

Depiction of Social Class in 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies' Novel

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Abstract

Literary texts frequently function as cultural artifacts that reflect and critique the socio-economic structures of their time. One such structure is the hierarchical division of society into distinct social classes, often determined by access to wealth, power, and privilege. This study explores the representation of class dynamics in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith, with particular attention to the symbolic positioning of zombies with human characters. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative methodology and grounded in Karl Marx's theory of class struggle within a sociological literary framework, the research examines how the novel constructs and reinforces social stratification. The study offers a distinctive contribution by interpreting the human-zombie dichotomy as a metaphor for entrenched class divisions, thereby extending Marxist analysis into the domain of genre fiction. The findings suggest that zombies are not merely monstrous figures but serve as symbolic representations of the oppressed lower class, subjected to marginalization and dehumanization by the elite. This narrative dynamic reflects broader concerns surrounding class-based prejudice and systemic inequality. Through its hybridization of horror and classic literature, the novel becomes a site for critical engagement with socio-economic hierarchies, illustrating how genre fiction can serve as a vehicle for ideological critique.

Keywords : class theory; Marxism; novel; social class; socioeconomic

INTRODUCTION

Social class distinctions often lead to dissatisfaction, especially between the upper and lower classes. This creates socio-economic inequality, influenced by unequal pay systems and labor divisions imposed by the upper class. According to Nasution (2021, p. 3), such inequalities stem from social conflict. Literature serves as a medium for writers to reflect these social issues, showing how society and economics are shaped by human decisions, ethics, and values (Molan, 2010). As a result, class systems are formed—intentionally or not—based on the prevailing mindset, and literature captures and communicates these realities through narrative.

According to Bressler (2007, p. 192), Marxism gained prominence in the 19th century as a practical interpretation of history, presenting the working class with a chance to transform both their society and their personal lives. In the 19th century, social distinctions between royalty and commoners remained complex and nuanced. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, although some zombies are economically capable, they are still marginalized and avoided. Characters like the Bennet family, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Bingley live comfortably and are accepted in upper-class society, while zombies are viewed as threats and are often eliminated. This research explores the socio-economic divide between royal society and zombies, focusing on how it affects quality of life. The zombies represent lower-class individuals seeking recognition and equal status within an elite society that continually rejects their existence.



On the occasion of this analysis, the researcher found several studies that had existed before the research was carried out, the first, from Erliska, entitled *Power and Gender Oppression In Lauren Weisberger's The Devil Wears Prada and Seth-Graham Smith's Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* in (2017), which explores the influence of gender-based oppression, exploitation, and the marginalization of the powerless, along with cultural domination in the workplace, as well as the ruling class's control over social life in both novels. The second article is *The Transformation of Women's Objectification in Multimodal Literary Adaptation of Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Graphic Novel* by Titien Diah Soelistyarini and Cindy Belinda Ramadhanty (2018). This study examines how the combination of textual and visual elements contributes to the objectification of women in narratives. By utilizing Kress's multimodality theory, Nussbaum's concept of objectification, and Kukkonen's perspective on graphic novels, the analysis demonstrates how visual and verbal modes work together to enhance the portrayal of objectification in graphic novels.

The next article, entitled *Economic Realities, Classicism, and Exploitation: A Marxist Study of Thomas Hardy's Novel Tess of D'Urbervilles* by Shadab Fatima (2016), focuses on the exploitation and victimization of the proletariat through surplus labor and the fluctuating duration of the working hours, as highlighted in several of the aforementioned studies. From the existing literature review, it is found that no prior research has specifically examined the contrast between human figures representing the royal upper class and zombies as a representation of the lower class in the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith (2009). Based on this gap, the researcher formulates two main problems: (1) how social status is depicted between humans and zombies in the novel, and (2) what impact these status differences have on the development of the zombie characters throughout the story. The aim is to analyze how social status influences the attitudes and interactions between both groups. The novelty of this research is its examination of class conflict through the lens of human-zombie relationships, offering a unique intersection of horror and socio-economic critique.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To analyze the contrast between the royal society and zombies, this study applies Marxist class theory with a focus on social status. Class theory views individuals based on the social class they occupy, where higher classes are often seen as inherently superior. According to Dubois (1996), the division of labor creates class divisions with conflicting needs. Economics is the core that makes up the superstructure of social, political, and ideological reality. Economic power forms the foundation of social, political, and ideological structures, making it central to shaping social realities (Tyson, 2015). Socioeconomics, according to Sandford (1977), includes economists' approaches to social problems and policies. Socioeconomics covers issues such as poverty, income distribution, wealth inequality, and environmental concerns. It also involves public policy and moral considerations in economic decisions. These aspects relate closely to the problems discussed in this study, which will be supported by evidence from the novel's quotations in the results and discussion section.

