

## ARTICLE



## Critical Application of Marxist Theory on Children's Literature: Investigating Capitalism and Class Struggles in 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' by Roald Dahl

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### Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the Marxist elements in children's literature with special reference to the novel "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" by Roald Dahl (1964). The study adopts qualitative approach and selects Karl Marx (1883)'s theory as a framework for the analysis of the text. The objective is to provide insights into how the narrative's themes of social class, capitalism, and labor oppression are portrayed from a Marxist perspective. According to Marxian theory, the study emphasizes the significance of treating the upper and lower classes equally. It emphasizes the desire for a classless society that serves the common people and discourages conservative thought and feudalism. The analysis takes into account general Marxism while acknowledging various perspectives on the subject. The research examines the relationship between the ruling class and the working class of a Capitalist society. It acknowledges the inherent fragility of capitalist control, which the struggles of the working class can challenge. The argument is that the working class's inventive efforts have the potential to undermine the ruling class's dominance, as they are seen as the driving force behind productive forces. Furthermore, it also acknowledges that economics influences social, political, and ideological realities and social dynamics. In conclusion, by implying a Marxist theoretical framework, this study contributes to a profound comprehension of the novel, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." The study concludes that children literature also incorporates Marxist elements that introduce the concept of class differences, capitalism, wealth, economic gains and social struggle at the early stages of childhood.

### Key Words

Children's Literature, Marxism, Class Struggle, Capitalism, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

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## Introduction

### Rational of the Study

Marxism is a very popular theory that helps in understanding the social structures and systems of hierarchy. However, the major focus of Marxist literary analyst has been on the adult literature. The researcher noticed that revealing the Marxist ideology in children discourse is very important. Therefore, the researcher has selected a popular children's novel, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" that represents themes of materialism and capitalism, thus can be analyzed through Marxist lens. The study seeks to unveil the representation of materialism, its impact on young brains and their ideological development.

Marxism is a social and political ideology that also includes Marxian economics and the notion of class struggle. The Communist Manifesto, a booklet by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1967) that lays out the idea of class struggle and revolution, was the first work to openly articulate Marxism. Karl Marx (1883) presented his critique of capitalism in his 1867 book *Das Kapital*, which serves as the foundation of Marxian economics. Marxism generally contends that capitalism is fundamentally flawed and doomed to failure as a means of economic and social reproduction. A form of production known as capitalism is one in which owners of businesses, known as capitalists, control all of the manufacturing facilities, equipment, raw materials, finished goods, and profits. A philosophical anthropology, a philosophy of history, and an economic and political programs made up its first core concepts. Also included is Marxism

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as it was interpreted and used by the various socialist movements, notably prior to 1914.

### Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions;

1. How does a Marxist theoretical framework can analyze "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" to explore the elements of social class, capitalism, and labor injustice.
2. How Marxist perspective does reveal the themes of social class and inequality in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"?
3. How does the novel use the Marxist symbols to critique capitalism and consumerism?

### Purpose of the Study

The present study aims at investigating details about social class, capitalism, and labor in Roald Dahl (1964)'s book, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" using a Marxist theoretical framework. The research tries to improve our comprehension of the critique of capitalism, labor exploitation, and class divides within the narrative by looking at the novel's themes, symbols, and character dynamics. This study is significant as it contributes to the understanding of Karl Marx (1883)'s theory of Marxism and its applicability to literary analysis. It will provide insights into the critique of capitalist systems and the portrayal of class struggles in the selected text.

### Review of the Related Literature

#### Description of the Theory

Karl Marx (1883)'s theory of Marxism is equally applicable to real life and literature. In its easiest structure, communist analysis endeavors to show the connection among writing and the social — fundamentally financial — conditions under which it was delivered. Marxist critics initially focused on literary depictions of workers and working class people. For later communists, in any case, writing turned into a report of a sort of information and a record of the verifiable circumstances that delivered that information. Marxist literary criticism, like cultural criticism, focuses on the intersections between culture and power and offers critiques of the "canon." Literature provides a setting in which existing power dynamics can be debated and rethought, according to a Marxist critic. Williams (1977) defines Marxism as, *"Settled body of theory or doctrine-Marxism has experienced at once a significant revival and a related openness and flexibility of theoretical development."* (p. 1). Georg Lucács (1971), Antonio Gramsci (1937), Louis Althusser (1990), and Raymond Williams (1988) were notable Marxist literary critics in the 20th century.

