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A Marxist Analysis of Alienation and Commodification of Robert Frost's Poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'

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ABSTRACT

The study revolves around the aspects of Marxism in Robert Frost's poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evenings'. The poem showcases various complexities of the human situation in this materialistic world. It further offers the perspective of human relationship with nature, desires, responsibilities, constraints, and revealing intricate depiction of human experience. Frost's poem presents a serene winter scene, but beneath its tranquil surface lies a rich tapestry of human emotion. The poem depicts the speaker's dilemma, the tension between the responsibilities and desires in this natural world. Moreover, the poem presents a sort of commentary on the alienating effects of capitalism and commodification of nature. The woods provide the commodity of nature and the horse symbolizes the labor as working class to serve for capitalism. The poem expresses isolation and disconnection, mystery and beauty of the natural world, commodification of nature, restrictions of capitalist society, and a sense of tranquility along with responsibilities. The researcher analyzes other research articles and documents to support the topic under study.

Keyword: Complexities Of Human Situations, Commodification Of Nature, Alienation, Speaker's Dilemma, Effects Of Capitalism

Introduction

Robert Frost's poems have more underlying meaning than the literal meanings. He produces his poetry in a way that offers multiple directions and angles to get diverse meanings at the time of explanation. He includes nature, social issues, unique usage of language, and familial problems in his poetry. He also presents the relationships between human and society through sufferings, obligations, desires, and the natural world.

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' gives the impression to be a peaceful depiction of a winter scene, but upon closer examination, it reveals itself to be a thought-provoking exploration of the human condition. The speaker's pause in the woods serves as a catalyst for a deeper exploration of the human experience, revealing tensions between desire, responsibility, and the natural world. In other words, the poem exposes itself to be a commentary on the alienating effects of capitalism and the commodification of nature.

Marxist ideology of alienation and commodification are often related in many senses. They are influenced by capitalist society. The pressure built by the capitalist society usually leads towards health and relationship issues (Lavalette, & Ferguson, 2018). Alienation is subjective or individual experience that is imposed by capitalists. This expresses the paradox of social power in the wake of isolation or the feelings of



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powerlessness that control the human from their desires (Øversveen, 2022). In other words, desires cannot be fulfilled without fulfilling the responsibilities. These obligations are forced by capitalist society which the individual does not want, but they are so obsessed with the norm of the 21st century. They must accept all the responsibilities and forget about their desires. They become commodities in the hands of capitalist society.

Framework

The researcher has selected the theory of Karl Marx to examine the poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' for alienation, commodification and human condition. According to Louis Tyson (2006), Karl Marx has mentioned two social classes: the bourgeoisie or capitalist, those who control the world's natural, economic, and human resources to obtain the benefit. The other one is the proletariat, the majority of the global population who live in substandard conditions and sell their power to the capitalist.

Research Questions

How does the poem help to explore the commodification and alienation of humans?

What are the factors that lead humans to become commodity and later alienated from society?

Literature Review

Marxism is a philosophical doctrine and revolutionary theory. It also plays a key role in the process of historical change. Marxists also related themselves to the explanatory approach to society and human history. They believed that they explored the law and establishment of human history (Engels, 1884). Worsley (2013) further illustrates that Marxists pointed out that individuals are also related to society. Those who control economic opportunities also control the political ground. Every individual has the power to change this arena, but only the ruling class can have this opportunity. Capitalism exploits the way where means of production are in private hands and labors are used and sold as commodities. Labors are exchangeable in the market and the labors themselves function as commodities. Marx argues about the alienation of the labors in different forms such as source of value, commodity itself, and labors are sold as commodity as well (Rosen, 2005).

Apart from other elements, commodities also play a significant role in Marxist philosophy. It is the relation between things and people. Sometimes it is related to exchange value or use value of the things and now it spreads its impact on other fields as well such as language, writings, etc. nowadays language is the main target of the commodity (Park, et al., 2021). There is also a connection of commodity between politics and language which occurs at different situations (Del Percio et al., 2017). Holborow (2018) further defines the link between commodity and language that language learning and other related markets work on the value of commodity. Everything works as a commodity in the arenas of the above domains. Language gains market purpose and now it is treated as the main resource of the market; therefore, it becomes a commodity. For instance, the use of language skills for the sake of sales and services work as a commodification (Holborow, 2018).

As for the explored research about 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is concerned, it has been analyzed from multiple perspectives such as Ambreen et al., (2020) analyzed this poem from the perspectives of stylistic analysis while searching for figurative language. Alrdaat et al., (2020) focused on the graphology, lexis and figurative language in the domain of stylistic analysis. Wiranota and Arifin (2024) analyzed this



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poem from the standpoint of hidden meanings through the use of figurative language. Cao (2023) works on this poem from the perspective of extensive use of metaphors which helps the poet to construct the reflection of the society in the poem. Hashmi et al., (2019) discovered the choice of language at phonetic, semantic, phonological, and grammatical level through connotation, assonance, alliteration, metaphor, symbolism, cacophony, tone modulation, personification to identify the idea of death and dismay. The above studies and other research articles create a space for the new dimension for the researcher. The researcher analyzes this poem from the perspective of Marxist theory which is a new realm of this poem.

