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# SOCIAL CLASS INEOUALITY DEPICTED IN CHILDREN PICTURE BOOK THE RICH MAN AND THE MONKEY BY IDRIES SHAH: GENETIC STRUCTURALISM LUCIEN GOLDMANN'S PERSPECTIVE

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Structucturalism, Lucien Goldmann, Class Inequality, Social Class, Worldview, Idries Shah, Picture Book, Literature

**ABSTRACT** This study uses genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's theory as a sociological framework. It aims to understand how class inequality is symbolically depicted through the characters' behavior and how shifting material conditions affect ideological transformation. Using a qualitative research design, this study conducted a careful textual analysis of the narrative, identifying ideological contradictions through a class-based worldview. This results show that the rich man and the monkey serve as symbolic representations of the oppressed class and the elite class, respectively. The monkey's initial plea highlights the structural exclusion of the lower class, while the rich man's moral crisis reflects contradictions in bourgeois consciousness. However, upon receiving the rich man's wealth, the monkey quickly adopts the attitudes and behaviors of the former elite, showing that material change alone does not guarantee ideological progress. The narrative reveals a cyclical pattern in which oppression is reproduced under new identities, confirming that without a transformation in collective consciousness, instead of erasing inequality, class mobility entrenches the existing hierarchical system. This study concludes that The Rich Man and The Monkey is more than a moral tale; it is a critical reflection on the persistence of class ideology.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of human expression manifested in written and spoken works, drawing from opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings. It may present imaginative worlds or realistic depictions, crafted aesthetically through language (Mayasari et al., 2023). Children's literature, in particular, serves not only to entertain but also to provide moral, philosophical, and social insights (Hidayat et al., 2023). Idries Shah, a prominent Sufi storyteller, often uses allegory to transmit lessons about human behavior, social values, and power dynamics. His work The Rich Man and the Monkey that comes in an accessible to younger readers operates simultaneously as a picture book and a layered commentary on class relations. In the Sufi tradition, allegories such as this are not mere amusements, they are vehicles for moral reflection, encouraging the audience to uncover hidden truths beneath simple narratives (Dea & Hadi, 2024).

In the story, a wealthy man, driven by guilt, gives away all his possessions to a poor monkey. The monkey, suddenly elevated to wealth, quickly abandons humility, adopts the



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mannerisms of the elite, and refuses to acknowledge the man now destitute. This transformation from gratitude to arrogance crystallizes the fragility of identity in shifting social positions. Such dynamics can be analyzed using Lucien Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism, which links the structure of the work to the collective consciousness and material conditions of society (Riana, 2021). From this perspective, the monkey's ideological shift reflects: material change alone does not ensure ideological progress, and the newly empowered can replicate the very hierarchies they once endured.

Goldmann's theory underscores how social class shapes worldview and ethical attitudes through shared historical and cultural experience (Syam, 2016). In *The Rich Man and the Monkey*, the rich man's impulsive generosity lacking structural awareness illustrates what Husni and Rozi (2022) describe, drawing from Paulo Freire, as "false generosity": an act that soothes the benefactor's conscience without dismantling the conditions of oppression. This contradiction aligns with Goldmann's critique of bourgeois moral identity.

There is limited analysis of how Sufi-inflected children's narratives function as both moral allegories and class critiques. This study addresses that gap by examining how *The Rich Man and the Monkey* encodes tensions between material change and ideological continuity. By applying genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's, this research aims to reveal how allegorical storytelling can illuminate the persistence of social inequality, the performative nature of power, and the instability of moral identity within a class-based society.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's theory has a close relationship with sociology, because basically this approach combines the analysis of literary works with the social structure (Riana, 2021). This theory invites readers and researchers to explore how literary works function as a reflection of collective consciousness and class-based worldviews (Hasibuan, 2025). In Idries Shah's *The Rich Man and the Monkey*, the genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's approach allows readers to analyze the representation of class struggle and ideological transformation through symbolic characters and narrative structure. Various literary studies have been conducted using Lucien Goldmann's sociological approach.

## **Previous Research**

Several previous studies have successfully applied genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's to analyze literary works in various cultural and thematic contexts, establishing a strong foundation for understanding how worldviews and class consciousness are embedded in narrative structures. Although the objects and genres studied vary, these works share a methodological commitment to examining the relationship between literary form and the collective ideology of a social group.

Khormai et al., (2022) focused on the novel *Secrets of the Genie Valley* by Ebrahim Golestan, using Goldmann's framework to explore how the protagonist represented the intellectual class in post-revolution Iran. Their study also has a strong contextual basis, but still leaves the question: to what extent symbolic or allegorical elements form the ideological picture and that is an important part of this study.

