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Alienation, Superstructure and Class Struggle: Explicating Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry* Series within the Ambit of Marxism through the Lens of Comedy

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Abstract**—***This paper undertakes a Marxist literary analysis of Francesca Simon's Horrid Henry series, with a specific focus on the short stories Horrid Henry Robs the Bank (2003), Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994) and Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997). It studies the construction of class struggle, alienation and superstructure through the lens of comedy. This is done by positioning Henry as the subaltern figure, whose humorous behavioural transgressions expose and are simultaneously contained by prevailing parental, i.e. capitalist state, ideologies. The study is structured around three comic modalities: farce, lexico-semantics and satirical characterisation. The farcical narrative foregrounds the grotesque inequalities embedded in the superstructure; lexical humour is deployed to represent resistance to conformity to bourgeois norms linguistically; authority figures, like parents, teachers, and even babysitters, are portrayed satirically to expose the arbitrariness of 'disciplinary' mechanisms (which mirror marginalisation and propaganda to maintain false consciousness) at the heart of the capitalist state's apparatus. The Horrid Henry series operates as a discursive site wherein the ideological tensions of capitalism are encoded, negotiated, and pedagogically transmitted through the comic form. Stories from three distinct quinquenniums have been selected for this study to explore the consistency in Simon's political messages across time. Ultimately, by situating Simon's series within broader debates on the political function of children's literature, this research underscores the genre's consequential role in constructing youth perspectives on class, power and justice.*

Keywords**—*Marxist literary theory, children's literature, class struggle, alienation, superstructure, capitalism, ideology, subversion, comedy, satire, Horrid Henry series***

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature has long been a site of ideological contestation, wherein narratives, ostensibly crafted for amusement, often serve as vehicles for transmitting prevalent cultural norms and political and economic ideologies. Seminal works such as *The Case of Peter Pan* (Rose, 1984) critique the ideological construction of childhood within literature, arguing that the adult authorial voice encodes political and cultural assumptions under the guise of innocence. Meanwhile, studies like *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (Nikolajeva, 2002) emphasise narrative structure and genre in shaping young readers' ideological orientation. So, children's literature narratives, while aimed at a juvenile audience, subtly encode political dynamics and ideological constructs.

The *Horrid Henry* series, first published in 1994, has sold over 21 million copies worldwide and has been translated into more than 25 languages, reflecting its significant global reach (Hachette UK). The animated television adaptation has enjoyed extensive international distribution, airing on prominent children's networks such as Nick Jr. in

the UK, ABC in Australia, and channels in India and South Africa, among others (Kidscreen, 2015). Additionally, the franchise expanded into film with *Horrid Henry: The Movie* (2011), which grossed approximately $10.1 million worldwide, demonstrating its commercial success beyond print media (Box Office Mojo). This widespread popularity and sustained presence across multiple media platforms reinforce *Horrid Henry*'s status as a major cross-border cultural fixture in children's entertainment, thereby underscoring the importance of critically analysing the ideological content embedded within the series. The public appeal of this series necessitates the study of its pedagogically political functions. The protagonist, Henry, embodies the Jungian archetype of the Rebel or the Outlaw (Jung, 1968), frequently engaging in acts of defiance against authority figures such as parents, teachers, and societal expectations. It operates under the literary framework of 'the carnivalesque', where dramatic subversion of social hierarchies is characterised by celebration and a sense of collective joy and chaos. Simon's linear narratives are most often seen to culminate in the restoration of order and the reaffirmation of societal norms, as Henry's parents and teachers crack down on the initiated rebellion.

Marxist literary theory views literature not as a passive reflection of social reality, but as an active agent in the production and reinforcement of ideological structures (Eagleton, 1976). Rooted in the writings of Karl Marx, this critical framework considers literature as part of the cultural superstructure that works to maintain the dominance of the ruling class by naturalising its worldview. Marxist criticism, therefore, interrogates how texts participate in the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies while also examining the potential for resistance, contradiction, and subversion within narrative forms. This mode of reading seeks to foreground the material conditions of textual production and reception, emphasising class struggle, alienation, and the commodification of human relations as central concerns. The application of Marxist literary theory to texts offers new insights into the intersection of literature and ideology. A Marxist analysis of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* was conducted, exploring how the novel reflects class distinctions and the ideological mechanisms that sustain social hierarchies (Khan, 2024). Similarly, a study with a broader scope examined the role of form in contemporary literary criticism, arguing that the study of formal structures in literature can reveal the ways in which capitalist ideologies shape and are reflected in literary forms (Nilges, 2024). Additionally, Raymond Williams's body of work was revisited with respect to Marxist literary criticism, highlighting the evolution of Marxist approaches to literature and their continued relevance in understanding the interplay between culture and class dynamics (Medovoi, 2024).

