在維護自身與統治階級的利益。此外，本文亦指出，此種效益邏輯反映並強化了更廣泛的結構性不平等與政治操弄系統。透過探討效益主義作為「宏大敘事」的運作方式，本文揭示意識形態如何掩飾個人野心、合理化暴政，並合理化平民的犧牲。最終，本研究希望能為探討虛構與現實政治體制中的權力倫理、正當性與敘事控制議題提供新的思考視角。

關鍵字：《飢餓遊戲前傳：鳴鳥與游蛇之歌》、科利奧蘭納斯．史諾、史諾總統、《飢餓遊戲》、反烏托邦文學、效益主義、彌勒、宏大敘事、李歐塔

Abstract

This thesis examines Coriolanus Snow's utilitarian justifications for rationalizing his decisions in the post-rebellion apocalypse depicted in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Drawing on John Stuart Mill's theory of utilitarianism and Jean-François Lyotard's critique of grand narratives, this study explores how Coriolanus negotiates morality, control, and survival in a society rebuilding itself through authoritarian means. This analysis focuses on three key dimensions of his personal development: the Snow family's fallen status in the Capitol, Coriolanus's performance as a mentor in the tenth Hunger Games, and his ambition as a Peacekeeper in District 12. These aspects are examined through close textual analysis with attention to how Coriolanus frames self-serving decisions as morally justified actions for the greater good.

This thesis argues that Coriolanus's embrace of utilitarian reasoning is not grounded in ethical concern but rather in a calculated effort to regain his family's power and status and protect elite interests. Furthermore, it considers how such reasoning reflects and reinforces broader systems of structural inequality and political manipulation. By examining how utilitarian logic is deployed as a grand narrative, this study sheds light on how ideology can be used to justify tyranny, obscure personal ambition, and normalize civilian sacrifice. Ultimately, this work contributes to the ongoing conversation about the ethics of power, legitimacy, and narrative control in both fictional and real-world political systems.

Keywords: *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, Coriolanus Snow, President Snow, *The Hunger Games*, Dystopian Literature, Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill, Grand Narrative, Jean-François Lyotard

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I. Introduction

I-1. Motivation and Background

After reading "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (Le Guin, 1973) in the Fantasy Literature course during my sophomore year, I was fascinated by the ironic atmosphere and the setting of Omelas as a place with utopian elements but a dystopian reality.[1] The ethical dilemmas and sacrifices central to the novella have since inspired me to explore more dystopian works. Afterward, I fell in love with dystopian literature and began rereading *The Hunger Games* series. The dystopian world in it, Panem, mirrors the real-world conflicts and moral ambiguities the leaders in this fictional republic face during and after the First Rebellion.

In light of current global events, the China-U.S. trade war has escalated, ushering in a new Cold War era in 2025. The presidents of the two countries both repeatedly state their utilitarian propaganda slogans: Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again (MAGA)" for the American Dream and Jinping Xi's "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation (中華民族偉大復興)" for the Chinese Dream. From a broader perspective, such political language seeks to invoke people's patriotism and promise a better future created by governments and their citizens. Superficially, the related policies allegedly aim to boost people's collective happiness. Yet, from an individual viewpoint, these narratives don't list the necessary requirements and detailed methods to achieve the ultimate goals. Regardless of costs during the tariff negotiations, the U.S. sacrifices interests of American investors and shareholders, while Chinese manufacturers and employees forfeit their right to earn a living. In the process, individual sacrifices are profoundly affected, which resembles situations depicted in political dystopian novels. In addition, the warfare between Ukraine and Russia and that between

[1] Le Guin, Ursula. "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*. Harper Perennial, 2004, pp. 275-284.

Israel and Hamas have deepened my interest in war scenarios of dystopian literature. These real-world predicaments, the struggle for power, the devastation of war, and the sacrifices of civilians, resonate strongly with dystopian fiction—where the lines between good and evil blur. It is not a surprise that we find leaders of dystopian nations often justify harsh measures in the name of security and survival.

I-2. Utilitarianism in *The Hunger Games* Series

The contemporary use of utilitarian justifications as illustrated above has prompted me to focus my research on how dystopian literature, like Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series, can offer insight into the consequences of rebellion, control, and governance. In particular, I am curious about how utilitarian schemes of leaders and elites in post-rebellion dystopias reflect the justifications used in modern warfare. Ultimately, I will explore these themes in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020) to shed new light on the ethical and political dimensions of dystopian literature and their relevance to contemporary conflicts.

Born in 1962, Suzanne Collins is the youngest child of a military officer. In her early life, she witnessed her father serving in the Korean War and the Vietnam War as a soldier in the U.S. Air Force. As a result, Collins became acquainted with the influence of warfare, including issues about poverty and starvation. In an interview conducted by *The New York Times* in 2018, Collins said footage of the Iraq War inspired her to start writing a new series about the just-war theory to explore the morality of declaring war, hatred, and xenophobia (Collins Interview). Years later, a post-war dystopian storyland, Panem, in *The Hunger Games* series was successfully established. The series consists of two parts. The first part comprises three books—*The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). This trilogy describes how Katniss Everdeen involves herself in two Hunger Games, works with others to overthrow the hierarchy among the government and citizens in both the Capitol and the districts, and eventually relocates to a world without any Hunger Games for

children. The second part, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2000, *The Ballad* hereafter) and *Sunrise on the Reaping* (2025), are set in the early years of Panem. *The Ballad* takes place 64 years prior to the events in *The Hunger Games*. This prequel describes how young Coriolanus Snow, a member of the once-elite Snow family, navigates the challenges of a post-rebellion society and struggles to regain stability and honor.[2] *The Ballad* accounts how Coriolanus is assigned as a mentor for the tenth Hunger Games, responsible for guiding Lucy Gray Baird, a charismatic performer and resourceful tribute from District 12, to win the Games. As Coriolanus grapples with his family's declining status, he becomes increasingly invested in Lucy's performance. Also, he finds himself torn between his ambition to procure a scholarship for college and a budding attraction to her. Throughout the Games, he witnesses the brutality and moral compromises necessary for survival, reflecting on themes of power, sacrifice, and the darker aspects of human nature. As the story unfolds, Coriolanus's choices begin to shape his future, leading him down a path that will ultimately define him as the ruthless President Snow. Unlike Katniss, he ends up choosing to assimilate into the existing system and become a member of the ruling class. This prequel explores the complexities of governance, the impact of war, and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals in a society that values control over compassion. In this way, *The Ballard* offers a rich backstory to the most ferocious antagonist we later see in the trilogy.

The theme of utilitarian thinking resonates strongly with *The Hunger Games* series, where the Capitol enforces a utilitarian framework to maintain control, suppress individuality, and ensure the stability of its hierarchical society. The Capitol's emphasis on survival and sacrifice mirrors the prioritization of societal stability over personal freedom. Many scholars'

[2] See Noah Hernandez's comparative analysis discussing how both Suzanne Collins's Coriolanus Snow and Shakespeare's Caius Martius Coriolanus are shaped by maternal figures and struggle with tensions between political failure and military ambition in a post-war scenario. Hernandez, Noah. "Shakespeare, 'Coriolanus' and 'The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes': How 'The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes' draws from the ill-fated hero of Shakespeare's play 'Coriolanus.'" *Study Breaks*, 13 Dec. 2023, studybreaks.com/tvfilm/film/shakespeare-coriolanus-and-the-ballad-of-songbirds-and-snakes/.

