



A Marxist Analysis of Social Inequality in the Netflix Series *Arcane* Season 2

Dilla Loanda Putri Gaotami¹, Putri Rindu Kinasih^{2*}

^{1,2} Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Bunda Mulia, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: l1779@lecturer.ubm.ac.id

Abstract. This study examines the representation of social inequality and class dynamics in the second season of the Netflix animated series *Arcane: League of Legends*. While previous research has focused on semiotic signs or isolated character dynamics in Season 1, this study explores how structural class conflict operates across the narrative climax of Season 2. Employing a qualitative textual analysis grounded in Karl Marx's critical framework, the research analyzes specific visual, spatial, and dialogic data across all nine episodes (370 minutes). The findings reveal that the bourgeoisie is represented not only by Piltover's governing elite, who monopolize technological production (Hextech) and institutional power, but also by Zaun's Chem-Barons, who function as an extralegal local bourgeoisie exploiting forced child labor. Conversely, the proletariat is embodied by Zaun's working class, whose material deprivation, addiction, and lack of political autonomy reflect structural alienation. Furthermore, the socio-spatial disparity between Piltover's refined infrastructure and Zaun's environmental degradation illustrates how systemic inequality offloads material risks onto marginalized populations. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that *Arcane* Season 2 presents social inequality not as a series of isolated misfortunes, but as an institutionalized system maintained through state apparatuses, ideological dehumanization, and resource monopoly.

Keywords: *Arcane*; Bourgeoisie; Class Conflict; Marxist Criticism; Social Inequality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a medium through which societies reflect upon, critique, and reinterpret social realities. Beyond storytelling, literary works engage with issues such as power, injustice, inequality, and human struggle, allowing readers and audiences to examine the conditions that shape individual lives and collective experiences. As Eagleton (2008) argues, literature plays a significant role in reflecting, critiquing, and shaping societal values by portraying human experiences and social realities. As society evolves, the scope of literature has expanded beyond written texts to include modern narrative forms such as film. Through visual storytelling, films function as contemporary literary expressions that present complex social issues, making film and literature distinct yet equally significant forms of art (Oza, 2020). Film is a popular form of artistic expression that delves into a variety of human issues and evokes unique emotional and cognitive experiences (Mangot & Murthy, 2017).

Arcane is an animated series produced by *Riot Games* and *Fortiche Productions*. It was first released on Netflix in 2021. Set in the *League of Legends* universe, the series explores the social and political tension between the privileged city of Piltover and the oppressed undercity of Zaun. As Christian Linke stated in an interview with *SciFi Vision*, the series is rooted in the tension between Piltover and Zaun, a divide that drives the story and highlights broader social inequality (Ruby, 2024). Although *Arcane* is a fantasy animated series, it is appropriate for the analysis of social inequality. Fantasy narratives often function as social allegories, allowing

complex social issues to be explored in heightened and symbolic forms (Morse, 2025). This focus on inequality is not incidental but intentionally embedded by the creators of the series. *Arcane* writer Amanda Overton has emphasized in an exclusive interview with Creative Screenwriting that the series was conceived as a story about two cities shaped by unequal systems, in which social environment, trauma, and access to power fundamentally influence people's lives and choices (Zacharias, 2025).

Due to its complex social and narrative elements, *Arcane* has attracted considerable scholarly attention as a site of critical analysis. Hakim and Chusna (2024) applied Althusserian Marxist theory and Marx's concept of commodity fetishism to show how the industrialist Silco maintains authority in Zaun by creating false consciousness, masking exploitation so citizens remain unaware of their class interests. Complementing this structural critique, Perdhana and Kusuma (2023) utilized Roland Barthes' semiotic model (denotation and connotation) to demonstrate how *Arcane* visually and narratively encodes social inequality—tracing disparities in education, housing, and economic resources, as well as the marginalization of Zaun as a form of symbolic violence.