In a different cultural and thematic context, , Hidayah et al., (2023) analyzed *El* by Luluk HF to uncover how its characters reflect the collective suffering and ethical dilemmas of



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marginalized groups. By applying Goldmann's theory beyond explicit class analysis, they demonstrated its versatility in addressing moral consciousness and social oppression. However, their focus on present-day realism, the density of symbols in the form of allegories, such as the story of *The Rich Man and The Monkey*, has not been widely discussed.

Meanwhile, (Ghalavandi & Hajipoor, 2023) applied Goldmann's approach to the Iranian short story *Siyasonbo*, using it to critique class-based domination and highlight symbolic acts of resistance. Their work is notable for showing how concise narratives can still embody complex ideological tensions a finding directly relevant to this study, which also deals with a short, allegorical text. However, their analysis does not address how genre and intended audience influence ideological interpretation, an important consideration when analyzing a children's picture book rooted in sufi tradition.

Beyond these examples, scholars such as Rohman, (2025) have defined allegorical storytelling as a narrative technique that uses symbolic elements to convey deeper truths about life. In the context of this research, *The Rich Man and the Monkey* with its role reversals, moral irony, and symbolic character roles is well suited for genetic structuralism analysis.

Literary scholars increasingly apply Goldmann's framework to explore how texts function as repositories of class ideology (Walidin, 2022). For example, Hidayah et al., (2023) showed how *El* reflects class-based distortions of identity, while Fernando et al., (2018) linked shifts in worldview to changes in material conditions a dynamic also central to *The Rich Man and the Monkey*, where the monkey's moral transformation follows his economic rise. This aligns with Goldmann's view that worldviews are socially and historically shaped, not fixed.

#### Similarities and Differences with Previous Research

One clear similarity between this study and three previous works is the use of genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's as the main analytical framework. This approach views literary works not merely as products of individual imagination but as expressions of the collective consciousness of a social group, shaped by its material and historical conditions. Both this study and earlier ones employ the framework to examine how literature mirrors social structures and class dynamics that influence a society's worldview.

Key differences also emerge in the form of the texts analyzed. Both Khormai et al., (2022) and Hidayah et al., (2023) examined long novels, and Ghalavandi & Hajipoor, (2023) focused on modern Iranian short stories, while this research centers on a picture book with allegorical storytelling. In short, picture books use pictures and short texts, so it is necessary to understand the meaning of the pictures and symbols, because the message in this picture book can be aimed for children and adults. Long stories, on the other hand, are more text-heavy and wordy.

The second difference can be seen in the themes raised. *The Rich Man and the Monkey* addresses issues such as the illusion of justice, reproduction of oppression, and moral failure of the powerful, yet it does so indirectly through irony and allegory. Previous studies, in contrast, tended to foreground these themes explicitly, with direct references to poverty, political repression, and marginalization. This indirectness in Shah's work poses both a challenge and an opportunity for analysis: it demands closer reading to unearth ideological critique beneath a seemingly simple plot.



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Lastly, the cultural background also shows significant differences. This study examines a work rooted in Middle Eastern and Central Asian Sufi storytelling traditions, where allegory is central to moral instruction and philosophical reflection. The values embedded in this tradition offer a more universal and timeless moral scope. Meanwhile, the earlier studies focused on Indonesian and Iranian works with modern socio-political settings, which though rich in historical detail are more anchored in specific local contexts.

## **Research Purposes**

The main purpose of this study is to analyze how social class inequality is represented in Idries Shah's *The Rich Man and the Monkey*, as well as how social class shapes individual attitudes and behaviors, using genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's framework. The research aims to interpret the characters' behaviors, dialogues, and transformations as symbolic reflections of class-based consciousness. In doing so, it seeks to uncover the structural contradictions between the dominant and subordinate classes in the narrative, and to examine how these contradictions influence the ideological development of the characters.

In addition, this study aims to contribute to the broader application of Goldmann's theory by applying it to Sufism-inspired allegorical texts a literary form often overlooked in sociological literary criticism. While previous studies have predominantly applied genetic structuralism to realist novels or modern short stories, this research focuses on a symbolic picture book, demonstrating the flexibility of Goldmann's framework in analyzing diverse literary forms. Ultimately, this study shows that even in a seemingly simple children's story, one can find a sophisticated critique of class power, moral decay, and the reproduction of social ideologies.

