

Critique to Capitalism in *The Little Prince* Film: A Marxist Approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze *The Little Prince* film using Marxism. *The Little Prince* film was released in 2015 with Mark Osborne as the director. This film was adapted from its book, but it tells the story from a different angle, which in turn changes the meaning of the film in some ways. A number of issues in the film can be analyzed from Marxism. *The Little Prince* film appears to highlight current thinking adopted by the society about work. Specifically, employing a qualitative research approach, this paper reveals the various representations of capitalism embedded in the film and the social class distinction that is portrayed. The analysis is expected to raise critical awareness among the audience of the ideologies embedded in the film.

Keywords: *The Little Prince*, film, Marxist approach, capitalism, social class.

INTRODUCTION

Since the twentieth century, there emerged a form of art which has become popular around the world—film. It is hard to neglect that film has become a mass culture nowadays. We can see many people go to cinema to watch film, or they just watch it on their television channels. We live in the media era where film can be accessed easily anywhere we want. This phenomenon of watching film has become common for people. People watch it and produce it almost every day. The phenomenon of mass culture happened because it can spread easily, and it is caused by the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization (Strinati, 2004). Despite reading books, people nowadays tend to watch film for pleasure. One of film functions is to communicate ideas contained in the film to the audience. It is like a language that has function to communicate. Film theorist said that film constitutes a language, which is called as “visual esperanto”, which functions to embody, communicate, enforce, and suggest meanings (Braudy & Cohen, 2009).

Sometimes, books are adapted into films. Many children books have been adapted to film such as *The Hobbit*, *Cinderella*, etc. In 2015, a famous children book was adapted into a film, *The Little Prince*, which was directed by Mark Osborne. In adapting books into movie, the film sometimes has a different plot than the original book. Marsh and Millard (2000) argued that reading the original text and comparing it to film version have valuable function to develop understanding of plot, setting, character, and themes. The rich visual in film is “enabling the viewer to reach new insight” (Marsh & Millard, 2000, p. 147) of the character and other implicit picture in the printed text version. *The Little Prince* as a book tells a story from the narrator’s perspective when he met Little Prince on the Sahara. The Little Prince

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then asks him to draw a sheep. Instead of drawing a sheep, the man draws him a box and tells that there is a sheep living in that box. Their friendship became strong and The Little Prince tells him his entire story where he has visited many stars. Moreover, he also tells his journey of meeting many unique people and things with different characteristics, including his one and only lovely Red Rose. However, in the film, Osborne added new characters and plots. This adaptation uses a child's perspective, the main character, in receiving *The Little Prince* story from an old man. Osborne used contemporary setting which portrays a capitalist society where they live only for money and being planned by schedule. Everyone's dreams have been stolen by the capitalist, the man who has money. This society can construct how children should be. This is in line with what Tyson (2006) said that cultural milieu constructs selfhood.

The topic of children's literature is interesting to discuss; children's literature can be defined as literary works which are created for children, from children, with children characters in the story. McCulloch (2011) argues that the children's literature is difficult to define because it is impossible to identify when the first children books are published. Nonetheless, children's literature can give insight to what is important for children. Literary works are indeed important for children's development. In the film *The Little Prince* we can see the reaction of the Little Girl who is being introduced to the fiction *The Little Prince*, and it changes her perspective about life. The use of literacy to teach children is really effective. Fiction can capture imagination of children for a long period (Marsh & Millard, 2000).

