




A Marxist Analysis of the Movie Third World Romance

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a Marxist analysis of Dwein Ruedas Baltazar's film *Third World Romance*, focusing on its depiction of the struggles faced by Filipino individuals from marginalized communities. The analysis examines how class struggle, labor exploitation, and the romanticization of resilience reflect systemic socio-economic issues in the Philippines. Employing a film-specific methodology, the study analyzes visual storytelling, character interactions, and dialogues to uncover the socio-political themes embedded in the narrative. Findings reveal pervasive exploitation of the working class, as depicted in unfair workplace practices and the lack of agency among workers. Themes such as poor compensation, unsafe working conditions, and powerlessness against capitalist-driven structures are explored. The film also critiques how resilience, often romanticized as a virtue, serves to obscure deeper systemic inequalities. Through its nuanced portrayal of Alvin and Britney, the narrative offers a realistic representation of the challenges faced by the proletariat in their pursuit of financial stability and self-empowerment. By highlighting the enduring struggles of the working class and their resistance to oppressive structures, *Third World Romance* serves as a critical reflection of the socio-economic realities that persist in contemporary Philippine society. This study underscores the role of film as a medium for exposing and critiquing structural inequities.

RESUMO

Este estudo apresenta uma análise marxista do filme *Third World Romance*, de Dwein Ruedas Baltazar, com foco na representação das lutas enfrentadas por indivíduos filipinos de comunidades marginalizadas. A análise examina como a luta de classes, a exploração do trabalho e a romantização da resiliência refletem questões socioeconômicas sistêmicas nas Filipinas. Utilizando uma metodologia específica para filmes, o estudo analisa a narrativa visual, as interações dos personagens e os diálogos para revelar os temas sociopolíticos embutidos na narrativa. Os resultados mostram uma exploração generalizada da classe trabalhadora, retratada em práticas injustas no local de trabalho e na falta de agência dos trabalhadores. São explorados temas como baixa remuneração, condições de trabalho inseguras e a impotência diante de estruturas dominadas pelo capitalismo. O filme também critica como a resiliência, frequentemente romantizada como uma virtude, serve para obscurecer desigualdades sistêmicas mais profundas. Por meio da representação detalhada de Alvin e Britney, a narrativa oferece uma visão realista dos desafios enfrentados pelo proletariado em sua busca por estabilidade financeira e empoderamento. Ao destacar as lutas constantes da classe trabalhadora e sua resistência contra estruturas opressoras, *Third World Romance* serve como uma reflexão crítica das realidades socioeconômicas que ainda persistem na sociedade contemporânea das Filipinas. Este estudo ressalta o papel do cinema como um meio de expor e criticar as desigualdades estruturais.

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Introduction

Films are often seen as a source of entertainment, offering audiences a way to relax or spend quality time with family. However, in the context of literature and cultural studies, films transcend entertainment; they become a medium for understanding societal structures, cultural values, and the lived experiences of individuals. By creating visual representations of narratives, films serve as mirrors to the complexities of society, reflecting issues such as inequality, corruption, and resilience.

In recent decades, literary criticism has expanded beyond traditional approaches to embrace a range of theoretical frameworks, including structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism, and Marxism. As Raman Selden highlighted in *Theory of Criticism* (1988), modern critics often adopt these frameworks to move beyond descriptive analysis and delve into the ideological, cultural, and political underpinnings of creative works. Among these, Marxist literary theory has proven particularly potent in analyzing the dynamics of power, class struggle, and exploitation as reflected in various forms of art, including film. Drawing from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' foundational work, the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), and later developments in Neo-Marxist criticism, this approach examines how economic systems influence cultural production and perpetuate ideologies that sustain power structures.

Third World Romance by Dwein Ruedas Baltazar was selected as the focus of this study due to its poignant depiction of the struggles faced by individuals from marginalized communities in the Philippines. While Philippine cinema frequently addresses themes of injustice, corruption, and vulnerability, *Third World Romance* stands out for its nuanced portrayal of the working class and their socio-economic challenges. The film's narrative captures the harsh realities of precarious labor conditions, the exploitation of workers, and the romanticization of resilience as a coping mechanism, all of which align with core Marxist concepts.

This study seeks to analyze how *Third World Romance* reflects and critiques the socio-economic realities of the Philippines, particularly through its depiction of class struggle and labor exploitation. By focusing on this film, the research underscores how cinema can serve as a powerful medium for exploring systemic inequalities and advocating for social change, thereby situating the work within the broader tradition of Marxist cultural critique.