However, these existing studies focus exclusively on the series' first season, leaving the escalated class conflicts, shifting political alliances, and ideological shifts in *Arcane* Season 2 entirely unexamined. Furthermore, neither study offers a comprehensive analysis of how structural class divisions between Piltover and Zaun operate beyond isolated characters or static visual symbols. A critical gap remains in examining how the dialectical relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat governs power apparatuses, material conditions, and character trajectories as the narrative reaches its climax in the second season. Thus, this study specifically examines the representation of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, as well as the mechanisms of social inequality in *Arcane* Season 2, through Karl Marx's theoretical framework.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Literature

Literature represents aspects of human life and social experiences. It reflects how individuals engage with conflicts, relationships, and broader societal structures through various forms of expression (Maku et al., 2022). Literature as a social document often encodes prevailing ideologies and historical conditions. Georg Lukács argues that literature plays an important role in depicting the totality of social reality, particularly within capitalist societies. From this perspective, literary works are not only artistic expressions but also fields of

ideological struggle that can both reflect dominant worldviews and present counter-narratives that challenge the status quo (Lukács, 1971, p. 153).

Literature and Film

Literature is traditionally associated with written texts; its narrative principles also extend to other forms of storytelling, including film and television. Film shares several characteristics with literary works, particularly in its use of narrative structure, character development, symbolism, and theme exploration. As a result, films can be analysed using similar critical approaches that are applied to literary texts. Cinema borrows heavily from literary traditions, incorporating narrative techniques such as plot construction, dialogue, and symbolic imagery (Stam, 2005). This relationship has contributed to the development of film studies as an interdisciplinary field that combines literary criticism with media and cultural studies. Films help portray human existence in ways that help audiences understand and interpret real-life conditions and societal issues (Kinasih, 2021).

Literary Criticism

Literary criticism provides the theoretical frameworks necessary to interpret and evaluate texts beyond their surface meanings, placing them within broader cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts (Abrams & Harpham, 2015; Wellek & Warren, 1949). Because cinema heavily adapts core literary devices—such as narrative structure, character arcs, and symbolism—film studies has developed as an interdisciplinary field that integrates literary criticism with media and cultural theory (Bordwell et al., 2023). Just as literature uses metaphor and setting to construct deeper meaning, cinema employs elements like cinematography, lighting, editing, and sound to encode ideological messages. When critically examined, these visual storytelling components reveal how a film engages with systemic societal issues, including power, identity, inequality, and resistance.

Marxist Theory

Marxist theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, is one of the most influential frameworks for examining class structures and power dynamics in society. In literary and cultural studies, Marxist criticism examines how texts reflect, reinforce, or challenge dominant ideologies within capitalist societies. Cultural products—including novels, films, and television series—are therefore not viewed as neutral artistic expressions but as works embedded within specific economic and ideological contexts. For instance, texts that glorify wealth, power, or individual success may reinforce capitalist values, whereas narratives that highlight exploitation or class conflict may challenge dominant social structures (Eagleton, 2008; Williams, 1977).

Bourgeoisie and Proletariat

Marxism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century as a social, economic, and political doctrine that critiques capitalist economic systems and examines the role of class struggle in shaping social and cultural life (Marx & Engels, 2002). Within capitalist societies, Marx identifies two main classes: the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labour to survive. Social inequality emerges because the ruling class controls the means of production—such as factories, resources, and capital—and exploits workers by extracting surplus value from their labour (Marx, 1849). Workers are therefore compelled to produce as much as possible while receiving minimal wages, creating a system that benefits the ruling class while marginalizing the working class.

Within this framework, capitalism generates exploitation, alienation, and systemic inequality. The bourgeoisie not only control economic production but also influence ideological institutions such as education, media, and literature, which help sustain their dominance. Through these institutions, the ruling class shapes public consciousness and often suppresses awareness of exploitation among workers.

Social Inequality

A key concept in Marxist theory is ideology, defined as a system of ideas and values that supports the interests of the ruling class while masking the realities of social inequality. Conflict arises not only from misunderstandings but also from differences in social power, access to resources, and values among groups within society (Isnaini et al., 2020). Literature and media frequently participate in this process by presenting existing social hierarchies as natural or inevitable. In such cases, individuals may internalize their social position and accept it as their fate. Marx describes this condition as false consciousness, in which members of the working class remain unaware of the structural forces that shape their oppression (Marx, 1867).