After reviewing previous research, a gap becomes evident, although genetic structuralism has been widely applied to modern and realist works, little attention has been given to allegorical narratives in Sufi traditions, particularly those presented in a picture book format. By combining the cultural richness of Sufi moral instruction with Goldmann's analytical approach, this research aims to highlight how literature that appears simple on the surface can serve as a profound commentary on class mobility, the persistence of inequality, and the cyclical nature of power relations. This alignment of text and method underscores the significance of the present study in expanding the scope of sociological literary analysis.

#### 3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a structured process used to obtain, process, and interpret data in a systematic manner (Warmansyah, 2020), ensuring objectivity, validity, and accountability (Pugu et al., 2024).

#### **Research Method**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze how *The Rich Man and the Monkey* represents social class inequality and worldview transformation. A descriptive qualitative approach is suitable for unpacking symbolic and ideological meanings embedded in literary texts (Waruwu, 2024).

The application of genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's in this study follows a clear sequence:

#### 1. Text Understanding

Do repeated and careful reading of *The Rich Man and the Monkey* to gain a thorough understanding of the plot, characters, and symbolic elements.



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2. Identification of Collective Subject and Worldview

Determine the collective subject by analyzing which group the characters represents (e.g., dominant vs. subordinate class). Identify worldview indicators, such as moral values, social attitudes, and ideological positions expressed in dialogue, action, or narrative outcome.

- 3. Symbolic-Structural Mapping
  - Mapping symbolic elements (e.g., reversal of wealth, rich man-monkey role reversal) to broader social structures.
- 4. Coding and Thematic Analysis

Open coding is the initial stage in the qualitative data analysis process. Apply open coding to label data segments related to class inequality, moral transformation, and ideological conflict. Axial coding is a follow-up process after open coding. Use axial coding to connect these codes into broader thematic categories aligned with the two analytical dimensions:

- 1) Representation of class inequality.
- 2) Transformation of class-based behavior and ideology.
- 5. Interpretation within Goldmann's Framework
  Interpret thematic findings in light of Goldmann's view that literature reflects the
  structured worldview of a social group shaped by historical and material conditions.

#### **Data Collection**

The primary data is the text of Idries Shah's *The Rich Man and the Monkey* (Idries Shah Foundation). The story is treated as a literary artifact containing class contradictions and ideological tensions. Key narrative elements such as character roles, symbolic actions, and turning points (e.g., the monkey inheriting the rich man's wealth) are documented and coded following the steps above.

The secondary data comprises scholarly works applying Goldmann's theory in various contexts, which serve as comparative references during interpretation. For example, (Khormai et al., 2022) offers a model for identifying ideological conflict in character crises, while ((Ghalavandi & Hajipoor, 2023) demonstrates how symbolic acts convey resistance to class domination. These references guide the analytical lens but do not replace the primary thematic coding process.

The final dataset consisting of coded textual excerpts, symbolic-structural maps, and thematic categories forms the basis for interpreting how Shah's allegorical narrative reflects and critiques class-based worldviews.

# 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents data and findings obtained from the research process objectively and systematically through dialogue between characters. According to (Tang et al., 2025), dialogue in literary works is often the main medium to express class differences implicitly. In *The Rich Man and the Monkey*, the characters of the rich man and the monkey reflect the dichotomy between the dominant and subaltern classes. These results are presented in the form of narratives and tables with the purpose to show what has been found.

# 4.1 Representation of Class Inequality in Character Dialogue

The representation of social class inequality in *The Rich Man and the Monkey* is strikingly shown through the dialogue between the monkey and the rich man at the beginning of the story. The monkey's statement on (Shah, 2024), "*I, quite simply, have nothing et all*" is in stark contrast



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to the luxuries that rich men have, including "embroidered silk waistcoast," "majestic carrige," and "endless expanses of land." This initial moment serves as a symbolic point of tension that shows a deep material gap between the two characters. According to genetic sructuralism Lucien Goldmann's, such narrative tension arises from historical experience (Goldmann in Khormai et al., 2022). The monkey's speech is not just a complaint, but an articulation of class consciousness. He defines himself through the absence of material wealth and perceived injustice from an unequal distribution.

In this context, the role of the monkey is as a collective subject that voices complaints from the subaltern class. The list of privileges that are not owned such as property, transportation, savings, and jewelry confirms that poverty is not just a shortage, but also the result of a system that makes people have no access to opportunities and recognition in society. This story summarizes this complex socio-economic dynamic into a short but emotional exchange. The monkey did not ask for pity, instead he asserted that his condition was the result of injustice. The list of material wealth shortages by monkeys is not only a personal lament but an ideological declaration that reflects the collective condition of the oppressed group.