analyses of *The Hunger Games* series primarily focus on the utility and dehumanization of the Hunger Games as well as the Second Rebellion, the war between District 13 and the Capitol in *Mockingjay*. Within the dehumanizing system, the country educates its citizens to make decisions based on the greater good (or utilitarianism), subtly encouraging them to sacrifice anything deemed unnecessary for survival. For example, books in Panem merely serve as educational tools for survival. In District 12, residents are taught just enough to work as miners. Similarly, Katniss's mother writes a book on medicinal herbs, while her father adds some hunting knowledge. Every word written by both of them in the book contributes to the "family's survival" amid a shortage of medical resources and food in districts (Du Plessis 121). However, district citizens thus lose the ability to read or write books for entertainment and creative expression. In contrast, the Capitol utilizes literacy as "a technology separate from an individual's thoughts, separate from human contexts" to prevent citizens from sharing rebellious comments on the government (Du Plessis 120). The manipulation of literacy and knowledge reflects its broader strategy of suppressing dissent and consolidating power. Finally, the information gap it creates ensures the nation's stability by fostering hierarchical discrimination. In this dystopian environment, Panem's citizens make decisions primarily guided by utilitarian logic, emphasizing survival over personal expression or freedom. Additionally, many view Hunger Games as the government's best option to stabilize society and minimize sacrifices, which can be regarded as dehumanization in a typical dystopian framework. For example, Joseph J. Foy draws parallels between Thomas Hobbes's concept of the social contract in *Leviathan* and Panem's Treaty of Treason, which legitimizes the Hunger Games as a reminder of the catastrophic First Rebellion and a warning delivered to potential rebels. Foy argues that the result is "bellum universale, a war of all against all" (Foy ch.14). In this context, the Capitol conditions its citizens to compete ruthlessly for scarce resources, both in the arena and in their daily lives. From a similar angle as Louis Melançon observes, "Panem is a world at war," with individuals pitted against each other

(Melançon ch.15). This environment of constant conflict and moral ambiguity lays the foundation for the broader themes of survival and sacrifice explored in the series. Furthermore, the trilogy frequently highlights how utilitarian ethics in warfare intersect with individual and collective struggles, as exemplified in Katniss's discussions with Gale Hawthorne on the sacrifices required for victory: "the cost of war, not only to society but to the individual" (Henthorne ch.3). The statement highlights the tension between collective stability and personal autonomy, drawing attention to how the protagonists struggle with the moral ambiguities of rebellion and the cost of challenging a utilitarian regime. All in all, these connections reveal a shared concern in dystopian literature about the dangers of reducing individuals to mere components of a broader social machine, raising critical questions about the ethical limits of utilitarian governance.

However, most of the existing studies delve deeply into the struggles of victims within a dystopian system and often trace their transformation from passive sufferers to active agents of change rather than exploring the dictator's inner journey. While Coriolanus's presidency in the trilogy reflects a utilitarian governance style that justifies sacrifices for societal stability, scholars largely overlook Coriolanus's internal conflicts during his formative years. Notably, his earlier struggles to balance personal ambition with societal expectations—and the sacrifices involved—often functioned to strengthen his own power in *The Ballad*. In this framework of societal conflict and moral dilemmas, Coriolanus's early experiences differ slightly from other district citizens. As a student in the Capitol's most prestigious high school, Coriolanus is immersed in an environment that upholds the Capitol's oppressive values. He is shaped by the expectations of those around him—teachers, peers, and society at large—to excel by exploiting others, especially those from lower statuses. This indoctrination prioritizes social expectations of dominance, manipulation, and resourcefulness over empathy or fairness. His personal struggles, therefore, lie not only in his ambition but also in navigating rigid expectations of the Capitol. Meanwhile, he possesses the pride of the

Capitol's ruling class, despising overreachers and those who rise from rags to riches, such as rebels and rich friends from families originally from the twelve districts. To secure his fallen family and protect his personal interests, he makes every effort to surpass these people and prove himself in the Hunger Games. This motivation prompts his agency to pursue victory and power, but he struggles to decide when he faces moral conundrums. Some critics focus on Collins's exploration of ambivalent morality, narrowing the scope to Coriolanus's internal dilemmas and his navigation of larger forces. Below, I provide a brief literature review of the existing scholarship in four aspects. First, from a broader perspective, John Granger in his essay, "*The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*: Three Notes on Hunger Games Prequel," frames this as a tension between being a "Human Being" and a "Citizen" (Granger). The comparison emphasizes how Coriolanus's natural desires—such as love, loyalty, and personal morality—clash with the societal expectation to conform to the Capitol's ideals. Second, Philip Womack in his essay, "*The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* review – a sleek Hunger Games prequel," highlights the pressure exerted by Coriolanus's declining family status and his ambitions, noting "his chance to gain glory back for his family name" (Womack). Third, Alexandria Acord in "A Book Review of 'The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes' by Suzanne Collins" further examines this dynamic in his exploitation of Lucy Gray, explaining that "Snow never really lets go of his original motivations to use Lucy Gray to his own benefit" (Acord). The influence of social expectations leads to Coriolanus's gradual transformation and drives him to chase what he longs for: power. Initially, he shows traces of respect and emotional connections with tributes for the Games, but he succumbs to viewing them as mere tools for personal gain over time. In the beginning, he tries to save his family's social status and earn enough scholarship for college; at last, he knows he needs more than fame and glory. This shift illustrates the pervasive power of Capitol values, which reward ruthlessness and punish dissent, and manifests Coriolanus's passivity to agency. Finally, Michael Vento in "*The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* Review and Analysis" emphasizes Coriolanus's ultimate

abandonment of his moral compass: “Despite his unfortunate circumstances, he could’ve followed his moral compass and either decided to flee with Lucy or challenge the Capitol. Ultimately, he did neither” (Vento). Although Coriolanus cannot escape from societal conditioning, he still prioritizes personal survival and power and fully aligns himself with the Capitol’s expectations. His moral ambiguity becomes not only a personal failing but also a testament to how an individual can consciously choose to internalize and perpetuate a corrupt system for self-advancement. His progression from a conflicted young man to a calculating strategist of authoritarian control illustrates how personal ambition and deliberate choices (not just social pressures) can drive one to embrace and enforce oppressive systems.

As a whole, these studies depict Coriolanus as a deeply conflicted character, navigating tensions among social expectations, morality, and self-interest within a dystopian society. Throughout the prequel, Coriolanus keeps justifying his alternatives to protecting people when he pursues his family glory, social status, and power. His behavior raises important questions about limits of utilitarian thinking when applied to one’s self-love and self-development in a dystopian setting. Also, this duality raises critical questions about whether his actions truly benefit the greater good or merely advance his own ambitions. To address this gap, my thesis aims to analyze and discuss how a dictator of an authoritarian dystopia crafts a compelling narrative to serve their self-interest at the expense of citizens’ sacrifices.

II. Theoretical Framework

In many political dystopian texts, ruling powers justify oppressive regimes by claiming they are necessary for the greater good—peace, stability, efficiency, or survival. This utilitarian logic becomes a moral smokescreen for authoritarian control. As readers can observe, politicians in such dystopian storylands encourage mass compliance or sacrifice, claim that short-term harm leads to long-term benefit, and thus justify deception and manipulation. Consequently, most scholars devote themselves to political dystopias, speaking of utilitarian justifications in dystopian literature.

For instance, Walter L. Ouzts, Jr. analyzes Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932, hereafter *BNW*) through the lenses of Jeremy Bentham's and John Stuart Mill's utilitarian philosophies. His dissertation points out that social stability represents the goal and parallels happiness for the whole society and discusses Huxley's exploration of issues about freedom and individuality. In such a social structure strictly controlled by the government and science, citizens who are interested in developing "a sense of individuality" feel "incompatible with the community" (Ouzts, Jr. 60). At that moment, they notice their impotence of thinking freely and identity as a slave, rather than a citizen. In this dehumanizing situation, individuality becomes a threat to societal stability, as those who recognize their lack of freedom begin to see themselves as tools of the system rather than autonomous beings.

