



**SOCIAL CLASS PORTRAYAL IN
WONKA: A MARXIST CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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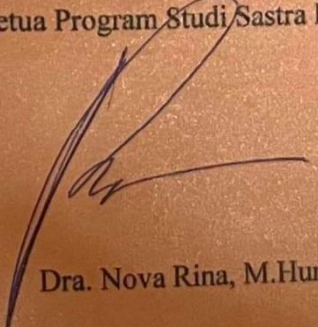
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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify the originality of this thesis I submitted to fulfil a requirement for a S1 degree in the English Department Faculty of Humanities Universitas Bung Hatta. This thesis is entirely mine and there are no works or opinions written or published by other people except as reference or quotations by following the usual scientific writing procedures.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, entitled Social Class Portrayal in *Wonka*: A Marxist Critical Analysis, examines the problem of social class and struggle of proletariat as reflected in *Wonka*. To analyze this issue, the study applies Karl Marx's theory of class conflict. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. The finding shows there are 40 data, 26 on social class which is divided into 18 for bourgeoisie and 8 for proletariat, meanwhile 14 data for struggle of proletariat. In conclusion the findings show that *Wonka* portrays two main social classes: the bourgeoisie, represented by characters such as Slugworth, Fickelgruber, Prodnose, and Mrs. Scrubbit, who control production and exploit others, and the proletariat, represented by Willy Wonka, Noodle, and the laundry workers, who depend on wages and face poverty. The proletariat's struggle is depicted through solidarity, rebellion, and direct conflict, with collective resistance becoming the key to challenging capitalist domination. Overall, the film reflects Marx's idea that class struggle is central to social change, illustrating how awareness and unity can confront inequality and move toward a more just society.

Keywords: *Social Class, Bourgeoisie, Proletariat, Class Struggle, Wonka*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Charles E. Bressler categorized literature as creative and imaginative works of art that use language to describe, explore and reproduce human experiences, ideas and emotions. Literature is more than just texts, literature is a media that can reflect one's culture, history and societal principles. In other words, literature helps people understand the world through real and imaginative images (Bressler 2). Additionally, Bressler highlighted that literature has many difference meanings and is open to new interpretations. It is not only the text itself that gives meaning to literary works, but also how the text, reader, and context interact with each other (4). Therefore, literature is often used to criticize or support ideologies popular in society, describe discord in society, and examine the relationship between individuals and their environment. In other hand, literature serves as an important tool for understanding the complexity of human experience who has impacts for social and cultural change (7).

Literary studies are a tool for understanding social reality for a long time, including class structures in society. Literature and society play an important role and have a close relationship in forming social contexts such as social change, social problems, and so on. Raymond Williams states that the function of literature as a cultural document can helps understand the structure of society and historical change. Through characters, narratives, and themes, literature provides insight into the values, conflicts, and aspirations in society, making it an important medium for understanding the relationship between individuals and their environment (Williams 285). In the Western literary tradition, social class analysis began to develop rapidly since the emergence of Marxist theory introduced by Karl Marx and Friedrich

Engels. In this perspective, literature is not only seen as an aesthetic expression, but also as an ideological product that reflects class struggle (290).

Nowadays, there are various forms to find literature. Literature and film have a close relationship because both are media used to convey stories, ideas and emotions. Linda C. Cahir explained that literature is often the main source of inspiration for films, especially in the form of adaptations. Literature provides narrative depth, character complexity, and symbolism that can be translated into the visual medium of film, that causes literature and film complement each other, enriching the way humans understand and experience stories (45).

According to Karl Marx, social classes are categories of society that are formed based on their relationship to the means of production (24). Marx divided capitalist society into two main classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeois class is the owner of the means of production, such as land, factories, and capital, who exploit the labor of the proletariat to generate profits. Meanwhile, the proletariat is the working class who does not own the means of production and must sell their labor power to survive (Marx 38). The relationship between these two classes was antagonistic because the bourgeoisie continued to maximize profits by suppressing the wages and working conditions of the proletariat, creating social and economic inequality. Marx also identified that in the capitalist system, this class structure is dynamic and can change through class struggle, which will ultimately lead to a proletarian revolution to overthrow the bourgeoisie and create a classless society or communism (43).