There are few things that make the film *The Little Prince* film interesting. One of them is how the main character, the Little Girl, portrays *The Little Prince* in the last scene, when the Little Girl passes out after she falls from her second floor room window. She becomes unconscious and she goes into *The Little Prince* world. *The Little Prince* is portrayed differently from how it is told in the book. He is not a cute prince anymore, but rather portrayed as a janitor in a company. Using a Marxist perspective, this paper intends to analyze and reveal some capitalism issues embedded in the film.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Marxism is a theory which is developed by Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), who is a German philosopher and economist. There are three point of Marxist theory that emphasized

in this paper, which are; “determining role of the material conditions of existence, the development and dynamics of capitalism and the historical specificity of human affairs” (Barker, 2004, p. 113). The material condition in Marxism is not only meant as tools or object, but it is also meant as the coordination between people and another people who have the power to control. Baker also states that this relation is the core of *power and conflict*. Marxism has been applied in many areas of study to criticize and analyze phenomena in sociology, philosophy, etc. Literature is one of the studies which uses Marxist approach to analyze a literary text. In the early times of the existence of Marxism, some researchers thought that Marxism only focuses on means of production and class struggles, but it is more than that. Eagleton (1976) in his books states that “its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings” (p. 2).

Moreover, one of the issues which is emphasized in Marxism is capitalism. It talks about the mode of production which is controlled by the ownership to make the means of production. The issues in society lie in the ruling class. There is power which controls life. This controlling power can do what they want to society and leave it as a culture. Marxist theory emphasizes this issue to see what kind of power or ruling class that controls the society.

This clearly suggests that the predominant ideas common to a capitalist society, including its popular culture, are those of the ruling class. They are produced and spread by the ruling class or its intellectual representatives, and they dominate the consciousness and actions of those classes outside the ruling class. Whatever other ideas the latter may have, it is the ideas of the ruling class which are the ruling ideas, although they may not be the only ideas in circulation. (Strinati, 2004, p. 120)

A way which is used by the ruling class to control and maintain the power is the *commodity*. Tyson (2006) in her books states that the commodity can be divided into three values: use values, exchange values, and sign-exchange values. In Marxist theory, a commodity value of an object is not based on its use values, but it is based on its exchange or sign-exchange values. For example, an object such as iPhone is not being judged by its function for communication (use values) but in how high its price is to get money (exchange values) or in how the people will admire and be impressed by the iPhone owner that makes the iPhone owner has more status in society (sign-exchange values). The commodity value can be sustained by the culture itself with society as the one that judges the object values.

Another issue in the Marxism is social class. The class in Marxism cannot be judged from only a person, but it must be understood from the person who belongs to groups based on

their socio-economics condition. According to Tyson (2006), there are three classes in Marxist perspective: lower class, middle class, and upper class. He also describes each class as having their own characteristics. The lower class is the class which is oppressed and suffers from economic distress. The upper class is the class which gets more privilege and does not suffer from economic distress. While the middle class is the class that can be positioned between those two classes, they get privileged and also suffer. The class holds what kind of power which is ruling and being ruled in a society. However, the class definition today has been enhancing into complex structure. Barker (2004) states that “class is now identifiable not simply through direct ownership of the means of production but through share distribution, managerial control, income, education and lifestyles” (p. 20). This power is ideology as an abstract idea but it can affect life in a society. Althusser (1971) asserts the ideology as the “the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group”(p. 158) . Marxist critics intend to make the reader aware of what happens in society.

Marxism works to make us constantly aware of all the ways in which we are products of material/historical circumstances and of the repressive ideologies that serve to blind us to this fact in order to keep us subservient to the ruling power system. (Tyson, 2006, p. 57)

The struggle of the ruled subject can be seen in the society when they realized that the mode of production is unfair for the lower class. The realization of a class which is oppressed and depressed by the ruling class creates a conflict between those classes. This movement from the ruled class has the intention to free themselves from the power which controls them. They will fight for freedom. Moreover, their motivation can lead to a revolution that can change the society. It does not only change the surface of a society but also changes the ideology, base and superstructure, lifestyle, etc.

