



EXPLORING THE ELEMENTS OF MARXISM IN THE POEM THE MAN WITH THE HOE BY EDWIN MARKHAM

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Abstract

This study provides a Marxist analysis of Edwin Markham's 1899 poem "The Man with the Hoe," inspired by Jean-François Millet's 1860-1862 painting. Through close textual reading, this paper examines how the poem critiques capitalist exploitation of the laboring class, revealing core Marxist concepts including class struggle, worker alienation, and surplus value extraction. The analysis demonstrates how Markham's imagery—particularly the laborer's stooped posture and extinguished consciousness—embodies Marx's theories of dehumanization under capitalism. The poem functions as both documentation and prophetic warning, holding the bourgeoisie accountable for systematically stripping workers of their humanity while predicting inevitable proletarian revolution. Despite the poem's historical significance and widespread impact, comprehensive Marxist analyses remain limited in contemporary scholarship. This study addresses this gap by connecting Markham's rhetoric and imagery to specific concepts in Marx's theory, offering a unique perspective on how nineteenth-century American poetry engaged with social critique and demonstrating the poem's enduring relevance as a call for economic justice and class resistance.

Keywords: Alienation, Labour Exploitation, Class Struggle, Marxist Literary Criticism, Edwin Markham

Introduction

The Marxist theory is critical of social injustice, unequal power distribution, exploitation of the lower classes (proletariat) and oppression of the ruling classes (bourgeoisie) over land, industries and property (Marx & Engels, 1986). The Marxist literary theory prefigures the precariousness of the working people, the conflict between classes, and the unequal economic balance between the classes (Eagleton, 1976). It explains how the capitalists make excess profit by the process of production mediated by labourers and hold large sums of money but pay small portions of money to the labourers. According to Marxist viewpoints, revolution is the only tool that can destroy the system created by the ruling class hence providing a solution to combat injustice and avoid class division, unequal distribution of property and subordination of power in the systematic societies (Fernandez, 1997).

The poem *The Man with the Hoe* by Edwin Markham sheds light on Marxism by showing the exploitation of working-class, the dominance of ruling-class, and social injustice. American poet wrote it in 1898 based on Jean-Francoise Millet 19th century picture "L'homme à la houe" (1860-1862), thus introducing a scalding indictment of capitalism and the industrial system (Booth, 2012). The poem describes the weak state, overload, and stress of labourers. *The Man with the Hoe*, published in the San Francisco Examiner on 15 January 1899, sparked controversy and sensitization of the population, gaining popularity in other countries within a short time, and being



translated into over thirty languages. It predicts the condition of the labouring masses by evaluating the painting of Millet, which portrays the domination of the ruling classes, the unequal distribution of the surplus value, and division into classes. The poet sheds light on such situations in verse, which presupposes the social injustice and power usage of the ruling elite.

A Marxist literary criticism describes the presence of class consciousness in the poem, which indicates how the labourers are forced to hooch over the hoe whilst they work under the guidance of the bourgeois controlling them to grow their capital (Tyson, 1999). The crouched stance of the labourer over the hoe is a symbol of the working class, their hard work, dedication and hard labour, but they are paid some salaries just to survive to go on another working round. This poem describes the true picture of the labouring group. The poet blames the ruling class in establishing the societal position of the labouring class - its oppression through production of labour - and insists that the silence of the labouring class would eventually yield to proletarian revolution. The Marxist view is thus brought out strongly in the central ideal that the poem takes.

Regardless of the historical value and the overall influence, thorough Marxist readings are still scarce in the contemporary literature. Although the social protest aspects of the poem have been explored by scholars and its importance in the American literature has been addressed, the systematic use of the Marxist literary theory to the Markham text has turned out to be very limited. This paper will fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive Marxist reading of the imagery employed by Markham, which employs particular ideas in the Marxian theory to show how the poem is a record of exploitation as well as a clarion call to action in the form of revolution. This research is important as it indicates how the American poetry of the 19th century approached the issue of the clash between classes and served to raise labour awareness, as well as demonstrates how the poem is still relevant to modern discussion of economic inequality and labour rights.

Research Objectives

1. To examine representations of working-class exploitation through textual analysis of imagery, metaphor, and symbolism in the poem.
2. To analyze how the poem portrays the bourgeoisie as an oppressive class and predicts revolutionary resistance.
3. To demonstrate the poem's relevance to core Marxist concepts including alienation, surplus value, and class consciousness.