Related Literature

Marxism and Ideology

Marxism delves into the concept of ideology within literature. According to Kerrey (2008), scholars like Terry Eagleton define ideology as the socially constructed ideas, images,

values, and norms that confine us to specific roles, shaping our relationships based on gender or social class. It encompasses all the beliefs and practices influenced by our culture, religion, or political beliefs. Something deemed socially constructed is not inherently natural or divine but is crafted by humans to direct human behavior. Therefore, ideology is viewed as a social construct that operates mostly unconsciously; we adhere to it without questioning, which hinders potential change. Marxists contend that ideology creates blind spots in our perception. In a capitalist society, workers become disconnected from the goods they labor to produce.

Alienation of Workers

Villanueva and Agustin (2024) and King (1960) assert, based on Marx's theory, that people are separated from the outcomes of their labor. The products made by workers are not their own; instead, they belong to their employers. Despite contributing effort to create a product, the worker doesn't own it. Hands (2000, p.32) further elaborates that the factory system alienates and dehumanizes workers due to how it extracts surplus value from their labor. Workers are dictated on their work hours and methods, resulting in minimal satisfaction from their efforts. Marx (2010, p.90) highlights that labor is an external activity for the worker, not aligning with their core identity. As a result, workers do not find fulfillment in their work and often feel unhappy and detached.

Exploitation of Workers

In a capitalist society, workers face exploitation. Villanueva et al (2023) and Gugelberger (1985) highlight exploitation as the unfair leveraging of individuals. Marx and Engels provide a more specific definition, characterizing it as situations where individuals toil for others without receiving adequate compensation. Raphael (1993) views class exploitation as an unequal transaction between employers and workers. Capitalists exploit workers by offering low wages, thereby increasing their own profits at the expense of workers. Workers possess a vested interest in favoring a socialist property system over capitalism. However, their economic power limits their options. Under capitalism, land predominantly belongs to the middle class. Schmitt (1997, p.91) notes that workers lack land ownership to sustain themselves and their families, making it difficult for them to refuse exploitative work arrangements. Additionally, workers lack the wealth necessary to support themselves, preventing them from rejecting undesirable work opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

Literature is inherently intertwined with the ideology of a specific society or group, and therefore, it is influenced by the ideological stances of the writer and the society at large.

Abrams (1999, p.49) argues that literature mirrors class struggles and materialistic concerns, arising as a result of economic and ideological factors particular to a given period. Literature often represents the writer's own class or the relationships between different social classes. This discussion employs the Marxist theory of Karl Marx.

According to Ogude (1999), Marx viewed human history as a series of conflicts between classes: the oppressed and the oppressors. Trainer (2010) identifies the bourgeoisie as the most influential class, consisting of individuals who own land, resources, factories, and other means of production, and the proletariat as those who work for wages. Marx contended that the capitalist system was unjust, leading to increasing impoverishment and alienation of the workers. Reiss (1997) notes that when workers are disconnected from the products of their labor, they become powerless. He further explains that Marx believed the solution to this issue lies in replacing capitalism with a socialist system that promotes equality and meets people's needs. Abrams (1999) also suggests that in a communist system, universal alienation can be avoided, and providing education to all ensures that future generations will have control over their destiny, empowering women as workers rather than subjecting them to male dominance.

Materials and Methods

The methodology employed in this study is designed to systematically collect, document, and analyze the dialogues and scenes in *Third World Romance* using a qualitative analysis approach grounded in Marxist theory. This approach ensures a structured exploration of the film's content, focusing on the socio-economic dynamics and power relations presented in the narrative.

To conduct the analysis, the researchers followed the thematic analysis process as outlined by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) and expanded upon by Villanueva (2022). The first phase involved familiarization, where the researchers engaged in an in-depth review of both primary and secondary sources, including the film itself and relevant academic literature. During this stage, comprehensive notes were taken to capture the essence of the dialogues, scenes, and narratives. This phase aimed to immerse the researchers in the material, allowing for the identification of preliminary themes and patterns related to class struggle, exploitation, and resilience.

Following familiarization, a meticulous coding process was employed. Researchers systematically categorized the content, identifying key elements for deeper analysis. The coding process was driven by a focus on the socio-economic and power structures depicted in the film, allowing for a detailed examination of how class struggle, labor exploitation, and

coping mechanisms were represented. The coding was aligned with Marxist theoretical concepts to ensure consistency with the study's critical framework.