Table 1. Class Disparity Reflected in Dialogue

Character	Dialogue / Description	Symbolic Function
Monkey	"I, quite simply, have nothing at all." (Shah, 2024).	Articulates subaltern class grievance
		(Khormai et al., 2022)
Monkey	"I have no great mansion, no fine clothes, and no	Highlights class disparity (Khormai et
	delicious food, like you." (Shah, 2024)	al., 2022)

### 4.2 Worldview Transformation through Class Mobility

The most striking ideological development in *The Rich Man and the Monkey* is the transformation of the monkey's worldview after he gains wealth. The sudden shift from a humble figure and begging to be an arrogant and underestimated master reflects a key concept in Lucien Goldmann's theory: that the world view (*vision du monde*) is not something innate, but is formed by historical and material conditions (Syam, 2016). On (Shah, 2024), when the monkey after legally acquiring the wealth of a rich man, wears luxurious clothes and orders, "*Get out of my sight immediately!*", it no longer speaks as a symbol of the oppressed, but has taken an ideological position from the previous ruling class. This shows that class-based behavior and attitudes are not moral traits, but structural positions embedded in social systems (Goldmann in Nasrollahi et al., 2024). The change in monkey's attitude is not just irony; it reflects how access to power and capital can fundamentally change the consciousness of individuals and groups. (Sonolet, 2022) mentions that ideological transformation in literature often occurs through the inner experience of the character in response to the social structure.

Unlike the traditional story that gives a reward for humility and punishment for greed, Shah's story actually complicates those expectations. The monkey did not become a wise ruler or benefactor; instead, he quickly adopted elite traits. On (Shah, 2024), he put his feet on "a stack of precious books," a symbolic act that shows contempt, not only towards knowledge, but also towards symbols of subtlety and status that he once did not have. In Goldmann's terms, monkeys have internalized the ideology of the dominant class. Instead of transforming the system, he adapts to it. (Kamila et al., 2023), in their study of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, observed a similar



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phenomenon, in which figures from marginalized groups, after gaining power, either transform the social structure or strengthen it depending on their ideological development. There are no structural changes, only reallocation of resources, and with it, the form of oppression is reflected again.

**Table 2.** Worldview Transformation in the Monkey's Behavior

Character	Action / Dialogue	Ideological Shift
Monkey	"Get out of my sight immediately!"	From oppressed to oppressor mindset (Nasrollahi
	(Shah, 2024)	et al., 2024)
Monkey	Places feet on precious books (Shah,	Symbolic rejection of intellectual heritage (Kamila
	2024)	et al., 2023)

## 4.3 Moral Crisis and Ideological Contradictions in the Bourgeois Class

One of the most significant ideological dimensions in *The Rich Man and the Monkey* is the depiction of an internal moral crisis experienced by a rich man, which occurred after he heard a monkey's complaint. (Fischer, 2025) stated that the bourgeois class in literature is often described as experiencing a moral crisis when faced with the social reality they create. His reaction by bowing his head in shame, contemplating his wealth deeply, and finally giving up all his possessions is not only an individual act based on guilt, but also symbolizes a structural contradiction in the bourgeois class. According to Lucien Goldmann, members of the dominant class can experience the collapse of worldview when faced with the ethical implications of the privileges they enjoy, which then encourage irrational or compensatory behavior that fails to touch the systemic roots of inequality Goldmann in (Hidayah et al., 2023). The rich man's decision to give up his wealth was not born from revolutionary transformation or socio-political insight, but emerged from emotional impulse. He acted alone, without dialogue, without reform, and without awareness of the structural implications of the wealth he had. His gesture, although it seems generous, is an example of what Paulo Freire called "false generosity", an action that relieves the guilt of the privileged without changing the condition of the oppressed (Husni & Rozi, 2022).

On (Shah, 2024), this internal conflict is evident when the text describes the rich man's contemplation of the luxury around him: "his splendid house," "embroidered silk," "cavernous library," and "endless expanses of land." These items, which were previously a symbol of pride, suddenly turned into empty reminders of their alienation. He no longer feels pleasure not because those items have lost their material value, but because they all represent the social order whose morality he can no longer justify. This moment reflects what Goldmann calls a collapsing worldview, a dominant class faced with its own ideological boundaries (Andalas, 2022). However, the handover of the property is not accompanied by political awareness. The rich man did not question the structure the structure that allowed him to accumulate such a wealth, and he also did not try to create a fairer system. His actions are one-sided and blind to the consequences, so it is easy to reverse and be exploited, as shown by the monkey's behavior afterwards. The lack of collective consciousness or ideological clarity makes his sacrifices symbolically empty.