3. METHOD

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which allows for a systematic and in-depth examination of the Netflix animated series *Arcane*. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative research is most appropriate for investigating complex social or human phenomena in their natural settings, enabling researchers to interpret the meanings individuals or groups attach to experiences, conditions, or symbols. Furthermore, a qualitative approach is suitable for studies that rely on non-numerical data such as documents, photographs, videos, and other related media (Ayuretno & Kinasih, 2024). In this study,

qualitative analysis serves as the primary tool for identifying and interpreting the representation of social inequality, class struggle, and ideological power within the series.

Source of Data

The primary data source for this study is the Netflix animated series *Arcane: League of Legends* Season 2, created by Christian Linke and Alex Yee, directed by Pascal Charrue, Arnaud Delord, and Barthélémy Maunoury, and produced by *Fortiche Production* and *Riot Games*. Comprising nine episodes with a total runtime of 370 minutes, the series functions as a complex cultural artifact that embodies ideological tensions highly relevant to Marxist literary criticism.

Table 1. List of *Arcane* Season 2 episodes and runtimes

Episodes	Runtime
Episode 1: Heavy is the Crown	40 minutes
Episode 2: Watch It All Burn	39 minutes
Episode 3: Finally Got the Name Right	40 minutes
Episode 4: Paint the Town Blue	39 minutes
Episode 5: Blisters and Bedrock	42 minutes
Episode 6: The Message Hidden with the Pattern	39 minutes
Episode 7: Pretend Like It's the First Time	41 minutes
Episode 8: Killing is a Cycle	40 minutes
Episode 9: The Dirt Under Your Nails	50 minutes
Total Duration	370 minutes

Rather than analyzing the series solely as entertainment, this study extracts specific narrative, visual, and dialogic elements to examine representations of social inequality, power dynamics, and class conflict. The research data extracted from the series include (a) visual and symbolic scenes, consisting of sequences that depict socio-economic, spatial, and technological disparities between the contrasting settings of Piltover and Zaun. These scenes provide insights into the differences in living conditions, technological advancement, and social status between the two regions. In addition, (b) dialogue and character development are analyzed through verbal exchanges that reveal characters' ideological beliefs, class-based tensions, and internalized social conditions. These elements help identify how social inequality and power relations are constructed and represented throughout the narrative.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved a multi-stage, qualitative process centered on a comprehensive analysis of *Arcane* Season 2. The researcher first conducted multiple full-series viewings to examine the complete narrative, visual, and character developments. Key scenes and dialogues were then systematically observed and extracted based on their relevance to class dynamics—specifically focusing on symbolic representations of the socio-political divide between Piltover

and Zaun (such as spatial separation, color palette, architecture, and technological disparity) and the structural positioning of central characters (Vi, Jinx, Ekko, Jayce, Mel, and Silco).

Once extracted, the raw data were categorized by intrinsic narrative dimensions (character trajectories, spatial settings, and structural conflicts) to isolate representations of material and ideological power. Finally, these categorized data were contextualized using Marxist theoretical concepts—including class division, power relations, and ideology—ensuring an analytically grounded, theory-informed dataset aligned with the research objectives.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed qualitative textual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to systematically examine representations and structural mechanisms of social inequality within *Arcane* Season 2. To maintain deep engagement with the material, the researcher manually coded all data without qualitative analysis software. The analytical process began with repeated viewings for narrative familiarization, followed by the extraction of scenes, dialogues, and visual elements reflecting class conflict, oppression, and ideological control. These data points were deductively coded and organized into primary analytical categories (e.g., economic disparity: rich vs. poor; structural dominance: justice vs. power) and secondary categories (e.g., class positioning: oppressed vs. oppressor; ideological struggle: revolution vs. control).

