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CRITICISM OF CAPITALISM IN UPTON SINCLAIR'S *THE JUNGLE*

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Abstract. This study examines the critique of capitalism in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) by integrating critical Discourse Analysis, narrative analysis, and intertextual analysis. The research aims to investigate how capitalism is criticized through language, narrative structure, characterization, and ideological discourse in the novel. By employing a qualitative research design, the study analyzes textual data related to labor exploitation, poverty, social injustice, class inequality, and power relations. The findings reveal that *The Jungle* portrays capitalism as an exploitative system. It prioritizes profit over human welfare. As a result, labor oppression, economic insecurity, social inequality, social alienation, and workers' dehumanization happen. Through its characters, the novel exposes the contradiction between the promise of the American Dream and the realities of industrial capitalism. Furthermore, the novel also demonstrates that discourse and narrative strategies function as instruments for revealing ideological domination and normalizing exploitation. Finally, in the novel, Sinclair presents socialism as an alternative form of social awareness and resistance. It is concluded that *The Jungle* serves not only as a literary work but also as a powerful social critique that remains relevant to contemporary discussions of labor rights, inequality, and capitalist power structures.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji kritik terhadap kapitalisme dalam novel *The Jungle* (1906) karya Upton Sinclair dengan mengintegrasikan Analisis Wacana Kritis, analisis naratif, dan analisis intertekstual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki bagaimana kapitalisme dikritik melalui bahasa, struktur naratif, penggambaran karakter, dan wacana ideologis dalam novel tersebut. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis data tekstual yang berkaitan dengan eksploitasi tenaga kerja, kemiskinan, ketidakadilan sosial, ketimpangan kelas, dan hubungan kuasa. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *The Jungle* menggambarkan kapitalisme sebagai sistem yang eksploitatif. Sistem ini mengutamakan keuntungan di atas kesejahteraan manusia. Akibatnya, terjadi penindasan tenaga kerja, ketidakpastian ekonomi, ketidaksetaraan sosial, alienasi sosial, dan dehumanisasi pekerja. Melalui karakter-karakternya, novel ini mengungkap kontradiksi antara janji American Dream dan realitas kapitalisme industri. Selain itu, novel ini juga menunjukkan bahwa strategi wacana dan naratif berfungsi sebagai instrumen untuk mengungkap dominasi ideologis dan menormalisasi eksploitasi. Akhirnya, dalam novel ini, Sinclair menghadirkan sosialisme sebagai bentuk alternatif kesadaran sosial dan perlawanan. Disimpulkan bahwa *The Jungle* tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai karya sastra, tetapi juga sebagai kritik sosial yang kuat yang tetap relevan dalam diskusi kontemporer mengenai hak-hak buruh, ketidaksetaraan, dan struktur kekuasaan kapitalis.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature has long functioned as a medium for expressing human experiences, emotions, and social realities through imaginative language. Besides the main function to entertain the readers, literary works are also used as a tool to campaign for moral and social values. According to Esten, literature is an artistic expression that reflects human life through aesthetic language while remaining connected to social reality (Esten, 1978). Similarly, literature serves as a form of communication between the author, the text, and the reader, allowing messages about life to be conveyed effectively (Luxemberg, 1989). Therefore, literary works can be understood as representations of social conditions that encourage readers to reflect critically on reality.

Language plays a crucial role in constructing social reality and shaping ideological perspectives within literary texts. Gee argues that language is not merely a communication tool but also a means of creating and maintaining social structures and power relations (Gee ,2011). Through language, literary works can reveal inequality, domination, and social conflicts that exist within society. However, many readers still perceive novels solely as entertainment and overlook their function as vehicles of social criticism. This gap highlights the need for further analysis of how literary discourse conveys criticism of dominant social systems such as capitalism.