A film study using Marxist approach was done by Yong Tang (2011) from Western Illinois University entitled *Avatar: A Marxist Saga on the Far Distant Planet*. In his study, he found that James Cameron, as the director of *Avatar*, showed marxism issue in his film. Tang found that the issue depicted in the film is the issue of class struggle where there is power conflict in Pandora, a planet that becomes the setting of the film. This issue occurs because of the arrival of the Earth's colonies who are looking for new resources to capitalize it for themselves without considering the Pandora's natives.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a descriptive qualitative method. The descriptive qualitative method is actualized by collecting data, analyzing, and interpreting. Bernard (2000) states that there are some approaches in doing qualitative study; one of them is interpretation. The data are taken from the film entitled *The Little Prince*, directed by Mark Osborne and first published in 2015. In this study, the film that is being used is in Digital format. Then the film was captured in screenshots to analyze how *The Little Prince* film represents capitalism. Specifically, this study focuses on Marxism. To reveal marxism in the film, this study also use *mise-en-scene* elements as the tools to collect the evidences. There are many elements in *mise-en-scene*, but this study only draws on the setting and costumes to interpret the meanings of the film through a Marxist perspective. In doing the analysis, the film was watched carefully to profoundly understand the film. Then, the writer analyzed the shots using a Marxist perspective. The purpose of analyzing this film is to reveal the Marxist ideologies embedded in it.

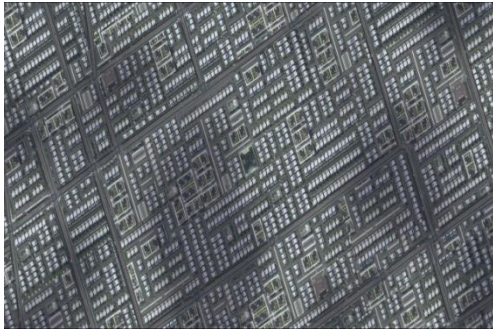
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the issue of capitalism through the lens of Marxist theory in the film. There are a number of shots in *The Little Prince* film which indicate issues related to capitalism and class distinctions.

Issues of Capitalism in the Film

As already mentioned in the literary review, the issue that is mostly discussed by Marxist theory is capitalism. Capitalism is described by Tyson (2006) as a condition in which the social environment is governed by an ideology instilled by the authorities. This creates an effect where the society becomes obedient to the views of the ruler and merely concerned with money. Everything in the environment will stick to money, or so-called capital. In *The Little Prince* movie itself the issue of capitalism can be seen through the depiction of settings, properties and costumes.

Firstly, the issue of capitalism in *The Little Prince* film can be seen from the beginning of the film. In the beginning of the film there is a shoot which is taken from above, exactly from the sky that shows the town where story takes place. The shoot which shows where the main character lives on is neat and arranged with the same architecture style pattern with no significant variation.



Pic.1 Shot of the city from above



Pic. 2 The closer look of the city

As mentioned by Tyson (2006), the arrangement and planting of the capitalism ideology are instilled unconsciously. It can be seen in *The Little Prince* film, the city arrangement shows that it has been controlled by the capitalist since the citizen are worker and they need a place to live that can make them go to the workplace easily. The issue of capitalism is visible in city arrangement where capitalists will take profit as much as possible by giving a neat house for their workers. The citizen live in the city that looks neatly arranged and run a normal life without have any feeling that they are controlled by capitalist.

Secondly, the issue of capitalism is shown through the characters' living. The characters in the film are workaholics who believe that work can guarantee happy life as we can see trough the main character's mother. The main character's mother also gives her child a complete life planned to guarantee her a successful future if she obeys the schedule.



Pic.3 Little Girl's Life Planned

This thought has been embedded to the character since they live in a workaholic society. Life plans represent how a worker lives. Workers are those who should obey a company's

schedule. The mother in this film wants her daughter to be like her by showing that working is the best way for living. This is show how the mindset of worker are constructed by the capitalist.

Furthermore, the Little Girl's mother also shows her capitalist power by ruling what the Little Girl should wear. In the beginning of the film it is seen that the Little Girl wears formal suits in her daily life. This suit is used only for doing daily activities such as when she wakes up, studies, and plays.