According to Suseno (2005, p. 105), society is structured around social classes—groups with similar socio-economic status—which often become the basis for alienation and oppression. Marx argued that capitalism shapes these classes through modes of production, creating a

dominant class that controls production and a subordinate working class. According to Wang (2025, p. 6), scientific communism views communism as a tangible movement aimed at eliminating capitalism, private property, and existing modes of production. It holds that the downfall of capitalism is inevitable due to the deep-rooted contradictions within its logic and system of production. Marx argued that capitalism fosters the development of social classes determined by the mode of production, ultimately leading to a division between those who control the means of production and those who operate within the production system. Suseno (2005, p. 112) Marx argues that the relationship between social classes is fundamentally shaped and governed by the capitalist system. He emphasizes that power and control within society are not exercised on an individual basis, but rather structured at the collective or societal level. They were adaptable, designed to suit the multilayered and socially intricate makeup of their communities, where shared property rights functioned alongside, supported, modified, and even strengthened emerging or established 'vertical' hierarchies—be they social, religious, political, or economic (Byer, 2023, p. 11).

Consequently, social life under capitalism is marked by a hierarchical class structure in which one class holds dominant power while the other is subjected to control and exploitation. His relationship, fully driven by capitalism, operates at the societal level, not the individual. Marxist literary theory explores how literature reflects class conflict and reinforces class divisions (Tayyaba Bashir, 2020). Marx also divided society into the bourgeoisie, the owners of capital who exploit labor, and the proletariat, workers who produce goods yet remain vulnerable to exploitation (Gingrich, 1999). Resistance from the working class arises from this inequality, as they struggle for a better life (Manuela Indriati Siahaan, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods must align with the true nature and reality of the object being studied (Faruk, 2012, p. 23). This qualitative research uses a hermeneutic method for textual analysis. It aims to explore how social status differences are portrayed in the zombie narrative of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith. The researcher will examine the novel as the primary data source and collect relevant data related to class distinctions depicted in the story. Data collection methods are tools that extend human senses to gather empirical facts relevant to the research problem (Faruk, 2012, p. 22).

RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the researcher's findings from the novel, aiming to answer the research questions using Marxist theory, which focuses on social status and the division between upper and lower classes. "The bourgeoisie have economically oppressed the proletariat through control of production and policies." (Engels, 2018).

The Royal Society is the Epitome of High Society

As is the case with what was conveyed by Marx, in this section, the researcher wants to show evidence of several statements about upper-class society. The dominant class uses its power to make the existing system appear logical and natural, convincing the proletariat to accept the identity and values imposed by the bourgeoisie, thereby maintaining control (Kashindi, 2018).

“Elizabeth spent most of the night in her sister’s room, and by morning, she was relieved to send a reasonably reassuring reply to Mr. Bingley’s early inquiry, delivered through a housemaid. However, the messenger never reached his destination—he was intercepted on the road by a horde of newly risen zombies and presumably met a grim fate.” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 9, page 1)

In the explanation above, it is mentioned how Elizabeth as society lives in a house, precisely in a room which has a housemaid as a maid if she wants to do everything in the above statement it is stated that she wants to send a letter to her mother, but on a trip in the delivery of the letter, in the middle of the road, the bearer of the letter met a group of zombies and took the letter until it was not finished until it was received by his mother.

“No, no, don’t move. You’re perfectly arranged and look quite striking as you are. Adding a fourth would ruin the composition. Moreover, that path is without doubt crawling with zombies, and I have no desire to battle them today. Farewell.” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 10, pages 4)

The conversation above gives us an idea of how they, as upper-class people, do not want to meet zombies, which are described in a lower-class society, and how their attitude in dealing with these zombies also states that they only want to meet them when they want to.

“After dinner, when the ladies withdrew, Elizabeth quickly went to her sister and, finding her in good spirits, accompanied her to the drawing-room. There, Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst greeted her with exaggerated expressions of delight... “If mere words could decapitate a zombie,” she mused, “I’d be sitting beside the two most fearsome warriors alive.” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 11, page 1)

It was explained how they, after dinner, which is identical to the upper-class society, then went straight to the living room, where there was no need to put their dinner plates and items that had been cleaned up by their maid, who then headed to the guests who were already present. Then, in the conversation itself, it is described how they seem to despise the zombies as lower-class, whom they think they can kill at any time with their strength as the upper class.

“She then read the opening line aloud, which revealed that they had just decided to immediately join their brother in town and planned to dine at Mr. Hurst’s residence on Grosvenor Street....” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 21, pages 3-4)

Bingley is told to be required to go outside the kingdom to carry out a mission as the leader of a war army to eradicate zombies, and he said that he had to be forced to leave the kingdom for a closed country inhabited only by zombies. Here, it can be concluded that Bingley considers the zombie area to be a very backward and uninhabitable area, which gives the impression that it is a very poor place that is only inhabited by people from the lower classes, unlike the areas around the prosperous kingdoms, be in environment and society.