These categorized data were then critically evaluated through a Marxist framework, applying concepts such as the bourgeoisie, proletariat, and ideological state apparatuses. To ensure analytical reliability and mitigate bias, the researcher iteratively reviewed selected scenes, reapplied coding criteria, and cross-referenced the findings with Marxist theory before synthesizing the results into a comprehensive narrative report.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Karl Marx's Representation of Bourgeoisie and Proletariat in Arcane

a. Bourgeoisie

The bourgeoisie refers to the ruling class that owns and controls the means of production, such as wealth, industry, and resources. This class holds economic and political power within society and benefits from the labour of the working class. As a result, the bourgeoisie maintains dominance by shaping systems that preserve their control and privilege (Marx & Engels, 1848).

In *Arcane* Season 2, the bourgeoisie spans both Piltover's governing elite and Zaun's local industrial rulers, defined by their shared control over production, resources, and structural power. In Piltover, this ruling class is embodied by political and military figures—including Council members Jayce Talis, Mel Medarda, Salo, Shoola, Caitlyn Kiramman, and Noxian warlord Ambessa Medarda—who monopolize institutional authority, wealth, and advanced technology. Conversely, within Zaun, the Chem-Barons function as an extralegal local bourgeoisie, extracting profit by controlling factories, Shimmer production, and exploited labor. Together, these groups demonstrate that bourgeois dominance operates across both legitimate state institutions and informal, criminal economic structures.

A scene that represents the bourgeoisie in *Arcane* Season 2 is when Caitlyn enters a private council meeting setting accompanied by a group of enforcers equipped with modified Hextech weapons.

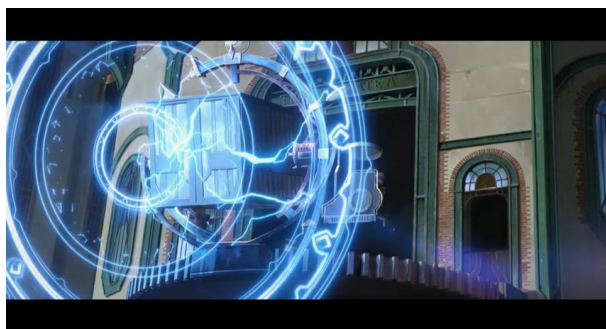


Figure 1. Advanced technology developed exclusively for Piltover (*Arcane* Season 2, Episode 9, 06:40–06:45).

The scene above shows a Piltover enforcer utilizing Hextech-based technology during combat operations. The glowing blue mechanism reflects Piltover's advanced scientific and technological development, particularly its ability to weaponize Hextech for military and security purposes. In this scene, Hextech is not used merely as a tool for innovation or public benefit, but as an instrument of enforcement and control. The sophisticated design and functionality of the weapon emphasize Piltover's access to resources, research, and institutional support that are unavailable to most Zaunites. This aligns with Karl Marx's argument that those who control production also control the distribution of its benefits.

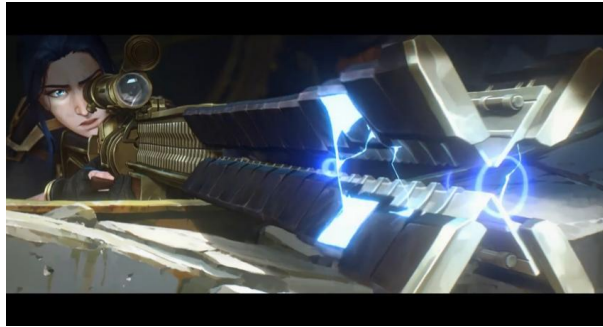


Figure 2. Hextech technology (Arcane Season 2, Episode 9, 07:50–07:55).

Caitlyn Kiramman's deployment of advanced Hextech weaponry against Ambessa Medarda's Noxian forces highlights Piltover's rapid militarization of technology to safeguard its political authority. This institutional monopoly on innovation contrasts sharply with Zaun's reliance on volatile Shimmer and improvised machinery, demonstrating how the ruling class sustains dominance through control over technology and the means of production (Marx & Engels, 1848).