Research Methodology

The researcher applies the theory of Karl Marx on ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ to discuss human condition and commodification. The researcher uses textual analysis method to explore the objectives of the study with the help of close reading.

Textual Analysis

Whose woods these are I think I know.

...

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer

...

The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

...

Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

...

And miles to go before I sleep.

Speaker's Dilemma

Traveler, the speaker, has the desire to stay in the woods, but he is not able to stay for long and he is forced to continue his journey. This is the alienation of the labor used as a metaphor where the labors have to give forcefully importance to the work over personal desires and fulfillment. The inability of the speaker to pause and appreciate nature and its beauty presents the approach of capitalism to commodify and exploit natural sources for commercial gain. The speaker stays in the woods for a while, but starts his journey again due to undesired obligations. This shows the contradictions and tension of the capitalist society where every individual are stuck between their demands of productivity and desires. The continues journey of the speaker symbolizes the scarification for the sake of profit and progress.

Nature as a Commodity

The nature has unknown characteristics which is indicated by the words ‘lovely, dark, and deep’ serve as a metaphor. Fascination of the woods presents the desire of human to link with nature, but this the connection is partial due to capitalist society’s restrictions. The woods are belonged to someone else or owned by someone else which shows



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speaker as outsider and the commodification of nature. The private owner of the woods also directed the sense of capitalist owner. The woods have commodified nature which seems to be a calm and peaceful setting of nature. The woods are unexplored or unfamiliar to the speaker and they are ready to exploit too.

The Horse as a Symbol of Labor

The words 'little and queer' are used for the horse and they identify the exploitation of workers in the realm of capitalism. The bell of the horse symbolizes the commodification and controlled of the labors. The pause of the speaker in the woods classifies the alienating impacts the capitalist society which simply indicates the mere commodity of the labor reduction. The strange feelings of horse and sound of the bell offer the sense of challenges in life while the bell further symbolizes the exploitation and commodification of labor. Like a working class, the horse forces the speaker to continue the journey and this is the sign of capitalist manifestation.

The speaker is drawn to the woods, but acknowledges that they belong to someone else, highlighting the commodification of nature.

The speaker's horse is confused by the stop, emphasizing the speaker's deviation from their expected journey.

The "darkest evening of the year" symbolizes speaker's feelings of isolation and disconnection.

'harness bell...easy wind and downy flake' provides the sense of serenity, tranquility, and stillness. It also gives a soft reminder to the speaker for his obligations.

The beauty and mystery of the woods are expressed through 'dark, lovely, and deep'.

The speaker acknowledges their "promises to keep" and "miles to go before I sleep," highlighting various constraints of capitalist society.

There are complex and intricate relationships between nature and human condition. There is a serene or peaceful atmosphere of the poem, but that shows only the surface level. Due to the burden and cruelty of the capitalist society, the speaker continues his journey after a short break in the woods. This shows a contradiction in the action and thoughts of the speaker. He sacrifices his every calmness for the sake of profit and progress.

The speaker is reminded by the horse about his duty and his commodification as a labor in the capitalist society. It seems that he is totally controlled by the system and he is unable to do anything according to his own will. The speaker does not have any control over the environment; therefore, he keeps going for the sake of his obligations forced by the society. Capitalist society makes the labors alienated from other and burdened with works even they are not able to appreciate nature while living in nature.

The poem has the elements of Marxism and it offer the impact of alienation of capitalist society along with the commodification of nature. The speaker wanted to linked himself with the woods, but due to obligations, he did not link with the woods. The woods are owned by someone else and this shows the controlling power of the society. The speaker is confused between his personal desires and the demand of the capitalism from the labor. The unknown aspects of nature in the poem present the dark picture of capitalism.

Conclusion

The poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' has the elements Marxism like the commodity and human condition. The poem offers a tension among obligations, natural world, and desires. It also showcases the alienation of human and control of the capitalist society. The speaker wishes to stay in the woods to enjoy the beauty of nature, but his existence is a commodity for capitalism and he is not able to pause in the woods. The commodity and controlled of capitalism serves the alienation and exploitation of the



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working class. The poem offers diverse aspects such as isolation, a sense of calmness, mystery and the appealing nature of the woods, commodification of nature, disconnection of human from nature, and speaker's unwilling obligations are they key findings of this study. These elements present the helplessness of human in the hand of capitalism and exploitation of humans while using them as labors for commercial gain.

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