Humour, as an authorial choice, plays a pivotal role in the process of a Marxist deconstruction in the *Horrid Henry* series. Humour is a multifaceted phenomenon in literature that encompasses various forms of amusement and comic effect, serving as a social and psychological mechanism to both entertain and critique cultural norms, thereby revealing contradictions within societal structures (Critchley, 2002). In literature, humour is often understood through the lens of incongruity theory, which posits that humour arises from the perception of something incongruous, leading to a pleasurable cognitive shift (Morreall, 1987). So, humour crucially possesses a subversive potential, capable of challenging established norms and hierarchies (Bakhtin, 1984). However, it must be noted that humour can also serve to normalise and legitimise the status quo when co-opted by dominant ideologies. Humour manifests in diverse forms, such as irony, which entails saying the opposite of what one means to highlight absurdity or critique (Booth, 1974); farce, a comedic style characterised by exaggerated situations and physical humour often used to expose irrationality (Dentith, 2000); wordplay, which relies on the manipulation of language, especially lexico-semantic ambiguities, to produce comic effect (Chiaro, 1992); satire, which ridicules vice, folly, or power structures through wit and exaggeration (Hutcheon, 1994); and parody, a mimetic form that imitates a particular genre, author, or text to critique its assumptions or conventions (Hutcheon, 1985). In Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry* series, while multiple comedic modes are present, farce, lexico-semantic wordplay, and satirical characterisation emerge as the most predominant forms, offering rich terrain for a Marxist reading.

A recent study shows how humour in children's fiction can both reinforce and challenge hegemonic masculinities, highlighting the complex interplay between humour and gender norms (Potter, 2024). Additionally, a systematic literature review on social media humour related to the COVID-19 pandemic, analyses themes, coping mechanisms, and linguistic devices, thereby shedding light on how humour functions in digital narratives (Alkaraki et al., 2024). Furthermore, another study investigates the impact of humorous conversational agents on learning experiences, offering insights into the pedagogical applications of humour in educational contexts (Ceha et al., 2021).

A few academic engagements with *Horrid Henry* have begun to unpack its cultural, psychological, and ideological significance within children's literature. A

quantitative study has revealed how fear and violence, often dismissed in juvenile fiction, manifest recurrently across the series in both physical and emotional forms, positioning these narratives as reflections of children's lived anxieties rather than mere comic exaggeration (Sakar, 2019). Most notably, a detailed linguistic study in the *Russian Linguistic Bulletin* foregrounds the pedagogical and psychological functions of food references (troponyms) within the series. This research argues that Francesca Simon's strategic use of gastronomic discourse not only reflects British food culture but also operates as an educational tool that conveys social norms, behavioural lessons, and cultural knowledge to young readers, simultaneously enriching their linguistic and cultural understanding through comic effect (Russian Linguistic Bulletin, 2020). A translation-focused analysis has highlighted the socio-political significance of the series, demonstrating how culture-specific references in the Turkish renditions necessitate strategic domestication or foreignisation, thereby exposing the ideological choices inherent in translating childhood itself (Tercan, 2022).

This study unfolds through a tripartite framework. The first section scrutinizes the farce at the base of the contradictory situations and interactions with secondary/minor characters that Henry finds himself in, exposing the exploitation of a capitalist and hegemonic order. The second section examines the intricacy of Simon's unassumingly labyrinthine lexico-semantics that subtly subvert predominant ideological narratives of alienation. The third section focuses on the construction of authority figures as objects of satire, revealing the paradoxical portrayal of power that oscillates between critique and complicity. Together, these interlinked dimensions of humour offer a comprehensive lens for unpacking the ideological ambivalence and class dynamics embedded in the *Horrid Henry* series.