Therefore, due to the economic problems and capitalist power system that occurred, Marx created a Marxist theory related to changing the idea of capitalism into communism. Marxist theory aims to promote a just society. This theory is a modern theory that responds to modernity and is a component of contemporary ideas that society can change for the better. the

progress that human understanding can achieve in the social order. Marxism is based on the idea that the potential for progress in the social organization, that is, the framework of society, is correlated with the potential for individual success and freedom (Karl Marx 30).

In the context of current society, issues of social class inequality remain deeply relevant. Economic disparity, exploitation of workers, and capitalist domination are not only historical problems but persist in various forms today. Films like *Wonka* reflect these social realities by portraying the struggles of individuals marginalized by systems of power and wealth. The depiction of the bourgeoisie exploiting the proletariat in *Wonka* mirrors ongoing global concerns about class oppression and the monopolization of resources by the elite. Through Willy Wonka's experience of poverty, manipulation, and resistance against capitalist forces, the film highlights the need for awareness of systemic injustice and the potential for collective action among the oppressed.

Wonka presents a unique narrative that intertwines fantasy with critical social commentary, making it an important subject for Marxist analysis. Unlike traditional literary works, the film uses visual storytelling to expose class stratification, domination, and the proletariat's struggle for liberation. The portrayal of Willy Wonka and his friends resisting the oppressive capitalist structure provides a symbolic representation of the broader revolutionary movements envisioned by Karl Marx. By analyzing *Wonka* through a Marxist lens, this study seeks to uncover how popular culture not only entertains but also educates audiences about social inequalities and the continuing relevance of class struggle in modern society.

According to Marx and Frederick Engels, economic structure is the true basis of society, or its relations of production, on the basis of which the legal and political superstructure is built, and which forms the basis of a particular social perception (38). The phenomena portray

the ways in which an individual's economic status affects not just their material well-being but also their access to opportunities, ability to influence policy, and overall social standing in society. Fundamentally, there are many different types of economic issues, ranging from unequal wealth and income distribution to unequal access to resources (42).

Social class related to Marxist that is a thought related to politics, economics and social matters. Marx stated that society and the social are distinguished by Marxism (106). Theroretically, Marxism is influential in society and the world, Marxists change and play an important role such as influencing cultural and identity criticism which changes a person's view of culture, power and identity. Based on history of Marxist, Marx as expert of Marxist theory stated that Marxist theory revolves around classes. The only meaningful aspect of interpersonal production interactions is their expression of power dynamics. Furthermore, class relations are a result of power dynamics (110).

Marx state that capitalism in practice is the basic control of everyday life, extreme oppression of workers who try to leave and rebel (6). Under a capitalist economic system, private owners manage the means of production, trade, and industry with the goal of profiting from the market. When operating their business, capital owners aim to make the most money possible. This phenomenon occurs because capitalism has materials, capital, strength and power that make it do whatever it wants to the working class, causing inequality, crime, and so on (9). Marx stated that capitalism only thinks about wealth and profit. People who own capital, who run businesses and employ workers always exist in the form of accumulated wealth, but that capital is used and acquired in a different way from capital when worker work without pay and their pay rent collected throughout the capitalist era (13).

According to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is a way for the ruling class to maintain dominance through cultural and ideological control, not just physical force. In the social context of class and struggle, understanding hegemony is important to realizing how power works and how to resist it (169). Gramsci emphasized that hegemony is not something fixed. The working class can fight this domination by creating counter-hegemony, namely forming a new consciousness that challenges the ruling ideology, for example through social movements, critical education and revolutionary art (170). Gramsci defined "hegemony" in two ways that are related to one other. In civil society, it first refers to the mutually agreed upon foundation of an established political system. Here, it is interpreted in opposition to the idea of "domination" the state's exclusive control over the means of violence and its ensuing function as the ultimate arbiter of all conflicts (171).

However, Gramsci argued that only weak regimes frequently have to rely on the implicit threat or use of force in order to maintain their dominance. Hegemony is the primary means by which powerful states govern. In this way, the idea is significant because it emphasizes the necessity for the working class to create political plans that challenge the current ruling class's approval (171). The second definition of hegemony is the triumph of the "economic-corporative:" This alludes to a certain historical phase within the current political era. The transition to a "class consciousness," where class is viewed not only in terms of economic status but also in terms of a shared philosophical and ethical consciousness, or culture, is symbolized by the hegemonic level. The possibility of a revolution occurring at the corporate and economic level was acknowledged by Gramsci. As we shall see, however, he was interested in the Italian Risorgimento in part because he thought it was an event of that

kind. however, contend that before one could even hope for a "complete" revolution, an alternative hegemony had to be established (172).