Pic.4 Waiting in Public Places



Pic.5 Doing Daily Activities

It is natural to see the background of the mother who works as an office employee where she dictates her child to follow her. Her mother is used to saying that she is a successful person and worth to become an example for her child. In the end the Little Girl is forced to follow her mother, from how her mother lives till how her mother dresses. The mother shows her hegemony to her daughter, by showing that the power of the parents is what gives rise to the cultivation of the mindset and unconsciously. It can be said that the mother is the ruler in the family and the Little Girl must obey the rules which is given by her Mother. Just like the workers who have to follow the rules of the ruler where they will be unconsciously affected by the rules that have no relationship with doing a free life.

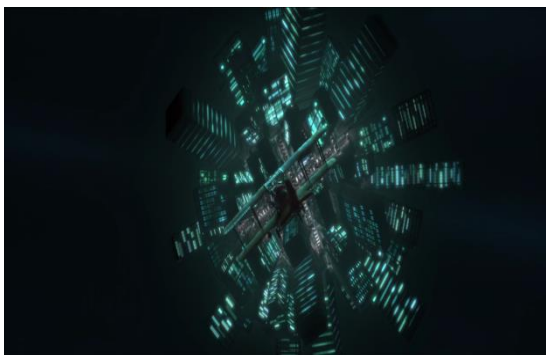
The Little Girl's attire changed when she went to her unconscious world. But this change is only a minor change. She still wears a formal suit but there is an accessories added on her head which is a pilot helmet.



Pic.6 Little Girl's Costume in Her Unconsciousness World

This costume represents freedom from a ruling power. The Little Girl wants to show that she can be free by becoming a pilot. However she does not wear a complete pilot uniform. She only wears the aviator helmet and scarf but from her torso to toe she wears formal suit which is still related to her mother's hegemony. It is like the worker who cannot express themselves in working if they are bounded by the rule from their boss. This rule will lead them to obey and does not give them freedom to do whatever they want.

Thirdly, last scene setting in this film represents Marxist issues. This setting is not held in the real world but in the little girl's mind. The Little Girl has experienced life that full of capitalism issues and unconsciously creates this setting in her mind. The Little Girl decides to run away from her house to find the Little Prince for rescuing the Aviator, but she felt from the window and being unconscious. Then, she took the Aviator plane to find the Little Prince in her unconscious world.



Pic.7 The Asteroid with Full of Work Places



Pic. 8 Closer Looks in the Asteroid

She arrives in an asteroid which is never being mentioned in *The Little Prince* story. This asteroid is the representation of the real life (adult) society for the Little Girl. By showing the depiction of Marxist issues in this setting. This asteroid is fulfilled by many office buildings. In this place, the world is being ruled by a big company where it is controlled by the Businessman. This leading company show different than another building there with a big light in its rooftop. It show that the ruler must be different and at the top class.

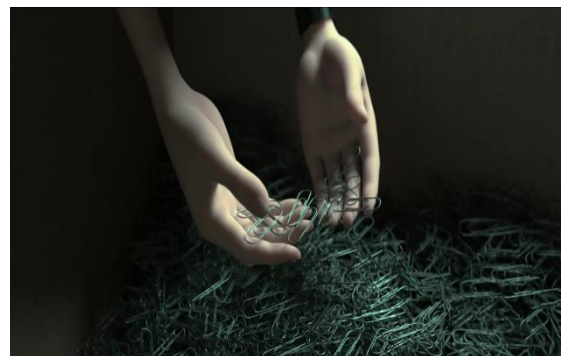


Pic.9 The Leading Company

Another shoot in this film also shows how the leading company does the business and portray how workers look like. The significant difference can be seen in the portrayal of lower class workers and the upper class workers or the person who owns a position. The leading company runs their business by using toys and abandoned stuffs from the past as the raw materials to produce the final product, the paper clips.



