

WHEN CLASS DEFINES ART AND MARRIAGE APPROVAL: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF *THE GREATEST SHOWMAN*

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Abstract

This research is descriptive qualitative research with Marxist theory on social class and culture stratification as its basis of the theory. Looking at the primary data taken from the movie, it is proven how social class and culture stratification affects art status and marriage approval. Circus as art is considered lower class art because it is cheap and historically poor just like it is rejected in the movie. Marriage approval is also affected by social class on how different class cannot marry because they would be not considered as not family member anymore. Industrial revolution as the beginning of all social class affect many things until today as what is depicted in the movie.

Keywords: *marxist, social class, culture stratification, art, marriage approval*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif yang menggunakan teori Marxist terhadap isu kelas sosial dan stratifikasi budaya sebagai dasar penelitian. Dilihat dari data utama yang diambil dari dalam film, terbukti bahwa kelas sosial dan stratifikasi budaya mempengaruhi anggapan masyarakat akan seni dan restu pernikahan. Sirkus sebagai seni dianggap seni kelas bawah karena harganya yang murah dan karena sejarahnya yang menunjukkan bahwa sirkus adalah seni yang diperuntukkan untuk rakyat kurang mampu sebagaimana sirkus ditolak oleh masyarakat di film ini. Restu pernikahan juga dipengaruhi oleh kelas sosial dimana orang dengan kelas sosial yang berbeda tidak bias menikah karena salah satu dengan kelas yang lebih rendah tidak akan diakui sebagai anggota keluarga. Revolusi industri yang merupakan permulaan dari adanya kelas sosial ini mempengaruhi banyak hal hingga saat ini sebagaimana ditunjukkan di dalam film.

Kata Kunci: Marxist, kelas sosial, stratifikasi budaya, seni, restu pernikahan

INTRODUCTION

The industrial revolution in 1780s has given huge impact not only to European country but also other countries such as United States. Industrial revolution was begun in Britain in 1760 where many machines were invented to help people do their activities. The first invention which affected the industries was the spinning jenny invented by James Hargreaves in 1764. Since then, other machines were invented such as steam power, railways, trains and many more. Those inventions gave huge benefit for society in faster travel, cheaper clothes and better metals for instance. However, industrial revolution did not only give good benefit, but it also gave bad impact to society, for example the population increased three times and it is imbalance with the available land in which it causes several plagues. One of the obvious impacts is the occurrence of social class.

Social class as a result of industrial development was divided into three classes; working class, middle class and upper class (aristocracy). Furthermore, those inequalities of hierarchy organization position also produce a culture stratification in society. The gap among those classes can be seen through their cultural production like arts and marriage for instance. Those are strongly related with someone's social class within the society. The class is going to define their value in comparison to others with upper class and not to mention several rejection or discrimination towards those in the below or working class.

Works of literary figures in writing on social class or social stratification themed is known by many. It has become one of all theme that is very interesting and dynamic to be written, not only in the industrial revolution era but also in the 21st century. *The Greatest Showman* (2017) is one of the greatest movies of all time in the 21st century. This is a movie by Michael Gracey in which theme is self-proving through ambition and talent. Within the movie, the issues of unfairness, discrimination, and social stratification are depicted through many conflicts. What becomes our focus is on how they depict marriage approval and art in the movie determined by the social class of the movie character, PT Barnum, Charity, and others.

In this research, the writers are going to analyze how social class or culture stratification affects the classification of art in the society and affects the standard of marriage approval at that moment. This research matters on how social and cultural stratification affects many things in the current era. Previous study by Stoyan Panchev did the research on similar issues which is social stratification. He analyzes the social stratification in Bulgaria by measuring the middle class and see the role of middle class in politics and society. He analyzes the social stratification in Bulgaria by measuring the middle class. His research analyzed the measurement of the class in social environment especially middle class about "*The middle class as a guardian of liberal democracy*". The results of the research is the middle class income has decreased from survey to year 2006 to survey year 2010. Meanwhile this

research is going to analyze the contemporary movie produced in 2017 taking the unique issues about low and high art defined by the social class and the treatment of the marriage approval in the character of the movie based on their social class.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The writers are going to use Marxist theory on caste and stratification with art and marriage as form of cultural production in which taken as the main issues of culture stratification in this research. The simplest goals of Marxist literary criticism include analyzing the class constructs demonstrated in the literature. Further, Frow (1968) in his Harvard journal saying that another of the ends of Marxist criticism is to analyze the narrative of class struggle in a given text. It is through the theories of class struggle, politics and economics that Marxist literary criticism emerged. The thought behind Marxist Criticism is that works of literature are mere products of history that can be analyzed by looking at the social and material conditions in which they were constructed.

