2........................................... Letter to the Reader.........................................................

3...The Have and Have-Not in Sweeney Todd: The Demon of Fleet Street - Frances..

5........................................... Staying the Course - Richelle Haynes...................................

6........................................... Untitled Illustration - Anonymous.................................

7... Is Squid Game Actually a Commentary on Socialism? - Ian Gebhart...........................

11.......................................... Untitled Painting - Sadat Anwar....................................

12........................................... Jesus is my Name - Jesus Velez.....................................

13........................................... Untitled Photographs - Ana Palacios Cano.........................

15........................................... On White Tiger - Oshin Sharma......................................

17........................................... Fairy Tale at the End of the World - Faith Daniels............... 

22........................................... Untitled Painting - Sadat Anwar....................................

24......Doom Cultists Dream of Immortal Sleep - Brian Sheffield......................................

25........................................... The Cost of Poverty - Olivia Tenn..................................

27........................................... Untitled Painting - Sadat Anwar.....................................

29........................................... On Parasite - Sepp Nasri..............................................

31........................................... Acknowledgement & Team...........................................
THE HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS IN SWEENEY TODD:
THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

“Because in all of the whole human race Mrs. Lovett, there are two kinds of men and only two: There’s the one staying put in his proper place/ And the one with his foot in the other one’s face” declares Sweeney Todd. In Tim Burton’s 2007 film adaptation of Stephen Sondheim’s musical Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, the damaging effects of capitalism are seen through the great wealth and class disparities, the production design, and the literal eating of the rich.

The musical takes place during the Industrial Revolution in Victorian England, where the population of London had grown at an unprecedented rate, which led to “overcrowding and the creation of slums in the nation’s urban centre” and where “factory machinery loom[ed] over unhealthy, pale workers.” In the opening sequence of the film, the camera pans over the city of London, showing the grey, the rain, the grittiness and the smoke rising from the chimneys. The audience follows a “pool of vibrant blood as it makes its way through industrial machinery and down into the sewers infested by rats.” Here Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street shows the harm that capitalism can bring “down” to the lower class. In the first song in the film “There’s No Place Like London”, Sweeney Todd sings: “At the top of the hole sit the privileged few / Making mock of the vermin in the lower zoo” as he disembarks the ship that brings him to the docks of London. As Sweeney walks into the centre of town, the camera quickly pans and zooms through the streets of London, displaying elements and characteristics of German Expressionism in the set design, using deep shadows, chiaroscuro lighting, high angles and a desaturated colour palette, “with the heavy fog of factories keep[ing] the entire setting in eternal grey.”

The use of a lot of greys, blacks, and cold pale colors, illustrate the poverty and wretched conditions around parts of London. In contrast, the parts of London that contain grand, elaborate buildings, showcase signs of wealth and luxury. The wealth and class inequalities of the time are made evident through the sets as well as through the costume design. In the film, the clothing attire worn by Mrs. Lovett is visually juxtaposed with Judge Turpin’s. While Mrs. Lovett’s clothes are stained and tattered, Judge Turpin’s clothes are clean and finely tailored. This juxtaposition can also be seen in the clothing attires of Adolfo Pirelli and Sweeney Todd, where Pirelli wears royal blue while Todd wears shades of grey and black.

In the song “The Worst Pies in London”, Mrs. Lovett laments how “Times is hard!” and “no wonder with the price of meat,” which leads her to concoct a plan with Sweeney Todd to use his unsuspecting customers, who come in for a shave but wind up with their throats slit, as filling in her meat pies. The term “eating the rich” is said today to “denote a desire to destroy an oppressive upper class and emancipate oneself from capitalism” and is used quite literally in Sweeney Todd. By using the bodies of the people killed by Sweeney Todd as filling for Mrs. Lovett’s meat pies, the film shows the “damages and desperations that capitalism can inflict on those not already enjoying fortunate lives.” The act of cooking human remains into pies to sell during a meat shortage is not seen as wholly evil but as a practical way to make a living. And what more “exemplary” humans to use in her meat pies than the rich upper classes, the ones who mock and oppress the lower class. In the song “A Little Priest”, Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney Todd alludes to the “benefits and drawbacks” of using priests, lawyers, royal marines, politicians, clergies, and judges in the meat pies. As Sweeney Todd sings to Mrs. Lovett, in tough times it will be “man devouing man, my dear / Then who are we to deny it in here?” And how, with the class and wealth imbalances, the tables will be turned: “How gratifying for once to know / That those above will serve those down below.”