Literature Review

Marxist theory discloses that the ruling class systematically dominates the working one within a system of engineered maintenance that does not allow acknowledging inequality, exploitation, and domination of power. This notion of social stratification is the key point of Marxist studies (Marx & Engels, 1986). According to Craig (1998), Karl Marx was able to illustrate how the system is made to exploit the working class via systematic deprivation directed to dominate power in relation to property and material ownership in the society. At the heart of the Marxist criticism is the realization that all other social relations are shaped by economic relationships and sets up a system where one group of people gains at the expense of another.

Marxist literary theory is a tool used in analysis of ideologies embedded in texts in literature and Marxism. It looks into the way in which literary works can explain social order and how literature can bring out contradictions and conflicts in the social order (Jameson, 2003). Jameson states that every literature should be read as a figurative reflection upon the fate of the community, and this



is why it is imperative to grasp the socioeconomic environment of the texts being created. As a result, literature works are placed in areas of ideological confrontation whereby class struggles are replicated, put to the test, or confirmed (Eagleton, 1976).

The Marxist theory claims that there are two groups in the society; the proletariat, or working class, who sell their labour in order to survive, and the ruling class or bourgeoisie, also referred to as capitalists. This conflict between these classes contributes to the historical and social change (Fernandez, 1997). It is on this dialectical relationship that historical materialism is built and under economic conditions, the nature of social institutions and cultural forms are determined. According to Marx and Engels (1986), the history of all the existing societies to date is the history of classes struggles, that is, conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed is the driving force behind historical development.

Alienation is the primary notion of Marxist discussion of labour in capitalism. Marx (1844/1964) singled out four forms of alienation: alienation of the product of labour, alienation of the act of production, alienation of species-being and alienation of other workers. Capitalism alienates workers to their labour and they produce goods that they cannot afford to consume and they also do not control the process of production (Ollman, 1971). This alienation does not solely refer to economic relations but it involves the whole life of the worker depriving him of his human nature and making him just a means of production.

The other principle of Marxist economics is the surplus value theory, which determines how capitalists exploit workers to get profit. According to Marx, the worth of labour power is less than the worth it produces and the difference between the two is surplus value that is amassed by the capitalist (Harvey, 2010). Workers receive a wage that is just enough to keep them alive and the surplus value created by them continues to enrich the bourgeoisie, which keeps the inequality in classes and economic exploitation.

In the German Ideology, Karl Marx stated that the ruling group not only controls the laboring group, but it also controls their intellectual faculties and thus they cannot autonomously rise and become victims of the system (Marx & Engels, 1998). The sociological arrangements are designed to generate profit to the oppressive group and at the same time subjugate intellectual strength of workers through stratified divisions of classes which does not allow them to recognize themselves to the bourgeoisie. Gramsci ideological hegemony goes further to add that the dominance of the ruling group is not only through the application of coercive force but also through the control of the production and propagation of ideas (Gramsci, 1971). As a result, employees continue to be held down by the need to labour under the rule of the ruling class, which makes their cognitive abilities blurred and constantly trapped in a systematic survival loop.

Literature has been an important means of expressing and criticizing these social-economic conditions. As Booth (2012) argues, poetry, especially in the period of the Industrial Revolution, was a form of expression of the struggles of the working classes and a way of enhancing the idea of class consciousness regarding exploitation. This socially conscious poetic practice is found throughout Markham's *The Man with the Hoe*, and urgently attempts to reveal injustice and to activate change. The reception of the poem shows how literary works can stimulate the people to talk about labour rights and social reform. The poem was controversial at first, though meant to cast socialist propaganda on some and a religious commentary on others, systematic Marxist literary criticism of this particular verse has remained remarkably light. Booth (2012) writes about



the role of Markham as popularising poetry among the audience of working classes but he does not indulge in an in-depth textual Marxist analysis of the poem.

Karl Marx discovered this larger system of structure, which appeared in the epoch of the Industrial Revolution, and which exposes the logic of the existence of ideology, which creates a sense of discrimination between the oppressor and the oppressed classes. Tyson (1999) argues that the superstructure of social, political and ideological facts is created on the basis of the building block of economics (p. 54). Such economic foundation determines the cultural, legal and political overlay of society which means that all social phenomena eventually reflect underlying economic relations. This interrelation is critical in the analysis of the way literature mirrors and forms the class consciousness.