In examining the *Horrid Henry* children's literature series through a Marxist lens, this paper aims to elucidate the ways in which humour functions as an instrument of class commentary. By analysing the nexus of humour and class dynamics in these texts, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of children's literature in the construction and negotiation of power, politics and justice. Through this analysis, the paper endeavours to illuminate the complex and often contradictory ways in which humour operates within the ideological backdrop of children's literature, acting as a crucial cultural influence on young, impressionable minds.

II. FARCE AS CLASS COMMENTARY

In the landscape of children's literature, farce, meaning deliberate exaggeration and ludicrous absurdity, functions as a potent narrative device to lay bare social norms, power relations, and ideological constructs (Palmer, 1994). Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry* series, crucially comprising of *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank (2003)*, *Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994) and Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997),* deploys farce not simply for comedic relief but as a mechanism for interrogating the tenuousness of adult authority and disciplinary practices, revealing the contradictions inherent in hegemonic family and societal systems and orders.

In *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank (2003)*, Simon pushes the farcical envelope by framing a child's bank robbery as an absurd critique of economic authority. Henry's "master plan" to "steal all the money from Dad's piggy bank" (Simon, 2003) parodies mature narratives of criminality as a response to the capitalist order of accumulation of resources as 'private property' (Locke, 1689). The absurdity here is underscored by the fact that in a family, wealth is shared as a 'common property resource', meaning that he clearly has a right over his father's savings. This exaggerates a familiar domestic and jejune object, the 'piggy bank', into not only an instrument of but also a site of claiming transgressive agency. The farce is heightened when Henry's disguises, such as pointlessly donning "a fake moustache and dark glasses" (Simon, 2003), fail spectacularly, drawing attention to the performative aspects of the roles of different classes in a hierarchical society. This suggests the rigidity of the system that Henry, and the working class, find themselves in, but fail to break free from. The farce employs structural repetition and thematic failure to underscore the limits of subversion (Neale, 1993), ultimately reinstating hegemonic control even as it appears to contest it. Furthermore, the reactions of secondary characters, here Henry's exasperated parents, who "catch him red-handed but can't help laughing" (Simon, 2003), illustrate cryptic nuance in state and bourgeois responses to protest, blending condemnation with a conceited form of amusement. For young readers, this oscillation produces a space where rebellion is both exciting and contained, encouraging reflection on the boundaries between protest and social order. Henry's ludicrous heist plan, including "waving a toy gun and shouting 'Give me all the sweets and money!'" (Simon, 2003), enacts Guy Debord's concept of the 'society of the spectacle' (Debord, 1967). The farcical performance parodies capitalist spectacle by trivialising the drama of robbery into child's play, exposing the deceitful, illusory and thus contemptible nature of capitalist power. The reader's likely laughter here

also functions as a subtle recognition of the infantilisation of workers inherent in consumer culture and the often eventual commodification of rebellion. Henry's antics, such as "dressing up in a silly mask and issuing ridiculous demands" (Simon, 2003), invoke Eric Havelock's interpretation of the Trickster archetype as a figure who challenges social order through ludic playfulness (Havelock, 1971). Henry's role-playing creates a liminal space where legal and moral boundaries are temporarily suspended, producing comic relief and allowing readers to vicariously experience transgression without real-world consequences. This dynamic simultaneously entertains and reinscribes social norms by ensuring that 'chaos' is controlled and ultimately resolved.