The qualitative and thematic analysis methods (Villanueva et al., 2023; Bustamante and Villanueva, 2024) were selected for their ability to provide an in-depth examination of the film's nuances and underlying messages. These methods allowed the researchers to explore the complex relationships between characters, the socio-economic conditions they face, and the power dynamics in play. Dialogues and scenes were thoroughly analyzed to dissect the social, economic, and political forces driving the characters' actions and circumstances. The analysis focused on key Marxist concepts such as class struggle, alienation, and the exploitation of labor, using these as lenses through which to interpret the film's narrative.

This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how Marxist principles are portrayed within the film, revealing the socio-economic conditions, inequalities, and conflicts faced by the characters. By examining the film through a Marxist lens, the study aimed to uncover the deeper, often hidden, social commentaries embedded in the story. This critical analysis contributed to a richer, more insightful interpretation of the film, allowing the researchers to present a nuanced perspective on the portrayal of class struggles and the lived realities of marginalized individuals in the Philippines.

Results and Discussions

The results and discussion of this study provide a critical examination of the film *Third World Romance* through a Marxist lens, focusing on the portrayal of class struggle, labor exploitation, and economic inequality. The analysis highlights how the characters' experiences reflect the socio-economic conditions faced by marginalized Filipinos, offering insights into the deeper themes of power dynamics and resilience depicted in the film.

Social Vulnerability

The first scene in the movie establishes the present status quo as it portrays the peak of the pandemic where people are busy lining up hoping they may receive relief goods released by the government. The major characters in the movie, Britney and Alvin, are just some of those people who are desperate to receive their share. However, as they waited a little longer, the distribution stopped and it started raining coincidentally. They tried to go inside the receiving area, however, someone claimed that there were no relief goods left for them already. This point marked the beginning of their closeness together as Britney asked Alvin to accompany her to follow the transportation used by the authorities to get their fair share.

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| Britney | : | <i>Kailangan mo ng ayuda? (Do you need government aid?)</i> |
| Alvin | : | <i>Alvin nods his head</i> |
| Britney | : | <i>Kailangan ko rin...tsaka yang payong mo. (I need it too...and your umbrella.)</i> |

These lines evidently tell how vulnerable these individuals are in times of difficulties. It presents an issue of inequitable distribution, where the distribution of relief goods is halted due to a perceived shortage. This can be some kind of issue of mismanagement, corruption, or inefficiency in the distribution process, leaving many without the aid they desperately need. Britney and Alvin, as major characters, represent the vulnerable segments of society deeply affected by the pandemic. Their desperation to receive aid stresses the broader societal issues of unemployment, poverty, and lack of access to necessities during crises.

In Beck's (2009) concept of a global risk society, the most disadvantaged communities are forced to confront the challenges brought about by such calamities. Due to their limited resources and marginalized status, these groups often find themselves excluded from pivotal risk-related decision-making processes. Therefore, they suffer the severe repercussions of choices made by those in more powerful positions (Beck, 2008). Within this framework, the role of power dynamics is crucial in understanding the disparities in risk exposure (Beck, 2013). Expanding on the topic of climate change, Beck (2010) suggested that contemporary risks, including the overarching issue of climate change, both intensify and diminish the gap between the rich and the poor. To address this inequality, a cosmopolitan approach is required, where individuals, regardless of their ethnic background, religion, or social class, come together with a shared objective of survival (Beck, 2011).

Unfair treatment in the workplace

Britney's mother is an Overseas Filipino Worker who works in Oman. Based on her phone conversation with her daughter she hasn't receive yet her 5-month salary. Meanwhile, Britney resigned with her recent job because of the unjust treatment of her boss.

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| Britney | : | <i>Ikaw ma? Nakuha mo na ba yung sweldo mo? (How about you, Ma? Did you get paid yet?)</i> |
| Britney's Mom | : | <i>Next month raw anak (They said next month)</i> |
| Britney | : | <i>Ha? Bakit ganon?Eh kalahating taon nay yun a. Naniniwala ka pa rin? (What? Why? It's been half a yea. You still believe them?)</i> |
| Britney's Mom | : | <i>Eh wala naman akong ibang pupuntahan (I have nowhere else to go.)</i> |