The way capitalism is depicted in Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street shows the great class divide of the Industrial Revolution and the harms extreme wealth inequality can inflict on the lower class. The lengths the working class will go to survive the damaging effects of capitalism are vividly represented in Burton’s film through the production design and the songs performed through the entire musical.

Frances

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
STAYING THE COURSE

Material things is the only concern.
Let the oceans cry
Let the impoverished die.
Let the injustice rise
No care for our demise.

A greed filled system of endless consumption.
Let the resentment fester,
Let the monopoly thrive
Let the rich survive.
No need to change the tide.

Inequality prevails,
The trenches get deeper.
Corruption blooms like a flower of doom.
But why would it change?
The system is fine.
As long as the rich, keep getting richer.

Richelle Haynes,
Barbados.
@kibika95
IS SQUID GAME ACTUALLY A COMMENTARY ON SOCIALISM?

The short answer is no.

For those who spent the last several months living under varying types of rocks, Squid Game is a massively popular Netflix series about a group of people competing in life-and-death versions of schoolyard games. The sole winner is given a cash prize of 45.6 billion Korean Won ($38 million US), or enough to buy approximately one gallon of gas. With 111 million viewers in its first 4 weeks of release, the series proved to be a ratings juggernaut, and understandably so. While its impressive production design and well-executed storytelling deserve their own articles, its unabashed criticism of capitalism fantastically fanned the flames of viewership. In these Unprecedented Times of pandemics, political revolutions, populists like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, inaccessible healthcare, and mounting student debts, it should be no surprise that a show with anti-capitalist and anti-elite themes would make headway among viewers. However, both the series' content and its runaway success have led to discussion about what exactly the show is skewering. Moving forward, please be prepared for anything, but mostly just spoilers.

One of the more common examples of the show “critiquing communism” is that all the contestants are stuck wearing the exact same outfits, with no room for personalization or flair. Big Brother much? Similarly, the players are only given small rations of bland food for sustenance, which is obviously what we the people would need to expect under communism. Thankfully there are never food shortages under capitalist regimes! Grocery stores at the start of the covid pandemic, anyone? Further, it has been argued that the VIPs creating and watching the games for their own amusement mirrors the authoritarian leaders of communist countries witnessing their own downfalls. However, that is the hole in the argument: those real-life violent leaders were authoritarian, and authoritarianism and communism do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Any system, be it capitalism, communism, school boards, or even local dry cleaners will only be as good as the people running it. Talking only about attributes like clothes or food are indicative of a misunderstanding of the show’s fundamentals; those are purely superficial aspects, and not what the show is really about: desperation. All of these examples and possibly more can be found if you, the reader of this article, google “Squid Game communism.” Funnily enough, that is exactly what I did. Me, the writer of this article!

With these slipshed, surface-level arguments in mind, let us focus now on examples of how the show actually discusses capitalism. First of all, the creator has literally said out loud that the show is about capitalism. If that is not enough, however, there is the fact that the contestants enter the games on the premise of achieving a better life, all at times when they are running desperately low on cash and/or options. While the arguments about the clothing and food could be reasonable without context, that is not the way the world works. Nothing exists in a vacuum. Nothing is free of its context. The players are stuck in a cold, unforgiving world of high household debt, low economic mobility, even lower wages, and raw, unchecked capitalism. I thought I came up with the word “hypercapitalism” to describe this, but apparently that term already existed.

One of the biggest issues with the “Squid Game is actually anti-communist” argument, though, is the presence of the cash prize. Dangling over their heads, the amount grows and grows as each player is eliminated. Capitalism promises us a prize. If you work hard enough to get ahead, supposedly you can get the big pile of money dangling just out of your reach. It keeps the system moving. If there were no cash prize, why would they keep playing? Why would we all keep going to work everyday? Communism and socialism have no such cash prize. There is no promise of opulence when everyone has the same paycheck. Squid Game cannot be a critique of socialism or communism because it would be a complete misinterpretation of those systems. Sure, everyone wears the same clothes and eats the same food, but there is so much more going on below the surface. Always look deeper!