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**Table 3.** Depiction of Bourgeois Moral Crisis in the Rich Man

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Character	Action / Reflection	Ideological Implication		
Rich Man	"Lowered his head in shame" after recalling his	Bourgeois guilt and collapse of ethical		
	wealth (Shah, 2024)	identity (Hidayah et al., 2023)		
Rich Man	"Signed over all he had to the impoverished	False generosity; symbolic but non-political		
	monkey" (Shah, 2024)	act (Husni & Rozi, 2022)		
Rich Man	Sighs as he recalls his "splendid house" and	Detachment from material symbols		
	"cavernous library" (Shah, 2024)	(Fischer, 2025)		

## 4.4 Representation of Oppression and Failure of Structural Change

The final part of *The Rich Man and the Monkey* conveys one of the most touching messages in the entire narrative: the reversal of social roles does not necessarily produce justice or moral improvement. When the monkey, who now has wealth and status, says to the former rich man on (Shah, 2024), "Why should I lower myself by talking to an impoverished fool like you?", he shows that the redistribution of material alone is not enough to dismantle the system of oppression. This moment is resonates strongly with Lucien Goldmann's insight that structural transformation must be accompanied by ideological changes; otherwise, the dominance pattern will still persist, only changing faces (Goldmann in Kamila et al., 2023). The monkey's arrogant rejection reflects the elitist that he previously condemned. Now he occupies the same symbolic position as the previous oppressor, repeating the behavior, attitude, and view inherent in the bourgeois class.

On (Shah, 2024), the rapid absorption of bourgeois symbols by monkeys, "splendid hat," "golden buttons," and the neglect of intellectual value (places feet on precious books) are direct metaphors of the reproduction. External changes in material conditions are not accompanied by a corresponding shift in consciousness. Instead, monkeys adopt the aesthetics of power without living their ethical responsibilities. From Goldmann's perspective, this result is not an individual's moral failure, but a systemic result of unresolved class contradictions (Muhtarom, 2019). Without a new collective consciousness or a fresh social vision, the transfer of wealth becomes empty. This is a narrative echo of what Goldmann called ideological reproduction: the return of old values in the form of a new structure (Fansuri, 2017).

The monkey, which used to be a symbol of lack, is now a place for domination that reflects the power that he used to criticize. The monkey's behavior shows that the structure remains intact; only the leader character changes. According to (Jameson, 2021), repetition in narrative is a form of ideological structure that forms a false awareness of change.

**Table 4.** Repetition of Oppression and Failure of Structural Change in Dialogue

Character	Action / Dialogue	Structural Implication
Monkey	"Why should I lower myself by talking to an	Replication of class elitism; no
	impoverished fool like you?" (Shah, 2024)	ideological shift (Kamila et al., 2023)
Monkey	Adopts symbols of wealth (hat, buttons, books as	Absorption of bourgeois aesthetics
	footrest) (Shah, 2024)	(Kamila et al., 2023)
<b>Rich Man</b>	Silent and removed from the ending (Shah, 2024)	Collapse of old class without reform
		(Jameson, 2021)



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In conclusion, the story of *The Rich Man and The Monkey* does not offer a happy ending, nor a simple moral message. This functions as a satirical allegory that, through the lens of Goldmann's structuralism genetic Lucien Goldmann's, criticizes the illusion of change in the absence of structural consciousness. The repetition of class-based dominance confirms the main claim of this study: that true transformation in social relations requires not only the redistribution of wealth, but also needs a change in the way of view that underlies human behavior.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

An analysis of *The Rich Man and the Monkey* through the lens of genetic structuralism Lucien Goldmann's reveals that the story, although brief and allegorical, contains profound sociological implications regarding class inequality and ideological transformation. The narrative illustrates how material inequality shapes not only the external conditions of life, but also the internal perspective of individuals. The dialogue between the monkey and the rich man becomes a moment of ideological rift, revealing the tension between privilege and deprivation. However, the rich man's emotional response and the monkey's subsequent transformation show that a change in social roles without a change in collective consciousness can reproduce the same structures of domination. Instead of providing solutions, the story highlights the cyclic nature of oppression and the fragility of moral gestures that are not accompanied by systemic reform. The monkey's after gaining wealth shows how quickly ideologies can adapt to new material conditions. The former rich man's silence at the end of the story also symbolizes the failure of the dominant class to deal meaningfully with the contradictions. Ultimately, the story emphasizes that true social transformation requires not only economic redistribution, but also a collective shift in perspective. The story serves as a critique of superficial change, as well as a reminder of the persistent power of ideology in class-based societies.

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