Among literary genres, the novel has a unique capacity to represent complex social realities through characters, events, and conflicts. Novels often portray class struggles, economic inequality, and power relations that reflect actual social conditions. Mitsigkas explains that novels are valid representations of social reality because they present human experiences and ideological positions within a social context (Mitsigkas, 2015). Through narrative and discourse, novels enable readers to engage critically with social and ideological tensions. Consequently, novels become an effective medium for exposing the consequences of capitalism on human life.

Capitalism has been widely criticized for creating social inequality, labor exploitation, and imbalances between capital owners and workers. This system emphasizes profit maximization, often at the expense of human welfare and dignity. Mandler argues that capitalism transforms human labor into a commodity whose value is determined by market demands rather than human needs (Mandler, 2018). As a result, workers frequently experience exploitation, alienation, and structural injustice within capitalist societies. These issues have inspired numerous literary works that challenge and criticize the capitalist system.

One literary work that strongly portrays criticism of capitalism is Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*. Published in 1906, the novel depicts the struggles of immigrant workers in Chicago's meatpacking industry under harsh capitalist conditions. Through the experiences of Jurgis Rudkus and his family, Sinclair reveals exploitation, unsafe working environments, low wages, and the loss of workers' rights. Previous studies have examined *The Jungle* from perspectives such as socialism, realism, and social criticism. Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to how criticism of capitalism is constructed through discourse and narrative structure within the novel.

To examine this issue, the present study employs narrative theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. Labov explains that narrative is an organized representation of social experience that reflects both events and evaluative meanings (Labov, 1972a). Furthermore, discourse analysis allows researchers to uncover ideological meanings embedded within language and textual structures. Fairclough states that discourse functions as a social practice that both shapes and is shaped by social structures (Fairclough, 1995a). These theoretical approaches provide an appropriate framework for analyzing how capitalism is represented and criticized in *The Jungle*.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of narrative analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate criticism of capitalism in *The Jungle*. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on realism or socialism, this research explores how discourse, narrative structure, and ideological representation work together to construct social criticism. The study specifically examines labor exploitation, class inequality, and power relations portrayed in the novel. In addition, it seeks to identify how capitalism is depicted and how criticism of capitalism is articulated through narrative and discourse. Therefore, the objective of this study is to reveal the ideological critique of capitalism embedded in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and contribute to the development of literary and discourse studies.

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RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and intertextual analysis to examine how criticism of capitalism is constructed in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). Drawing on the theories of Gee, Renkema, Fairclough, and Kristeva, the research explores how language, narrative structure, and ideological discourse represent social injustice, labor exploitation, and class inequality within capitalist society. The study views language not only as a means of communication but also as a social practice that constructs meaning, power relations, and ideology. Narrative analysis is used to examine the organization of the novel's plot and character development, particularly the experiences of Jurgis Rudkus, while intertextual analysis connects the novel to broader socio-economic theories, especially Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. Through this integrated framework, the novel is analyzed as both a literary text and a social commentary that challenges dominant capitalist ideologies.

The research was conducted through several systematic stages, beginning with the selection of *The Jungle* as the primary object of study due to its vivid portrayal of immigrant workers' struggles in industrial America. An extensive literature review was carried out to establish the theoretical foundation, followed by repeated readings of the novel to identify passages related to labor exploitation, poverty, social injustice, and economic inequality. The collected data were organized through thematic coding and classified according to linguistic features, narrative structures, and socio-economic themes. The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by coding sheets and analytical frameworks derived from discourse analysis theories. Data collection relied on document analysis, close reading, note-taking, and classification of relevant textual evidence, while validity was strengthened through triangulation, peer debriefing, audit trails, and reflexivity to ensure credible and reliable interpretations.