From a similar perspective, Gregory Claeys analyzes utilitarian illusions in *BNW* in *Dystopia: A Natural History*. Exploring the Huxleyan conundrum, Claeys situates World State as a literary counterpart to utilitarian governance. In the story, citizens of this dystopia are pacified with pleasure for the sake of social stability, but they sacrifice freedom and emotion in return. To stabilize its eugenic hierarchy and maintain its social order, pleasure and stability become tools of control rather than liberation and form the government's grand narrative for its tyranny. World State encourages citizens to enjoy

amusements, such as soma (the fictional drug in *BNW*), casual sex, and entertainment, and indulge themselves in sensual pleasure and mental comfort. In this way, the government claims to help people reach collective happiness but actually traps its people in the cycle of pleasure that ensures their political impotence: the policy only turns them into "mere onlookers" instead of "potential performers" (Claeys 376).[3] With sensual pleasure as input, citizens are numbed by superficial satisfaction that distracts them from critical thought, emotional depth, and authentic human experiences. Without any output, they don't possess any capacity to overthrow the regime and remain passive, compliant, and easily manipulated. Hence, Huxley's dystopian critiques mechanize not only repression but also hedonistic utilitarianism that legitimizes the government's authoritarian policies. As Claeys agrees, the pleasure might seem reasonable during the Great Depression, when *BNW* was published, but modern readers are likely to notice that "there is something false or artificial in this happiness" (Claeys 376). The homogenous notion of pleasure in *BNW* conceals psychological distress, cultural impoverishment, and suppressed individuality beneath a smiling surface in the 1930s. In sum, utilitarian grand narratives often silence dissent by equating declared happiness with actual happiness. This rhetorical move constructs a false consensus: those who question the system are seen as deviant, just like Coriolanus before the tenth Hunger Games.

Scholars' emphases on utilitarian justifications in dystopian literature set the stage for a deeper theoretical investigation into how rhetoric, narrative structure, and political ideology intersect to sustain authoritarian power.

II-1. Mill and Utilitarianism

My research is theoretically derived from Mill's treatise, *Utilitarianism*, to explore

[3] World State rids its citizens of their ability to think critically and act independently in *BNW*, while Panem transforms its Capitol citizens into active participants in its propaganda machine in *The Ballad*.

utilitarian justifications for dehumanizing issues in *The Ballad*. According to Mill, the standard of moral actions dwells on the "promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain" (Mill 14). In other words, the morality of an action is determined by its ability to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, even if it requires the sacrifice of individuals. When we make a decision, we have to think about our options suitable for the situation we are facing: "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others" (Mill 15). Mill emphasizes that utilitarianism must consider both the quality and distribution of that happiness and acknowledge that some harm may be necessary for the greater good and social utility while it seeks to maximize overall happiness. In short, utilitarian decision-making is not merely about maximizing pleasure, but about carefully weighing context, consequences, and the moral worth of each option to achieve the most just and beneficial outcome for all.

Within a utilitarian social framework, Mill believes individuals can be trained to value others' happiness through education (Mill 32). In other words, this kind of moral society nurtures people's sympathy, conscience, and motivation to promote the greater good. In this way, utilitarian regulations gradually shape and reinforce people's moral values. Influenced by mainstream public opinion, individuals align their personal well-being with the greater good of society and equate their own happiness with that of others out of a sense of duty to contribute and peer pressure. Otherwise, few people sacrifice themselves for a higher moral pursuit and goal that is much more important than their rights, which is the precious, core spirit of utilitarianism. Under the circumstances, "As little is there an inherent necessity that any human being should be a selfish egoist, devoid of every feeling or care but those which centre in his own miserable individuality" (Mill 27). With utilitarian morality as a sanction against egoism, people rarely show selfish and self-centered behavior. In a democratic nation, legislators represent citizens and their will, enact laws based on the greater good, and abandon individual interests as public servants. Regardless of humanity, Mill prescribes an

ideal moral system in which people help one another to ensure the happiness of individuals as well as society. As time goes by, utilitarianism will finally lead to a win-win situation.

Nonetheless, whether utilitarianism also successfully operates in an authoritarian regime remains a question. In a political dystopian nation, its president usually possesses the utmost power. Also, citizens of the upper class enjoy a better social status compared with other residents without political power. More importantly, the social hierarchy equips these first-class citizens with entitlements to acquire resources of good quality and be entertained by miseries of second-class citizens without physically participating in their daily struggles. In this situation, the social structure, as Mill affirms, isn't qualified as a society consisting of equals based on "the understanding that the interests of all are to be regarded equally" (Mill 59). Undoubtedly, privileged families of an authoritarian nation firmly seated in high-ranking government positions implement policies based solely on personal interest, draft unjust laws, and even fabricate excuses to achieve their goals. Appointed officials who have not been elected lack the legitimacy to govern. Therefore, it is possible for them to enact unjust laws in the absence of supervision by civic organizations and cause injustice and sacrifices. As Mill notes, an unjust law "is not the ultimate criterion of justice, but may give to one person a benefit, or impose on another an evil, which justice condemns" (Mill 84). The ruling class of the authoritarian nation justifies injustice through unjust laws and fails to protect or even deprive normal citizens of their individual rights and social utility. In Mill's discussion about injustice and self-sacrifice in utilitarianism, he highlights the legitimacy and legal aspects: "the terms just and unjust in a perfectly definite sense, namely that it is just to respect, unjust to violate, the *legal rights* of any one" (Mill 83). Evidently, an authoritarian government treats its people excluded from the political decision-making circle as if they were slaves responsible for serving the ruling class in spite of their legal rights as citizens and even humans. To be more specific, the terrible living conditions of areas outside of the capital receive little attention, and the existence of unreasonable policies robs the general public of

their right. In fact, it is the government's propaganda of anti-rebellion that controls people's thoughts and actions for retaliation, which morally justifies the nation's policies and decision-making in the name of utilitarianism.

Overall, Mill's exploration of the connections and correlations between utilitarianism and justice is instrumental in analyzing Coriolanus's narrative framework as his excuses for his decision-making.

II-2. Lyotard and Grand Narrative

Besides utilitarian philosophy, Jean-François Lyotard's critique of the grand narrative (*grand récit* in French) offers a lens for understanding how classical forms of utility-based reasoning may operate as overarching moral frameworks. In Lyotard's discussion of postmodern society, he defines grand narrative as overreaching statements that "legitimat[e] social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics, ways of thinking" (Lyotard 18). In brief, grand narratives offer a universal story about human progress, development, or fate, and therefore frame unreasonable decisions as the necessary process of a larger blueprint or an ultimate goal of the shared future for mankind. Nevertheless, rulers may accomplish their pursuit by suppressing voices of individuals or minority groups in society. In contrast, utilitarianism also provides a universal moral framework, a direction for progress, and a single metric to judge all actions, policies, and institutions, which is appealing for rulers to claim moral legitimacy for their actions.

Usually, grand narratives enable governments to ignore common people's basic needs for survival but rationalize officials' personal benefits under their reign. In "Narratives of Post-Truth: Lyotard and the Epistemic Fragmentation of Society," Christian Baier takes Trump's MAGA, for example, to interpret epistemology of the contemporary "post-truth" world (Baier 95). These days, some powerful politicians deliver particularly exaggerated or ideal political slogans or propaganda during their election campaigns. They persuade their voters

into faithfully believing themselves and "combin[ing] the preference for emotional appeal over rational argument with a profound mistrust toward the institutions traditionally tasked to generate, evaluate and communicate knowledge" (Baier 96). The phenomenon indicates that grand narratives not only encourage the public to believe in biased opinions or beliefs on public affairs but also gradually undermine the trustworthiness of impartial suggestions from scholars. Through political approaches, grand narratives "aim to establish discursive hegemony, marginalizing minorities and their divergent stories in the process" (Baier 97). The morally superficial and empty justifications distort citizens' cognitive ability and judgment and convince them to yield to oppressive governance that only maximizes rulers' individual benefits without skeptical notions. In the end, the ruling class will ignore mainstream public opinions and appeals that affect and supervise the government and its policies.