As shown in Figure 3, this structural disparity is highlighted by Zaun's reliance on Shimmer and improvised technology, in contrast to Piltover's institutional monopoly on Hextech. Beyond technological inequality, the production and distribution of Shimmer reveal an exploitative labor system that perpetuates violence and mutation in the undercity.

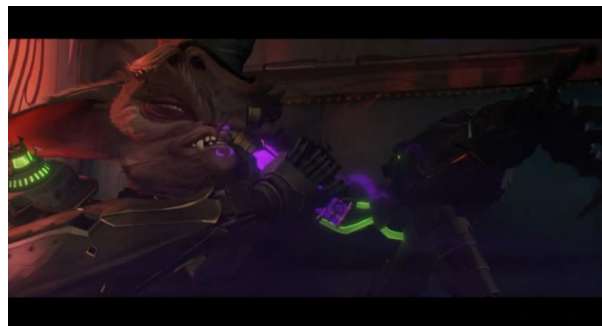


Figure 3. Smeech inhaling Shimmer (Arcane Season 2, Episode 2, 06:54–07:00).

What is worse, the bourgeois domination within Zaun is shown when the Chem-Barons target vulnerable children. In this context, children are exploited for forced labour, used in the production of Shimmer, and, in some cases, subjected to dangerous experimentation. Shimmer is a highly volatile purple chemical substance developed by Singed in Zaun. It functions as both a drug and an industrial product capable of enhancing physical strength, durability, and aggression. However, despite its benefits, Shimmer also causes severe side effects such as addiction, physical mutation, psychological instability, and long-term bodily damage. Forced labour can be seen in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4. Children are forced into labour (Arcane Season 2, Episode 2, 04:10–04:16).

Bourgeois domination within Zaun is starkly illustrated when the Chem-Barons force kidnapped children into hazardous, cheap labor to maintain industrial control. As Marx and Engels (1848) posit, class domination is defined by control over the means of production and the ability to exploit labor. Here, the Chem-Barons function as a localized bourgeoisie leveraging violence, coercion, and economic dependency, while the vulnerable children represent a powerless segment of the proletariat exploited to perpetuate undercity inequality.

b. Proletariat

The proletariat refers to the class of people who do not own the means of production and must therefore sell their labour in order to survive. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) define the proletariat as the modern working class whose livelihood depends entirely on wages. Unlike the bourgeoisie, they possess no productive property and are structurally dependent on those who control economic resources. In *Arcane*, the proletariat is primarily represented by the civilians of Zaun, the undercity that exists beneath Piltover. Zaunites are generally portrayed as the lower social class who lack political authority, economic stability, and control over resources or production.

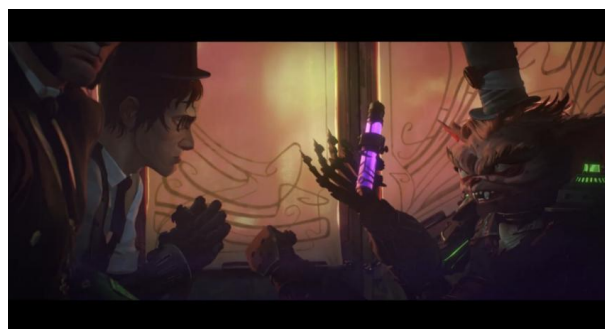


Figure 5. Smeech and Heenot plan to get Smeech into Silco's chair (Arcane Season 2, Episode 2, 06:47–07:35).

Heenot: Well, you know, far be it from me, but, uh, you hired me to run the numbers. And ever since we've gone up against the other chembarons, the numbers are in the, uh...

Smeech: Shitter?

Heenot: Not exactly the term I'd...

Smeech: Ever wonder why fat brains like you always wind up working for grunts like me?

Heenot: No, uh, never.

Smeech: You only use half your head. Plotting moves. Calculating odds. Know how Silco took hold of the Lanes? With his bare teeth... Until I'm in Silco's chair, your only job is to make the numbers work, hmm? (Episode 2, 06:47–07:35).