The modern Marxist literary critique still finds its way and still maintains interest in material conditions and the issues of a given class struggle, but incorporates elements of poststructuralism, feminism and postcolonial theory (Eagleton, 1996). The relevance of the Marxist interpretation to the modern texts is shown by scholars like Salunke (2021) and shows that the modern literature still struggles with the themes of exploitation, alienation, and the struggle. Awan and Perveen (2018) also use the Marxist theories in postcolonial literature to demonstrate that the issue of classes cuts across culture and national identity in complex fashions. Nevertheless, such studies focus on other literary pieces but not on the poem by Markham.

This paper fills this gap in the literature by providing a detailed Marxist reading of *The Man with the Hoe* connecting its imagery and rhetoric to the theoretical ideas of Marx and explaining how the poem is both a social report and a revolutionary prophecy.

Theoretical Framework

The literature in this work takes a Marxist theoretical approach which is based on a qualitative view of the economic system, description of labour in society, and exploitation (Tyson, 1999). The proletariat is just regarded as an efficient factor in the growth of capital of the ruling class. Workers suffer long hours but earn a poor pay, a fact that Marx (1867/1990) highlights. The issues of labour exploitation that Marx raised including alienation, bodily labour and nature are still relevant. The bourgeoisie creates such exploitation to make the maximum profits by working around (Harvey, 2010).

The Marxist philosophy also explains the oppressor class putting a heavy posture to the working class which is the labour capitals dichotomy (Ollman, 1971). Expanded perspective theorizes that the bourgeoisie use the working classes to produce excess production past the inherent worth of the workers, and as such, place them under the existential standards of the ruling classes. The capitalist system consumes intellectual resources, deprives laborers of their reflective ability, and eventually imposes ideological discourses that perpetuate the capitalist system and deceive people that egalitarian prospects are provided (Eagleton, 1996).

Particularly, this paper uses three fundamental concepts of Marxism to discuss the poem by Markham:

Alienation Theory

Based on Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844/1964) by Marx, this framework questions the poem on how workers were estranged by their own production, their products, much-needed humanity, and their own proletariat.



Surplus Value Theory

According to the concept of capital as defined by Marx's Capital (1867/1990), this will judge how the poem depicts capitalists that collect wealth at the expense of the workers at a small cost, therefore, strengthening and enforcing the class inequality.

The Struggle of Classes and Revolutionary Consciousness

This framework has its base in the Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels, 1986) and it analyzes how the poem archives the conflict of classes and predicts the rise of revolutionary consciousness among the oppressed that is bound to come.

Through a systematic approach to these theoretical lenses in the text of Markham, the paper sheds light on the hidden class struggle and exploitation in the imagery and rhetoric of the poem.

Key Concepts in Marxism

Exploitation and Surplus Value

Marxism criticizes the ownership and means of production of the bourgeoisie, which oppressed the proletariat in the existing system. Super value is the result of the work of the workers but it is stolen by the ruling classes who also gives back a small fraction of the super value to the working classes, thus continuing to create unequal economic distribution (Marx, 1867/1990). The whole system is still maintained by the bourgeoisie who develop gears that are unable to allow workers to challenge the systems devised by the bourgeoisie as it is articulated by Marx. This also highlights segregation of power, wealth, social norms and political influence (Harvey, 2010).

Marx clarifies that, workers are selling their labour power to the capitalists, and the latter take more value out of such labour than what they compensate in wages. It is this difference or surplus value which forms the origin of capitalist profit. This system sustains workers at best at the subsistence level forcing them to keep commodifying their labour in order to survive as the bourgeoisie further accumulates wealth. This is not an accident but is deeply embedded in the structure of the capitalistic relations of production (Tyson, 1999).

Alienation

Marxism is basically against the alienation of workers to human under capitalism. Laborers are dispossessed, remodeled by the literary products and they are incarcerated, which results in the loss of their basic social interest (Ollman, 1971).

The alienation theory of Marx plays the major role in the interpretation of the state of laborers. Workers are estranged through the loss of power resulting in the denial of the fundamental portion of society.