The conception of grand narratives allows us to have a better understanding of how dictators, dictators-to-be, and strongman politicians justify their policies, rule, and actions, as well as the historical and social contexts in which such grand narratives can be effective in deceiving and manipulating the masses.

How a dictator and the privileged people of an authoritarian country construct their grand narratives to make utilitarian justifications is worth discussing and analyzing in *The Ballad*. If we interpret Coriolanus's decision-making with Mill's utilitarianism and Lyotard's grand narrative, we can see that he learns means of moral justifications at the privileged school operated by the authorities concerned. However, he also witnesses district citizens' injustice in the tenth Hunger Games. Unfortunately, he ends up standing with most Capitol citizens and claiming that his authoritarian governance is essential for the stability of society even if it involves morally questionable actions, such as violence and repression. Noticeably, his narratives benefit no one but only him. In modern democratic societies, utilitarianism

functions as a persuasive moral framework for policy decisions, so political actors often frame their grand narratives in utilitarian terms even when the underlying ideology may differ.[4] Many contemporary political narratives adopt a utilitarian framework to justify deception, control, or sacrifice, especially in democratic nations, where the idea of the "greater good" holds cultural weight.

From the lens of a dictator-to-be's greater picture that is used to gain more personal profits, my thesis draws on insights into the challenge of aligning personal motives with the greater good and the role of grand narratives to examine how Coriolanus leverages ethical reasoning to rationalize his self-interest to the detriment of others. Firstly, I will outline key narrative events and character decisions in a neutral tone to brief Coriolanus's self-development, particularly those related to Coriolanus's responsibility and performances as a mentor in the tenth Hunger Games and as a Peacekeeper in District 12. Next, I will adopt the comparative method to analyze how the utilitarian themes work based on the portrayal of Coriolanus's character, contrasting his external behavior and real thoughts. Also, I will facilitate the examination of his dialogue, speeches, and inner monologues with discourse analysis, focusing on his rhetoric of power and moral justification as a privileged Capitol citizen born in an elite family but raised in a post-rebellion situation. All of these approaches will be utilized to interpret the ethical dilemmas in the novel, enabling a deeper understanding of how Coriolanus's decisions reflect egoistic schemes under the disguise of utilitarianism. In this way, I can draw connections among Coriolanus's internal dilemmas, external actions, and the broader philosophical debates on utilitarian grand narratives.

[4] Not all grand narratives are utilitarian in nature. Different grand narratives pursue different ends, and utilitarianism is merely one possible logic behind political deception rather than its universal foundation. When politicians lie "for the greater good," they invoke a utilitarian rhetoric. However, this does not mean that all lies and propaganda in service of grand narratives follow a utilitarian structure. This thesis argues that utilitarianism functions in the narrative not as a genuine ethical framework but as an ideological façade. The government's true objectives lie elsewhere: self-preservation, political dominance, and elite privilege. Therefore, utilitarian reasoning becomes a tool of critique rather than support. By holding the regime accountable to the moral logic it claims to uphold, we expose the profound disjunction between the ethical narrative and the dystopian reality.

III. Textual Analysis

In *The Hunger Games* series, Panem is a country built on the collapse of North America hundreds of years later. After the remaining population establishes this country, the nation's totalitarian dictatorship prevails in the storyland with the collective happiness as its excuse. Yet, the Capitol's unreasonable resource allocation and oppressive regime make rebels, mostly from District 13, declare numerous wars on the government, which are the so-called First Rebellion. The continuing civil wars undermine the nation in every aspect, including economy, population, politics, and so on, which corresponds to Claeys's definition of dystopian storylands: "[t]he adjective dystopian implies fearful futures where chaos and ruin prevail" (Claeys 5). In brief, Panem is a dystopia born from chaos and sustained through ongoing internal and external damage, projecting a bleak and unstable future for both its citizens and its government.

Hence, this dystopia suffers from war traumas, the fright of losing everything overnight, and the anxiety of lacking provisions. The imagery not only shows a new post-apocalyptic landscape but also brings back everyone's nightmare again. In Andrew Feenberg's discussion about dystopia in *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory*, Panem confronts the "prophecies of doom" that have haunted the nation since the warfare of the First Rebellion (Feenberg 41). After enduring repeated wars, the people adopt eschatological beliefs, reflecting "apocalyptic fears" and "dystopian anxieties", typical of "postwar science fiction" (Feenberg 42). In the context of the story, the inhabitants fear losing everything, including their loved ones, so survival becomes their ultimate objective. The nation, ravaged by civil war during the Dark Days, faces widespread starvation and the challenge of reconstructing essential public utilities. Also, it displays the scarcity of resources and the infertility of the land. Everything is up for grabs, creating a post-apocalyptic image and causing related fears and anxieties. Faced with such fears, the people of Panem have no

choice but to surrender their desires for freedom, turn to the government for protection, and rely on them even if it means submitting to tyranny, especially in the form of the Hunger Games.

The section is divided into three parts, each focusing on a distinct phase of *The Ballad* under analysis. The first part, "**The Compelling Narrative for the Greater Good in Panem**," establishes Coriolanus's background by exploring how warfare and Panem's state-sponsored propaganda shape his early worldview. Building on this foundation, the second part, "**Perfect Propaganda as a Mentor in the 10th Hunger Games**," examines how Coriolanus's family legacy and elite education influence his mindset and compel him to make utilitarian justifications under guidance as a mentor. Finally, the third part, "**The Informing Done by Jabberjays in District 12**," analyzes the climax of his ideological transformation, underscoring his embrace of control through self-authored grand narratives. These three parts progress from inherited influences to autonomous decisions, offering a layered understanding of Coriolanus's moral mutation and gradual internalization of Panem's authoritarian logic.

III-1. The Compelling Narrative for the Greater Good in Panem

Citizens of the Capitol, including Coriolanus, still live in the shadow of the First Rebellion ten years later, when the story begins in *The Ballad*. Given this premise, the Capitol spreads fear and manifests the divide between Capitol citizens and those in the districts to establish a compelling grand narrative to justify and legitimize its brutal regime.

Born into a native Capitol family, Coriolanus experienced a childhood shaped by the fallout from the First Rebellion and the Capitol's tight grip on power. In his memories, the Capitol turns into a man-made inferno because of starvation and bombardment during the war. From his personal experience, he struggles with hunger almost every day:

> During the war, the rebels had held the food-producing districts. Taking a page out of the Capitol's playbook, they'd tried to starve the Capitol into submission using

food — or a lack thereof — as a weapon. (Collins 31)

As a city without many natural resources, the Capital is dependent on external supplies to survive. However, rebels from the districts block the delivery channels of basic necessities, leading to famine. To Coriolanus's astonishment, incidents of cannibalism driven by famine are commonplace: "That desperation had turned upstanding Capitol citizens into monsters. People who dropped dead from starvation in the streets became part of a gruesome food chain" (Collins 31). Witnessing some horrible scenes of people eating one another, Coriolanus cannot get rid of the terror of starvation. In the aftermath of warfare, he develops the habit of not wasting food due to a lack of material indulgence. In addition, Coriolanus cannot forget the scare of seeking refuge in the basement of the Snows' building to escape the bombs: "Coriolanus's muscles always went rigid with terror when he heard the whistling of the bombs, and it would be hours before he felt he could walk right. The streets weren't safe either, nor the Academy. You could be bombed anywhere" (Collins 139-140). Even inside the shelter, he feels exposed, insecure, and vulnerable. Also, his muscle memory still clings to the fear of war. As a countermeasure against rebellion, the Capitol wipes out District 13 with nuclear weapons only to destroy the rebel headquarters. This action also destroys the Snows' investment in munitions in this area as the cost of the Capitol's violent repression. The deaths of Coriolanus's parents follow the catastrophic loss of the family's fortune. Rebels relentlessly bomb the Capitol, indirectly causing the death of his mother during the birth of his sister. As for his father, Crassus Snow, a man once holding a prestigious position among Peacekeepers, is killed by a rebel sniper. After the series of unfortunate events, the family's wealth and influence are shattered. Young Coriolanus witnesses firsthand and hears secondhand accounts of the ruthlessness of warfare, the devastating effects of nuclear weapons, and the precariousness of survival in a world where resources are scarce. For him, rebels from the districts are murderers of his parents as well as culprits behind his family's downfall. Deep in his mind, this perception erodes his trust in districts, but he hasn't lost faith

