CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

In "*Critical Theory Today*", Lois Tyson explores Karl Marx's Marxist theory and the foundational principles upon which it is built. Tyson asserts that Marxism is the "...getting and keeping economic power 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/ideological realities is built" (Tyson, 2006). Marxism, according to Tyson, is a tool for evaluating the ideologies that shape the everyday lives of individuals in society. Tyson emphasizes that the social structure we inhabit is grounded in constructed ideologies that humans have collectively accepted and made into our perceived reality.

Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* is a widely recognized adventure and science fiction movie directed by Steven Spielberg, released in 2018. The concept of the plot is the work's principal selling factor. It takes place in a dystopian civilization where individuals prefer to stay in the endless possibilities of virtual world over the harsh realities of the real one. In the year 2045, the Earth is in the brink of implosion, but a lot of individuals seek sanctuary in the so called OASIS, a vast virtual reality environment built by James Halliday. Upon his death, Halliday announces a grand prize: a fortune to be awarded to the first person who finds a hidden digital Easter egg within the OASIS. An unlikely hero with the name Wade

Watts embarks on a high-stakes treasure hunt through a fantastical world filled with mystery, exploration, and danger as he enters the tournament. When the tournament to inherit the virtual world arises one day, however, a big business is determined to win and conquer the planet.

Every class-based society is structured around a fundamental distinction between two main groups: the dominant and the submissive. In Marxist terms, these are the bourgeoisie, or capitalists, and the proletariat. In *Ready Player One*, the protagonists represent the proletariat, while the capitalists are embodied by the members of Innovative Online Industries (IOI). "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable." (Marx & Engels, 1998). This quotation from Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1998) underscores the paradox within the capitalist system. It suggests that the bourgeoisie, by exploiting the proletariat and perpetuating inequality, ultimately creates the conditions for its own downfall. The "grave-diggers" metaphor implies that the working class, through collective struggle and awareness of their oppression, will rise against the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels argue that the fall of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of the proletariat are not just possible but inevitable, as the contradictions of capitalism will lead to revolutionary change and the establishment of a classless society.

The writer is interested in this issue because the power relations between corporations and people are intriguing. As a result, the writer aims to explore the dynamics between the opposing groups, examining how the company attempts to influence the broader social groups and how these groups react to such attempts.

The other reason the writer was drawn to this movie is that the Internet community has grown to its largest size since the inception of the Internet, which is covered in depth of the movie. As a member of that group, the writer is curious about the users' experience of belonging and the power of the community. This movie is also one of the few that have been successful in adapting game-like themes into a movie.

1.2   Research Questions

1.2.1   What are the intrinsic elements of *Ready Player One's* (2018) depicted?

1.2.2   How are dominance of the elite and resistance of the lower class presented in the movie *Ready Player One (2018)*?

1.2.3   What are the reasons that the lower class are able to achieve victory against the oppressor in the movie *Ready Player One (2018)*?

1.3   Aims of the Study

1.3.1   To identify the intrinsic elements presented in the movie *Ready Player One (2018)*.

1.3.2   To understand how dominance of the elite and resistance of the lower class presented in the movie *Ready Player One (2018)*.

1.3.3   To identify the reasons that the lower class were able to achieve victory against the oppressor in *Ready Player One (2018)*.

1.4   Scope of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing the dynamics of class struggle as depicted in the movie *Ready Player One* (2018) through a Marxist lens. The analysis

highlights the portrayal of the dominant elite class, represented by the Innovative Online Industries (IOI), and their attempts to consolidate power and control. In contrast, the resistance of the lower class, embodied by the protagonist Wade Watts and his allies, is examined in detail. The scope is limited to the exploration of how the movie represents elite dominance and the mechanisms of resistance by the oppressed.

The study uses Marxist theory, particularly the ideas outlined by Lois Tyson and Karl Marx, to evaluate the socioeconomic disparities and power dynamics depicted in the film. It delves into how the movie reflects the lower class's collective struggle against oppression and their eventual triumph over the elite. Additionally, it investigates how the digital world of OASIS serves as both a site of control and a platform for resistance.

The limitations of the study include its focus on the movie version of *Ready Player One*, excluding the novel by Ernest Cline, and the emphasis on character dynamics and narrative elements that illustrate class struggle. The study does not extend to broader technological or cultural implications beyond the context of the film's storyline. Furthermore, while the theoretical framework is based on Marxist principles, the analysis is confined to specific scenes, dialogues, and character actions that are pivotal in illustrating the conflict between the elite and the proletariat.