Marx's *Capital* (Marx, 1977) states that 'the mode of production of material life determines altogether the social, political, and intellectual life process. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being. That determines their consciousness.' Put simply, the social situation of the author determines the types of characters that will develop, the political ideas displayed and the economical statements developed in the text.

Rumel (1977) stated in his module that Karl Marx based his conflict theory on the idea that modern society has only two classes of people: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie are the owners of the means of production: the factories, businesses, and equipment needed to produce wealth. The proletariat are the workers.

According to Marx, the bourgeoisie in capitalist societies exploit workers. The owners pay them enough to afford food and a place to live, and the workers, who do not realize they are being exploited, have a false consciousness, or a mistaken sense, that they are well off. They think they can count on their capitalist bosses to do what was best for them. In the meantime, Max Weber believed that social class is also a result of power, which is merely the ability of an individual to get his or her way, despite opposition. Wealthy people tend to be more powerful than poor people, and power can come from an individual's prestige.

The set of social practices we call "art" is a phenomenon of the society that gave itself the name "modern." Appreciation of products of the arts in the premodern sense of the term (as craft) is seemingly to be found in earlier European, and many other, cultures, and the beginnings of something like the

modern conception were already visible in the theory and practice of *the cinquecento arti del disegno*. Nonetheless, the eighteenth-century birth of aesthetics as a discipline concerned with the theory of art and nature as objects of appreciation may be taken as marking the crystallization of a field of activities, concepts, and institutions that has since played a leading role in social life (Mattick, 2003).

Given that modern society has been based like none other in history on commerce, Mattick also added that it is a striking paradox that, in discussion of the arts from the eighteenth century to the present, “commercial” has been a synonym for “low.” In the same way, “mass” has been a derogatory term for culture in a globally integrated social order founded on mass production and consumption. Even a Marxist critic like Clement Greenberg in 1939, who described the artistic avantgarde as attached to the capitalist ruling class “by an umbilical cord of gold,” at the same time characterized the mass-cultural counterpart to that avant-garde as the commercialism to which he gave the German name of kitsch.

Meanwhile marriage markets have changed dramatically since Becker’s (1973, 1974) seminal theory of marriage. Foremost among these developments in both the US and Western Europe have been the large changes in divorce rates, the decline in marriage, and the general weakening of the traditional family structure. In which economy influences or affects how marriage is going to be approved or rejected (Matouscheck, 2006).

METHODS

This research is descriptive qualitative research in which this research got the primary data from the movie *The Greatest Showman* (2017) by Michael Gracey and the secondary data from previous studies, journals, articles, or another possible internet sources. The data is taken by watching, re-watching, taking proof, and reducing proof I which the writers categorized the proof based on the issues of art and marriage approval in the movie that are related to the social lass or culture stratification. The data are analysed in accordance to the Marxist theory as well as the theory on art and marriage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part contains the discussion to meet the objective of the analysis. The discussion is divided into two points of analysis. They are on how art is determined by the social class in the movie so the art would be categorized and low art or high art. Another one is on how marriage approval issue in the movie is depicted biased on the social class and stratification on how different class marriage is really not encouraged in the movie in accordance to the culture of industrial revolutionary era. Those two issues are going to

be supported by the dialogue in the movie in which they stand to portray something we analyse in the movie.

In the movie, art is one of the main themes in which becomes the conflict between the main character, PT Barnum in proving himself to be the best artist he can be to prove the world that he is able to be greatest showman for society and great man for his wife, Charity and their daughters. The first discussion would be about the class difference for circus and opera singing. Circus is considered to be lower class art and opera singing is considered to be higher class art. In which, those differences make them treated differently by society including the price to watch, the audiences and not to mention the acceptance and rejection they both struggled previously.

The dialogue stated by Barnum's own daughter "Ballet takes years of hard work. It's not like the circus." (00:34:51) In the next dialogue is "Do you understand that just associating with you could cost me my inheritance." (00:36:44) Another one is stated by Philip, one of Barnum's assistance who was rich but made it to be Barnum's right hand in running the circus "But I live among the swells, and we don't pick up peanut shells." (00:38:09)

Those three script dialogues are proofs to see the class of circus. The first dialogue is when Coraline, Barnum's daughter told her father that ballet is different with circus because at that time circus is considered as cheap and lower-class art. According the historical background, ballet is a dance appeared during the Italian renaissance and it had spread from Italy to France by Italian aristocrat who become a queen of France. From the history we can see the difference social background of ballet and circus. Ballet is performed in front of aristocrat and kingdom family while circus is a very cheap show. It is probably because of that historical background so ballet and circus are seen differently. Ballet is always seen expensive and luxurious show like it is never going to be shown outdoor just like that. In comparison to that, circus is seen as "peanut show" on how it stands for lower class show with cheap cost to enjoy.