In *Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994)*, Simon constructs a farcical sequence grounded in the chaotic disintegration of the quintessential middle-class family Christmas celebration. Henry's relentless pranks disrupt the "hallowed" domestic rituals that embody bourgeois stability, such as when he "sneaked downstairs and tipped the glass of orange juice over Mum's laptop" (Simon, 1994). This act of disproportionate destruction, seemingly trivial yet symbolically loaded, foregrounds Henry's rejection of adult-imposed order. This underscores how the industrialised state (represented here by 'Mum's laptop') has the blood of the workers (red as the colour closest to that of 'orange juice') tainting its hands. Moreover, Henry's escalation from mere sabotage to full-scale "snowball wars" inside the house, resulting in a "mountain of smashed ornaments and soggy wrapping paper" (Simon, 1994), employs farce's signature hyperbole to expose the fragility of domestic control. These absurd scenarios evoke a carnival of disorder where normative Christmas conventions are inverted. The conception of literary farce, here, is as a theatre of excess and chaotic eruption that dismantles social stability. For the child reader, the exaggerated mayhem engenders not only amusement but also a rare, vicarious sense of empowerment, subtly destabilising adult authority through laughter while simultaneously highlighting the performativity of order. Another important dimension here is the religious significance of Christmas traditions, the disruption of which indicates the underpinnings of the ideas of religion as the 'opium' (Marx, 1848) of the oppressed masses. Henry's farcical disruption of Christmas traditions vividly manifests when he deliberately sabotages the Christmas tree by "shaking it until all the baubles fell off" (Simon, 1994). His hyperbolic activity invokes the notion of farce as mimicry (Bhabha, 1984): Henry mimics adult festive behaviours only to distort them comically, highlighting the ambivalence of rebellion that both mocks (through criticism) and remodels (through a show of and claim on power) the authority it contests. The effect on the reader is double-edged: laughter arises from the absurdity, but it also prompts reflection on the rigidity of cultural rituals and the superficial and consumerist performativity of holiday cheer, an element of the superstructure. Henry's antics, such as "hiding the Christmas pudding in the dog's bed" (Simon, 1994), illustrate the deployment of farce to conjure rippling familial tensions. The home here is a microcosm of society. However, drawing on the theory of 'sublimation', Henry's exaggerated pranks serve as a socially permissible outlet for aggressive impulses within the family's structure (Freud, 1914). This grotesque humour both contains and redirects potential conflict, producing a cathartic effect on the reader who navigates between amusement and awareness of deeper power struggles.

Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997) similarly leverages farce through the depiction of the sitter's escalating ineptitude. The sitter's attempts to enforce discipline unravel into comic disaster, illustrated by moments such as her "slipping on the spilled juice and crashing into the Christmas tree" (Simon, 1997), a physical farce that externalizes the sitter's loss of control; this is an especially prominent theme, since having been installed by the parental or the state authority, the babysitter herself is a pawn of the capitalist system. Henry's resistance represents the liminality of the transition from the 'capitalism' to the 'socialism' stages in the theory of dialectic materialism (Marx, 1848). The sitter's disproportionate reactions, ranging from desperate yelling to overblown threats, contrast sharply with Henry's also impassive defiance, reflecting a clash between autonomy and surveillance. This dynamic also aligns with the analysis of farce as a mode that exposes state power's inherently corrupt nature, theatricality by highlighting the absurd gap between authority's intentions and its actual efficacy, signalling the anti-productive system of capitalism. Additionally, Henry's penchant for hyper rebellion is exemplified when he dubs the sitter "Scary Sitter" despite her meekness, amplifying the farce by juxtaposing the sitter's ineffectuality with Henry's grandiose perception of her, further undermining her authority in the eyes of the child reader (Simon, 1997). The cumulative effect for readers is a complex negotiation of empathy and amusement, wherein the sitter's failures elicit humour but also foreground the instability of capitalist power structures when faced with resistance rooted in the idea of justice. Henry's creation of absurd traps like "glueing marbles on the stairs to make the sitter slip" (Simon, 1997) enacts the theory of the abject (Kristeva, 1982). The grotesque physicality of these antics positions Henry's childish resistance as a bodily revolt

against bourgeois state control and capitalist oppression, evoking disgust and humour simultaneously. This embodied farce unsettles any assumed capitalist complicity by literally destabilising the sitter's physical presence, inviting readers to viscerally engage with the limits and possibilities of agency under authoritative and unfair regimes. Henry's hyperbolic misrepresentations of the sitter's 'scariness', for example, calling her a "monster with three heads" (Simon, 1997), function as a deconstruction of narratives (Derrida, 1967): the farcical exaggeration subverts adult or privileged-class dominated discourses by exposing their constructedness and instability. The allusion to the Cerberus in Greek mythology also evokes the themes of power and control being presented in a contradictory-to-the-ideal setting of misuse or abuse of the same. This invites readers to critically question the legitimacy of adult-imposed meanings and fear, highlighting humour's potential as a tool for ideological resistance and reinterpretation.