in the humanity of district people at this point. All those memories about the First Rebellion back in the Dark Days leave deep scars on his psyche. Meanwhile, Coriolanus despises district citizens to some extent in spite of his family's catastrophic loss of social standing and poor financial conditions. As a member of one of the most prestigious families, he enjoys the fame and spotlight brought by his last name. In response to the envy masked by pride, Coriolanus bears the motto in mind: "Snow lands on top," "the saying that had gotten them through the war, when it was a constant struggle not to be ground into the earth" (Collins 9). The family motto emphasizes the Snows' confidence in positioning themselves at the top of the social hierarchy and their determination to retrieve the family glory after the war. In addition, the Snows have a long history of going to the Academy, the best middle school in the Capitol: "People knew him — or at least they had known his parents and grandparents — and there was a certain standard expected of a Snow" (Collins 13). Whatever he does, all eyes are on him—after all, he embodies the elite of the capital. In this situation, he masks his financial struggles with all his might and determines to preserve the appearance of privilege and prosperity. In contrast, Sejanus Plinth, Coriolanus's rich classmate from District Two, threatens his status: "For Coriolanus, the Plinths and their kind were a threat to all he held dear. The newly rich climbers in the Capitol were chipping away at the old order simply by virtue of their presence" (Collins 17). The Plinths' investments in munitions replace those of the Snows, and their wealth and relocation to the Capitol are enviable in the post-rebellion era. Ironically, Coriolanus only wears the old, carefully altered uniform, while Sejanus shows up in a brand-new, luxurious outfit at the reaping ceremony. The comparison unsettles Coriolanus and deepens his disdain for Sejanus's provincial behavior and non-Capitol bearing, which corresponds to the government's post-war propaganda: the Capitol lands at the top of districts for societal stability and the greater good.

With fears about warfare and hierarchical discrimination, the Capitol asserts its role as a protector within the city no matter how much it may sacrifice. These policies serve to uphold

a delicate balance of terror while compelling people's unquestioning obedience, which helps the Capitol make utilitarian justifications. For example, the government's slogans about protecting its citizens appear in Panem's national anthem:

> *Gem of Panem,*
>
> *Seat of power,*
>
> *Strength in peacetime, shield in strife.*
>
> *Protect our land*
>
> *With armored hand,*
>
> *Our Capitol, our life!* (Collins 6-7)

By means of accessible and widely sung pieces such as the national anthem, the Capitol crafts an image of itself as the defender of the homeland, repeatedly stirring up fear of war and indoctrinating the populace into accepting the Capitol as the sole legitimate choice. The lyrics distort the history of the Dark Days since they avoid discussing the rebels' political appeals for freedom and motivations for launching the First Rebellion. By criticizing the lyrics, Sejanus points out the nonsense of such protection in class: "'Well, then it should protect everyone,' said Sejanus. 'That's its number-one job! And I don't see how making them fight to the death achieves that'" (Collins 92). The so-called protection applies solely to Capitol residents, which forms a self-serving narrative crafted for internal propaganda within the Capitol. Obviously, this approach doesn't aim to maximize the overall happiness of all citizens and even violates the principle of proportionality. What's more, the national anthem even addresses the Capitol as the "*Heart of justice*" to make justifications about the revenge promoted by the ruling class against district citizens—the Hunger Games (Collins 5). Under the influence, Coriolanus approves the legitimacy of the Hunger Games:

> Now the tables had turned again, with the Capitol controlling the supply and taking it one step further, twisting the knife into the districts' hearts with the Hunger Games. Amid the violence of the Games, there was a silent agony that everyone in

> Panem had experienced, the desperation for enough sustenance to bring you to the following sunrise. (Collins 31)

District citizens represent the majority of the population in Panem but the minority in political power. Not standing with them, the retaliatory action speaks for the famine that the Capitol experiences in the Dark Days and strikes back at civilians with the same approach. It abandons district citizens' right to life and neglects their needs for food resources, dehumanizing people of lower social status and lower income. In this way, the Capitol establishes discursive hegemony that appeals to power holders and marginalizes the minority, which resembles Lyotard's conception of grand narrative.

III-2. Perfect Propaganda as a Mentor in the 10th Hunger Games

With an urgent need for victory to obtain a full college scholarship, Coriolanus's decision to help Lucy Gray win is driven by more than love in the tenth Hunger Games. In his eyes, winning the Games is both a practical and strategic move to secure a bright future. During the Games, school education profoundly influences and shapes his understanding of the Games' procedures in terms of social utility even though he sometimes questions the morality of the rules. In the end, Coriolanus's proposal and performance for the Games perfectly correspond to the Capitol's propaganda and reinforce the grand narrative of exploitation and commodification within rulers' utilitarian justifications.

Owing to the loss of the Snow family's status and wealth, burdens weigh heavily on Coriolanus, shape his worldview, and train his utilitarian thinking for personal use throughout the Games. To begin with, Coriolanus's original motivations to perform well result from two aspects. On one hand, he is eager to prove himself as a Snow with the same honor shared by his ancestors, which allows him to maintain a flawless persona and enhances his sense of achievement at the same time. Also, he views the Games as a ticket to reclaiming his family's former elite status and protecting the house. On the other hand, he has no choice but to

carefully plan his future as a student without enough money to pay college tuition:

> 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" (Collins 13).

As the "final project," the tenth Hunger Games parallels the final crucial chance for a turnaround in Coriolanus's high school days. The most significant problem for him lies in his financial instability, so he primarily seeks to gain a scholarship to the Capitol's prestigious university. Advocating the Capitol's revenge with the Games, Coriolanus is not motivated by idealistic notions of helping the tributes. Instead, he sees the Games as a business opportunity. Regardless of any sentimental causes, all the factors center interests of his family and him. He is acutely aware of the importance of securing resources and opportunities to land on top as the family saying goes.

In the name of the greater good, the Academy encourages this kind of egoist thinking for Capitol students to help the government establish more sophisticated regulations of the Hunger Games and a more comprehensive system for citizens to participate in the Games. As Mill states, education can train people's utilitarian thinking and therefore impact their thoughts and actions, and the Academy is no exception. Take two assignments concerning the Games, for instance. The first one is intended to help commercialize the Hunger Games and develop a potential market. In a seminar hosted by Professor Crispus Demigloss beforehand, mentors of this year are asked to brainstorm how to attract more people to watch the Hunger Games from a historical perspective. However, the students turn out to discuss the legitimacy of the Games first, which is initially doubted by Sejanus. Then, they conclude the reasons why people are unwilling or refuse to appreciate and enjoy the process of the Games: "The real problem is, it's sickening to watch," "[s]o people avoid it" (Collins 81). In addition, as "basically decent people," "[m]ost of [Capitol citizens] don't want to watch other people

