

Marxism & Deconstruction combined

Karl Marx's theory of Marxism is based upon principles regarding the structure of socio-economic classes and the power in which each class holds. In Lois Tyson's "Critical Theory Today" Tyson states that Marxism is the "...Getting and keeping [of] economic power [which] is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so on. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ideologies realities is built. (Tyson 53)" Marxism itself can only be used to judge concrete ideologies that one sees through the everyday lives of individuals in our society. Here, Tyson focuses on the fact that the social structure/system in which we live in is based on made up ideologies that we as humans have made a reality for ourselves. Tyson goes on to argue that "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 54) Essentially, those who are in a position of power do whatever they can to keep themselves at the top regardless of their platform, leaving no regard for those beneath. Thus, the overall power structure is set up so those who fall within the poor-middle class never move beyond their social class, meaning the wealthy get wealthier and the poor get poorer. In addition to, Tyson goes on to further discuss Jaques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction which focuses on the structure of fundamental concepts, language, and ideologies that we as humans abide by. Essentially, this theory dismantles the structure of traditional modes of thought. Tyson states that deconstruction itself "offers us a radical vision of the activity of thinking. Our mental life consists not of concepts -not of solid, stable meanings

but of a fleeting, continually changing play of signifiers.” (Tyson 234) Thus, we become whatever our mind allows regardless of the structure society may have set forth for us to follow. By taking a look at Stephen Conraid “The Pursuit of Happyness” from a Marxist perspective one can see the cruelties in the structure and dynamic of our social system in which the movie does not openly portray. Furthermore, by taking a look at this particular film through a deconstructive lens one is able to see the positive perspective in which the movie depicts within the underlying message.

Conraid’s film was inspired by a true story based off the life of Chris Gardner. The film itself is an overall portrayal of the injustices done within society each day. The film opens up showing the protagonist, played by Will Smith, and his struggle to handle the pressure of working-class America. The story begins with unfortunate circumstances; the main character is out of a job, wife, and now left to care for his son, he soon becomes homeless after failing to pay his taxes as well as an accumulation of overdue parking tickets. Despite his unforeseen situation, the main character decides to apply for an internship with a big-time corporation. The internship becomes a process of no pay with constant competition in sales with the other candidates in hopes that he receives the position at the end of the internship. Each day he must dress up and face upper class corporate society in hopes that someday he will truly be apart of this particular class. Throughout the film the protagonist faces a constant battle with life and the people within. His biggest battle becomes obtaining the position through the internship. Ironically, although he is homeless himself, majority of the trials he faces while trying to obtain the position is caused by individuals

from the homeless community. Aside from the protagonist, each homeless character shown in the film is used to portray homeless deviance.

According to *Jotted Lines*, an article based off a critical analysis of the movie, the movie itself “highlights a pressing social problem in America” in both a negative and positive light. (Admin) The protagonist's first encounter with a homeless person occurs when he asks a female busker to watch a piece of his sales equipment while he attends a job interview. Immediately after putting his trust into this woman, she picks up the equipment and sprints towards the subway. The subsequent meaning conveyed by her actions insinuates that homeless people are so desperate for money that they are not to be trusted with anything of value. (Admin) Although the main character is homeless and strives for success, this particular scene highlights the fact that homeless people cannot be trusted, despite the movies overall message that it may seem to present. Another example is the main characters second encounter which occurs when a schizophrenic homeless man steals the same piece of equipment from the protagonist. The homeless man claims that it is a time machine that will take him back to 1960. This character is shown to be portrayed not only as a thief but a mentally unstable one at that. This depiction of homelessness essentially stereotypes and allows the film to fall within societal standards of what a true homeless person may be like when that is not the case.

According to Matt Vida's “The Contribution of Marxist Grand Theory” Vida argues that “The class structure of each mode of production at first serves to promote the growth of the productive forces, as each dominant class develops productive capacity in order to extract ever-greater

surplus from the producing.” (Vidal, 409) Essentially, in order to keep each social structure, separate the movie incorporated additional homeless people. Each homeless character fit the homeless stereotype in order to ensure a steady reflection of our societal structure.

