

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

According to Marx and Engels (1848:13), in capitalist society, social class divides people into two opposing classes based on money, power, and status, because it influences how people are valued and treated in society. In many cases, those who have wealth and power gain greater access to opportunities, known as the upper class, while people from the lower class are more likely to face hardship and inequality in their lives. This difference creates a gap between social classes and often leads to conflict and an unequal treatment in society, that is, the upper class and the lower class society. In Marxist, society is divided into two main groups, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The Bourgeoisie are the upper class who own the wealth and the “means of production,” while the Proletariat are the working class who own nothing but their ability to work, they are usually dependent on labor and live under the control of the upper class (Marx and Engels, 1848:13-15). The upper class, or bourgeoisie, exploits the lower class, or proletariat, by taking most of the value from their work that creates constant struggle between the classes (Marx & Engels, 1848:16). This struggle is not only economic, but also social, shaping identity, opportunity, and human dignity. The economic system often benefits the upper class, while the lower class is forced to endure the burdens of poverty and social injustice. This difference creates conflict, which is, known as class struggle.

In a capitalist society, the economy serves as the foundation that shapes other aspects of life, including the way people are valued and treated. This inequality does not only talk about economics, but also touches on the deeper issue of human dignity. Ironically, those who put in the most physical labor often earn the least, while the wealth stays at the top with the owners who provide the funding. Because of this inequality, the lower class must struggle to survive under the dominance of the upper class. These social conditions are not just limited to the real world, they are also vividly reflected in various literary works. Through literary works, authors can present how class differences influence people's lives and how social power affects their treatment in society. Literature must be understood in relation to the social and historical conditions in which it is produced, since literary forms and meanings are shaped by structures of class and power (Eagleton, 1976:5).

In *A Little Princess*, Frances Hodgson Burnett illustrates how class system and inequality shape Sara Crewe's life, as her position in society shifts dramatically throughout the story. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist, Sara, belongs to the bourgeoisie class. She is wealthy, privileged, and treated with respect at Miss Minchin's seminary school. However, her life suddenly changes after her father died and her family loses its wealth, Sara, then experiences a dramatic change in social status from upper class to lower class. Instead of being treated like a student, she is pushed into a life of struggle where she has to live in a shabby attic and work as a servant.

The topic of Sara Crewe's class struggle in *A Little Princess* is chosen for three main reasons. Firstly, Sara's change from a wealthy girl to a servant is thought-provoking to study because it shows how social status can shape a person's life. Secondly, the novel presents the causes of this conflict, which are still relevant to issues in society today. Thirdly, Sara's experience shows the real impact of class struggle, especially how it affects someone physically and emotionally. Ultimately, this research thesis will analyze the depiction, factor, and the impact of class struggle in *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. How is Sara Crewe's class struggle depicted in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*?
2. What is the factor of Sara Crewe's class struggle in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*?
3. What is the impact of class struggle on Sara Crewe in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*?

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research of this thesis are as follows:

1. To depict Sara Crewe's class struggle in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*.

2. To analyze the factor of Sara Crewe's class struggle in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*.
3. To analyze the impact of class struggle on Sara Crewe in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*.

1.4 Previous Studies

The researcher found several previous studies discussing *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, as well as other studies that examine class struggle in different literary works. These previous studies help provide comparison and highlight the research gap that this thesis focuses on, particularly in analyzing class struggle in *A Little Princess*.

The first previous study is a journal article written by Hamdiyah *et al.* (2025) entitled "*Children struggle towards discrimination in A Little Princess by Frances Hodgson Burnett*" that examines Sara's struggle against discrimination. This study uses a psychological approach called Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Erikson's psychosocial development theory to look at how Sara resists injustice. Researchers found that Sara relies on her independence to withstand social pressure.

The second previous study is a thesis by Arifin (2023) entitled "*Sara's defense mechanisms in A Little Princess by Frances Hodgson Burnett*" that mainly discusses Sara's defense mechanisms. This research uses George E. Vaillant's theory to show how Sara uses her imagination and altruism to deal with her pain after becoming poor.

The third previous study is a research by Yuliawati (2023) entitled “*The Relation Between Being Orphans and Its Effect on Social Status in The Victorian Era as Reflected in A Little Princess Novel*”, this study explores the relationship between being an orphan and Victorian social status, categorizing the characters into distinct social strata. This research focuses on the vulnerabilities of being an orphan than on the systemic economic exploitation of the working class.

The fourth previous study is a research by Septiana (2023) entitled “*The Effect of The Social Environment on Children’s Independent Behavior in A Little Princess by Frances Hodgson Burnett*”. This research uses ecocriticism to show how a child's environment and family relationships help shape their independence. It explains that Sara's personality is a result of the world around her.

The fifth previous study is a thesis written by Fauzan (2024) entitled “*Unmasking Gotham: Class Struggle in The Batman (2022)*”. This research is analyzing the class conflict using Karl Marx’s theory that shows the difference between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in Gotham City. In the end, the result shows that this film is reflecting the class struggle through power imbalance, social inequality, and resistance.