Alienation in the form of capitalism occurs in four different forms:

Loss of ownership of the product of labor: Workers produce products that they are not able to own or afford

Loss of being a producer: Work is no longer free expression and becomes forced activity

Detachment of species-being: Man no longer has the necessary creative power

Loss of unity with the rest of the workers: Competition is substituting cooperation and unity

Alienation is not only on work, but also on body and soul, which results in dehumanization (Marx, 1844/1964). Capitalists cherish labor and not humanity- which is highly unnatural occurrence in a society. Laborers are slandered by themselves because they transformed into the means of money production, their bodies are alienated, both physically and spiritually.



The Marxist school of thought suggests that humans are born without burden, classification, and unequal distribution of work in the labor market but the role of the labourer in the society nullifies this argument (Eagleton, 1976). Bourgeoisie has all the sophisticated posts and workers are deprived of their creativity as well as human dignity and are left as tools of production (Jameson, 2003).

Class Struggle

The theory by Marx portrays the idea of the struggle of classes in a vociferous manner with the ruling class being the only class that is operating and owns all the value (Marx and Engels, 1986). The working masses are programmed to be dominated over by classes as the motivated one. Class struggle is the inherent opposition between those who possess production resources and those who have to sell their labor power to live.

This is not only an economic struggle but a struggle of every kind of social life political power, system of law, cultural production, and ideological control. To advance its interests, the bourgeoisie applies its economic superiority to create institutions that defend its interests and the proletariat should organize itself in unity to counter such superiority (Gramsci, 1971). According to Marx, the growing contradictions in capitalism would in the long run result in the development of revolutionary consciousness among the workers leading to the overthrow of the capitalist society (Fernandez, 1997).

The classification system contradicts not only the society, but nature, as it breaks the rules of nature, robs the rights by the system of classes in which humans are granted the same rights by the world. One of the main systems that ensure that the underclass does not go beyond the boundaries of the society is the class struggle, yet it is the seed of the revolutionary change (Harvey, 2010).

Research Methodology

The present study is based on qualitative textual analysis that belongs to the Marxist literary criticism (Eagleton, 1976; Tyson, 1999). After the close reading approach, the study critically analyzes the articles on Edwin Markham concerning *The Man with the Hoe* to detect and explain the components that convey Marxist ideas on the concept of exploitation, alienation, and struggle of classes. In this study, the qualitative method can be used because it provides an opportunity to dive into the linguistic characteristics of the text, metaphorical patterns, and ideological connotations.

The analytical model discusses four major dimensions:

- Imagery and Symbolism
- Rhetorical Strategies
- Metaphorical Language
- Prophetic Language

It is analyzed to determine the ways in which the warnings and predictions on the poem speak of the dialectical materialism and theories of inevitable revolution proposed by Marx. The prophetic voice is discussed in terms of its connection with the Marxist ideas of historical necessity and contradiction as the driver of social change.

In the analysis of the text of the poem, the line-by-line analysis is performed to outline the passages representing the Marxist themes, and the passages under discussion are interpreted with the help of the topical theoretical ideas of Marx in the book *Capital* (1867/1990), *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844/1964), and *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 1986). Marxist



literary criticism suggests further interpretive categories as secondary sources, such as Eagleton (1976, 1996), Tyson (1999), Jameson (2003), Harvey (2010), and Ollman (1971) works.

This methodology gives more emphasis to the textual evidence and all interpretative claims in the poem are based on certain lines of the poem. The structure of every analytical part is similar: the quotation of the poem, the linguistic and imagistic elements analysis, the referral to the theoretical ideas of Marxism, and the referral to the relevant literature. This methodological approach guarantees rigor and transparency when analyzing but in the process lets the language of the poem spearhead the analysis. This methodology can be understood by integrating close-reading methods and Marxist theoretical approaches to show how literary works encode, represent, and criticize societal relationships to show the ability of literature to act as documentation and intervention in disputes over meaning and power.

Textual Analysis

The Man with the Hoe written by Edwin Markham is an effective criticism of industrial capitalism and its dehumanizing impact on the working people. The poem is a reply to a 1860-1862 painting by Jean-Francois Millet with the same title, which is a conversion of visual art into a hostile social commentary that enforces fundamental Marxist principles of exploitation, alienation, and social conflict (Booth, 2012).

The Image of Dehumanization

The opening lines themselves already define the dehumanized state of the laborer:

"Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,

And on his back the burden of the world" (Markham, 1899, lines 1-4).