Instead of a single framework, Marxism is made up of many different traditions and points of view. The idea of childhood has frequently been overlooked in Marxist studies. In orthodox Marxism, which can have a tendency toward economic reductivism, individual actors and social groups outside of class have been ignored, and classes, institutions, and forces of production have frequently been the dominant categories of Marxist analysis. However, this does not imply that children and childhood have been ignored; rather, Marxist theory has frequently placed a secondary emphasis on these categories. As a result, Marxists can best understand childhood in terms of labor, state institutions, education, globalization, and culture. The structural Marxism of Willis (1981) and Bowles and Gintis (1976), the Frankfurt School and critical cultural studies, Marxist feminism, and some critical education studies are all examples of Marxism in relation to childhood studies. According to Brown (2013), an Engelsian understanding of dialectics and the organization of society was connected to this diverse tradition, which primarily focused on economic issues at the expense of social issues for the majority of its history.

#### Review of Previously Carried Researches Related to Marxism

Castree (2000) examines the ongoing debate on the relationship between Marx and nature over the past century. The author challenges the foundational assumptions that have shaped this discourse and presents three key arguments. First, the essay suggests that Marxist theories of nature have oscillated between naturalistic and social constructionist viewpoints. Second, it reveals that many of these theories share similarities with both bourgeois and anti-bourgeois environmentalism. Lastly, it proposes a tentative concept of the production of nature as a potential solution to the limitations of Marxist thinking on the subject.

Gurung (2023) examines the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" through a Marxist lens, focusing on the theme of social class conflict. The story represents the ongoing struggle between the upper class and the working class, with the witch symbolizing the upper class and the children representing the working class. Despite the theoretical decline of feudalism, the study argues that discrimination and domination persist, and society still holds a feudal mentality. The analysis highlights the need to address and minimize feudal discrimination. The paper adopts a Marxist approach to shed light on the persistent social inequalities and emphasizes the dominance of monetary power in perpetuating discrimination, particularly in the context of the American dream. According to Zipes (2009), this children's tale is a tale of triumph and hope.

In addition to 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' Marxist elements can be found in many other children books such as Hansel and Gretel, Parker's "Poverty" and Chekhov's "Grief". All of these stories demonstrate that different classes are treated differently. Stories about people from the working class have been written by a number of authors. There have been a number of films about people from the working class. In order to improve the lives of working-class people, a number of governments in various countries have implemented poverty reduction programs. Discrimination against working-class people has not diminished, even though some reforms have been implemented, their standard of living has improved, and a number of stereotypes may have disappeared.

### **Description of the Novel Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**

According to Marxist theory, society is a major contributor to poverty. The classes are entirely society's creation. The rich people exploit the poor from the tool of money and power. In the selected novel, Willy Wonka, the eccentric owner of a renowned chocolate factory, opens its doors to five lucky children through the discovery of golden tickets. Charlie Bucket, a poor and virtuous boy, defies the odds by finding the final ticket. The story explores themes of class inequality, with Charlie's impoverished background contrasting with the other privileged children. The motifs of capitalist exploitation and materialism are depicted through the eccentricities of the factory and the consequences faced by the greedy children. The setting symbolizes the alienation of the working class and the potential for revolutionary change. The story ends with Charlie and his family joining Mr. Wonka in a grand adventure, suggesting a possible shift in power dynamics.

Roald Dahl's (1964) *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is a novel written for children that highlights the various social impacts on the childhood. This novel also possesses Marxist elements in relation to children. The present study applies theory of Marxism on the novel to investigate the class differences, financial weakness, economic struggles, and impact of all these factors on the protagonist and other characters. Dahl faced difficulties while publishing his novel, he claimed that the rejections were the result of British publishers being "prim, stupid, and snobbish." The fact that Charlie was written for both children and adults seemed to offend the publishers, who considered it to be tasteless. Later, one of the editors who turned down Charlie said, "I could see that Dahl would be popular with children, but publishing for them has to involve more than that, somehow" (Treglown, 2016, p. 148).

### **Review of Previously Carried Researches Related to the Novel**

Previously, many research scholars have analyzed the novel "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" from different perspectives. For example, Billsberry and Gilbert (2008) propose utilizing Roald Dahl's children's book, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," as a teaching tool for recruitment and selection practices. It explores three recruitment paradigms - psychometric, social process, and fit - and explains how the plot of the book aligns with these paradigms. By leveraging the fantastical elements of the story, students are encouraged to critically analyze the analogies. The article concludes by providing practical suggestions for incorporating the 2005 film adaptation of the story into management classrooms, aiming to create a memorable learning experience for students studying recruitment and selection.

Similarly, Hissan (2012) examines the moral aspects of children's characters in Roald Dahl's *"Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"* to aid educators and parents in understanding the moral principles depicted in children's literature. Using Gibbs (1979)'s Revisionist Model and textual analysis, it analyzes the mature and immature morality of the characters and highlights the potential for using children's books, including this novel, as a tool for teaching moral values.

The research aims to emphasize the significance of morality in children's literature and its educational potential.