III. LEXICO-SEMANTICS AS SUBVERSION

In the discursive terrain of children's literature, textual humour and lexical play operate not merely as stylistic embellishments but as ideological tools that shape readers' perception, narrative alignment, and symbolic power (Nikolajeva, 2005). Within the *Horrid Henry* series, language becomes a subversive force: a space where authorial choices work in concert to both destabilise and reproduce dominant cultural codes. Francesca Simon's prose has utterances and rhetorics that encode dichotomic tensions between authority and resistance, politeness and insubordination, normativity and deviance. Across *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank (2003), Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994)* and *Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997),* lexical strategies not only amplify comic effect but also dramatise the ideological contradictions within domestic and capitalist regimes. Simon's strategic deployment of inventive neologisms, paradoxes or ironic epithets, and playful invective enacts a rupture in hierarchies, foregrounding the multiplicity of voices and resisting monologic, elitist construction of meaning; this brings forth the classic theme of 'language as power' (Whorf, 1956).

Simon's lexical subversion in *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank* (2003) operates as a destabilising force against dominant linguistic and ideological norms. One of the many prominent neologisms, "sneak attacker" (Simon, 2003), combines two typically separate concepts, rupturing conventional syntax and semantics. This linguistic fusion exemplifies the notion of 'différance' (Derrida, 1976), revealing language's instability and the impossibility of fixed meaning: here, Henry's playful invention unsettles political discourse by blending 'sneaking' (childish stealth) with 'attacker' (criminal violence), thus blurring moral categories. This underscores the assassination of the common worker's character by associating him with guilt when any opposition to the capitalist system of structural violence in terms of material distribution is shown. The portmanteau "snatchery" (Simon, 2003) merges childish phonetics with the criminal 'snatch', parodying capitalist and legal institutions by trivialising the notion of theft, which aligns with the conception of political discourse as a site for contesting power through language (Foucault, 1972). This reverts the blame assigned to the oppressed back to the oppressor classes, creating a sense of subtle satisfaction. By infantilising criminal acts, Henry's language mocks adults or the ruling state, undermining the gravity associated with capitalist law enforcement: subversion of authority at its peak. The playful insult "trouble duos" (Simon, 2003) reclaims systematically imposed negativity, as hierarchical power relations invert through grotesque humour (Bakhtin, 1984). Henry's light-hearted embrace of 'trouble' transforms condemnation into a badge of identity, which destabilises the legitimacy and perception of fairness of the capitalist state, which has withheld wealth through the institution of the (piggy) bank. The nonsense term "fartlek" (Simon, 2003), originally an athletic term, is appropriated here as a linguistic joke, creating a cross-field semantic space that defies fixed interpretation; this is view of cultural hegemony being a dynamic site of negotiation where subordinate groups can resist through creative language use (Gramsci, 1971). Henry's self-referential tricolonic alliteration "bank bandit brat" (Simon, 2003) conjoins the criminal 'bandit' with the diminutive 'brat,' complicating moral binaries by conflating delinquency with childhood identity. This linguistic juxtaposition highlights deviance is socially constructed and embedded within language as defiance of the political and economic establishment, echoing the analyses of the socio-economic production of 'criminal' identities through discourse (Hall et al., 1978). Lastly, the mock-legal/jargon-referencing phrase "charge sheet challenge" (Simon, 2003) mimics judicial formalism, ironically exposing how language naturalises authority, consistent with the critique of ideological (in this context, capitalist) language games that legitimise elite power by cloaking it in bureaucratic rhetoric (Eagleton, 1991). This is also a commentary on the alienation of the masses by the system, since the diminishing accessibility of language is an indication of the system deviating from the principles of 'agency theory' (Spence, et al., 1976).

In *Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994)*, Simon's lexical play performs a dual function: it both participates in and