These lines are the open view of alienation under Marxism. The weight of centuries refers to the fact that this exploitation is not a one-time event but a system and a historical process, which the generations of workers experienced under the reign of the capitalist system (Marx and Engels, 1986). His bent back position signifies physical fatigue or spiritual failure- he is unable to look up beyond the earth symbolizing his lack of connection to higher ideals and culture or on himself as a human being (Ollman, 1971). This corporeal disposition is what Marx termed as the subversion of workers into mere machine appendages and denude of their fundamental human attributes (Marx, 1867/1990, p. 799).

The "emptiness of ages in his face implies" the total emptiness of intellectual and emotional existence, and the burden of the world on his back makes the Marxist idea of workers carrying the load of creating all values and the bourgeoisie taking the reward of their efforts real (Harvey, 2010). The staring of the laborer downwards symbolizes his failure to look further than just the need to survive as he is in a state of what Marx described as the false consciousness- they cannot see themselves as exploited nor know of any other way to avert the system (Tyson, 1999).

Alienation from Human Essence

Markham's rhetorical questions intensify the critique of capitalist alienation:

"Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?" (Markham, 1899, lines 5-7).



The animal analogy (to an ox) directly refers to the idea of Marx on alienation of species -being, in which workers lose their personalities and resemble beasts of burden (Marx, 1844/1964). The worker has been deprived of the ability to experience the feelings of rapture and despair the whole gamut of human emotion which makes consciousness. This body-killing is the ultimate psychological price of exploitation, by which the capitalists do not only rob the worker of his or her surplus, but also of the fundamental humanity (Harvey, 2010). According to Tyson (1999), in capitalism, workers become commodities of their own, with their only value being the labor power and not their human value.

This account of the worker being described as solid and stunned is a reminder of the fact that the capitalistic system requires intellectual repression in order to perpetuate the capitalistic process of exploitation. The thinker/feelers, a worker with consciousness, as Marx may call him/her, would presumably see the unfairness and then arrange the counter-strategy; thus, the machine needs to produce workers that are not only dead to both pleasure and pain but also able to work only as a machine (Eagleton, 1976). The use of thing rather than man or person brings out full dehumanisation -turning the worker into a subject to be balanced to an object, a human being to a means of production (Ollmann, 1971).

Intellectual Suppression and False Consciousness

Markham interrogates the mechanisms of ideological control:

"Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?

Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?

Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?" (Markham, 1899, lines 8-10).

These questions shed some light on what Gramsci (1971) described as hegemony, the domination of the domineering class on even the consciousness itself. The lost light in this brain symbolizes the repression of the consciousness of classes, which Marx and Engels (1998) define in the German ideology where the bourgeoisie not only controls material production, but also controls the production of ideas. Employees are kept in their false consciousness levels and cannot understand their exploitation or that they can find alternatives to the capitalist order, which is the best (Tyson, 1999, p. 54).

The corporeal signs of exploitation, the physiological imagery of the brute jaw, the slanted back (brow) imply that the mark of oppression has actually marked the anatomy of the worker making human corporeal form the testimony of oppression (Jameson, 2003). The repetition of the word who in these lines underlines the agency and responsibility and the bourgeoisie is directly involved in this intellectual subjugation. Markham does not want to naturalise the situation of the worker, on the contrary, he asserts that this situation of degradation was willfully created by a particular group of actors: masters, lords and rulers (Fernandez, 1997).

The image of the doused light is echoed by Marxian negation of alienation to species-being. Human beings are characterized by consciousness, reason and creativity and to kill the light in this brain is to kill what makes us human (Marx, 1844/1964). This is not a chance rather a systematic result, which is imperative in the maintenance of capitalist dominance over labour (Harvey, 2010).



The Accusation of the Ruling Class

The poem's most direct confrontation with the bourgeoisie appears in its accusatory address:

"O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
Is this the handiwork you give to God,

This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?" (Markham, 1899, lines 18-20).

In this case, Markham identifies the oppressor class namely, the masters, lords and rulers, which he holds responsible in subjecting the labouring class (Fernandez, 1997). The term handiwork you give to God implies that the elite corrupts the creation of God and makes humans monstrous creatures. This accusation is parallel to the statement of Marx who claimed that the bourgeoisie dehumanises workers in a systematic fashion to maintain control over the economy and exploit surplus value (Marx, 1867/1990).