## Research Methods

### Research Statement

Children's literature propagates capitalist, materialist and Marxist ideology as depicted by a Marxist critical analysis of Roald Dahl's novel, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" which explores the elements of social class, capitalism, and labor injustice by incorporating specific symbols, motifs, settings, and themes.

### Research Design

The present research is a qualitative and theoretical study of the selected novel. It uses Roald Dahl's novel "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" as the primary text for the analysis. First of all, the researcher has read the whole novel and pointed out the Marxist elements where they occurred. Then, the researcher developed a concept map based on Karl Marx' theory and other versions of Marxism. Then, the researcher analyzed the selected quotations, themes, symbols, motifs, and setting of the novel through Marxist lens.

### Framework of Analysis

For the purpose of analyzing the novel "*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*" the study chooses Marxian theory. This theory states that the working class and upper class ought to be treated equally, but not differently. The information was gathered from a variety of books, research articles, and websites. They have been examined and analyzed by the researcher using qualitative methods. Various perspectives on Marxian scholars have been remembered for the investigation. The goal of Marxism is always to create a classless society for the benefit of the common people. Marxism strongly discourages encouraging feudalism. This paper employs general Marxism, which discourages conservative thought, despite the presence of several Marxists, such as neo-Marxists or so. According to Bell and Cleaver (2002), our interpretation of Marxian theory sees accumulation as the expanded reproduction of a fabric of capitalist control that is always fragile and frequently threatened by working-class struggle. The ruling class is supposed to be strong, but they are actually weak, so when they are threatened by the working class, they frequently lose. This is due to the fact that rich people fight against poor people by putting their lives in danger, while poor people fight against rich people by using money, hiring people, or risking their money. However, the upper class views the working class as weaker than they actually are. The creative energies of the working class constitute the productive forces (Bell and Cleaver (2002). "*Victory is not won by the ruling class because of the inventive efforts of the working class. The ruling class frequently discriminates against the ruled.*" (p. 5). The theory of Marx provides a working-class perspective on capitalist accumulation. Capital has its own ideas, which are reflected in bourgeois economics, sociology, and so on. Additionally, economics serves as the foundation upon which social, political, and ideological realities are constructed. According to Tyson (2006), economic power always includes social and political power.

### Findings and Discussions

Karl Marx (1883)'s theory of Marxism provides insights into social class, capitalism, and labor. In analyzing "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" from a Marxist theoretical framework, several dimensions of Marxism can be applied to the story regarding its major themes. The theme of social class and inequality is prominent as the novel portrays a stark contrast between the wealthy, eccentric figure of Willy Wonka and the impoverished protagonist, Charlie Bucket. "*I've got the last ticket in the whole world! Just think of it! The last one!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 19). The theme of class struggle is evident as the competition for the golden tickets highlights the division between the working-class characters like Charlie and the wealthier contestants. This contrast raises questions about the inherent inequalities and class divisions present in society, as well as the limited opportunities available to individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The novel portrays a stark divide between the wealthy and the impoverished. Marx's theory emphasizes the struggle between the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat (working class). Quotes such as, "*There's plenty of money out there. They print more every day*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 67) highlight the accumulation of wealth by the capitalist class while the impoverished characters, like Charlie's family, struggle to meet their basic needs.

Another Marxist aspect is the critique of capitalism and consumerism. The chocolate factory represents a capitalist

enterprise, driven by profit and mass production. The character of Willy Wonka can be seen as a representation of the capitalist bourgeoisie, while the golden ticket winners, including Charlie, symbolize the proletariat. The novel explores the consequences of unchecked capitalism, such as the moral degradation and greed exemplified by the other children who win the golden tickets. Marx (1883) argued that capitalism exploits the labor of the working class for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. "*We have so much time and so little to see... Wait a minute! Strike that, reverse it!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 121) reflects the factory's demand for efficient labor, often pushing workers to their limits without adequate compensation.

Furthermore, the theme of exploitation of labor can be examined through the depiction of the Oompa-Loompas. These characters, who work under poor conditions in the factory, can be seen as a representation of the proletariat subjected to exploitative labor practices. Their presence raises questions about the ethics of labor exploitation and the role of workers in the capitalist system. Marx (1883)'s theory emphasizes the alienation of workers from their labor and the dehumanizing effects of capitalist production. For example, the author says, "*But how can a machine possibly make a mistake? ... All I can say is, hooray for me!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 85) reveals the devaluation of human labor and the prioritization of mechanical efficiency.

Marxist analysis may also consider the themes of alienation and commodification. The novel presents a world where even something as simple as a chocolate bar becomes a highly valued and coveted commodity. This emphasis on material possessions and consumer culture highlights the alienation of individuals from their labor and the commodification of human desires within a capitalist system. Marx (1883) argued that capitalism turns everything, including human desires, into commodities. The lines, "But this ticket didn't come through a chocolate bar... It came through a Wonka Bar" (Dahl, 1964, p. 19) demonstrates how even the pursuit of happiness becomes tied to the consumption of a specific product.