Pic.10 The Raw Materials



Pic. 11 Paper Clips as the Final Product

In this film, it is said that those stuffs are abandoned not because they are not used anymore, but because the owners are forced to do that for another reason. The reason of abandoning those stuffs is to get a job. People have to grow up and because of that reason people have to

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get a job to continue their life. The capitalists here use human psychological weaknesses against a *comodity* value. Where the comodity value presented by the Businessmen is the value of *sign-exchange comodity*. Workers unconsciously have to sell their past and dreams to get the job as the *sign-exchange comodity*.

The final product of the raw materials are paper clips. This property symbolizes the modern form of capitalism. The meaning of the paper clips is connected with how the workers do their work. In this film, the portrayal of capitalism can be seen in how the company can take the profit greatly from the work of its workers. What is sacrificed in the making of a product is not proportional to what is gained. Sacrificing the past for the workers in this film only results in a job earned where they have to work again. However if the owner of this past does not sacrifice his past he might be able to make a bigger profit for his future life which is not limited by a job intended for capitalists.

Implicitly the film attempts to show the form of capitalism nowadays with company works. The clipping is the product which represents the product of workers nowadays that produce documents. All products these days are not only in the form of material products but also in the form of documents. It shows that there is something wrong with our ways of thinking that says that if we work in a company we are more than the workers who work in an industry. The workers who work in a company are the same as the labours but only what they produce is of different forms.



Pic.12 Big Tube with Stars

Lastly, the capitalism in the film is represented by the big tube with many stars inside in the leading company. The stars in the big tube represent the dreams of every people. Those

dreams are being monopolized by the company and used as the main energy to run the company. People can dream as they like before they become an adult, after that the company will take their dreams and use it as the energy to work. The shot in this scene tries to note the class struggle when the lower class has to fight back the capitalist through their action. The little girl realizes that she does not want to become what the adults nowadays are like. So she tries a revolution and frees those dreams because she does not want to be ruled again. She thinks that people have the right to be free and be what they like without being dictated by another people.

Issues of Social Class Distinctions in the Film

In connection with Marxist theory, the main issue in *The Little Prince* film is class portrayal. This class portrayal represents which class the characters belong. The class issue in this film makes some characters distinctive to others. In the film, some characters portray their class through their costumes and their personalities.

Firstly, The social class depiction in *The Little Prince* film that is most visible is the middle class. The middle class includes the people who live in the city. This middle class can be seen from how the characters wear their costumes. It can be seen that almost all figures who are the middle class wear formal work suits.



Pic.13 Citizens in Little Girl's Real World

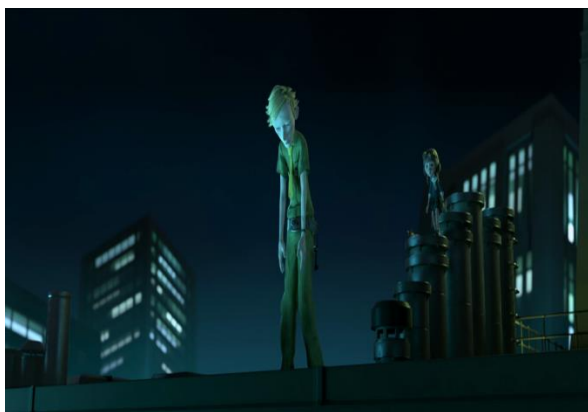


Pic.14 Citizens in Little Girl's Unconscious World

Their status is clear as office workers. As already mentioned in the previous discussion where work becomes a sign-exchange value, social status as a worker becomes a pride for the community. These workers are also described like zombies who can not get out of their zone where they just think about working regardless of what is going on around them. The middle class itself is in the midst of *socioeconomic* conditions that make them helpless. They think

that they are oppressed, but at the same time they have some privileges. Their lives are clearly no better than the upper classes and no worse than the lower classes.