critiques consumerism-based cultural rituals through witty use of language. Henry's blunt exclamation, "Bah, humbug to your Christmas cheer!" (Simon, 1994), is an irreverent childish voice: mimicry, which simultaneously repeats and unsettles dominant cultural narratives (Bhabha, 1994). This phrase mocks the sanctity of festive cheer, highlighting the performative nature of cultural rituals and suggesting the fragility of religion under critical scrutiny, especially from the perspective of the historically alienated classes. The alliterative phrase "Tinsel Trouble" (Simon, 1994) uses playful sound repetition to disrupt the sanitised domestic order of Christmas. The semantic subversion inherent in the contrasting coupling of 'tinsel' (symbolising festivity) with 'trouble' foregrounds the excess and disorder beneath bourgeois stability, suggesting the power and weightage of language as a disruptive eruption that exposes social tensions. While the repetition of the 't-sound', similar to that of 'bells' ringing, could be a parody of Christmas conventions, it also serves as an alarm to those in political power and with the accumulated wealth of society to start counting their days. Henry's label "Rudolph's Reject" (Simon, 1994) displaces the heroic cultural iconography of Rudolph, alluding to and turning a symbol of festive rejoicement and conformity into one of marginalisation. This is a crucial moment whereby Henry is interrogating how cultural symbols reinforce the social ideological superstructure. Additionally, the fact that Rudolph and Santa are only mental constructs to keep children in discipline not only underscores the conservative role of religion in society but also shows how mass psychology is weaponised to be used against the masses themselves. Similarly, the phraseology of "Grinchy Grumble" (Simon, 1994) appropriates the familiar anti-Christmas figure to articulate resistance against adult or state-imposed conformity, illustrating that lexical diminishment can serve as an act of rebellion within the language of rituals. Henry's ironic "Jolly Jumper" (Simon, 1994) inverts traditional festive warmth, exposing the artificiality of enforced cheer and showing ideological interpellation through language, whereby subjects are 'hailed' into conformity through a reductionist nominalism (Althusser, 1971). Finally, the iconic phrase "Silent Night Silliness" (Simon, 1994) undermines the solemnity of Christmas rituals by drawing attention to their performative and fragile nature, echoing (Butler, 1990) theories on performativity and social construction of norms. By alluding to the classic Christmas Carol 'Silent Night', Henry associates tradition with complicity and festivity with obedience. The phonetic recurrence of the 's'-sound in this phrase connotes, in turn, a serpentine, and thus a sly, evil-intentioned persona that Henry is characterised with.

Simon's strategic use of epithets in *Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997)* exemplifies linguistic defiance against entities wielding unfair political and economic power. Also mentioned in the previous sub-section, the iconic and titular "Scary Sitter" (Simon, 1997) ironically acknowledges the sitter's disciplinary function while simultaneously mocking it: this illustrates heteroglossia, where conflicting voices destabilise official discourse and reveal power's performativity (Bakhtin, 1981). The grotesque nickname "Moo-Moo Monster" (Simon, 1997) infantilises the sitter, rendering her simultaneously ridiculous and menacing, another manifestation of the 'abject' (Kristeva, 1982), where comic disgust serves as a site of resistance against dominant authority. This title also dehumanises the babysitter, implying that by deviating from the standard of justice by complying with the oppressive state (Henry's parents), she has lost the humanity that was inherent in her otherwise. The diminutive "Fussy Fuss" (Simon, 1997) trivialises the sitter's efforts at control, reflecting a similar ambivalence in interpellation (Althusser, 1971). However, this also brings forth the interpretation of the sitter as 'fussy', commenting on the rigidity of the alienating superstructure, minimally prone to any alterations. The derisive "Wobbly Wimp" (Simon, 1997) further diminishes adult authority by associating it with weakness, while the oxymoron "Silent Screamer" (Simon, 1997) destabilises disciplinary discourse through paradox: deconstruction of binary oppositions (Derrida, 1967).

IV. SATIRICAL CHARACTERISATION OF AUTHORITY

The satirical characterisation of authority figures operates as a fundamental ideological critique that undermines adult hegemony through caricature and comedic deflation in Simon's *Horrid Henry* series. These portrayals expose the performativity and inherent contradictions of adult and elitist, accumulation-based power structures, delegitimizing them in the process. Through hyperbolic visual depictions and linguistically exaggerated dialogue, authority figures such as parents, teachers, and babysitters become sites of ridicule that reflect broader class anxieties and the instability of disciplinary regimes (Foucault, 1977). This section critically analyses five such textual and visual instances from each of Simon's short stories, *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank (2003), Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994),* and *Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997),* elucidating how Simon's satire enacts a subversive commentary on authority within the socio-cultural matrix of children's literature.

In Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank (2003)*, the depiction of adult authority figures is rendered satirical through an interplay of visuals and linguistic dialogue, exposing the contradictions and fragilities of hegemonic power. For instance, the portrayal of Henry's father, with his disproportionately large nose and heavily furrowed brow (Simon, 2003), suggests visually grotesque paternal authority, inviting a carnivalesque inversion reminiscent of Bakhtin's theory, where the body becomes a site for social critique. This disciplinarian characterisation mirrors legal structural rigidity of the modern state, where the interests of the privileged keep prevailing in a continuous, vicious cycle of 'power and profit', implicitly alluding to cultural conventions of a large nose representing egoism. The father's admonition, "Don't take the money, Henry!" (Simon, 2003), delivered in simple, almost already ineffectual language, underscores the erosion of adult command within the child's realm of resistance. This dynamic aligns with the reading of authority as inherently performative and vulnerable to parody (Žižek, 2008). Similarly, the teacher figure "Miss Perfect" is satirized both textually and visually; her obsessive "nagging about right and wrong" is portrayed by an illustration emphasizing her oversized spectacles and pointed finger (Simon, 2003), which functions as a visual metonym for institutional control and surveillance (Foucault, 1977). These gestures are classic or historically consistent, emphasising the traditional nature of liberal capitalism as the official economic ideology of the state. Further, this comical exaggeration serves to undermine even the pedagogical authority of the school (part of the superstructure) by emphasising its rigidity and detachment from the child's lived experience (recipe for alienation). The mother's characterisation in the same text further reinforces the satirical dismantling of domestic power. The textual depiction of her "worried face turning red" is paired with a frenetic illustration featuring spiralling eyes and frazzled hair (Simon, 2003), which transforms maternal anxiety into a spectacle of excess that both parodies and critiques bourgeois family norms (Bourdieu, 1984). By rendering maternal concern visually chaotic and emotionally overwrought, Simon destabilises the idealised maternal figure, inviting readers to question normative domestic authority. Additionally, institutional power is mocked through the figure of "PC Plod," whose bumbling incompetence is illustrated with exaggeratedly large boots and a drooping hat (Simon, 2003). The textual remark that "He couldn't even catch a cold, let alone a thief" punctuates the satirical tone, positioning state authority as symbolically impotent. Finally, the bank manager's bombastic speech, "We run a tight ship here!" is visually contradicted by a puffed-chested, monocle-wearing caricature (Simon, 2003), satirizing capitalist disciplinary rhetoric by emphasizing its theatricality and inflated self-importance (Harvey, 2005); the role of propaganda in public indoctrination and the cunning mechanisms of capitalist institutions are parodied through synecdochic characterisation here.

Horrid Henry's Christmas (1994) employs satire to dismantle adult figures through the interplay of text and image, foregrounding its subversion of authority in the commentary on the nature of festive authority. The father's repeated failures at festive tasks, such as struggling with tangled Christmas lights depicted in a chaotic illustration with smoking wires and a bewildered expression (Simon, 1994), subvert the patriarchal ideal of competence. This visual, of his struggle in particular, echoes the conceptualisation of farce as a mode that exposes social disarray through comedic excess. The symbolism of tangled lights represents unfiltered historical narratives and intricate hegemonic structures that 'entangle' the common man in a web of obligations with no rights. The mother's domineering presence is likewise caricatured through the textual refrain of "endless reminders about manners" and an image of her wagging finger with exaggeratedly sharp eyes (Simon, 1994). The perpetually infinite potential, as conveyed here, not only shows the alienating curse of the superstructure on lower classes of society, but also the omnipotent nature of the state, which holds sovereign rights it employs in its defence of elites who 'own' the means of production. Importantly, this hyperbolic depiction functions as a critique of bourgeois maternal authoritarianism and its function within disciplinary regimes like Henry's middle-class home or in the broader society itself (Foucault, 1977). The figure of Santa Claus is inverted into a parodic authority through a gruff voice and scowling face depicted visually with crossed arms (Simon, 1994), satirizing the commercialization and ideological manufacture of festive mythologies (Eco, 1986). Santa Claus is exposed as an icon of the capitalist imaginative apparatus, which seeks to internalise the profit-based moral compass in the minds of the masses. The schoolteacher, dubbed "Miss Grumble," is similarly rendered a strict disciplinarian with pursed lips and stern eyes (Simon, 1994), a visual and textual representation that critiques educational authority by foregrounding the critique's rigidity and humour. The fact that an educational institution has transformed into a propaganda and indoctrination instrument is a testimony to the pro-worker critique of the modern capitalist state.