The symbols in the novel can also be analyzed from Marxist lens as they allow for an examination of power dynamics, social class, and exploitation. The golden ticket serves as a symbol of social mobility and opportunity, "*The golden tickets! They're all over! They're all gone! There won't be any more!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 24). In a Marxist interpretation, it represents the limited access to wealth and privilege that exists within a capitalist society. The fact that only a few tickets are available reflects the scarcity of resources and the competition among the working class for a chance to improve their lives.

Similarly, Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory can be seen as a representation of the means of production controlled by the bourgeoisie. It symbolizes the wealth and power amassed by the capitalist class through the exploitation of labor. "*The most wonderful, the most marvelous, the most extraordinary place in the whole world!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 33). The factory's secretive and exclusive nature reflects the elitism and control exerted by the bourgeoisie over the working class. The setting of Willy Wonka's factory symbolizes capitalist exploitation, with the Oompa-Loompas representing the exploited working class, laboring under oppressive conditions for the benefit of the capitalist owner. The Oompa-Loompas symbolize the exploited proletariat within the capitalist system. They are depicted as a marginalized group working under harsh conditions in the factory, "*And underneath the factory, he has a whole underground cave where he keeps all his workers.*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 65). Their labor is instrumental in producing the wealth enjoyed by the bourgeoisie, highlighting the exploitative nature of capitalist production.

The other children who win golden tickets represent different social classes and their corresponding flaws. Augustus Gloop, for example, represents gluttony and excessive consumption, "*Augustus Gloop! Augustus Gloop! The great big greedy nincompoop!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 84). While Veruca Salt embodies greed and entitlement, "*Veruca Salt, the little brute, has just gone down the garbage chute.*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 100). Each child's downfall and removal from the factory can be interpreted as a critique of the negative traits associated with different social classes. Charlie represents the hopeful and resilient working class, "*There's something about that little fellow, something that tells me he's got all the makings of a champion!*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 48). His poverty and humble background position him as the underdog. Through his moral integrity and humility, Charlie challenges the exploitative system and serves as a symbol of resistance against the oppressive forces of capitalism. "*A small boy, whose name was Charlie Bucket, had won it... And by winning,*

*he had proved something quite important indeed--- that a chocolate factory could affect the lives of a whole family.*" (Dahl, 1964, p. 164). These quotes exemplify the symbolic elements discussed earlier, emphasizing the significance of the golden ticket, the secretive nature of the chocolate factory, the presence and role of the Oompa-Loompas, the portrayal of the other children, and the representation of Charlie as a hopeful and resilient figure within the narrative.

The motif of alienation and materialism is depicted through the other children's obsession with wealth and power, contrasting with Charlie's modest background and emphasis on genuine human connections. *"I can see the headlines now! Whipple-Scrumptious Fudgemallow Delight! Most Secret Formula of the Century!"* (Dahl, 1964, p. 101). The false promises of capitalism are exemplified by the exaggerated marketing and advertising techniques employed by Willy Wonka, suggesting that material possessions will bring happiness and success. Likewise, Charlie's character represents the potential for revolutionary change. His victory challenges the established order, suggesting that a fairer and more equitable society is possible, where wealth and opportunities are accessible to all.

## Conclusion

To summarize the discussion, themes of social class, inequality, capitalism, labor exploitation, and alienation abound in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," which presents ample opportunities for Marxist analysis. Researchers can improve their comprehension of the story's underlying social and economic dynamics by applying Marxism's lens. The novel reveals underlying power dynamics, social class divisions, and the exploitation of labor within a capitalist society by analyzing these symbols through a Marxist lens. The novel's symbolism draws attention to the criticism of an unequal system and encourages readers to consider the inherent injustices of capitalist structures. Moreover, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" reveals class divisions, capitalist exploitation, and the transformative potential of solidarity and resistance by analyzing these themes, motifs, and settings through a Marxist lens. It emphasizes the value of genuine human connections over the accumulation of wealth and exposes materialistic false promises. In conclusion, the study provided insights into the manifestation of inequality, the critique of capitalism, and the exploitation of labor within the narrative, highlighting the relevance of Marxist theory in understanding literary works. The study concludes that children literature also incorporates Marxist elements that introduce the concept of class differences, capitalism, wealth, economic gains and social struggle at the early stages of childhood. Furthermore, the researcher suggests that it is significant to analyze the children's literature from various perspectives in order to understand the ideologies and messages that popular literary works incorporate in children's brains who are the future contributors.

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