1.5   Previous Studies

Previous studies have explored multifaceted themes, emphasizing critique of societal structures, technological dependency, and the interplay between virtual and real worlds, from the various novels and movies. Additionally, research has delved into the text's intertextuality, examining how its rich tapestry of pop culture references informs its commentary on nostalgia and cultural production. In relation to this research, several previous studies have provided valuable insights into the themes and dimensions of *Ready Player One*.

The first is Farris (2017), who believes that game literature, in this case, Ready Player One by Ernest Cline, is a helpful tool for discussing acceptance, identity, and embodiment in both the virtual and physical worlds. This study highlights the differences between the real and virtual worlds as well as the advantages of avatar role-playing as a means of self-acceptance. The interaction between Wade and Aech serves as an example of how avatars enable characters to experiment with infinite physical construction while projecting genuine, unfiltered personalities that transcend race or gender boundaries and foster a closer mental bond between people.

Nordstrom (2016) is the second. This research explores the novel through the lens of philosophical approach by Bernard Suits to utopia and games, demonstrating the importance of playing games. According to the research, games are just as important in dystopian environment as a method of escaping the realities of future deterioration. Utami (2015) is the third researcher. Although the subject is not from the movie *Ready Player One*, it examines the depiction of tyranny and difficulties in the time of the industrial revolution. Permatasari (2015), the fourth

research, emphasizes determining one's economic standing, and he inequality of opportunity in *The Hunger Games* by identifying with each socioeconomic class.

Andrew Barton's (2018) undergraduate thesis is the fifth study. Barton discovered that the novel's bleak actual world contrasted with the OASIS's purportedly utopian virtual existence. As a result, the OASIS becomes a source of temptation for the hero (Barton 2018, 6). The sixth study is an undergraduate thesis by Muhammad Faizal (2017) from Diponegoro University, titled *Marxist Criticism on Disney's Movie Cinderella*. The author applies Karl Marx's theories to analyze the movie's elements, concluding that *Cinderella* is more than just a typical animated movie, as it is rich with Marxist themes. Through this analysis, the thesis reveals how the movie reflects class struggles and capitalist ideologies, offering a deeper understanding of the social dynamics portrayed in the story. The seventh study is Pratama (2021). This study explores the connection between the novel *Ready Player One* and myth, specifically focusing on the hero's journey as embodied by the protagonist, Wade Watts. The aim is to demonstrate that elements of monomyth and mythological characteristics are present in the story by analyzing the traits and journey of Wade Watts through the lens of mythological genres.

What differentiates of my research from the previous studies is that I looked at the movie *Ready Player One* from the Lower Class Resistance side. This study adopts a Marxist approach, drawing on Tyson's theory that economic difference drives all social and political activities, including those in religion, media, technology, art, education, and beyond.

1.6   Method of the Study

1.6.1   Data and The Sources of Data

The data for this study were collected from a range of relevant sources. The primary source is the movie *Ready Player One*, with a focus on its scenes, dialogue, and storyline. Supplementary data were drawn from journals, essays, articles, and books, which provide additional insights and support the arguments presented in this paper.

1.6.2   Method of Data Collection

This movie research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, with the Film Narrative Analysis method (Lacey, 2017). Narrative technique, as an analytical method, is valuable for examining the entire movie as a form of mass communication with a unique character, one that differentiates it from television programs and audiovisual documentaries (Ida, 2014). Like documentary audio-visual programs and television programs, movie has two elements, namely images and sounds (audio visual) and stories (narration). But in the film medium, there are other aspects that can only be captured through wide-screen technology (cinema) - especially in terms of audio technology and long narratives. Narration is the whole story (story) and the style of telling (plot or plot). The writer adds character elements as a unit of analysis, considering that the characters are unusual characters, namely those who live in the real world and the digital world, which is highlighted by Foucault in his theory of subjectivity and identity. The research method of film

narrative analysis basically follows the standard qualitative content analysis research method of structuralism.

1.6.3   Method Approach

After the data has been collected, this research applies Marxist theory as outlined by Tyson (2006), which said that the pursuit and preservation of economic power drive all social and political activities, including those in religion, media, technology, art, education, and beyond. This framework helps explain how the ruling class maintains its dominance by controlling key social and cultural structures, which in turn perpetuate systems of inequality. In analyzing Ready Player One through a Marxist lens, this idea reveals how corporate interests in the film influence societal norms, behaviors, and even the digital spaces where people seek refuge from their oppressed realities.

1.7   Writing Organization

CHAPTER I   INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, method of the study, and writing organization.

CHAPTER II   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that supports the study. The framework includes the theory used to analyze the research problems.

CHAPTER III   DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the discussion and provides answers to the research questions. The writer carefully outlines the findings based on the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion derived from the analysis of the research findings.

REFERENCES