The poet questions not only the inequality of the economy but also the ethical bankruptcy of the system that goes against the law of nature and God (Eagleton, 1976). With an appeal to God, Markham is addressing a superior power than human jurisprudence; that is to say, that capitalist exploitation is putting into defiance the essential principles of justice above any social system. Soul-quenched underlines a spiritual and physical and intellectual degradation, the worker has been denuded not only of labour power but also the immortal essence (Booth, 2012).

The interrogative is a moral challenge and a legal indictment, the interrogative form, that is, is this the handiwork you give to God? It compels the ruling elite to face the consequences of their own behavior and apologize to the rest of humanity and God in general on how they treat their fellow human beings (Tyson, ..., 1999). Such rhetoric is used to cut through ideological rationalisations used by the bourgeoisie to justify exploitation, and puts the human price of their prosperity in the scale of serious challenge (Jameson, 2003).

Surplus Value and Economic Exploitation

The poem implicitly addresses the extraction of surplus value:

"Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,

Plundered, profaned and disinherited" (Markham, 1899, lines 13-16).

The terms plundered and disinherited themselves make direct reference to the Marxist theory of surplus value, or the gap between what workers create and what they get in salaries (Harvey, 2010). Employees produce wealth but are deprived of the fruits of labor; the capitalists seize the surplus and accumulate it. The stooping ache is an image of the physical cost of this extraction, in which the very body of the labourer is its own witness to exploitation over many centuries (suffering ages) (Ollmann, 1971).

Such generational aspect as the suffering ages, the tragedy of time, accentuates the idea of the structural characteristics of the capitalistic exploitation which is built into the very structure of the economy (Marx, 1867/1990). And the burden falls on successive generations of workers and the labour of one generation educates the bourgeoisie and enriches the proletariat. The word betrayed implies that employees have been deprived of the proper totality of their labour, by a kind of systematic theft in the guise of a fair exchange (Tyson, 1999).



The fact that profaned is applied adds an element of religion to economic criticism. Employees are not only exploited but also desecrated their sacred humanity is denied because they are seen as factors of production (Eagleton, 1976). It is a desecration where Marx extends his analysis to ontology and ethics, which implies that capitalism is guilty of sinning against its own being (Jameson, 2003).

Class Consciousness and the Call to Recognition

Markham challenges readers to recognize class structure:

"What the long reaches of the peaks of song,

The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?

Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;

Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop" (Markham, 1899, lines 11-14).

These verses contrast the beauty and culture that the ruling class can experience, the peaks of song, the rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose, with the total barrenness of the worker to aesthetic experience. The bourgeoisie is able to spend time on leisure activities, art and nature but the laborer only has to work tirelessly (Fernandez, 1997). This alienation of experience in classes illustrates how capitalism produces not only economic inequality but an entire alienation of whatever leads to human prosperity (Marx, 1844/1964).

The rhetorical questions underline what has been deprived to the worker: of the access to beauty, of time to think, of the chance to take part in the cultural life. They are not just luxuries but are an important aspect of human dignity and development (Ollmann, 1971). Capitalism robs workers of such experiences and thus it cripples the potentials of human beings by producing beings capable of work and unable to live comprehensively (Harvey, 2010).

The Prophetic Warning of Revolution

The poem concludes with an ominous prediction:

"How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—

With those who shaped him to the thing he is—

When this dumb Terror shall reply to God,

After the silence of the centuries?" (Markham, 1899, lines 42-45).

This prophetic warning is a reflection of the Marxist faith in the hegemonic proletariat revolution. Dumb Terror is a phrase that depicts the stored anger of exploited workers who will destroy their oppressors once they have awakened to the knowledge of their own classes (Marx & Engels, 1986). The fact that the word Terror is capitalized implies the strength of this next revolution and its righteousness as a reaction against centuries of injustice.

According to Jameson (2003), this revolutionary imagery in literature has the effect of voicing the hushpuppies of the working masses which is political unconsciousness that the capitalist machine desperately tries to suppress the desires of justice that the capitalist system tries to stifle. The mention of kingdoms and kings collapsing reverberates Marxian materialism of history, which argues that the struggle of classes should be the driving force of historical development and foretells the unchangeable demise of the exploitative systems (Marx and Engels, 1986).