suffer" (Collins 82). The conclusion proves the mentors are also humans with feelings and emotions instead of cold-blooded animals. Realizing the Hunger Games are strongly linked with the First Rebellion in the fields of forms and sacrifices, they avoid recalling similar suffering scenes they physically experience in the Dark Days by means of unjust laws enacted by a small group of wealthy elites. Laws don't work all the time. At that moment, an epiphany pops into Coriolanus's head: "[giving] odds on the tributes" (Collins 82). Originally, it is merely a joke although some students think gambling can actually liven up the atmosphere of the heavy, gloomy event. Yet, Dr. Gaul thinks projecting empathy onto the tributes can increase the audience's willingness to engage and demands 24 mentors work in groups and write a business proposal to boost audience involvement in the Games. After Coriolanus reflects on the classroom discussion, he decides to promote sponsorship and gambling to entertain Capitol citizens as their privileges in his essay. It is worth mentioning that "either program would be funneled toward the costs of the Games, making them essentially free for the government of Panem" (Collins 104). Not letting go of every usable resource, Coriolanus utilizes tributes as commodities to build a sustainable business model without any cost from the government. Indeed, he does well on the assignment and has remarkable business instincts. However, the assignment doesn't show he fully advocates or embraces the Capitol's tyranny at this phase. Still, his teachers, especially Dr. Gaul, appreciate his potential to maximize benefits with minimal resources and regard him as a *useful idiot*. According to *Merriam-Webster*, a *useful idiot* stands for "a naive or credulous person who can be manipulated or exploited to advance a cause or political agenda" ("Useful idiot"). The phrase is a political term widely used during the Cold War to describe individuals who are dedicated to their profession but unaware of the broader consequences of their actions, making them unconscious of manipulation by those in power. Coriolanus does the same thing in the beginning, pursuing his scholarship with calculated dedication, unaware or unconcerned about the larger implications of aligning with the Capitol's agenda. Also, his

proposal is successfully practiced in the tenth Hunger Games. As Dean Highbottom approves, "Now the audience is an active player in the Games" (Collins 274). His proposal has gained public backing, with people willing to contribute financially and feeling more engaged, which manifests his value as a *useful idiot*. As for the second related individual assignment, mentors need to list what they like and don't like about warfare. In the class discussion about wars, Coriolanus expresses his thoughts about a scenario in which the war in Panem never stops:

> If the war's impossible to end, then we have to control it indefinitely. Just as we do now. With the Peacekeepers occupying the districts, with strict laws, and with reminders of who's in charge, like the Hunger Games. In any scenario, it's preferable to have the upper hand, to be the victor rather than the defeated. (Collins 161-162).

As Melançon comments above, Panem is always at war, and the Hunger Games represent the extension of the First Rebellion. The assignment tries to let students stand in the Capitol's shoes and think of a good way to develop its control over society and the Games (or power itself and human nature in brief). Yet, Dr. Gaul intentionally hides the purpose and draws the question back to the original essence: warfare. On the deadline, Dr. Gaul discusses the issue with these mentors again. Coriolanus's classmate, Domitia Whimsiwick, possesses a romantic viewpoint on warfare on seeing soldiers' bravery and heroism: "It felt like we were all part of something bigger," "[s]omething important. We all made sacrifices, but it was to save our country" (Collins 182). Her thoughts suggest the impact of the Capitol's grand narrative, backing their propaganda about patriotism. Actually, patriotic sacrifices only benefit the authorities concerned because they attract countless soldiers to fight for them against the rebels without much loss. Let alone dealing with normal district civilians' casualties and wishes. About this issue, Coriolanus likes the feelings of control: "He'd loved the unfamiliar sense of safety that their defeat had brought. The security that could only come with power. The ability to control things. Yes, that was what he'd loved best of all" (Collins

180). While he is doing the homework, he thinks of his family's fall caused by the Capitol. Although not completely forgiving the government, he chooses to speak about the inner peace he feels after reaching a point where no one can hurt him anymore amid the chaos resulting from the Dark Days. It shows his sense of insecurity, vulnerability, and ambition to seize power in the future. With the seduction of scholarship, Dr. Gaul asks Coriolanus to elaborate on the part about control and guide him to think about 3Cs in the war: chaos as the start, control as the means, and contract as the law. Though Coriolanus cannot correlate everything together at once, he utilizes what he learns later in the Games.

Coriolanus's motivations and the Academy's training for the Hunger Games illustrate his targets as a mentor and the moral transformation in his character. Along with Lucy Gray, he gives a strategically crafted performance that totally serves as the wonderful propaganda of the Capitol in the tenth Hunger Games. Initially, Coriolanus uses the female tribute from District 12 to an end. While he may have some emotional connections and affections with her later, his primary motivation for participating lies in his pursuit of scholarship and personal development as I analyzed in the previous paragraphs. At the reaping ceremony, he feels insulted upon knowing the assignment of tributes:

> 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? Not that a girl couldn't win, but in his mind the Hunger Games were largely about brute force, and the girls were naturally smaller than the boys and therefore at a disadvantage. (Collins 22)

Given the resources he has right now, he knows deep down that he can't win with the cards he's been dealt. Additionally, a female tribute stands little chance of surviving in a brute-force environment like the Capitol Arena—an open, brightly lit space where there is hardly any place to hide. Accordingly, he realizes he is just a pawn in someone else's game, and the chess player wants him to quietly sacrifice for a bigger picture. Although he strongly suspects

Dean Highbottom of being the mastermind behind the Games, he fails to find evidence or uncover the real conspiracy in this arrangement throughout the story. Luckily, he turns out to receive a game changer—Lucy Gray. At first sight, both the nation and Coriolanus are captivated by Lucy Gray's charm as a singer as well as a performer during the live broadcast of reaping in District 12: "Lucy Gray Baird stood upright in a dress made of a rainbow of ruffles, now raggedy but once fancy. Her dark, curly hair was pulled up and woven with limp wildflowers. Her colorful ensemble drew the eye, as to a tattered butterfly in a field of moths" (Collins 24). Her bright outfits stand out in a coal-mining district, where people usually dress in darker colors. Undoubtedly, her well-dressed appearance captures people's attention, not to mention her voice and self-composed songs. It is this distinctive, appealing quality that gradually shifts Coriolanus's mindset and motivates him to win the audience's attention and empathy together. At first, Coriolanus takes Tigris's advice and goes to the train station to welcome Lucy Gray: "he needed to make a good first impression on the girl so that she would be willing to work with him. He should treat her not as a condemned prisoner, but as a guest" (Collins 37). Treating Lucy Gray as a guest rather than an animal and winning her trust constitute the first step in cooperating with her and creating a win-win situation. Much to Coriolanus's surprise, the tributes are cuffed and sent to the zoo. Accompanying Lucy Gray and seizing every opportunity to talk to her before the first formal meeting, Coriolanus also experiences the humiliating feelings of being caged and watched as an animal with the tributes at the zoo. Unlike most Capitol residents, he appears to possess a sense of humanity and recognize Lucy Gray as a person rather than a pawn after people call Lucy Gray "Coriolanus's girl" or "his girl":

> His girl. His. Here in the Capitol, it was a given that Lucy Gray belonged to him, as if she'd had no life before her name was called out at the reaping. Even that sanctimonious Sejanus believed she was something he could trade for. If that wasn't ownership, what was? (Collins 172)

Coriolanus recognizes Lucy Gray's individuality as a person with a name. In addition, he seems to reject Sejanus's casual idea of "trading tributes," insisting that Lucy Gracy isn't an animal nor an object that can be exchanged without any agency. Compared with peers, Coriolanus understands tributes' struggles more intimately, as they all suffer from hunger and hardship before due to the Capitol's harsh regime. Also, he develops a personal affection for Lucy Gray and hopes she can become his lover. Although his thoughts reveal that he has feelings for her, his actions show he only sees her as a tool to be used. Soon, his empathy is quickly undermined by his deeper ambition, and his desire for success thus overrides any moral hesitation. By elevating Lucy Gray to victory, Coriolanus not only secures a win in the Games but also gains visibility and recognition from the Capitol's audience. This understanding enables him to increase his access to resources and future opportunities and mentor her with a mixture of strategic precision and emotional detachment. Everything is calculated in advance. From a utilitarian perspective, the happiness Coriolanus pursues benefits only himself but sacrifices tributes' lives and dignity and other mentors' opportunities for success. For example, he encourages Lucy Gray to sing in front of cameras although he says, "You don't have to" (Collins 68). Though he may still struggle with the awareness that Lucy Gray is a person, he knows well that her performance attracts more sponsors and public attention. Also, Lucy Gray is aware of her value and tries to survive as long as possible by following his instructions in the media-driven Games. Though framed as empowerment, this act reduces her to a marketed product. Moreover, this pragmatic alliance reflects Coriolanus's growing belief in the utility of human lives as tools to be manipulated for personal gain. He views them with calculated detachment and stages performances at just the right moments to craft a perfect narrative for the Hunger Games, in which he plays a central role. For instance, he establishes a calm and composed persona in front of the on-site audience when his classmate, Arachne Crane, is attacked and killed by her tribute out of her arrogance at the zoo. After he returns home, Tigris and Grandma'am praise him as a