- Britney** : *Bubukas na daw ekonomiya dito. (They say the economy's opening up.)*
- Britney's Mom** : *Kaya ba ang lakas ng loob mong magresign sa isa mong trabaho?*
(Is that why you resigned from your job?)
- Britney** : *Naku ma sino ba naman ang hindi magre-resign dun eh more than 8 hours yung trabaho. Wala pang overtime pay. Tapos nalaman ko pang yung boss ko binubulsa daw yung tip para sa amin. Syempre ma. Papalag ako dun diba, ayoko pa naman ng boss na magnanakaw*
(Well, yeah. Also, who wouldn't resign? The job is more than 8 hours with no overtime pay. I even found out that my boss was keeping out tips. Of course, I had to do something. I don't like a boss who steals.)
- Britney's Mom** : *Ikaw lang ang kilala kong choosy ngayong pandemic*
(You're too choosy in a pandemic)
- Britney** : *Hindi naman sa pagiging choosy ma. Nasa tama lang ako noh. Ayoko pa naman ng ano unfair labor practices. Diba alam mo 'yon. (It's not being choosy, Mom. It's about being fair. I'm also against unfair labor practices. You know that.)*
- Britney's Mom** : *Hay anak, huwag ka na ngang mapili, ang Hiran ng buhay ngayon*
(Sometimes, we really don't have a choice)

We can conclude that these struggles can manifest a detrimental effect on the well-being, morale, and productivity of these two characters because of these kind of labor practices in their respective workplaces.

Resilience despite hardships

- Alvin** : *Kung hind nagka-pandemic, nasaan and isang Britney Gatmaitan?*
(If there was no pandemic, where would Britney Gatmaitan be?)
- Britney** : *Siguro sumunod na ako kay mama sa Oman (I might be in Oman with Mama)*
- Alvin** : *Anong trabaho ni tita dun? (What does Auntie do there?)*
- Britney** : *Dati nagtrabaho siya sa isang malaking salon dun. Assistant siya ng naggugupit. Tapos nung nagkapandemya, nag DH (Domestic Helper). Daming ngang aberya nun. Sabi ko noon umuwi na siya. Kaya alam mo, number one goal ko talaga magiipun-ipon ako para maiuwi ko na si mama dito. Tapos dina siya magtatrabaho. Dun nalang siya sa bahay. Tapos bibilhan ko siya ng malaking TV. Deserve ni mama yun. Bata palang ako laging siya nalang bahala, This time gusto ko ako naman bahala.*
(She used to work in a big salon. Assistant to a stylist. During the pandemic, she became a helper. She had a lot of

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| | | problems. I told her to come home. That's why my number one goal is... to afford my Mama's ticket back home. She won't have to work. She can just stay home. Then, I'll buy her a big TV. She Deserves it. Since I was a kid, she took care of everything. This time, I want to take care of her.) |
| Alvin | : | <i>Oh, ikaw Naman. Anong pangarap ni Alvin Tolentino sa buhay?</i> (How about you? What is Alvin Tolentino's Dream in life?) |
| Britney | : | <i>Weird ba yung, ang gusto ko lang naman maging masaya</i> (Is it weird if I just want to be happy?) |
| Alvin | : | <i>Anong klaseng pangarap yan?</i> (What kind of dream is that?) |

Britney was hired as a cashier in a Grocery Store where Alvin works as a bagger. As they finished their shift, they decided to eat outside and had a deep conversation about their goals in life. During their meal, Alvin asked Britney if where she might be if a pandemic did not happen. Britney shared that she might be with her Mom in Oman but due to the unprecedented circumstance, her goal now is to save money just to buy a ticket for her mom's air fare back to the Philippines. When Alvin was asked the same question, he answered the question directly as he wants nothing but just to be happy.

Despite the struggles of these characters in the movie, they prefer to go on with what life would offer them. Their fate may not be as precious as the others but they remain strong. The trait of being resilient is seen in this part that workers do not have a choice but to be in a position where they are being controlled over by some individuals.

Analyzing through a Marxist theory, the relationship between Britney and Alvin can be interpreted as a reflection of the class struggle inherent in capitalist societies. Britney and Alvin, as workers in a grocery store, are part of the proletariat, or the working class, who sell their labor power to the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class, in exchange for wages.

The situation of Britney exposes the economic hardships faced by the working class in their workplace. The eagerness to save money for the sake of her mother is a manifestation of the constraints she faces as a worker. These only means that her compensation in her work could hardly afford the ticker she's been wanting to. This scenario can be analyzed through the idea of exploitation under the Marxist Criticism, where workers are not compensated with the desired salary under their position.

Alvin's response to the question about where he might be without the pandemic, desiring only happiness, can be interpreted as a form of alienation. According to Marxist theory, under capitalism, workers are alienated from their labor, the product of their labor,

other workers, and ultimately themselves. Alvin's simple desire for happiness may reflect a detachment from his labor and the broader economic system that controls and exploits it.