Is the show anti-capitalism? Yes. Is it pro-communism? Not exactly. Calling the show communist is not necessarily incorrect, although it is not necessarily not incorrect. Did I say that right? Anyway, regardless of the actual position the series takes, it should not be surprising that such a show with such themes should arise during such a time period as this. The rich keep getting absurdly richer, while the middle classes in most countries have slowly withered away over the decades.
We live in an era of populists like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, both of whom rose up politically by promising huge changes to a system they describe as corrupt. While Trump supporters and Bernie supporters may feel differently about most things, they can and do agree on one fundamental belief: the system is not working. And again, neither media nor politics exist in a vacuum.

Entire generations of young people are graduating into the world saddled by student debt, being forced to work multiple jobs simply to break even and pay for the education that they needed in order to get a job in the first place. Capitalism is supposed to be sustained by people spending money, but so many people don’t have any money to spend. Even further, those few VIPs who do have money won’t spend it. Are they not self-appointed job creators? If the hypercapitalist elites were truly interested in keeping the system running, they would see the importance of raising wages, erasing student debt, and making healthcare truly affordable. But so far, they just seem interested in hoarding their money. Their own system is crumbling around them because they can’t let go of their huge stacks of cash. To paraphrase Old Man 001, life is not very fun when you have too much or too little money. That being said, the show did confirm one thing we all already knew to be true: the furries are in charge of everything.

While this has hopefully laid any questions about Squid Game’s themes to rest, questions about the show itself remain. For example, did the Hot Cop survive his fall off that cliff? If so, is he currently dating anyone? Did none of the players understand beforehand that one person from each pair would die in the marbles game? What more is there to know about the Front Man’s past? What will happen to the gang next year? Why does my remote keep acting weird? Did I leave the oven on? All of these questions and possibly more will hopefully be answered in season two, the existence of which has been confirmed because season one was a hit and companies enjoy making money.

And now for the conclusion: Squid Game is one of the most-watched shows in recent memory. Its daunting viewership numbers are precisely because of, not in spite of, its anti-capitalist and anti-elite leanings. In this generation of desperation, it is understandable that so many people find relief in something so grim. Art will always mirror life, and vice versa. So, if anyone quizzically queries the quixotic question of whether Squid Game is quite actually an oblique critique of socialism, unequivocally remember:

The short answer is no.

Ian Gebhart,
United States.
@ianspencer95
What am I? you may ask.
Is not a matter of my ethnic.

I’m a number in a country
A label in a card.
I’m a seat in someone’s table.
A face in a badge.

A sibling of a sister.
A friend of a man.
A lover of a woman.
A child of the millennium.

A soul of a world,
Surrounded by computers
Burning into ashes
The greenery of life.

I’m a rent in someone’s land
A paycheck in the bank
I’m the click from your bait
And your consumer campaign

I’m the blood of some natives.
The legacy of a name.
The skin of privilege.
I’m a story of my time.

Sadat Anwar,
Bangladesh.
@sadat_in_war

Jesus Velez,
Lima, Peru.
Toronto, Canada.
@gsus.velez
The pictures reflect how capitalism reflected in the media can show a distorted reality.

Ana Palacios Cano,
Colombia.
@anapalaciosc
ON WHITE TIGER

“Nowadays there are only two kinds of people in the world, the men with big bellies and the men with small ones, either you eat or you get eaten up.”

As harsh as these lines sound this is the reality of not only India but the world today. Ramin Bahrani’s movie The White Tiger based on the Booker Prize award winning novel, gives us a deep insight into the poles apart worlds of have and have nots.

The White Tiger revolves around a young villager trying to escape this rooster coop (as he likes to call it) and fly high in the sky. While he manages to get a job in a well known city, he witnesses himself falling into the marsh of this cruel, unfair world where you as a commoner only get despair and hopelessness in your plate. He eventually leads himself out of the dark having done something darker.

The film based in the Indian subcontinent can be seen as a metaphor for the current scenario of our beloved world. A world where income disparity and economic inequality screams and you cannot make ends meet. A world where the dissonance between the rich and the poor is devastating.

The U.S., one of the richest countries on the planet witnessing capitalism at its worst, leaves the rest of the world urgent to get their voices heard. According to Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez’s statistics, the top 1% income of US citizens increased to three times what it was in the 1980’s today, whereas the income below 50% stayed the same.