In *Horrid Henry and the Scary Sitter (1997)*, Simon continues to satirise authority by exposing its contradictions and superficial performativity through vivid textual descriptions and striking illustrations. The

babysitter's exaggerated overreactions, "screaming and yelling at the slightest mischief", are visually captured in an illustration of bulging eyes and flailing arms (Simon, 1997), parodying state attempts at controlling protest and countering subversive acts, as hysterical and ultimately ineffective. This underscores the inevitability of an eventual socialist state or 'stage' (Marx, 1848); this depiction also exposes performative failure within authority discourses (Butler, 1997). The father's diminished presence is marked textually by "Dad's voice barely heard over the chaos" and visually by a small, distant figure overshadowed by Henry's antics (Simon, 1997). By portraying Henry in a size larger than that of his father, the author is signaling a satirical inversion of paternal or political authority and reflecting anxieties over shifting family or structural power dynamics (Connell, 2005); the script has been flipped and now the earlier ruling authority has been rendered the status of an insignificant actor. Maternal nagging is caricatured both textually ("Mum's endless worrying") and visually through exaggerated frown lines and speech bubbles filled with repetitive warnings (Simon, 1997), satirizing maternal surveillance as simultaneously oppressive and comic (Althusser, 1971): referring to the concept of 'division of labour' (Smith, 1776) under capitalism, a maternal authority is parodied to imply that her 'rightful sphere' is not power and control, but of servitude itself. However, a softer portrayal of Henry's mother here as 'worried' evokes an almost sympathetic reaction within the readership; this emotive effect can be interpreted as a form of false consciousness propaganda, prompting sympathy for the ruling class. Lastly, the 'nosy neighbour' trope is ridiculed via a textual description of "busybody neighbour always spying" paired with an illustration of the supposed but unidentified 'neighbour' peeking through curtains with binoculars (Simon, 1997). This caricature reflects the constant surveillance culture (Foucault, 1977), emphasising the absurdity of communal authoritarianism through the satirical characterisation of the neighbour as a state ministry in a synecdochic sense. The success of this authority's surveillance lies in its stealth and unassuming nature, which is immediately subverted the moment Henry's narrative in the book simply recognises the neighbour's presence. Thus, the mere portrayal of authority-representative characters in a narrative that centralises Horrid Henry is itself an implicit reclamation of every oppressed classes' rights.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that beneath the laughter and pranks in the *Horrid Henry* series lies a deeper terrain where ideological contestation unfolds. The interplay of farce, lexical rebellion, and satirical authority does more than momentarily undermine adult control: it reveals children's literature as a stealthy battleground of power, hegemony, and identity formation.

The farce unfolds in a cycle of exaggerated absurdity, from the sitter's clumsy failures in *Horrid Henry and The Scary* Sitter, to Henry's chaotic Christmas, or the failed bank robbery in *Horrid Henry Robs the Bank.* This pattern reflects farce's typical suspension and eventual restoration of social order (Critchley, 2002), highlighting the farcical mode of questioning and containing power. Simon's inventive language further unsettles dominant narratives by transforming words into tools of resistance, echoing the idea of cultural hegemony as a contested field where power and agency clash (Gramsci, 1971). Finally, through ironic text and exaggerated illustrations, Simon's satire exposes adults as fallible and often ridiculous figures, creating space for readers to question authority with humour and insight.

In an age increasingly shaped by surveillance, performative obedience, and shrinking spaces for genuine dissent, even among the youngest, literature aimed at children must be reappraised not simply as pedagogical or entertaining but as ideologically charged terrain. The humorous subversions in Simon's work offer a powerful pedagogical model: one that doesn't dictate rebellion, but makes resistance legible, even desirable, through joy and satire. This opens a crucial avenue for educators, writers, and policymakers to engage young minds in critical thinking about justice, class, and authority, not through moralistic instruction, but through the seductive, disarming logic of comedy.

Future applications of this research lie in both theory and praxis: in reassessing reading curricula through a Marxist lens, in crafting new children's literature that embraces political ambivalence, or in empowering children to recognise the encoded politics of stories they consume normally. It also invites scholars to re-evaluate what constitutes "resistance" in literature, especially when disguised as play, nonsense, or laughter. If laughter can expose the grotesque scaffolding of the superstructure, then perhaps it is time we stop treating humour in children's literature as apolitical sugar-coating. It is, instead, a radical tool: a masked language of critique that children understand before they even know the word ideology. In this light, Horrid Henry is not merely horrid; he is revolutionary. And that revolution begins with a joke.

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