“Elizabeth let out a sharp gasp—her dearest friend, infected by the plague and doomed to serve the forces of darkness! Every instinct in her urged her to retreat...” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 21, pages 4)

Elizabeth, who gasped when she heard her friend was sick, immediately uttered obscenities and then traveled alone to see her friend. On her way, Elizabeth finds a vehicle that has been damaged by being attacked by zombies. In the sentence mentioned above, the word "to her horror" can be understood as the direction of the sentence is something that is not appropriate for an upper-class society that is finally overrun by the zombies and immediately commits violence against the creature. Elizabeth seemed not to want to be touched by the lower-class society, which she considered a dirty society.

"A man who was rejected so harshly—both physically and outright! How could I have been so naive as to hope he might still care for me? Surely, no man alive would lower himself to propose a second time to the same woman. He'd sooner propose to a zombie!" (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 54, pages 3)

At the top, it is concluded that a man who has been rejected in a matter involving the feet and fists of the opposite sex, is oppression of noble men, they say they are better off just offering them to the zombies which again these zombies are depiction as a lower-class society that is not suitable for the upper-class society according to them.

Based on the explanation above, if it can be related to the Indonesian context, this often happens to officials, political elites, big businessmen, and people with high social privilege. Incidents such as reports of lavish lifestyles by government officials and their families exposed on social media have shocked the Indonesian public. These lavish lifestyles spark public outrage because they contrast sharply with the conditions of ordinary people facing economic hardship. This ultimately reflects social inequality and highlights the existence of an "upper class" living in comfort and power.

Zombies as a Lower-Class Society

"The working class should overthrow the bourgeoisie and transfer property ownership to the government for fair wealth distribution." (Engels, 2018). Unlike the upper class, who act freely without concern for the lower classes, the lower classes must endure oppression from those who control the social hierarchy, as described by Marx.

"...While the majority were preoccupied with tearing into the carriage horse's entrails, one particularly gleeful creature was scraping the final bits from the shattered head of the coachman—a young girl instantly identified by the sisters." (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 42, pages 3)

Elizabeth felt the suffering experienced by the zombies, even though they pretended that they could not be saved from what had happened, but still, she felt that a practice like the people of Hook Master was an act that was not worth doing, where they didn't care what it was. Then, what happened to the zombies? They are then detained for engaging given a dirty practice that causes something bad to happen to the people who are being sold. This is also a picture of the lower-class society, who are always ignored and seem to want to be eliminated by the upper class because they are considered a herd or group of people who are not worthy to live, even though they are still able to be employed well and still need something to make a living. They want to live, like their family, for example.

“Having strolled for a while in this formation—the ladies leading and the gentlemen following—upon returning to their positions after stepping down to the river’s edge to more closely examine some traces left by zombies, a slight change happened to occur...” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 42, pages 9)

Two women and two men who are described as bodyguards of Mrs. Gardiner, who is a royal family that must be protected and must not come into contact with zombies, are conducting inspections of the roads that Mrs. Gardiner will pass. Describes how the details of the lower classes should not be associated with the royal family because the lower classes are considered very lowly, and the difference in social status is very far.

“...one of them bore a note indicating it had traveled on a mail coach that had fallen victim to a zombie attack, hence the postponement in its arrival.” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 46, page 1)

The stagecoach being invaded by a herd of zombies is an illustration of how the facilities provided will usually be used by the lower classes to be used in an orderly manner, and something bad is likely to happen. Meanwhile, Elizabeth, as an upper-class society is always disappointed with how something trivial is just because of a letter that might be accidentally lost due to the behavior of the lower-class people who tend to use public facilities, they don't know how difficult it is for the lower-class to use private facilities that can only be used by the public. High society people like Elizabeth.

“...I’ll imagine your mind being devoured by a zombie, for there is only one man on earth whom I truly love—and he is nothing short of an angel...” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 47, pages 8)

The zombie brain mentioned in the conversation above is a term commonly used by upper-class people against lower-class people who seem to underestimate their thinking. It's as if making a small mistake is always considered stupid, like zombies and also ordinary people living in the kingdom, like Wickham, who are still the subject of ridicule by the royal family, who consider them very special.

“...The living observed as the undead spotted the cauliflower, mistaking it for a tender and juicy brain. As soon as it reached for the bait, the trap snapped shut on its arm, prompting the men to move in—striking the creature with musket butts, firing upon it, and ultimately setting it ablaze...” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 55, pages 2-3)

By setting a trap to lure the zombies with something they like, it's a common thing that can be called the upper-class people's way of demeaning the lower-class society, and then they lie about it to do something behind it. Offering something that is needed by the lower-class society, then taking advantage of them by taking what the upper class wants, is also an action that we often encounter in life between the upper and lower classes.