This catastrophe is disheartening and yet is the reality for have nots. Government policies in the name of ‘corporate welfare’ and economic development take too much from the taxpayers’ pockets for the subsidies they provide. As a result we live in a vicious circle where the average person’s hard earned money falls into the hands of executives and politicians running the biggest businesses and lobbies.

Unlike the movie, people can’t escape their lives for a mysterious climax where things get drastically better. People have to be awake enough to influence government policies, and regulations like the minimum wage. We should be able to make them accountable for the filth of late-stage capitalism before it makes the system hollow.

Oshin Sharma, India.
FAIRY TALE AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Devastation. Complete and utter devastation. Destruction. Ruin. Society’s fall. Many people have thrown these words around for many centuries. Now they’re all true. Perfectly, coldly true.

I do not want to be writing about this.

What I want to write: something sweet, something whimsical, maybe with a moral if I had time. It’s what I used to write. Cats, and clockmakers, and clockmaker’s cats. A frog in a tailcoat, from time to time, if I was so inclined. I want to be writing about a clockmaker, an irascible old chap with a long-buried soft side. And a cat (black, long fur). I’m not. I’m writing about bodies. Her face (worn but pretty), is frozen in agony. Her dress is pink, muted, shapeless. Not the best dress to die in, but not the worst. The blood isn’t too obvious, like it is when they wear white. Her arms are thrown out wide, shielding something. Shielding someone, more likely. It tends to be the mothers who die like this, hurling themselves onto bullets. I can see through her chest to the wall.

The town’s clockmaker has lived the same way for seventy years. Alone. He likes it that way. But will a lively girl finally open his heart to life? Find out in this heartwarming tale.

I am not the right person to be writing this. I am not particularly clever or particularly brave. I’m not even a particularly good writer. I can churn out a quick romance in three months, a fairytale in two, but it’s never exactly been high art. I should not be the person to write this, but I’m here. I have a brain to think with and hands to write with and I witness horrors every day. This gives me a duty.

Do I believe any of this shit? I don’t know. It gives me a mission. To document, to watch, to record. I need a purpose, or I’d just be watching bodies pile up. So I watch and I write and I dream about change. Change is far beyond our reach now, we hit the point of no return years ago. But a girl can dream. That’s an expression, right?

Watching the apocalypse in real time is strange. Things don’t change much, day to day. But things have changed. There was a time when people being shot on their way to get groceries would cause a stir, and now it raises precisely zero eyebrows. The transition between these phases was not noticeable. It’s very easy to get on with your life when the people with the guns skip your house.

After the death of his wife, the clockmaker swore he would never love again.

I love rain, especially when it comes after days of oppressive heat. It cleanses the world, makes everything cooler and gentler. Now all days are days of oppressive heat and rain is corrosive. If souls are acceptable currency anywhere, I’m willing to sell mine for a thunderstorm. A proper one, that destroys the whole world and makes it whole again. One that rattles windows and slams doors. I want to stand outside with my arms outstretched letting raindrops fall onto my tongue. My soul for a thunderstorm. Is that an acceptable trade?

I hate seeing dead kids. He’s probably about seven. His coat is bright blue and his socks don’t match. This time last year he would have been going to school. His mother would have worried about him crossing main roads. Now, he is slumped by a wall, and his head is caved in. I think it would’ve been quick. I have to find these small mercies, or I’ll start screaming. I cover him with a blanket, as gently as I can. I make sure to never touch the corpse, not with all the new diseases going around. He has to die like this, alone and unheld. The blanket is stupid, a frivolous waste to sate my ego. I am supposed to be an observer, a reporter. I am supposed to be above interference, above judgement. But that boy was so very small and young.

He had a pleasant, orderly life, slightly tinged with sadness. He was content, until Maura came bouncing onto the scene.

