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Humanities

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Rhyme or Reason: Can A Song Motivate Citizens to Cause the Collapse of Capitalism More Than Critical Commentary Can?

Capitalism is known as a system that makes the rich richer while consuming resources and exploiting workers. Thus, it is crucial for people to be educated on the system and encouraged to refrain from participating in the same destructive practices. However, this necessitates the question: what medium best inspires people to turn away from capitalism — an informative article or a song? In April of 2019, George Monbiot wrote the opinion piece “Dare to declare capitalism dead – before it takes us all down with it,” criticizing capitalism’s incentivisation of widespread environmental destruction and worker abuse through a history-based argument. Exactly one year later, the singer and songwriter Ren released a song titled “Money Game Pt. 2.” This song, a criticism of the singular pursuit of money seen in capitalism, features a section using the renowned tongue-twister “she sells seashells by the seashore” to give a satirical lesson on how to grow a successful business. Though Monbiot’s appeals to logic and emotions effectively convey the destructive nature of capitalistic society in his news opinion piece, the darkly humorous irony, allusions, and appeals to pathos in Ren’s “Money Game Pt. 2” better convince the reader of capitalism’s detriments.

Although both pieces cover the environmental impacts of a finance-obsessed society, the appeals to pathos of “Money Game Pt. 2” compel the reader to truly care about this destruction

more effectively than the opinion article. In the logical appeals that characterize the majority of his piece, Monbiot states that “Capitalism collapses without growth, yet perpetual growth on a finite planet leads inexorably to environmental calamity” (Monbiot). While this argument certainly makes it evident that capitalist societies have dire consequences, it does little to convince a reader who does not already share his views to be invested in this issue. Furthermore, his diction — a formal voice meant to convey expertise — renders his thoughts unmoving, simply because he seems detached from the issue himself. Conversely, “Money Game Pt. 2” fosters the listener’s care for the environment through the hyperbolized detachment of its satirical persona. This persona, a business economics instructor, advises the listener to “expand, expand, expand [their business], clear forest, [and] make land” in a lilting, authoritative tone whose evident disregard for the ecosystems and people hurt by this expansion serves to disgust and anger the listener (Ren). In portraying this exaggerated version of a capitalist’s individualistic quest for money, Ren successfully turns the listener’s emotions against such selfish pursuits in themselves and others. Moreover, the menacing notes of horns that grow in intensity, playing in time with Ren’s words, evoke a sinking feeling of dread, reinforcing the idea that capitalism is harmful and leads society down a destructive path. Monbiot goes on to assert that “There must always be an extraction zone – from which materials are taken … and a disposal zone, where … waste and pollution [is disposed of],” once again expressing capitalism’s detriments through a highly rational argument (Monbiot). However, his diction continues to belie his message; his description of landfills and the like as “disposal zones” conveys a clinical perspective that fails to convey the humanitarian cost of these issues. Ren, though, begins the allusion to his chosen tongue-twister by singing to the listener to, “take as many shells as [they] can find and hide ‘em on an island [and] stockpile ‘em high until they’re rarer than a diamond,” likening business as it is

seen in capitalism to the diamond industry, which is well known to be extremely cruel to workers and environmentally taxing (Ren). Depicting all businesses as ones that wreak havoc on the environment with executives who build industries on the backs of the weak compels a listener to develop a fundamental opposition to capitalism due to its errant disregard for humanity.

This theme of criticizing the amorality that is amplified in the pursuit of riches is echoed in both pieces. However, “Money Game Pt. 2” again exhibits a greater ability to persuade a listener of capitalism’s failures via its satirical reduction of people, *reductio ad absurdum*, and cleverly integrated allusions. Ren first targets these moral implications when urging the listener to expand their business, referring to those whose labor facilitates this unstable growth as “fresh blood on hand” (Ren). Reducing people to simply “blood on hand” conveys a vicious double meaning; those whose blood, sweat, and tears fuel the capitalist engine are no more than objects to the powerful, and it is these executives who, in their greed, cause workers’ injury and death, thus painting the hands of the rich with the blood of the poor. The blatant lack of a moral compass in the satirical singer’s bouncing tone serves to infuriate the listener at the outlook of a power-hungry businessperson. Monbiot addresses a similar issue when he argues that capitalism “demand[s] endless, brutal labour...[and is] dehumanizing,” this time appealing to a reader’s emotions as is more effective for such an inherently human issue. Though he successfully triggers anger towards the system that enforces such brutality, Monbiot’s descriptions do not evoke the acute horror as the imagery of blood that Ren uses. “Money Game Pt. 2” also calls out the all-consuming nature of profit margins when his satirical persona aggressively questions the listener, demanding, “Why just shells? Why limit yourself? She sells seashells, sell oil as well!” (Ren). At the surface level, the progression from shells to oil seems like a solid use of reduction to the absurd, hyperbolically illustrating the extreme lengths to which people are willing to go in

the name of revenue. However, a closer examination reveals that this seemingly ridiculous scenario is, in fact, an allusion to the real world; the oil company Shell Plc started out as a seashell business. This reality makes the argument all the more powerful as it does not simply make an exaggerated and fallacious comparison; it displays the full extent of capitalism's absurdity, making yet another highly compelling appeal to the listener's outrage. In contrast, Monbiot's criticism of the "bizarre assumption that a person is entitled to as great a share of the world's natural wealth as their money can buy" falls flat (Monbiot). Though it relates to the same insatiable thirst for material possessions, his distant statement lacks the ability to kindle a genuine care for the implications of capitalism.

Songs are intrinsically connecting, whereas an opinion piece is more detached, and it is this fundamental difference that makes "Money Game Pt. 2" the more persuasive criticism of capitalism.

Works Cited

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