The scene above reflects the position of the proletariat in *Arcane* Season 2 through the interaction between the Chem-Baron, Smeech, and his subordinate, Heenot. Although Heenot is intellectually capable and responsible for calculations and strategic planning, he remains in a subordinate and powerless position. His role is reduced to the use of his mental labour, which is controlled and directed by Smeech. This dynamic is reinforced when Smeech dismisses him, stating, “ever wonder why fat brains like you always wind up working for grunts like me... because you only use half your head,” indicating that Heenot is valued only for his utility rather than his autonomy or insight.

Smeech's dismissal of Heenot's input, combined with his reliance on authority and intimidation, highlights a clear imbalance of power. Despite his intelligence, Heenot does not control the conditions or outcomes of his labour, nor does he benefit from it independently. This reflects the condition of the proletariat as defined in *The Communist Manifesto*, where workers are compelled to sell their labour while lacking control over production (Marx & Engels, 1848). Marx (1849) further explains that labour becomes a commodity under capitalism, meaning that a worker's value is determined by how useful their labour is to those in power.

Secondly, as shown in Figure 6, the portrayal of the proletariat is illustrated through Zaunite civilians—specifically Huck—attempting to rob Viktor. Their unstable movements, weakened posture, and physical deterioration visually signify severe Shimmer dependency and the long-term effects of Zaun's polluted, neglected environment. This visual portrayal aligns with Trottier's characterization framework (as cited in Sanjaya, 2023), which states that a character's physical appearance supports the narrative and directly shapes their psychological and sociological dimensions. In Huck's case, his visible physical decay materializes his sociological reality as an exploited lower-class citizen and his psychological compulsion as an addict. Furthermore, as Trottier notes that backstory manifests through action, Huck's physical degradation and desperation directly drive his decision to rob Viktor, demonstrating how physical and material deprivation force the proletariat into criminal acts strictly to survive.



Figure 6. Poor Zaunites attempting to rob Viktor (Arcane Season 2, Episode 2, 32:45-33:20).

Figure 6 shows a character named Huck, a recurring character whose transformation throughout the series reflects the devastating social conditions of the undercity. Initially portrayed as an ordinary merchant, Huck gradually becomes heavily addicted to Shimmer, leading to both physical and psychological decline. His desperation eventually drives him toward criminal behaviour, including attempting to rob Viktor for resources that could support his survival or addiction. Huck's character arc functions as a representation of how systemic inequality and poverty can push individuals into cycles of dependency, desperation, and social collapse.

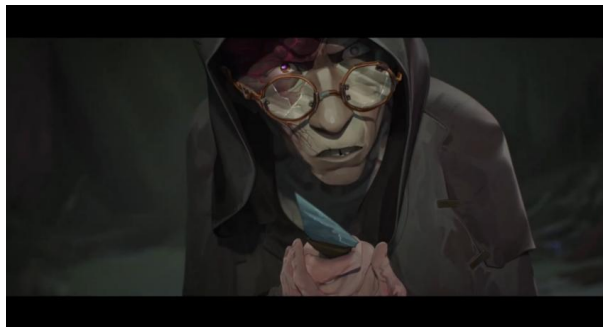


Figure 7. Huck attempting to rob Viktor (Arcane Season 2, Episode 2, 32:45-33:20)

Heenot: Well, you know, far be it from me, but, uh, you hired me to run the numbers. And ever since we've gone up against the other chembarons, the numbers are in the, uh...

Smeech: Shitter?

Lastly, the representation of how the proletariat are treated can be seen from the scene and dialogue above. The line, "we just got needs we can't ignore," underlines their desperation, indicating that their actions are driven less by malice than by the necessity of survival. Such circumstances reflect a condition in which individuals are deprived of access to basic resources and are compelled to resort to criminal acts in order to sustain themselves. This aligns with the concept of the proletariat, where the working class lacks ownership of the means of production and remains structurally dependent on existing economic systems (Marx & Engels, 1848).

Their situation also reflects alienation, a condition further elaborated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), in which individuals are disconnected from control over their labour, their environment, and ultimately their sense of self.