I watch the news. Ostensibly to document, but it’s truly a habit. I have always watched the news. Saturday night, with a pizza and the dog, catching up with the world. Even the depressing stuff was oddly comforting. Bad things were happening, but I was safe in my little bubble. The people being hurt were other people and the places being destroyed were other places.
Red warning. People are advised to stay in their homes. People are instructed not to panic. The food shipment delays will be fixed shortly, the army is fine, we will be back to normal very soon. We have a new stuffed suit. Younger than our dear haggard Grey. Blonde hair, slicked back, brimming with Eton arrogance. The world has always been his for the taking, why should this be any different? Just you wait, darling, I think. Then I remember that he can wait. He can wait for as long as he wants and he’ll be fine. His family will be fine, his friends from the yacht club will be fine, his mistress will be fine provided she keeps that body up. Someone will iron his clothes and prepare his speeches for him. I hate him, with deep burning hatred I didn’t think I was still capable of. I know it’s pointless, but I hate him. For a time, I remember what it’s like to want revolution. To want to stand with our brothers and sisters and usher in a glorious new age. I hope there are still revolutionaries, even if I’m too tired to join them. A singer, some redhead, has somehow released a new album. I turn the news off.

I struggle to believe that this is the end. It seems overdramatic, bordering on ridiculous. The world cannot possibly be ending, but it is. Our world is dying and so are we. There will be one more generation, two if we’re lucky, and then lights-out. The rich will die with us. The dust from their bones will mingle with ours. In my more energetic moments, I want to scream at them. YOU’RE GOING TO DIE TOO, FUCKERS! Your children will die, your legacy will die, your mansions will decay. There will not be a single person on earth who will have less than you. There is going to be a last human on this planet. I’m glad it isn’t going to be me.

Maura was bright and happy and idealistic. The clockmaker was as gruff and rude as could be. He tried to scare her off, but she came back to visit every week.

Obviously, I wish it didn’t happen. I wish someone had stopped it sooner, I wish the inevitable could be avoided. I wish there could be grass in the parks and children playing in the street and I wish there could be hope for the future. I let myself mourn once a week. Fully mourn, let the horror of it all sink in. I’m very disciplined about when I allow myself to feel. Too often, you go quietly crazy. Never, you go loudly crazy. Often the kind of loud that involves guns. I don’t want either of those. I plan on living, for at least a while longer. I have quite a few books and a typewriter and a decent stockpile of food. My body and mind are relatively intact. There’s no point in dying just because the world is.

The clockmaker tried hard to hide his growing fondness for Maura, but she saw through it. He began to eagerly await her visits, finding trinkets to give her as a thanks.

I should be a better narrator. Actually, I’m a perfectly good narrator. I should be a hero. Hero - a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. I have very little courage, no achievements to speak of, and the nobility I can on occasion muster is the quiet kind. I am in a place, at a time, watching things fall apart, and I have a typewriter now computers are down. I’d like to give you some tale of astounding bravery, involving a child or perhaps a kitten. I don’t have any such tales. I’m an observer; weak-minded, prone to rambling. But someone has to write this down.

I don’t know who I’m writing for, given humanity’s fairly imminent downfall. Paper is not a medium meant to survive millennia, and apparently neither are humans. But part of how I keep sane is imagining, centuries from now, odd creatures landing on a barren wasteland called Earth. Finding a scrap of tree pulp, inscribed with strange runes. Hold me in your tentacles and download my words into brain 4, and try not to think too badly of the idiots called humans. We did spectacular good, on top of all our spectacular evil.

The clockmaker stared at Maura, looking over her young (I should say ‘mature’, here, but it’s not a word I like to write) form. Rage overtook him, years of pent-up hatred mixed with a good dose of sex. He leapt towards her, impressively strong for a man his age, and slashed her pretty white throat. Hot blood running down his arms, he grabbed the sharp part of a clockwork mechanism and drove it into his stomach with all his strength.
There. That’s an ending, fittingly dark. I was trying for Brothers Grimm. It’s petty but I can’t bring myself to let anyone else, even fictional characters, enjoy a lovely world with tea parties and lop-eared rabbits. Not when rabbits went extinct ten years ago. Now, it’s time to follow his example. Nothing sharp, certainly not my stomach. Slow and messy. I’m going for a noose. Quick, classic, tinged with irony. I’m not sad, I’m just done. This isn’t a world for living, so I am going to die. Goodbye, reader. I’m sorry for my shortcomings, and I hope you can live happier than me.

Faith Daniels,
UK.