The analysis reveals that *The Jungle* presents a powerful critique of capitalist ideology by exposing contradictions between capitalist ideals and the lived realities of workers. Through the experiences of Jurgis and his family, the novel demonstrates how concepts such as voluntary contracts, private property rights, free markets, market efficiency, productivity, and individual freedom often fail to provide justice and welfare for the working class. Instead, workers experience exploitation, unsafe working conditions, economic insecurity, and social oppression. Intertextual comparison with Hans-Hermann Hoppe's capitalist principles highlights significant gaps between theoretical assumptions and actual social conditions portrayed in the novel. The findings indicate that capitalist institutions in *The Jungle* reinforce power imbalances that favor wealthy elites while marginalizing laborers, making the novel a compelling literary critique of social inequality, economic exploitation, and the dehumanizing effects of industrial capitalism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Finding the Theme

The central theme of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* is a critique of capitalism as an exploitative system that produces labor oppression, social injustice, class inequality, and the dehumanization of workers. Theme, as the central idea conveyed through a literary work, is developed through the interaction of plot, characters, conflict, and setting rather than being stated directly (Abrams, 1999). Through the experiences of Jurgis Rudkus and his family, Sinclair portrays how workers in the meatpacking industry are subjected to dangerous working conditions, low wages, economic insecurity, and social marginalization, while capitalists accumulate wealth and power (Sinclair, 1906).

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From a psycholinguistic perspective, the novel also demonstrates how capitalist discourse shapes workers' cognition by encouraging them to accept exploitation, poverty, and inequality as normal aspects of life, thereby limiting their ability to question the system that oppresses them (Van Dijk, 2008). Furthermore, the novel exposes the illusion of the American Dream, showing that hard work alone does not guarantee social mobility but instead traps workers in cycles of poverty and suffering. Through its portrayal of labor exploitation, ideological domination, class struggle, and the erosion of human dignity, *The Jungle* presents capitalism as a destructive social and economic system that benefits the powerful while oppressing the working class (Sinclair, 1906).

This theme is further reinforced through the novel's depiction of corruption, alienation, and the unequal distribution of power within industrial society. Throughout the narrative, workers are treated as commodities whose value depends solely on their productivity, while political and legal institutions often function to protect the interests of business owners rather than ordinary laborers (Sinclair, 1906). The experiences of Jurgis reveal how capitalism extends beyond economic exploitation to influence social relationships, personal identity, and psychological well-being. As workers internalize dominant capitalist ideologies, they become increasingly vulnerable to accepting injustice as unavoidable, reflecting the connection between discourse, cognition, and social power (Van Dijk, 2008). Consequently, *The Jungle* serves not only as a literary representation of industrial America but also as a powerful social critique that exposes the systemic nature of exploitation and calls attention to the need for social awareness and collective resistance against oppression.

Moreover, the development of the narrative demonstrates how capitalism creates a cycle of suffering that is difficult for workers to escape. Despite their determination and hard work, Jurgis and his family repeatedly encounter poverty, workplace injuries, unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, and personal tragedy, revealing that individual effort alone cannot overcome structural inequality (Sinclair, 1906). The transformation of Jurgis from an optimistic immigrant who believes in the American Dream into a worker who gains class consciousness highlights the novel's ideological message. Through this transformation, Sinclair suggests that the root of social injustice lies not in individual failure but in the capitalist system itself. The novel ultimately presents socialism as an alternative framework based on solidarity, equality, and collective action, emphasizing that meaningful social change can only be achieved when workers recognize their shared experiences of oppression and unite to challenge existing power structures (Sinclair, 1906).

Synopsis

The story begins at the wedding of Jurgis Rudkus and Ona Lukoszaite in the back room of a Polish bar in Chicago. The atmosphere of the party reflects the spirit of the Lithuanian immigrant community, but also highlights the economic hardships they face. The party was expensive, and the guests, who were supposed to contribute, left without paying. Ona and her family were worried, but Jurgis, still optimistic and full of energy, was confident that he could work harder to overcome their financial problems. The story begins in the past, when Jurgis's family decided to move from Lithuania to America in search of a better life. They believed that America was a "land of opportunity" promising unlimited possibilities.