Social Inequality Representation in Arcane Season 2

a. Inequality in Facilities and Infrastructure

One of the clearest representations of social inequality in this series can be seen through the stark contrast between the two cities, Piltover and Zaun. The series presents both cities not only as different physical settings but also as symbols of class division and unequal access to power, wealth, and opportunity.

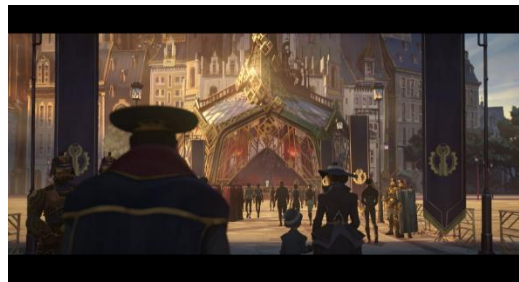


Figure 8. Piltover, a technologically advanced and prosperous city (Arcane Season 2, Episode 1, 21:00-21:06).

Firstly, as seen in Figure 8, Piltover is portrayed as an affluent, technologically advanced metropolis defined by political stability and institutional access. Its visual environment—characterized by grand golden architecture, bright lighting, and polished infrastructure—reflects wealth, order, and modernization. Spatially and aesthetically, these open, refined public spaces symbolize ruling-class dominance, reinforcing Piltover's position as a hub of economic privilege and systemic power.

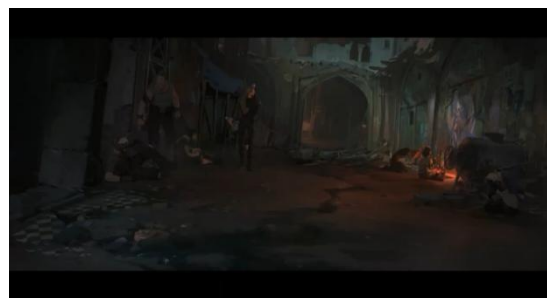


Figure 9. The impoverished living conditions in Zaun (Arcane Season 2, Episode 2, 21:20–21:25)

In contrast, Zaun is depicted as polluted, impoverished, and socially neglected, with its inhabitants forced to survive in hazardous living conditions marked by crime, exploitation, and limited access to basic necessities. This condition is visually reinforced through the city's dark and deteriorated environment. Unlike the clean and organized architecture of Piltover, Zaun is

characterized by narrow alleyways, damaged infrastructure, dim lighting, and polluted surroundings that reflect decay and instability. The presence of trash-filled streets, rundown buildings, and crowded living spaces emphasizes the lack of institutional care and social support experienced by the people of the undercity.

Zaun's polluted setting and physical separation from Piltover materialize the realities of structural class inequality, forcing the undercity to bear the burdens of industrial development without its benefits. This spatial contrast demonstrates that inequality in *Arcane* is systemic rather than merely economic: while Piltover monopolizes safety, resources, and social mobility, Zaunites are trapped in material conditions that breed criminalization and addiction. This dynamic aligns with Marx and Engels' (1848) assertion that capitalist structures reproduce inequality by concentrating power within the ruling class, using institutional control and material deprivation to perpetuate cycles of oppression.

b. Social Oppression and Class Discrimination

In addition to environmental and economic disparities, *Arcane* further illustrates social inequality through institutional control and the oppression of Zaunites by Piltover's ruling authorities. Piltover's ruling class uses dehumanizing discourse—framing Zaunites as criminal "creatures" and social threats—to legitimize state violence. Consequently, militarized raids, surveillance, and arrests operate not to protect the undercity, but as mechanisms of containment and suppression. One example appears when Salo refers to Zaunites as “creatures” in the scene and dialogue below, revealing how members of Piltover's elite perceive the undercity population as less civilized and less human.