Sadat Anwar,
Bangladesh.
@sadat_in_war
DOOM CULTISTS DREAM OF IMMORTAL SLEEP

And I can’t blame people for feeling that this world is coming to some kind of end. Even as each generation, like blossoming puddles, bring prophecies of eventual doom, even as each generation continues on and births, from promises of death, a new wave of life to confront what was understood to be a world that could not sustain them, even as this generation calls out that this, here, could be the last generation of humans:

dare I dream that tomorrow will go on as yesterday did? that the sun will make its rounds as it always has? and that somewhere, a connivingly intelligent creature will rise from its intricately constructed hovel, make a cup of strong coffee, and go about its day in the way that all life tends to? Slowly, forgetting for a moment about yesterday’s sins, or chores still to do in the yard, and, instead, appreciating the struggle of a marigold rising from wood and stone, or laughing at a passage from a salvaged book of old jokes? until, hunger comes in, and reminds the creature that it is still an organic thing: a machine of sinew and bones exactly like the finch that perches on the birth tree outside the broken window, singing loudly that, at last, the earth, in its freedom from an unfortunate dream, is finally allowed to relax, and heal, and breathe.

Brian Sheffield, United States.
@brian_tries
THE COST OF POVERTY

The romanticization of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps is wholly dismissed by Netflix’s Maid (2021), and I love that for us. As a member of a single immigrant parent household the accurate portrayal of abject poverty was at times hard to watch. While I usually enjoy Netflix as an escape from the horror that is the looming spectre of capitalism, this was not my viewing experience of Maid. Much of Alex’s struggles as a single mother felt all too familiar.

When Alex decides to leave her abusive partner with $18 in her pocket to start a new life with her daughter Maddy, she is met with the harsh realities of “the system”. After visiting a social worker, she learns that she needs two pay stubs to get on the list for subsidized housing, except she doesn’t have a job. She has been in an abusive environment with limited mobility and access to opportunity. Without a job, they cannot help her find emergency housing. She can’t find a job if she does not have access to daycare as she needs someone to watch her daughter. She can only receive subsidized daycare from social services if she has a job. The obstructive confusing paperwork, the general lack of access, and the cycle of institutional barriers are exhausting.

This is a realistic portrayal of the poverty tax. There is a cost to being poor, and it is steep. The injustice of Alex cleaning a mansion from top to bottom only for the homeowner to not pay her is another perfect example of the privilege of the rich and the punishment of the poor. When you are amongst the rich and especially famous, people give you goods and services for free, you don’t even have to ask. While the lower classes work to the bone to make ends meet, Instagram influencers can now directly reprimand them for not putting their money into crypto.

When you are poor, you better pay extra, keep your head down, and be grateful. When you are poor you are forced to make decisions for the short term just to get by. The cost of being poor is not just in money, it is also in time, opportunity, and health. Estimates place the cost of poverty on the Canadian healthcare system to be 7.2 billion dollars. The World Health Organization has declared poverty to be the single largest determinant of health. For some Americans it is more affordable to avoid going to the doctor now for a medical issue that could become much more expensive and potentially fatal in the future. If you can’t afford to pay the $5 parking meter, get ready to pay a $40 fine. Oh, and don’t forget to pay the fine for not paying your fine. And a fine for not paying that last one either. Fines ad infinitum! Don’t have enough money in your bank account? Take this charge for insufficient funds so now you have less than nothing.

Having experienced the hardships of low socio-economic status I can safely say the show operates almost like a virtual poverty simulator. By the end of the series, I felt a profound sense of grief and sadness for my own mother. Remarkably, I also felt a sense of pride. Though it was tough at times, she got us through it. But did it have to be so difficult? Did my mother have to write a letter to the mayor to qualify for subsidized housing? Did Alex have to jump through hoops and sleep in a transit terminal to escape an abusive situation? Is the “American Dream” living paycheck to paycheck, hoping to make it through another day of navigating institutional barriers? This is the reality for millions of people across the world, and especially for single mothers.

In the end Alex takes Maddy and goes to school in Missoula Montana to become a writer. While this is depicted as a happy ending with mother and child driving away to a nostalgic tune, in reality, I am not so sure. Even once you have “escaped” poverty there is a lasting impact on both your mental and physical health. Her time at college will be difficult to manage as a single parent. She may even have to work, attend classes, and take care of Maddy all at once. But this life is better than it was before, and that is something to celebrate. People work hard to overcome poverty in an economic system over which they have no control, and of course this is a meaningful achievement. However, institutional barriers, the poverty tax, and societal scrutiny, further add to the trauma of poverty and only serve to reduce economic mobility. Let’s stop punishing people for their socio-economic status. Let’s stop figuratively and literally charging people for insufficient funds. And please, stop telling us to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We sold our boots to pay the rent.