The title After the silence of the centuries accepts the fact of the oppression of long years but gives hope of its conclusion. The silence of workers is not an act of consent rather it is a matter of repression; once they are heard, their voice will be dreadful and will be a revolution (Tyson, 1999). The invocation of God--shall answer God--implicates that revolution is not necessarily simply a



question of a political transition, but the cosmic righteousness, the recovery of a lost divine order in which capitalist avarice has caused havoc (Eagleton, 1976).

The question "How will it be with kingdoms and with kings?" is both warning and threat. It requires that the ruling class weighs up the effects of their actions as well as foreseeing their demise with historical accuracy (Harvey, 2010). This prophetic form changes this poem into protest but even more revolutionary protest since it states that it is inevitable that capitalism will be toppled and that the working classes will be emancipated (Booth, 2012).

Discussion

In the textual analysis, it is possible to say that the *The Man with Hoe* by Markham is a fully developed Marxist work, which deals with exploitation, alienation, the struggle of classes, and the consciousness of a revolution using the powerful images and accusative speech. The strength of the poem lies in its ability to make abstract Marxism ideas visible and palpable and, thus, turn theoretical examination into a heartfelt and an ethical appeal.

Addressing Research Objectives

Objective 1: Representations of Working-Class Exploitation

The discussion shows how Markham applies various representational techniques to portray exploitation. The bent stature of the laborer, his stare, and his vacant consciousness are all combined to form an image of a systematic degradation. The poem does not include any solitary acts of abuse but, on the contrary, reveals the structural violence that exists in capitalistic society as a whole. Markham makes it clear that exploitation is not unique by referring to the group of workers as a whole, he uses singular *he*, as a reference to centuries as a way of showing the fact that the capitalist mode of production is based on exploitation (Marx, 1867/1990).

The plundering and disinheriting imagery are a direct visualization of the process of extracting surplus value to see the invisible process of appropriating labor of workers by capitalists. The poem therefore has a pedagogical role, which educates the readers to observe exploitation that is usually concealed by ideological structures (Gramsci, 1971).

Objective 2: The Bourgeoisie as Oppressive Class

The poem where the author directly addresses the masters, lords and rulers, and repeats the phrase that includes the interrogative *who* made the worker generates definite responsibilities. Markham does not believe in naturalizing poverty and degradation, but instead he insists that there are certain actors (the bourgeoisie) who have systematically created this system to their own advantage (Tyson, 1999).

The accusing mode establishes responsibility, which puts the bourgeoisie to task in the eyes of both the human and divine justice. The prophetic alarm of revolution is a twofold purpose, warning of an inevitability in history, and also threatening the ruling classes of being brought to bear with the consequences in case of non-reform. This documentation and accusation and warning turn the poem not only descriptive, but interventionist, and is out to alter consciousness and material conditions (Eagleton, 1976).

Objective 3: Demonstrating Relevance to Marxist Concepts

The discussion can be used to note that there is systemic use of fundamental concepts of Marxism in the entire poem. Alienation also takes various forms: alienation of the worker to beauty and culture, to intellectual life and to emotional faculty and humanity itself. The extraction of surplus value is represented in the image of plundering and disinheriting. The conflict between classes is



recorded (in the status quo of the oppression) and is anticipated (in the impending revolution and turmoil).

The poem illustrates that literary works can contain the theoretic ideas in the forms that can be understood by the mass audience and fulfill the role of creating awareness that Marx himself belonged to (Booth, 2012). Markham allows the readers to become aware of systemic exploitation by relating personal suffering with the general suffering experienced by all workers and a realization that the bourgeois as a whole is the common enemy (Jameson, 2003).

Historical and Contemporary Significance

At the time of the publication of *The Man with the Hoe* in 1899, the United States had been experiencing the most serious conflicts on labor. The poem came to play a role in the general societal discussion on worker rights, along with other cultural productions which criticized the excesses of the Gilded Age capitalism. Its extensive circulation and ensuring translation to various languages is evidence to the ability of literature in crossing national borders and providing international working-class solidarity (Fernandez, 1997).

The poem can still be relevant nowadays because the process of global capitalism still generates the same type of exploitation. Modern employees of the manufacturing, agricultural, and service sector have to work under the conditions which Markham described: prolonged working hours, lack of payment, loss of control over their work, and the systematic deprivation of complete humanism. Markham is right in stating that the emergence of precarious work, gig-economy, and increasing wealth inequality makes his critique as pressing in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth (Harvey, 2010).