Theoretically, the power of capitalism which have been going on for quite a long time certainly do not make the working class or proletariat just stay silent and continue to follow the orders of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat feels exploited and oppressed, therefore they carry out a revolution and take action against capitalism to achieve political goals, hegemony. With trust and optimism, they believe they can change social conditions in the future (Marx 498). According to Marx, the core contradiction in class relations is the source of class struggle, whereas workers create money collectively, a small elite appropriates it, leaving the working class impoverished and miserable. The proletariat is not only a suffering class, it is also a fighting class (513).

Social class and the struggle of proletariat can be seen in one of the movies entitled *Wonka*. The movie was released in 2023, directed by Paul King, which tells the story of the character Willy Wonka in the novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in 1964.

The *Wonka* film tells the story of a man named Willy Wonka who is a magician and maker of delicious chocolate with a touch of magic. Willy, who has big dreams of selling world-famous chocolate and opening a shop in gourmet galleries, turns out to be not an easy thing. Community life where there are gaps and differences between groups or individuals who have power and ordinary people. Therefore, Willy, as a new visitor who doesn't know anything about the city's system, is easily framed for exploitation, Willy has to work to pay his debts. When Willy worked at the laundry house, he found five people who had the same fate as him.

Therefore, because of their awareness of exploitation and the city system which is governed by capitalists, the five of them implemented a strategy to overthrow the system run

by the bourgeoisie by creating an effective strategy to overthrow the capitalist system and an equal and just society despite the many obstacles faced by Willy and his 5 friends such as being forced to work non-stop, poisoning the business they had worked for and built together and so on with the same goal there are equality.

Willy as the proletariat class with his chocolate innovation which makes everyone interested becomes a rival to the bourgeoisie so that Willy as the proletariat must obey the applicable capitalist regulations. Because of the proletariat's class awareness of economic exploitation and alienation, the proletariat carried out a revolution to overthrow the prevailing capitalist system. Willy is the pioneer of the proletariat in carrying out actions to eliminate social classes so as to create justice in society.

Therefore, the writer is interested in analyzing class differences and the struggles of Proletariat that occur in *Wonka*. This film is interesting with a story that depicts the persistence of Willy Wonka and his five friends in achieving success and becoming successful and famous chocolate sellers. Even though there are many obstacles that prevent Willy from being succeeded, he continues to struggle as a proletariat with economic limitations and the prevailing capitalist system. The writer chose an analysis entitled "Social Class Portrayal in *Wonka*: A Marxist Critical Analysis". The writer finds differences and gaps in social classes, as well as the class struggle of the proletariat depicted in the film *Wonka* as research objects.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the research, the writer poses the following research questions:

1. How are the social class depicted in *Wonka* ?
2. How are the struggle of the proletariat depicted in *Wonka* ?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the research questions above, the purposes of this research are:

1. To describe social class depicted in *Wonka*
2. To describe the struggle of the proletariat depicted in *Wonka*

1.4 Scope of the Study

In this research, the writer is interested in analyzing social class and class struggle in *Wonka* (2023) by applying Karl Marx's theory. The analysis focuses on how characters represent either the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) or the proletariat (working class). Willy, the main character, is portrayed as part of the proletariat: a young man with limited economic resources but big ambitions to sell chocolate and open his own shop. Mrs. Scrubbit, as the owner of a hotel and laundry business, belongs to the bourgeoisie since she controls production and exploits workers for profit. Similarly, Mr. Slugworth, Mr. Prodnose, and Mr. Fickelgrubber represent the bourgeoisie class as wealthy chocolate shop owners and factory controllers who dominate the market and suppress competition. Through these character roles, the study examines how the film portrays social inequality and the struggles of the proletariat against capitalist domination.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is that the writer hopes that there are benefits that can be derived from this research. Theoretically, the purpose of this research is more understanding about social class, so that there are no misunderstandings and knowledge to other people and social society. Class differences that occur in social communities sometimes have negative effects and tend to be rigid in social life. Practically, the results of this research can be used as a reference for English Literature students, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Bung Hatta who are interested in analysis movie using Karl Marx's Marxism theory.