Olivia Tenn
ON PARASITE

Bong Joon Ho’s Parasite is a true masterpiece. Having watched the movie three times, I truly appreciate the deep meaning, symbolism, metaphors and message the movie conveys. There is more than what meets the eye behind every scene. Parasite subtly and aggressively criticizes modern capitalism through its perfect portrayal of the class system within Korean society. In this paper, I’ll list and analyze a few examples of how Capitalism is critiqued in this unforgettable work of art, Parasite.

Parasite is filled with symbolism. The Park family (the elites of capitalism) are always moving up. They live up the heels of the city. They are always walking up the stairs in their house. In fact, they rarely ever look down. The Kim family, on the other hand, constantly find themselves walking down despite their greatest effort to bridge the gap between the rich and poor in a capitalistic society. They live in a semi-basement with limited sunlight, a stark contrast from the natural light the Park family house gets. But there are families even poorer and classes lower than that of Kim’s in a Capitalistic society. That’s portrayed by the maid’s husband (the original parasite), who’s been living in the Park’s family’s basement for years and sees zero natural light at all.

Throughout Parasite, we see many subtle examples of how Capitalism malfunctions in the society. The very basic discussions about money by different tiers of the class society is a testament to that. The Park family rarely, if ever, discuss money. When looking for people to hire, money is never mentioned. The discussion often revolves around quality and the benefits. On the other hand, money is a constant theme of discussion among the Kims. It’s in their everyday life and almost present in every aspect and action of their daily lives. The Kims have to “plan” and perfectly execute it to get temporary and untenable financial elevation, whereas the Parks never talk about a plan. It hits one of the fundamental myths about Capitalism: “If you really desire to earn money, plan it carefully and execute that plan flawlessly and you shall get some success.” This idea looks good on paper, but hardly ever materializes in real life.

A great example of the class differences in a Capitalist society happens near the end of the movie. Strong rain and storm in Seoul leads to flooding, leaving the Kims and their neighbours to lose their home, livelihood, and pretty much everything. They have to save as much of their belongings from sewage water and seek public shelter. The same storm is merely a simple inconvenience for the Parks as their weekend getaway plan gets cancelled. In one of the most touching scenes of the movie, Mrs. Park thanks the heavy rain for the beautiful sun and weather in the day that follows, when she has planned a birthday party for her son, unaware that the same rain destroyed Mr Kim’s and thousands of other homes the night before. If one looks carefully, you can see the disgust on Mr. Kim’s face as he hears that elitist conversation, while driving.

I’d like to conclude this essay with a short look at Parasite’s ending and the movies’ main symbol which relates to this critique. As Kevin realizes that his father is now hiding in the basement, he make a “plan” to get rich, buy that house and free his father. The plan is symbolized by “The Rock” that throughout the movie he dearly holds and protects. The Rock symbolizes that Capitalist dream. It symbolizes Capitalism’s main promise for ordinary citizens. The Rock is what Kevin dealy holds on to it, even after he almost dies by being hit by The Rock. As the ending credits roll out and Kevin dreams of freeing his father, we realize The Rock’s dream is an illusion and very unlikely to come to reality and fruition. It’s the director’s final shot at Capitalism and how often it overpromises and underdelivers.

Sepp Nasri
@langulife
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Have/Not Zine team would like to thank all the writers and visual artists for their thoughtful and inspiring contributions. We would also like to thank Humber College and its faculty in the Arts Administration & Cultural Management graduate certificate program for their assistance and support.

This publication was developed with the generous aid of the IGNITE Learning Essentials Support program.

The views presented herein do not represent those of IGNITE, Humber College or its faculty.

HAVE/NOT TEAM

Alena Aiapergenova (Illustrations)  Shaun Fernandes (Design)
Mohit Bhatt  Pedro Lobo-Guerrero
Yazmin Camacho Vela  Olivia Tenn

©HAVE/NOT: A Late Capitalism Zine 2022