Jurgis managed to get a job at a meat-processing plant. He was fascinated by the efficiency of the machinery and the organization of the industrial work system, but he didn't realize that the system was deeply inhumane. Meanwhile, his family struggled to adapt to the harsh life in the industrial city. Dangerous working conditions and monotonous work began to take a toll on the workers' bodies and minds. The family decided to buy a small house that they thought would be theirs. However, it turned out to be a lease riddled with legal and financial traps.

They didn't realize they'd have to pay hidden costs like taxes, interest, and maintenance. The home they'd dreamed of became a burden that accelerated their economic downfall. Every family member had to workincluding the children and the elderly to pay for the house and survive. They entered a harsh working world, with low wages and heavy pressure. Jurgis was proud to be able to support his family, but the tension kept rising. Ona's health and spirits began to decline. The family's situation grew increasingly fragile due to economic demands and an unfair labor system.

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Winter has arrived, and its harsh effects are already beginning to show. The Jurgis family must endure the extreme cold in Chicago. They struggle through the snow just to get to work or look for new jobs. Children and the elderly are the groups that suffer the most. Meanwhile, the economic system continues to trap them in a cycle of poverty, making the dream of a better life in America seem increasingly out of reach. Jurgis suffers a workplace accident and sustains serious injuries. He is unable to work for weeks. Without his primary income, his family plunges into an even deeper financial crisis. There is no sick leave or health insurance from the company. They began selling their belongings and lived in misery.

Meanwhile, Jurgis slowly realized that his hard work alone was not enough to fight against a cruel and unjust system. Then Ona, Jurgis's wife, began showing signs of depression and unexplained fear. She often cried, trembled, and appeared deeply distressed. The family tried to find out the cause, but Ona remained silent. Meanwhile, the work grew heavier and the pay grew smaller, making the situation increasingly tense. The family was on the brink of mental and physical collapse. Stanislovas, Teta Elzbieta's son, was a victim of exploitation. He was forced to work at a very young age and had to endure an overwhelming fear of winter because he had once been locked outside until his fingers nearly froze. This illustrates the real suffering of child laborers. Social inequality and laws that favor employers continue to oppress them.

As Jurgis Rudkus's life deteriorates, he realizes that Chicago's political, legal, and economic systems are deeply corrupt and designed to protect the interests of the powerful while exploiting workers. After losing his job, enduring poverty, witnessing Ona's sexual exploitation, and being imprisoned for defending her, Jurgis returns to find his family homeless and Ona dying from childbirth complications. Her death, followed by continued hardship, homelessness, exploitation, repeated imprisonment, and the tragic drowning of his son Antanas, leaves him emotionally devastated and disillusioned with the American Dream. Forced into vagrancy and later involvement in corrupt political networks, Jurgis experiences firsthand how capitalism dehumanizes and marginalizes the working class.

His life changes when he attends a Socialist Party meeting, where he gains class consciousness and begins to understand the structural causes of oppression. Inspired by socialist ideals, he becomes an active political organizer and advocate for workers' rights, helping spread awareness about inequality and exploitation. Through his transformation from a victim of capitalist oppression into a committed socialist activist, Jurgis comes to believe that solidarity, education, and collective struggle are essential for achieving social justice and creating a society free from exploitation.

Simple Story

The Jungle follows the life of Jurgis Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant who arrives in Chicago with his family hoping to achieve the American Dream. Initially optimistic, Jurgis believes that hard work will lead to prosperity, but he soon encounters the harsh realities of industrial capitalism in Packingtown. The family experiences poverty, labor exploitation, unsafe working conditions, financial deception, illness, workplace injuries, corruption, imprisonment, homelessness, and the deaths of loved ones, including his wife Ona and son Antanas. These tragedies gradually destroy Jurgis's faith in the capitalist system, revealing how workers are treated as disposable commodities and trapped in cycles of inequality and oppression.