Related to the movie, Barnum's circus is firstly rejected by society so Barnum's wanted to expand by having something expensive, opera singing. That leads to the second and the third proofs which are spoken by Philip Carlyle. In order to gain reputation among the upper class, Barnum met Philip Carlyle to help him get the reputation since Carlyle family has many relation and connection with the upper class. But Philip refused Barnum's request because he will be a lower class and lost his inheritance from his family because in the movie circus is considered as a "peanut" performance and it is such a shame to join with the circus. Once more this is a proof showing how upper-class family consider circus as something created for poor people and that is a shame for upper class family to join, moreover run such things.

"I trust your reputation more than my own taste" (00:46:27) and "Everyone is here. Look at this. Even the Winthrops." (00:47:32) are taken to see the difference class between opera and circus. Here, Mr. Barnum asked Jenny Lind, an opera singer to perform in America. Here Mr. Barnum only saw Jenny Lind's reputation instead of her voice as an opera singer because he thought Jenny Lind has good reputation among rich people or upper class and aristocrat. When Jenny Lind was invited to perform in America, Mr. Barnum pledge Jenny Lynd a grandest theater with the finest orchestra, it is so contrast with the circus which only perform in a small museum. Same as ballet, if we see from historical background opera is a performance to entertain kingdom family. The second proof is when the day of Jenny Lind's performance every rich people in town are coming to see the opera performance. It is depicted in the movie that the people who come to the opera is an upper class or an aristocrat and it can be seen of the clothes they wear is very difference with the people who watch the circus. Since the visitor is from upper class, the place where Jenny Lynd perform is also depicted very differently with the place where the circus performs.

The next would be the discussion about how marriage approval is seen by signifying people's social class. In a society, when a person is born of the lowest class, forever he remains in a low caste. He cannot possibly move to a higher caste, even though he has the ability or expertise. As such, the stratification criteria are descended. Thus, there is no social movement from one stratum to another higher strata. It can be overcome by way of marriage. To improve the higher social status can be done through marriage. Example: A woman from a very simple family married a man from a wealthy and respected family. This marriage can increase the status of the woman. So, we can assume that in a general society, if a woman from a low social class is married with a man from a higher social class then the social class of the woman will go up.

Unlike in this movie, if someone who has a high social class is married to those who come from a low social class then automatically their social class will go down as well. It does not look at gender, whether they are male or female if they marry someone whose social class is, then their social class will go down. This is evidenced by several scenes that exist in the movie, where the scene when P.T Barnum invite Charity to marry. Charity's father certainly refused him even saying that *"Sooner or later she will get tired of your life of having nothing and she will keep running back home."* (00:09:10) However, he still let Charity marry Barnum and tell him to stay with Barnum.

The next evidence lies at the scene when Philip Charlyle and Anne are caught holding hands by Philip's parents (00:51:33) and also when Philip and Anne accidentally encounter Philip's parents. (01:02:24) Philip's parents strongly opposed the relationship between Philip and Anne. Philip's family

was so distinguished that they wanted Philip to marry someone who was at least equal to him. Philip's father clearly said "*Phillip, have you no shame? To associate yourself with that Barnum business is one thing ... but parading around with that elf ...*". From the words of Philip's father, it is clear that it is okay if Philip who in fact comes from a high social class participates in the circus show business of P.T Barnum as long as it does not relate to a woman whose social class is inferior to him.

Based on the evidence collected, it can be concluded that there is a clear line between people who have high social class and low social class. Even people who have a low social class who are successful in their lives so that having enough wealth will still be underestimated if they originally come from a family with low social class. People from high social class will feel very ashamed if their offspring marry people whose social class position is lower.

Therefore, in order to keep the family image and social class of their families down, anybody from the upper circle who married to the lower should split up with his family and live with their spouse who came from a low social class.

CONCLUSION

It is sure on how art is determined through social class such as ballet, opera singing, and circus. In the movie *The Greatest Showman* (2017) by Michael Gracey, circus is rejected and considered lower class art so it is cheap and not worth it for those rich people. Looking at the historical background, ballet indeed serve for the kingdom, and opera was highly shown in the luxurious indoor. Therefore, many proofs are there to say how rejection are there for circus and dignity are there for ballet and opera singing.

Another issue is marriage approval on how it is seen that different people from different class are not going to be together and not meant to be together because they would have miserable life due to the lower social class. No matter male or female, they would have rejection from the family. That is how Marxist theory on social stratification affects art and marriage.

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