The zombie metaphor, encompassing what is happening in Indonesia, reflects the lower classes, such as farmers, laborers, and small traders, who live under the pressure of a repressive system without the space to voice their objections or change their fate. They seem to "walk" passively within a frozen system. A key point to be drawn from this metaphor in relation to what is happening in Indonesia is the recent incident in Pati, where news broke of a 250% increase in

rural and urban land and building tax (PBB-P2) by the Pati government, which was deemed extremely burdensome by the Pati community. This policy demonstrates how the small communities, the backbone of the region, are considered victims of exploitative policies without prior public consultation.

Revenge of the Zombies

The upper classes often emphasize their customs while viewing the lower classes as spoiled, with a false sense of entitlement, and having lost the ability to take initiative (Salonen, 2023). Therefore, of the many oppressions carried out by the upper class, in the end, the lower classes will also use their power to unite forces to fight the oppression. This depiction also occurs in how the zombies that are always exterminated and considered disturbing by humans can be more violent than humans think.

“Elizabeth stepped into the church prepared for battle, but as she took in the scene within, she returned her Katana to its scabbard—realizing it was useless in such a place... Witnessing others being ripped apart before them. The sheer terror of being devoured alive by monsters of unimaginable wickedness.” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 38, pages 3)

With Elizabeth, who is ready to fight to finish off the zombies in a church far apart from the royal environment, she finally re-sheathed her sword, which she had wanted to kill the zombies, feeling that she would not be able to destroy all the zombies that attacked them. This shows that no matter how great the upper-class people are, there will be a time when they cannot control the lower classes of society if they intend to unite and shake the upper classes, once again, based on their dissatisfaction with what the upper classes are doing.

“With each passing day and the dwindling daylight, the population of zombies in Hertfordshire steadily increased. The hordes arrived in large numbers, driven southward by the frozen ground and the relentless fire of His Majesty’s muskets.” (Grahame-Smith, 2009, pp. Chapter 55, pages 5)

The situation was made worse by the description of a group of zombies arriving in Hertfordshire, overwhelming the troops there, and finally forcing them to retreat. This happens when circumstances that force the lower classes to use their powers are underestimated by the upper classes. Feeling that they will continue to be on top makes the lower class feel like trying to stop this attitude by using the power they combine at a predetermined time, much like the narrative “as the days grew shorter”.

The zombies' revenge or resistance is a moment when marginalized people rise against systematic injustice. Those who were previously silent are now fighting back. Continuing from the incident above, regarding the 250% increase in property and building tax (PBB-P2), this triggered mass demonstrations by Pati residents. Reportedly, more than 100,000 residents took to the streets in the largest demonstration in Pati's history. They demanded the cancellation of the tax increase. They also demanded the resignation of their Regent and the reversal of other unpopular policies. This action is a manifestation of "revenge" from the grassroots, like zombies rising, demanding justice, transparency, and participation in public policy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and findings presented in the preceding chapter, it can be concluded that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith illustrates a distinct class stratification, aligning with Karl Marx's theory of societal division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The people who reside within or near the royal environment are depicted as part of the upper class. In contrast, those who live outside the royal setting are often mocked or considered inferior, such as the character Lydia Wickham, who is treated poorly by the aristocracy. In this study, the zombies serve as a symbol of the lower class. They are portrayed as being unequal to humans in the royal realm—beings considered unworthy of life and frequently exterminated. The zombies are constantly depicted as feeding on both human and animal flesh, dead or alive, symbolizing the perception of the lower class as wild and desperate, surviving only on leftovers without regard for hygiene or long-term consequences.

The royal family's persistent attitude of indifference and hostility toward the zombies—choosing to eradicate them on sight without seeking to understand their condition—ultimately leads to devastating consequences. This ongoing repression breeds resentment, and when the zombies finally unite and launch a massive assault on the kingdom, the royal troops are unable to contain the uprising. As a result, the monarchy is forced to take extreme measures, such as burning lands that were once vital for future use, simply to prevent the zombies from reaching the surrounding areas of the kingdom. This illustrates a critical message: the upper class cannot continue to act arbitrarily or unjustly toward the lower class without facing consequences. Such oppressive actions become a ticking time bomb, destined to explode when the collective frustrations of the marginalized grow strong enough to challenge the power structure. Ultimately, the lower classes, long subjected to outdated and condescending treatment, may rise in unified resistance, disrupting the assumed permanence of upper-class dominance.

STATEMENT OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the conduct of this research. This includes the planning and execution of the study, the analysis and interpretation of the data, the writing of the manuscript, and the decision to submit the article for publication. No financial, personal, or professional relationships have influenced or could be perceived to have influenced the outcomes of this work. The authors affirm that the research was carried out independently and objectively, without any external influence or bias.

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