"national hero," and he reflects on the utility of the performance: "Being a hero at home had its limitations; he needed a larger audience" (Collins 105). Apparently, he isn't satisfied with the size of his audience and desperately needs a bigger stage, so the national broadcast becomes his next goal. He saves his time in mentor interviews for Lucy Gray to sing on the livestream show for publicity. Fortunately, he is designated to sing the national anthem of Panem at Arachne's funeral, which is nationally aired live. Propagandawise, the Capitol holds this funeral to reclaim grand narratives about the protection it can provide for Capitol citizens: "Today we honor her sacrifice with a reminder that while evil exists, it does not prevail. And once again, we bear witness as our great Capitol brings justice to Panem" (Collins 129). With the murderer's corpse suspended at the funeral as her punishment, the Capitol warns that rebels appear everywhere. Otherwise, the Capitol fools the public by forging fake enemies to provoke civilians' patriotism and build a just image. During the process, Coriolanus is utilized as a *useful idiot* and a representative of young, brave, upright youth that will inherit the government's leadership and leading style one day.

Furthermore, Coriolanus wins the Games with Lucy Gray and survives together by cheating, which manifests his willingness to manipulate systems for personal gain under the guise of her performances. First, he tells Lucy Gray to win by poisoning other tributes in the Hunger Games. Additionally, he leaves the handkerchief in Dr. Gaul's lab to let mutated snakes get accustomed to Lucy Gray's smell soon after he knows they will use the snakes for the Games in the end. At this stage, Coriolanus's behavior shows that he fully views the tributes as commodities to be exploited for personal gain, reaching the point of no return. He realizes his teachers are dedicated to turning him into one of them:

> The needle of his moral compass had swung madly without direction. Fueled by the terror of being prey, how quickly he himself had become a predator……He'd transformed, all right, but not into anything he was proud of — and being a Snow, he had more self-control than most. (Collins 291)

He realizes he is gradually transformed into a member of the ruling class like his ancestors, who tend to acquire what they want at all costs, including others' sacrifices. His transformation is not yet completed, but his moral struggle becomes a critical part of his character development as he grapples with reconciling the dictates of a totalitarian society with his desires for power and prestige. In such ways, Coriolanus creates a narrative corresponding to the Capital's propaganda that delivers the necessity and honor of the Hunger Games. The calculated outcome of the tenth Hunger Games displays that Lucy Gray's victory is dramatic: "None of the snakes were inclined to attack her…They surrounded her, flocking in from all sides, making it impossible for her to continue retreating" (Collins 301). The snakes crawling around Lucy Gray recognize her smell and only attack other tributes due to Coriolanus's preparation beforehand. Lucy Gray even pretends that the phenomenon results from her voice and songs. The show goes viral and meets the Capitol's expectations, and the success makes justifications for Coriolanus's unethical approaches and cheating in the Games. Without damaging the grand narratives and Coriolanus's image for the greater good of the ruling class, the government doesn't uncover the dishonesty in his victory. Instead, the program tells the whole nation Coriolanus deserves a brilliant title for his successful cooperation with Lucy Gray and promotes the greatness of the Hunger Games with the perfect performances crafted by both of them.

III-3. The Informing Done by Jabberjays in District 12

Under the table, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray still need to pay for their dishonesty. After being caught cheating in Hunger Games, Lucy Gray is sent back to District 12 without a further prize for the victor. Also, Coriolanus is exiled to District 12 as a punishment, which exposes him to a completely different reality. One of the most pivotal moments in District 12 involves Coriolanus's betrayal of his close friend, Sejanus, which forms a decision that underscores his moral descent and turns him into a dictator-to-be that independently makes

his own utilitarian justifications.

District 12 features poverty, desolation, daily struggle, the government's rule, and the simmering rebellion. Still, it provides Coriolanus with the hope of going back to the Capitol as long as he earns great merits. For him, his exile to District 12 means shame and another kind of "*Snow falling*" for his family glory (Collins 324). Right now, he has two options: serving as a Peacekeeper in District 12 for twenty years or passing the officer candidate test and going back to somewhere near the Capitol as soon as possible. Serving as a Peacekeeper, Coriolanus is tasked with maintaining order in a district already on the brink of uprising. During his time here, he is forced to confront the inequalities inherent in the Capitol's rule and observes the dire conditions of district citizens and their harsh lives marked by deprivation and constant surveillance. He regards rebellion with only anger rather than weapons as stupid and understands the conflicts between the Capitol and the districts: "The Hunger Games are a reminder of what monsters we are and how we need the Capitol to keep us from chaos" (Collins 343). He calls rebellion "chaos," the situation difficult even for people with absolute power to handle and the core of this dystopian world. Indeed, the Capitol sacrifices many things to win the war. The words show he understands the dark essence of the Games and its original purpose although he hasn't mastered the way of gripping power in the order of 3Cs that Dr. Gaul tries to teach him.

One day, he receives orders to assist in capturing jabberjays and mockingjays for Dr. Kay. Jabberjays, genetically engineered birds capable of mimicking human speech, are used by the Capitol to spy on and trap its enemies in the Dark Days. By learning how to control and deploy jabberjays, Coriolanus can use them as a tool for surveillance and intelligence gathering, which aligns with his ambition to gain power and influence. At the same time, Coriolanus finds out that Sejanus (also exiled to District 12 due to his inappropriate behavior of mourning his friend from District 2) contacts Spruce and Bill Taupe, leaders of rebels in District 12. Out of sympathy, Sejanus participates in the rebellion action to free imprisoned

rebels and discuss routes to flee northward. Coriolanus inquires about the reasons for Sejanus's actions: "Why were you in deep discussion with him over a map of the base? What is he? A rebel sympathizer?" (Collins 396). He thinks Sejanus's sympathy for the rebels makes him a potential accomplice of rebels and risks their lives for helping dangerous, illegal, rebellious actions. For Coriolanus, rebels don't represent normal civilians that have nothing to do with war: "They lost the war. A war they started. They took that risk. This is the price they pay" (Collins 398). In his view, rebels lead to chaos, cause the fall of the Snows, and thus deserve to pay the price through the Capitol's revenge. What's worse, he also finds a large sum of money in Sejanus's locker that is enough to buy many weapons for the rebels, and the alarm goes off in his mind. Though Coriolanus acts concerned on the surface, he is anxious about being implicated. During a moment when Sejanus confided in him, Coriolanus secretly uses a jabberjay to record his discussion of rebellion:

> Now was the time for the pieces to be explained. The money. The guns. The base map. The moment the whole treasonous rebel plot would be revealed. Once Coriolanus heard it, he'd be as good as a rebel himself. A traitor to the Capitol. He should panic, or run, or at least try to shut Sejanus up. But he did none of these things. (Collins 446-447)

He doesn't stop Sejanus from talking about the rebellious plans and calls him a "traitor to the Capitol." On one hand, he doesn't approve of Sejanus's actions. Helping rebels means putting both of them at risk of treason since their rebellious behavior, upsetting the ruling class in the Hunger Games, makes them untrustworthy enough. On the other hand, Coriolanus gets tired of and grows impatient with Sejanus's ideals for helping rebels and creating a more equal world with them. As I analyzed above, the ideals only appeal for people's passion and anger instead of physical methods for them to fight in a war. Apart from self-protection, Coriolanus once again sees the opportunity to regain the trust of the Capitol and the ticket to go home in the name of loyalty. A little bit regretted as he is, Coriolanus still sends the recording to Dr.