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Workers are powerless

Alvin's experiences lead him to be accustomed with how his boss treat him in his workplace. Even though he knows that he has been maltreated, he continues to do his job and work like a slave for him not to get fired. Employees will just have to get used to it as they have no other choice or else they will lose their job.

Britney : *Vin, Bakit pala pumapayag ka na utos-utosan ka ni Sir Dodong ng ganun (Vin, why do you let Sir Dodong order you around?)*

Alvin : *Sanay na ako. Sa lahat ng pinagtrabuhan ko noon, ganun lahat ng boss. (I'm used to it. Everywhere I've worked, that's how bosses are.)*

Britney : *Boss siya, hindi siya Diyos. May limitasyon dapat yun no. Tsaka wala naman sa Job Description mo na kailangan bilhin mo yung pang-birthday nung bisor mo. Diba? Tsaka ang alam mo diko napapansin, ikaw yung paborito niyang utusan. Palibhasa kase dika pumapalag eh. Kapal ng mukha, namimihasa sa 'yo.*

(He's a boss, not a god. There's a limit to it. And it's not in your job description to buy food for his birthday. Right? You think I don't see? You're his favorite errand boy. That's because you don't complain. What a jerk. Taking advantage of you.)

Behind the line "I'm used to it", denotes the concept of false consciousness. In Marxist terms, false consciousness refers to the acceptance of the ideologies and narratives perpetuated by the ruling class (bourgeoisie) that justify and maintain the existing capitalist system, even when it is detrimental to the interests of the working class. Alvin's belief that he must tolerate his maltreatment to keep his job exemplifies this acceptance of the status quo and lack of agency among workers.

Endurance of Struggle

Britney : *Gets ko na. (I get you now)*

Alvin : *Alin? (Get what?)*

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| Britney | : | <i>Nung sinabi mong pangarap mong maging masaya. Kase yun na din ang pangarap ko. (About your dream of just being happy. Because that's my dream now, too.)</i> |
| Alvin | : | <i>Dadamayan kita, kase diba, pareho na tayo ng pangarap. Mas maganda kung pipilitin natin maging masaya (I'll join you, because now, we have the same dream. It's better if we work hard on being happy.)</i> |
| Britney | : | Mahirap (It's hard) |
| Alvin | : | <i>Mahirap pero, at least, may kasama ka (It's hard but at least, we're together.)</i> |

Britney's mother was left by her boss in Oman that's why she called Britney for help as she does not have enough money for her lodging expenses. Britney wanted her to go back home but her mother insisted that she wanted to stay even though how critical her situation is now. In a night filled with emotions, Britney had the chance to talk with Alvin and shared that she wanted to be happy also.

The struggles of these employees are traumatizing. They were left with no choice but to endure the pain of the life they have. Their hardships are the sole inspiration why they continue to fight for their lives and make ends meet. These are the struggles of the lower class that the upper class do not experience. They pour all their energy just to save their family from starving and difficulties.

The social inequalities of individuals create suffering to individuals who belong to the lower class. This kind of suffering can't be seen to the upper class as they have more power in the social system.

Conclusion

The situation of the working class in Third World Romance is portrayed as complex and multifaceted, with scenes vividly illustrating their persistent struggles to secure employment and achieve financial stability. The film underscores the systemic challenges faced by workers, including the sacrifice of personal welfare in an environment where profit often takes precedence over fair treatment. This depiction aligns with the Marxist concept of exploitation, highlighting the imbalance in power dynamics and the inadequate compensation that contributes to poor working conditions and limited productivity.

The narrative also explores the resilience of individuals within marginalized communities. Despite their hardships, the determination of the working class to persevere—motivated by their responsibilities to their families and communities—emerges as a significant theme. This resilience, while admirable, underscores the inherent structural inequalities that compel individuals to endure and adapt to unfavorable conditions. The film

presents a nuanced view of the socio-economic dynamics between the working class and the upper class, showing how limited agency and systemic barriers shape their interactions.

Ultimately, *Third World Romance* provides a reflective critique of the socio-economic realities faced by many Filipinos today. It examines the interplay of resilience, systemic inequality, and class dynamics, offering insights into the broader implications of these themes within the context of Philippine society. By focusing on these issues, the film invites viewers to consider the challenges of social equity and the importance of addressing the underlying factors contributing to economic disparity.

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