The sixth previous study is a thesis written by Mursyidah (2023) entitled “*Class Struggle Depiction in Ben Okri’s The Famished Road*”. This research is analyzing how the novel portrays the working class’ struggles through Karl Marx’s theory of class struggle. Literary criticism and a sociological approach is used to identify and interpret words, phrases, and messages from the novel to

reveal the dynamics of social inequality. This research shows how class conflict emerges through limited mobility, corruption, and exploitation, and how the lower class attempts resistance.

The seventh previous study is a research paper written by Khasanah (2025) entitled “*Kristin Hannah’s The Four Winds: A Working Class Struggle Against Capitalism*”. It explores the conflict between the working class and capitalist structures. This study analyzes how characters face exploitation, commodification, and alienation under a capitalist system, using Marxist literary criticism.

The eighth previous study is a journal article written by Dewi *et al.* (2023) entitled “*Halwai’s Struggle Against Injustice Of Indian Caste System In Adiga’s The White Tiger Novel*”. This journal analyzes the fight against the systemic injustices of the Indian caste system. This research uses Marxist theory, focusing on the social class structures of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, alongside Mario Klarer’s author-oriented approach. The researchers found that the main character represents the success of the lower class by deconstructing social hierarchies.

The ninth previous study is a journal article written by Prasetya *et al.* (2025) entitled “*Literature as a Tool for Social-Emotional Learning: A Character-Based Analysis of A Little Princess*”. This article examines how *A Little Princess* can be used to support social-emotional learning (SEL) in students. The CASEL framework is used by the researchers, which includes self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and

self-management. The study focuses on Sara Crewe's character development, especially her empathy, resilience, and moral values. In the end, the results show that the novel can help students understand emotions and develop social skills.

The last previous study is a journal article written by Grashya *et al.* (2024) entitled "*Restraint and Resilience: A Thematic Portrayal of Casualty Notification in A Little Princess and Its Film Adaptation*". This article explores the theme of casualty notification in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* and Alfonso Cuarón's 1995 film adaptation. The study examines how the death of Sara Crewe's father is portrayed and shows the traits of self-restraint and resilience in both versions using a thematic approach. The researchers show how the narrative and adaptation convey grief, emotional endurance, and resilience in the face of loss by comparing the novel and the film.

This research thesis is very different from any other previous researches mentioned. The first difference is in the theory; while the previous researches done by Hamdiah (2025), Arifin (2023), Yuliawati (2023), Septiana (2023), Prasetya (2025), and Grashya (2024) use various theories, such as Self-Determination Theory, defense mechanisms, Victorian social strata, ecocriticism, social-emotional learning (SEL), and thematic resilience, while this research thesis uses class struggle theory by Karl Marx. Class struggle theory is chosen because it provides a clear and suitable approach to examine the power dynamics, labor exploitation, and structural inequality that cause Sara's transition from an upper class to an exploited lower class, which remains relevant to modern

economic inequalities today. The second difference is in the data; although the previous researches written by Fauzan (2024), Mursyidah (2023), Khasanah (2025), and Dewi (2023) use the same Marxist theory, they use data from different films and novels, whereas this research thesis focuses specifically on Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*. In conclusion, there are no previous studies that have specifically analyzed class struggle in *A Little Princess* through Karl Marx's theory.

1.5 Research Method

1.5.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative library research approach to analyze the literary text. The qualitative library research approach is “captured in words, images, or nonnumeric symbols; for instance, research on dreams” (George, 2008:7). In analyzing Sara Crewe's experiences in *A Little Princess*, the writer applies Karl Marx's theory of class struggle.

1.5.2 Method of Data Collection

This research employs the library research method, which involves “Identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal or expert opinion on a research question” (George, 2008:6). There are two data sources that are related to library research, namely primary data and secondary data. Original materials that provide raw evidence for the researcher are called primary data, while secondary data are those sources produced after the events

that offer interpretation or contextual discussion (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006:142). The primary data is collected through a comprehensive analysis of the text, focusing on its structure and themes. Meanwhile, the secondary data is gathered from relevant sources, including academic journals, scholarly books on Marxist theory, and existing literary analyses that provide a broader context for the novel.

1.6 Scope of the Research

This research thesis focuses on Sara Crewe's class struggle in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*. The intrinsic discussion covers the characters, characterizations, settings, and conflicts surrounding Sara Crewe. Furthermore, the research topic discussion covers an analysis of class struggle, which considers how the struggle is depicted, the factors that cause it, and the physical and psychological impacts to Sara Crewe.

1.7 Writing Organization

The organization of this thesis is divided into four main chapters:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter consists of 7 sub-sections. Those are the background of the research, research question, objective of the study, previous studies, research method, scope of the study, and writing organization.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The second chapter explains the theoretical framework such as intrinsic and extrinsic elements that are used to analyze the novel *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

CHAPTER III: RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The third chapter discusses the analysis results of the novel based on the theoretical framework and methodology described previously. It interprets the findings in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the research and draws conclusions based on the analysis.