Unfortunately, rather than incorporate other homeless people who seem to be working towards getting out of the poor class, they allowed those characters to fit into societal constructs so those watching the film would not be moved in totality by the film’s overall message. Furthermore, Benjamin Young’s *Homeless in Hollywood* discusses this issue of homelessness in Conrad’s film. Young argues that “the issue of homelessness then becomes misplaced amongst the struggle between the "good" homeless and the "bad" homeless.” (Young 21) By looking at this film through the lens of a Marxists perspective, it is clearly evident that “the film's representation of homelessness only works to perpetuate the stigmatized image [of the negligent homeless individuals].” (Young 21) This then leads to the conclusion that the overall movie is a tactic in and of itself to work against the lower class and continue to separate the rich and the poor from one another. Additionally, whether stealing or lying, the conflict is not just rooted in the protagonist's struggle against systemic injustice but also against the inconsiderate actions of other homeless characters.

Despite the continuation of unfortunate events throughout the film the protagonist continues to show diligence and eventually proves himself to be a hard worker. After a month-long internship, he is eventually offered a high paying job with the firm and officially makes his way out of the poor class. This particular narrative illustrates that one can overcome societal standards and become whatever their mind allows them to be. The main character never gave up,

each day he arrived at his internship dressed and ready for the job as if he already had it. By taking a look at this film through a deconstructive lens one can see how the narrative shows a positive perspective despite the hiccups throughout. Although the film undermined its overall message the ideological significance is that “homelessness is a personal issue brought on exclusively by one's own financial neglect and with the proper amount of focus and determination, even somebody raising a child can work their way out of poverty.” (Young 22)

According to David Kotz "Social Structure of Accumulation Theory, Marxist Theory, and System Transformation." This film can be seen as a structural contradiction. Kotz argues that “Each mode of production [(social structure)]has economic, political, and cultural/ideological aspects that initially promote the reproduction and development of that mode of production...however, each mode of production is eventually undermined by structural contradictions and class conflicts, giving rise to a transition to a qualitatively different and more “advanced” mode of production.” (Kotz 535) This particular quote highlights societal modes and emphasizes the fact that each mode of production functions the way it does due to the cultural and structural ideologies that promote its function. Thus, middle class stays within the middle class and rich continue to get richer. The experience that the protagonist endured allowed him to overcome the structural norms and “transition to a qualitatively different and more advanced mode” outside of the class in which society predicted him to adhere to. (Kotz 535) Essentially, the protagonist became a structural contradiction when he, as a poor class citizen, crossed over into the rich upper class of American society.

By combining Karl Marx's theory of Marxism with Derrida Jacques's theory of Deconstruction to analyze Steven Conrad's "The Pursuit of Happiness" one is able to depict an overall theme of societal oppression and slow progression towards victory. The film itself portrays an underlining misnomer which suggests that in a rare case someone will overcome homelessness but 9 times out of 10 homeless individuals are deemed negligent and not to be trusted. By looking at the film through a Marxist perspective it still falls within societal stereotypes. In opposition, when looking at the film through a deconstructive lens although societal stereotypes are shown underneath the overall message is presented that you are essentially whatever your mind allows. The theory itself "offers us a radical vision of the activity of thinking. Our mental life consists not of concepts -not of solid, stable meanings but of a fleeting, continually changing play of signifiers." (Tyson 234) The protagonist overcame every wall and trial he was faced with and landed a position at a high paying firm. By dressing the part, believing in himself, and overriding the structure of society within his mind he was able to become successful. When viewers first initially watched this film they walked away with hope in their hearts but were reminded through the film that many homeless people are not like what the overall movie depicted. Based on Marxism, the film highlights that no matter how aware we are of the social ideologies within this world we still fall for them in everyday society (going to the movies and watching this) whether we mean to or not. In addition to, when viewing this through a deconstructive lens the movie itself exhibits that in order to be successful one must fall. Overall, one must pay attention to not just the theme itself when analyzing a work such as a literary text or a film but the details within. In order to get to the root of a piece of work one must ask questions and analyze from different perspectives to fully understand the work and what it entails.

References

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