Secondly, the representation of lower class is shown in the portrayal of the Little Prince and the Aviator. In the Little Girl unconscious world the Little Prince is not portrayed as a child but as an adult. In this film he is represented as a janitor in the leading company.



Pic.15 Little Prince as a Janitor



Pic. 16 Little Prince after Quit from His Job

He wears green janitor suit and he looks dirty. This appearance is meant to describe what low-level workers are like—a stereotype of a janitor that has been widely seen in the real world. It is also shown that The Little Prince's hair is not neatly combed. The dull effect caused by the appearance of the Little Prince raises an interpretation that he is powerless for the company that employs him and he is the one who is doing more physical work. This portrayal of the Little Prince may be due to the fact that he is told as a character who does not go to school. One's level of education indicates their position in a workplace. It is like what happens in the current era where people who do not attend school will end up as unemployed or as lower-position employees. It is the view of a ruler that people with low level of education do not deserve better jobs. This appearance makes the portrayal of the Little Prince as an irony in the movie version. On the other hand, the Little Prince changes after he and the Little Girl are against the company and they free the dreams which are monopolized by the Businessman. At the end of the film he is described exactly as the Little Prince in the original story as a cute and innocent child that represents freedom and does not belong to any social class.

The next character that is categorized in the lower class is the Aviator. This can be seen from the depiction of his house. The Aviator's house looks dull, old and unkempt. This house is different when juxtaposed with neighboring houses. The appearance of this house causes the

Aviator to be regarded as an inappropriate person to be cared for nor he is considered by the society. Aviator itself uses clothes that are not the same as other communities. He is depicted as wearing a dull yellow pilot suit.



Pic.17 The Aviator's House



Pic. 18 The Aviator in Pilot Suit

This Aviator depiction is almost the same as *The Little Prince* which represents the lower class. Aviator in this movie does not work as office employees like the others. He does not want his life to be the same as the others because he realizes that the social circumstances that occur today are wrong. He does not want to be controlled by the upper class and he desires to be free. This realization is reflected when the police comes to his house to ask for information because he accidentally smashes the walls of Little Girl's house with his aircraft propeller. He is seen wearing the tidy clothes that people around him wear. This happens because he knows that he needs to avoid a bad image of himself then he needs to behave like a normal citizen.



Pic.19 The Businessmen

Lastly, Upper class is represented by the Businessman. The Businessman in the film has a company that monopolizes dreams. The capitalist traits of the Businessman can be seen from the hidden agenda of monopolizing the dreams. With the commodity of a job offered by Businessman, then he will benefit greatly by taking people's dreams and get more workers. Businessman himself is depicted in different costumes than others. He wears the most elegant suit among the other figures. When other workers are stereotyped with dark formal dresses, Businessman, on the contrary, wears clothes with colored and patterned outfits. This depiction is done to show the difference between upper class with other class. In Marxism, every human will show his nature to "get ahead" and show that he is better than others (Tyson, 2006). By showing that an individual has a higher social class, the more he is approved, upheld, and he becomes a role model in life.

CONCLUSION

Seen from a Marxist perspective, the film *The Little Prince* is not merely a story about the Little Girl and The Little Prince, but rather it tells a story about the dark side of capitalism. The film wants to show the audience what is happening these days. Setting in *The Little Prince* film holds important role to represent the issues of marxism. It can be seen from the setting with modern culture where every individual only think about work. Furthermore, when the story takes another setting it makes the setting represent the issue of marxism more intensively. The setting changes to a leading company where the mode of production of a society causes the atmosphere of the film to feel gloomy. The view that employment status is a pride makes work itself a commodity profitable by the capitalists. This issue can make the audience realize that work is not always the best thing in the world. The Marxist theory in this study makes clear of the purpose of the film and makes us realize that there is power that rules our lives. The film seems to want to point out that there is something wrong in the current society. The film also shows that capitalism can happen in the family environment, where parents become a capitalist for their children, as they manage everything and curb their children to dream.