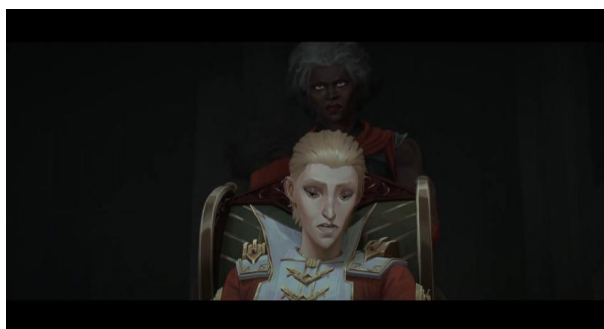


Figure 10. Salo expressing prejudice toward the residents of Zaun (*Arcane* Season 2, Episode 1, 06:11-06:15)

Salo: To think we nearly extended sovereignty to the creatures who did this.

Framing Zaunites as monstrous "others" legitimizes discriminatory control and reinforces the socio-political divide between cities. Through institutional authority—exercised via the Council and Enforcers—Piltover's ruling class preserves existing class hierarchies

while systematically denying Zaunites political representation. This institutional exclusion solidifies the divide between the governing and the governed, ensuring the undercity remains structurally marginalized and powerless.

Discussion

In *Arcane* Season 2, class division is anchored in the socio-spatial divide between Piltover and Zaun. The formal bourgeoisie comprises Piltover's governing elite (Jayce, Mel, Caitlyn, Ambessa), whose monopoly over Hextech innovation functions as ownership of the means of production to enforce class dominance (Marx & Engels, 1848). Bourgeois power also operates extralegally through Zaun's Chem-Barons, who maintain local hegemony by controlling Shimmer production and exploiting forced child labor—a fictional dynamic mirroring contemporary global child labor crises (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). Conversely, the proletariat is embodied by Zaun's working class (e.g., Huck, Heenot), who lack material autonomy and bear the physical toll of pollution and addiction, confirming that class status is defined by one's structural relation to capital (Marx & Engels, 1848).

Beyond character roles, *Arcane* Season 2 portrays social inequality as an institutionalized mechanism. The spatial divide between affluent Piltover and polluted Zaun illustrates how capitalist structures delegate environmental degradation to the lower class, reflecting real-world environmental racism (Mohai & Bryant, 1992). This structural neglect manifests in unequal resource access, mirroring global wealth concentration and healthcare barriers experienced by marginalized populations (OECD, 2025; UN DESA, 2025). Furthermore, placing dangerous Hexcore technology in Zaun offloads material risks onto the working class, directly paralleling modern industrial burdens like AI data centers built in low-income neighborhoods (Copley, 2025). Serialized animation uniquely enables such complex socio-political conflicts to unfold progressively across multi-episodic arcs (Jun et al., 2022; Mittell, 2015).

While prior scholarship focused primarily on semiotic signs (Perdhana & Kusuma, 2023) or individual false consciousness (Hakim & Chusna, 2024), this study demonstrates that *Arcane* Season 2 represents inequality as a cohesive narrative system driven by class conflict, institutional oppression, and spatial segregation. Consequently, this research highlights how modern animated series serve as critical cultural artifacts that mediate and critique contemporary capitalist structures.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Arcane* Season 2 represents social inequality as an institutionalized system driven by class conflict, resource monopoly, and ideological oppression. Through a Marxist lens, the analysis reveals that bourgeois control spans both Piltover's governing elite and Zaun's Chem-Barons via their monopoly over Hextech and Shimmer production, whereas Zaun's working class represents a disenfranchised proletariat subject to environmental degradation and state-sanctioned violence. Theoretically, this research expands Marxist media critique into serialized animation, proving that animated fantasy narratives function as complex cultural artifacts that encode dialectical tensions between capital, state apparatuses, and subaltern resistance.

These findings carry significant implications for film and literature classes by demonstrating how visual storytelling components—such as color palettes, spatial architecture, and technological distribution—function as active ideological devices that convey systemic power dynamics. For future research, scholars should investigate audience reception to assess how viewers interpret these embedded class critiques, or conduct comparative analyses with other contemporary animated allegories. Additionally, future studies could integrate post-colonial or eco-critical frameworks with Marxist criticism to explore how environmental exploitation and imperial hegemony intersect in modern screen media.

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