Gaul and uses it as evidence of Sejanus's crime. At that moment, he realizes he has already committed three murders. The first murder takes place when Sejanus insists on farewelling a dead tribute that is his classmate from District 2. Upon noticing, Coriolanus gets the secret mission from the Academy to bring his friend out of the arena. Unfortunately, a tribute, Bobbin, tries to attack Sejanus and Coriolanus, so Coriolanus kills the kid out of self-defense. Second, he kills Mayfair Lipp, the daughter of the mayor of District 12, at the rebel meeting. He persuades himself that self-defense "support[s] the rightness of his actions" as well: "Mayfair may not have had a knife, but she had the power to get him hanged. Not to mention what she'd do to Lucy Gray and the others" (Collins 464). Mayfair is the spoiled girl stealing Lucy Gray's previous romantic relationship with Bill Taupe and making her the tribute with her father's power as the mayor. For Coriolanus, she deserves death as the punishment and the cost for what she has done to Lucy Gray. However, he cannot morally justify the murder by concealing the fact that Mayfair intends to report their rebellion to her father and that he also attends the meeting with Sejanus. Third, Sejanus is arrested and executed by hanging in District 12 without a public trial afterward. The betrayal marks the first time in Coriolanus's life that he directly sacrifices a "friend" to protect his interests, forming a turning point in Coriolanus's moral compass. Overall, the process of the three murders displays Coriolanus's moral decline, showcasing how far he is willing to maintain his power and serves as a metaphor for the Capitol's control over the twelve districts. When he accidentally reveals his three murders to Lucy Gray, she immediately speculates that he betrays Sejanus. In order not to disclose the secret, Coriolanus convinces himself that Lucy Gray doesn't have the motivation to report him: "She would never tell. She wouldn't be thrilled, obviously, when he told her there'd been a change of plans" (Collins 498). However, he worries the authorities concerned may torture her to confess and expose him. The clever victor of the tenth Hunger Games doesn't do what threatens her life or anything meaningless as if she were still in the Games. Additionally, he keeps suspecting Lucy Gray's love and loyalty after Bill Taupe

shows up. Her potential betrayal can leave him with no way out but only chaos, which he hates so much. All the factors make him struggle with one question: whether to kill her or not. After all, dead men tell no tales. At the end of their relationship, Lucy Gray chooses to escape from Coriolanus, which completes Coriolanus's utilitarian justification for his crimes. In this way, he continues to pretend to be a loyal and potential Peacekeeper as usual. For the first time, Coriolanus develops the ability to independently inform and spread a false story to everyone. At the end of the prequel, Coriolanus gives up his friendship, romantic relationship, and fame to pursue his ambition and craving for power under the influence of a fake blueprint of a seemingly safe and stable society shown by the government and his teacher. However, he rationalizes his cheating in the Games, betrayal of friends, and the continuation of Hunger Games as necessary for power.

Most important of all, his actions resemble the extra homework Dr. Gaul asks him to elaborate on "control" in the field of warfare. He answers as follows: the Hunger Games aim "not just to punish the districts, they're part of the eternal war. Each one is its own battle. One we can hold in the palm of our hand, instead of waging a real war that could get out of our control" (Collins 508-509). He recognizes the Hunger Games as the extension of the war in the Dark Days and concludes his thoughts on controlling the war without leaving it with chaos as the best option for maintaining power and stabilizing the regime. Learning from the authorities concerned and standing with them, Coriolanus ends up realizing Dr. Gaul's lesson on his exile: "You don't think I've invested all this time in you to hand you off to those imbeciles in the districts, do you?" (Collins 510). She makes this arrangement on purpose and seeks the right timing and an excuse to welcome Coriolanus back to the Capitol and join the University. In other words, she paves a path to success for Coriolanus with her enlightenment of chaos, control, and contract, which finally educates him and shapes his utilitarian thinking of obtaining power by himself. As Coriolanus confesses, "He'd never give up the name Snow" after Sejanus's parents end up raising him as their own son without knowing

Coriolanus indirectly kills their son (Collins 512). Literally, as the novel notes, he thinks it is inappropriate to do so because it is too late for them to adopt a college kid. Figuratively, his last name, Snow, implies his unlimited ambition to gain more power and his inclination to adopt the same approach to get what he craves. Eventually, he has become fully immersed in the system of manipulation and control defining the regime. He thinks his authoritarian governance is essential for the stability of society even if it involves morally questionable actions, such as violence and repression. Nevertheless, his narratives benefit no one but only him:

> He'd continue the Games, of course, when he ruled Panem. People would call him a tyrant, ironfisted and cruel. But at least he would ensure survival for survival's sake, giving them a chance to evolve. What else could humanity hope for? Really, they should thank him. (Collins 516)

Citizens of Panem are more or less disturbed and bothered by similar moral struggles to survive in the post-rebellion dystopia for a long time when it comes to ethics and morality as I mentioned above. However, Coriolanus's needs and cravings tell readers they are all human beings with desires. Then, they are citizens of a nation where they tend to sacrifice for everyone's good. Gradually, this utilitarian thinking is distorted to justify sacrifices of individuals and entire districts to maintain control over Panem and prevent conflicts in the future.

IV. Conclusion

In *The Ballad*, Coriolanus Snow employs utilitarian logic as a strategic tool to legitimize self-serving choices in the name of the greater good. Through the lens of Mill's utilitarianism and Lyotard's critique of grand narratives, Coriolanus's real purpose of self-interest is revealed in his pursuit of status and influence in this post-rebellion dystopia. By being a *useful idiot*, he reinforces Panem's authoritarian control and systemic inequality. In the process, his moral reasoning and political manipulation demonstrate how utilitarian narratives can be weaponized to obscure ambition, justify oppression, and shape post-rebellion societal norms. In addition, Coriolanus's transformation from a poor, naive boy to a young, sly man adhering to the Capitol's policies highlights the profound effects of a dystopia built on control, exploitation, and fear. His mutation and moral descent also exemplify Mill's attitude toward education and its impact on people's morality. All these elements offer a powerful narrative on the dangers of uncovered ambitions and the moral compromises that are made to secure a ruler's position in such a dystopian world. All in all, I argue that a dictator of a dystopian regime tends to weave a charming utilitarian story to conceal their real desires and benefits for political purposes and stabilize their grip on power.

In contemporary contexts, Coriolanus's narratives echo some ideological messages present in real-world warfare and political regimes. His pragmatic, morally ambiguous language mirrors the rhetorical strategies used by those in power to frame violence, repression, and exploitation as necessary measures for maintaining peace and order. Such justifications are often disguised in the language of utilitarian logic and the greater good while serving to uphold hierarchical systems and elites' interests in reality. Coriolanus's character offers a compelling illustration of how the ruling class rationalizes unethical actions by invoking moral logic that masks personal ambition. His internal conflicts, coupled with his outwardly calculated behavior, reflect a broader pattern observed in modern geopolitical

conflicts, where survival, authority, and ideology become entangled. The distinctions between right and wrong are deliberately blurred, and decisions are driven more by the desire to keep power at all costs than by the will to do what is right. By examining these themes through *The Ballad*, we are invited to reflect on the mechanisms by which dystopian conditions emerge not only in fiction but in reality. The novel thus opens space for the urgent need to question the grand narratives that justify systemic violence and sacrifice.

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