After periods of despair, wandering, and involvement in corrupt political activities, Jurgis discovers the socialist movement, which provides him with a new understanding of the structural causes of exploitation. Through political education and collective action, he develops class consciousness and becomes an advocate for workers' rights. Ultimately, the novel traces Jurgis's transformation from an optimistic immigrant and victim of capitalist oppression into a symbol of working-class resistance, emphasizing themes of labor exploitation, social injustice, inequality, alienation, and the struggle for social change.

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Jurgis Rudkus and his family immigrate from Lithuania to Chicago hoping to achieve a better life through hard work and determination. At first, Jurgis strongly believes in the promise of the American Dream and trusts that economic success is attainable for anyone willing to work. However, the family quickly encounters poverty, exploitative labor conditions, and deceptive housing agreements that place them in severe financial difficulty. Every family member, including women, children, and the elderly, is forced to work in order to survive. Dangerous working environments, low wages, and job insecurity gradually destroy their hopes for social mobility. As time passes, Jurgis begins to realize that the capitalist system values profit more than human welfare. Through these experiences, the novel portrays the harsh realities faced by immigrant workers in industrial America.

The family's situation worsens as workplace injuries, economic hardship, and social inequality continue to affect their lives. Jurgis loses his job after a serious accident and discovers that workers can be easily replaced without compensation or protection. Ona becomes a victim of sexual exploitation by her supervisor, forcing her to endure abuse in order to keep her employment. When Jurgis attacks the man responsible, he is imprisoned and separated from his family. After his release, he finds that his home has been repossessed and that his family is living in extreme poverty. Ona later dies after a difficult childbirth, leaving Jurgis emotionally devastated and hopeless. These tragedies demonstrate how capitalist institutions and social systems fail to protect vulnerable workers and their families.

Overcome by grief and despair, Jurgis abandons his family and wanders in search of work and survival. He experiences homelessness, unemployment, corruption, and continued exploitation in both rural and urban settings.The death of his son Antanas further destroys his remaining faith in society and deepens his sense of isolation. However, Jurgis's life changes when he accidentally attends a Socialist Party meeting and hears speeches about workers' rights and social justice. Inspired by these ideas, he develops class consciousness and begins to understand the structural causes of oppression. He becomes actively involved in socialist activities, labor organization, and political campaigns aimed at improving workers' conditions. By the end of the novel, Jurgis emerges as a symbol of working-class awakening, illustrating that solidarity and collective action are essential for challenging capitalist exploitation and achieving social change. He becomes actively involved in socialist activities, labor organization, and political campaigns aimed at improving workers' conditions. By the end of the novel, Jurgis emerges as a symbol of working-class awakening, illustrating that solidarity and collective action are essential for challenging capitalist exploitation and achieving social change.

The Theme

The themes in the novel The Jungle can be seen as a critique of capitalism through the exploitation of labor and social injustice. This theme emerges from a structural analysis of the narrative structure, which reveals consistent patterns of conflict related to economic power, class inequality, and the oppression of the working class. Within the narrative structure, the capitalist system is portrayed as a dominant force that controls workers through economic pressure, unfair working conditions, and ideological influence particularly as experienced by Jurgis and his family.

Based on the summary, the novel consistently depicts the rise of capitalist power through an industrial system that prioritizes profit over human well-being. Factory owners and capitalist institutions treat workers merely as tools of production and exploit their economic dependence to maintain control over them. This pattern indicates that the core issue is not merely about poverty and survival, but also about the systemic exploitation generated by capitalism. In a simplified version of the story, the narrative depicts immigrant workers entering an industrial environment and gradually experiencing physical suffering, psychological pressure, and social alienation due to capitalist oppression.

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The narrative structure of *The Jungle* highlights the connection between capitalism, exploitation, and the erosion of human dignity, showing how workers are subjected not only to economic hardship but also to ideological control. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the novel demonstrates how language shapes cognition and influences workers' perceptions of reality. Through repeated exposure to capitalist discourse emphasizing obedience, productivity, sacrifice, and individual responsibility, workers gradually internalize the belief that exploitation, poverty, and inequality are normal and unavoidable aspects of life. This discourse leads them to view hard work as the sole path to survival while attributing poverty to personal failure rather than systemic injustice. Consequently, capitalist ideology influences the characters' thoughts and behaviors, limiting their ability to critically challenge the social and economic structures that oppress them, thereby reinforcing both economic domination and psychological control.