It is also important that the poem has a prophetic aspect. Although Marx never envisioned how exactly the revolution would take place, the struggle of workers is still rife across the globe. The poem makes modern readers remember that the exploitation is not natural and unavoidable but a result of certain economic systems that might be challenged and reformed (Tyson, 1999).

Conclusion

In Marxist perspective, Edwin Markham's work, *The Man with the Hoe*, is functioning both as a documentary account and as a critique of exploitation by the capitalists. Using imagery and accusatory words, the poem reveals the systematic dehumanisation of labour by the bourgeoisie which is a system that steals surplus value and at the same time, snuff out the consciousness of the classes (Booth, 2012). This physical dominance of the laborer summarizes the alienation model by Marx as it shows how capitalism alienates workers to their labour, to their products, to their fundamental humanity, and to one another (Marx, 1844/1964; Ollman, 1971).

What is more, the prophetic end of the poem is not just a warning, it is a call to revolt, which is in harmon with the claim of the Marx and Engels (1986) that the natural contradictions in the system of capitalism must inevitably lead to its destruction. Markham provides literary expression to the repressed political consciousness that Marx predicted would ultimately break out in the revolutionary praxis by recording the dumb Terror of the oppressed (Jameson, 2003). In this way, the poem traces the ability of literature as a site of ideological opposition, against prevailing interests of the dominant classes and in favor of a radical social change (Eagleton, 1976).

The logical discussion presented below indicates the extent to which the Marxist ideas are infused in the composition of Markham. Starting with the first sight of the ancient man toil crippled and the last prophetic denunciation, the poem approaches the topics of exploitation, alienation, struggle



of classes, and revolutionary awareness incisively. All the rhetorical devices, metaphors, and descriptive details converge into the overall critique of capitalism which is as relevant today as the poem was first published (Tyson, 1999).

Although world capitalism is becoming even more globalized and wealth inequality is becoming more heinous in the twenty-first century, the critique provided by Markham is more than urgent. The man with the hoe continues to work in sweatshops, factories, fields, and even gig-economy platforms across the globe, which makes the requested justice and human dignity in the poem as necessary as it was 100 years ago. Modern anti-exploitation fights in fast-fashion supply chains, agricultural labour, and platform labour follow the same pattern as Markham, and need to recognise the humanity of workers as well (Harvey, 2010).

This work adds to the scholarship as it provides a Marxist reading systematic exegesis of a major but previously poorly-studied poem in American literature shedding light on the way literary texts at the end of the nineteenth century were responding to the class struggle and developing the working-class consciousness. It also represents one of the ways that Marxist literary criticism may integrate a rigorous close reading with theoretical acumen, and show how poetry can render such sophisticated social analysis in ways that are both understandable and emotionally heartening.

Limitations and Future Research

Considering that this work concerns itself with a Marxist approach, future research may have a productive discussion of the poem in alternative critical approaches ecocriticism, in terms of labour-land relations; religious studies, in terms of theological aspects; or reception theory, in terms of how the work has been understood by various audiences over time and across cultures.

Also, comparative analysis would help reveal links between the poem by Markham and other domestic and international labour poetry of that period. This investigation could reveal working-class cross-border cultural production and struggle. This would be a rich historical context to explore how the poem contributed to the labour movements during the early twentieth century and how it helped in specific organising campaigns.

Lastly, the modern uses of the themes of the poem to the existing discussions on the exploitation of the gig-economy, wealth inequality, automation, and employees rights represent a rich area of exploration. What could be the role of the critique of Markham in contemporary economic justice efforts? What does the man with the hoe look like in the world of the twenty-first century capitalism? These queries maintain the topicality of the poem and confirm that the Marxist literary criticism will always be essential in the identification of the past and present processes.

After all, *The Man with the Hoe* is an example of literature doing a consciousness-raising job which makes visible the realities of oppression which ideology tries to make natural and unseen. Turning the Marxist theory into a powerful verse, Markham created a piece of work that makes the readers still recognize the presence of exploitation and undermine the necessity of it, as well as imagine how things might have been. By doing so, the poem serves one of the most important purposes of literature, which is to help us see the world the way it really is and how it could be.

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