Furthermore, acceptance of exploitation influences the characters' behavior. Because workers cognitively internalize capitalist values, they continue to work under inhumane conditions despite experiencing physical suffering, emotional stress, and social degradation. The language of capitalism instills fear of unemployment and insecurity, forcing them to prioritize survival over resistance. This psychological control demonstrates how ideological domination operates through discourse. Ultimately, capitalist exploitation leads to severe social suffering and the loss of human dignity, as workers are treated merely as tools of production, not as individuals possessing rights and personal worth. From a psycholinguistic perspective, manipulation begins when capitalist language and ideological discourse are cognitively processed and internalized by the characters, shaping their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding exploitation and social inequality.

The Historical and Biographical Background on Capitalism Critique

The critique of capitalism in *The Jungle* is rooted in the social and economic conditions of the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period marked by rapid industrialization and the expansion of large-scale factory production. As capitalism became the dominant economic system, industrial growth generated significant wealth but also created serious social problems, including labor exploitation, poverty, and inequality. Workers often endured long working hours, low wages, unsafe conditions, and limited legal protection, while factory owners accumulated substantial profits through control of production and labor

The rise of industrial capitalism attracted millions of immigrants to the United States who sought better economic opportunities and improved living conditions. However, many immigrants instead found themselves trapped in exploitative industries, particularly in Chicago's meatpacking sector. Workers faced dangerous workplaces, poor sanitation, job insecurity, and constant economic pressure. At the same time, industrial capitalism widened the gap between wealthy business owners and the working class, creating a social structure in which economic power was concentrated in the hands of a small elite while laborers struggled to survive.

These conditions also affected society beyond the workplace. Weak government regulation allowed factories to operate under unsafe and unsanitary conditions, endangering both workers and consumers. Labor unions were relatively weak, and capitalist ideology often encouraged people to accept exploitation as a necessary part of economic progress. Within this historical context, *The Jungle* emerged as a powerful literary critique that exposed the realities of industrial capitalism through the experiences of Jurgis Rudkus and his family. The novel highlighted the connections between poverty, exploitation, social inequality, and the loss of human dignity, reflecting the broader struggles faced by many workers during the industrial era.

The novel was strongly influenced by the life and beliefs of its author, Upton Sinclair. Growing up between conditions of poverty and affluence, Sinclair developed a deep awareness of social inequality and class divisions. Influenced by socialist ideals, he viewed literature as a tool for social reform and sought to challenge systems that oppressed ordinary people. Before writing *The Jungle*, Sinclair conducted direct investigations of Chicago's meatpacking industry, allowing him to portray labor conditions with realism and accuracy. His goal was not only to expose worker exploitation but also to demonstrate how capitalism reduced human beings to instruments of production whose value depended solely on economic productivity.

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Beyond *The Jungle*, Sinclair consistently criticized capitalism in works such as *King Coal* (1917), *The Brass Check* (1919), *Oil!* (1927), and *Boston* (1928). Across these writings, he addressed issues including industrial exploitation, media corruption, political influence, class conflict, and social injustice. Through realistic narratives and strong social criticism, Sinclair established himself as both a novelist and a reform-minded activist who advocated for workers' rights, social equality, and human dignity. His literary career demonstrates a sustained commitment to challenging capitalist oppression and promoting social awareness through literature.

The Depiction of Capitalism

The findings indicate that the central theme in *The Jungle* is a critique of capitalism through the exploitation of labor, social injustice, and the dehumanization of workers. This theme is consistently developed throughout the narrative structure, particularly through the experiences of Jurgis Rudkus and his family as immigrant workers in industrial Chicago. This novel portrays capitalism not only as an economic system but also as a powerful social structure that controls workers through economic pressure, unequal power relations, and ideological domination.

From the very beginning of the story, the capitalist system is portrayed as deceitful and exploitative. Jurgis and his family come to America with faith in the promise of prosperity and social mobility, yet they quickly face poverty, exploitation, and discrimination. Their experiences reflect the contradiction between the "American Dream" and the harsh reality of industrial capitalism. This finding supports Labov (1972) view that narrative structure reflects social experience and ideological evaluation. Through a chronological sequence of the characters' sufferings, Sinclair gradually reveals how capitalism systematically undermines human dignity.

The narrative structure also reinforces the development of themes. The exposition introduces the immigrants' optimism, while the complication presents a series of economic hardships, unsafe working conditions, and social oppression. The resolution, which guides Jurgis toward socialist consciousness, further emphasizes the ideological critique of capitalism. This structure demonstrates that the theme is not revealed directly, but is built through the development of events, conflicts, and character transformations.

Furthermore, a psycholinguistic approach shows that language plays a crucial role in shaping themes. At the beginning of the novel, Jurgis often expresses optimism and determination through statements such as his belief that hard work guarantees success. However, as he experiences exploitation and suffering, his language gradually shifts to expressions of frustration, despair, and anger. This linguistic transformation reflects how capitalist conditions influence an individual's psychological state and consciousness. According to T. A. van Dijk (2008), discourse is closely linked to cognitive processes and social context. Therefore, the changes in Jurgis's language demonstrate how the capitalist environment shapes human thought and identity.

The theme of capitalism is also depicted through the representation of social inequality. Factory owners hold economic power and control over production, while workers remain powerless and dependent. Workers are treated merely as tools of labor whose value depends on productivity, not on their humanity. This finding aligns with Marx's theory that capitalism creates a class division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The novel shows that workers have little control over their jobs and can be easily replaced when they are injured, sick, or no longer productive.

Furthermore, the setting of Packingtown plays a crucial role in reinforcing this theme. The filthy environment, overcrowded housing, unsafe factories, and unhealthy working conditions symbolize the destructive impact of industrial capitalism. Sinclair uses realistic descriptions to create a powerful portrayal of social suffering and economic oppression. These descriptions support Mandler (2018) argument, which states that capitalism often sacrifices human well-being for economic profit.

This finding also demonstrates that the theme of capitalism is closely linked to alienation. Workers become alienated from their work, their humanity, and even their families. Jurgis gradually loses hope, moral stability, and emotional security as the capitalist system forces him to focus solely on survival. This reflects Marx's concept of alienation, in which workers are viewed as mechanical cogs in industrial production.

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Furthermore, the novel portrays capitalism as a system reproduced through discourse and ideology. The dominant ideology encourages workers to believe that success can only be achieved through hard work, while ignoring structural inequality and exploitation. This finding supports Fairclough (1995) theory, which states that discourse functions as a social practice that reflects and reproduces power relations. Through narrative discourse, *The Jungle* reveals how capitalist ideology normalizes exploitation and inequality.

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Zhao (2021), Lee (2020), and Martínez (2022), who found that *The Jungle* depicts the suffering of the working class and capitalist oppression through narrative language and thematic structures. However, this study further expands on previous research by demonstrating how the theme of capitalism is systematically constructed through narrative grammar, psycholinguistic processes, and discursive practices. Therefore, it can be concluded that the theme of capitalism in *The Jungle* is portrayed as a system that creates exploitation, inequality, alienation, and social injustice. Through narrative structure, language, and the characters' experiences, Sinclair depicts capitalism as a destructive force that oppresses the working class and degrades human dignity.

The Criticism of Capitalism

This finding also shows that *The Jungle* condemns capitalism through its plot, character portrayals, symbolism, and depictions of social suffering. Sinclair portrays capitalism as a system that prioritizes profit over humanity, leading to exploitation, corruption, moral decay, and the ruin of workers' lives.

One of the most striking forms of criticism emerges from the depiction of labor exploitation. Workers in the meat-processing industry are forced to work under dangerous conditions for low wages and without legal protection. Workers who sustain injuries are immediately fired and replaced by new immigrants. This demonstrates that capitalism treats humans as disposable commodities, not as individuals possessing rights and dignity. According to Harvey (2020), capitalism inherently creates exploitation because labor is valued only in the context of economic productivity. Sinclair's narrative clearly reflects this condition.

This novel also critiques capitalism through its depiction of poverty and economic inequality. Although Jurgis and his family work extremely hard, they remain trapped in poverty. Their inability to escape their economic hardships demonstrates that capitalism benefits the wealthy while marginalizing workers. This finding supports Standing (2021) argument that capitalism creates a vulnerable class lacking economic security and social protection.

Another significant critique targets corruption and political manipulation. The novel depicts politicians, businesspeople, and institutions collaborating to maintain capitalist power. Jurgis eventually becomes involved in corrupt political activities because the system leaves him with few options for survival. This demonstrates that capitalism not only exploits workers economically but also undermines moral values and social institutions. Fairclough (1995) explains that discourse and institutions often function together to maintain social dominance. In *The Jungle*, political and economic institutions collaborate to preserve capitalist interests at the expense of the working class.

Criticism of capitalism is further reinforced through narrative realism and emotional discourse. Sinclair uses vivid descriptions of suffering, death, starvation, and despair to elicit an emotional response from readers. The deaths of Ona and Antanas symbolize the devastating impact of capitalist oppression on family life and human existence. Through this tragedy, the novel reveals the human cost of industrial capitalism.

From a discourse analysis perspective, the novel critiques capitalism by exposing the unequal power dynamics between workers and factory owners. The language used by business owners and institutions often reflects dominance and authority, while the voices of workers are marginalized. This finding supports Renkema (2004) view that discourse reproduces social inequality and ideological control. The capitalist discourse in this novel normalizes exploitation and presents workers as powerless subjects in industrial society.

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Furthermore, the novel critiques capitalism through the transformation of Jurgis's consciousness. Initially, he believed in individual enterprise and capitalist opportunity. However, after experiencing repeated exploitation and injustice, he realized that the problem lies in the system itself. His involvement in the socialist movement ultimately represents Sinclair's ideological resistance to capitalism. Socialism is presented as an alternative that values solidarity, equality, and workers' rights. This transformation reflects Gee (2011) theory, which states that language and discourse shape social identity and ideological understanding. Through socialist discourse, Jurgis gains class consciousness and begins to understand the structural roots of oppression. Therefore, the novel serves not only as a critique of capitalism but also as a call for collective resistance and social reform.

This finding also supports previous research conducted by Haque & Nur (2023), who found that *The Jungle* portrays workers as ideological subjects resisting systemic exploitation. Similarly, Lee (2020) argues that Sinclair utilizes narrative language as a tool for social change. However, this study specifically demonstrates how the critique of capitalism is constructed through discursive practices, narrative organization, and psycholinguistic transformations.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, this study finds that Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* systematically critiques capitalism through its narrative structure, discourse, characterization, and depiction of social reality. The novel portrays capitalism as an exploitative system that produces labor oppression, poverty, inequality, alienation, and the dehumanization of workers, as reflected in the experiences of Jurgis Rudkus and his family. Through realistic descriptions and ideological discourse, Sinclair reveals how capitalist power shapes social relations and normalizes injustice while presenting socialism as a form of resistance and collective awareness. Therefore, *The Jungle* functions not only as a literary work but also as a powerful social critique that remains relevant to discussions of labor rights and social inequality. Based on these findings, future researchers are encouraged to explore the novel using alternative theoretical perspectives or comparative approaches, while students and readers should develop a more critical understanding of literature as a reflection of social reality and ideological struggle.

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