



Alienation, Labor, and Capitalist Power in Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener*: A Marxist Critical Analysis

Assis. Lect. Zahraa Adil Abdulsahib,

College of Education for Women, University of Kufa, Department of English

Email: zahraaa.alkafnaweez@uokufa.edu.iq

Assis. Lect. Jaafer Jassim Mohammad,

General Directorate of Education in Najaf, Iraqi Ministry of Education

Email: Jaaferjassim83@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper provides the Marxist critical analysis of *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville with its dramatizing of the themes of alienation, labor exploitation, and capitalist power being experienced by the character of Bartleby and the bureaucratic setting he works in. The work applies the theory of alienated labor developed by Karl Marx, and adopts the perspectives of Althusser, Lukacs and Marcuse to analyze how passive resistance of Bartleby, who replied incessantly, "I would prefer not to," demonstrates the psychological and material implications of the capitalist ideology. The monotonous clerical work, the strict order of classes, and the incapability of the narrator to see the humanity within Bartleby described in the story predict the dehumanizing nature of the capitalist order. This paper has attempted to make a case by close textual analysis to argue that Bartleby is a kind of alienated worker who isolates him/herself in a system that cannot provide emotional, social, and existential satisfaction. His retreat ends up revealing the ethical sterility of the capitalistic system and the lack of possibility of authentic human interaction in the same. The study has added to the Melville studies in both placing Bartleby into a wider context of critique of capitalism in the nineteenth century and showing how Melville prefigures contemporary interpretations of labor, resistance, and ideological control.

Keywords: Melville; Bartleby; Marxism; alienation; capitalist power; labor; ideology

الاغتراب والعمل وسلطة الرأسمال في قصة هرمان ملفيل *بارتلباي الكاتب الناسخ*: تحليل نقدي
ماركسي

م.م. زهراء عادل عبد الصاحب

م.م. جعفر جاسم محمد

الملخص

تقدّم هذه الدراسة قراءة نقدية ماركسية لقصة هيرمان ملفيل: *بارتلباي، الناسخ*، من خلال تحليل تمثيلات الاغتراب العمالي، واستغلال القوة العاملة، وهيمنة النظام الرأسمالي البيروقراطي. وبالاستناد إلى نظرية ماركس حول الاغتراب، وإلى مفاهيم التوسير حول الأيديولوجيا، ولوكاش حول التشبيء، وماركوز حول



الإنسان ذي البعد الواحد، تستكشف الدراسة كيف تكشف مقاومة بارتلبي السلبية المتجلية في عبارته المتكررة "أفضل عدم ذلك" عن الآثار النفسية والمادية التي يفرضها النظام الرأسمالي على الفرد العامل. وتوضح القراءة كيف يعكس العمل الروتيني الميكانيكي للنسّاج، والهرمية الطبقيّة الصارمة، وعجز الراوي عن إدراك إنسانية بارتلبي، الطبيعة اللاإنسانية للبنى الرأسمالية. ومن خلال تحليل نصّي دقيق، تجادل الدراسة بأن بارتلبي يمثل العامل المغترب الذي ينسحب من نظام يحرّمه من الإشباع الإنساني والاجتماعي والوجودي، وأن انسحابه يكشف إفلاس النظام الرأسمالي أخلاقياً وعجزه عن خلق علاقات إنسانية حقيقية. وتساهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء نقد ميلفل عبر وضع القصة ضمن إطار نقدي للرأسمالية في القرن التاسع عشر، وإظهار كيف أن ميلفل استشرف مفاهيم حديثة تتعلق بالعمل والمقاومة والهيمنة الأيديولوجية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ميلفل, بارتلبي, الماركسية, الإغتراب, القوى الرأسمالية, العمالة, الايديولوجية.

Chapter One: Introduction

Bartleby, the Scrivener (1853) by Herman Melville has been one of the most interesting commentaries on the contemporary work and capitalist ethics in the American literature. The setting of the story is Wall Street, the era during which bureaucratic forms of work were spreading at a high pace so the psychological and social implications of the system that emphasizes productivity over human beings are dramatized in the story. According to scholars like Andrew Delbanco (2005), Melville is seen as repeatedly challenging the contradictions of the capitalist America, showing the conflicts between the economic rationality and human dignity. These strains are created in *Bartleby* in the sterile atmosphere of the law office, the mechanistic quality of clerical job, and the inability of the narrator to perceive the suffering of Bartleby.

New discipline and control of workers were enforced by the emergence of capitalist labor in the nineteenth century. The capitalist mode of production, as Marx (1978) explicates, makes work a process of alienation that is repetitive, and the worker finds himself alienated to work and selfhood. This estrangement is symbolized by Melville in the scriveners; Turkey, Nippers, Ginger Nut and later on Bartleby whose main activity is to produce copies, to have strict work schedules and partitions that separate individuals and make them functions. The office of the lawyer resembles the Marxian definition of alienated labor, where the identity of workers is just fashioned completely in line with the requirements of the capital.

The fact that Bartleby is iconically refusing; "I would prefer not to," brings into this system a disruption that is into deep waters. According to critics like Gilles Deleuze (1997), the phrase represents a kind of resistance, the resistance that declines to subscribe to the ideological formations of obedience. Capitalistically speaking, Bartleby refuses, dramatizing the emotional and existential disaster of the working life, to put it in the words of Lukacs (1971): reification: the transformation of human being into an object of economic activity. The passivity of Bartleby is not the



passivity of indifference, but by itself forms a criticism of the workplace which appreciates labor and totally overlooks the laborer.

Although *Bartleby* has elicited a variety of interpretations; existential, psychological, and legal interpretations, there has been a relative dearth of Marxist scholarship on the story. Most researchers accept the themes of alienation but they do not tie them together in a systematic manner in relation to the material and ideological conditions that are described at the workplace. The available criticism has a tendency to interpret the refusal of *Bartleby* in a symbolic manner as well, instead of putting it in the context of the larger processes of capitalist production and labor discipline. As Parker (1996) writes in his biography of Melville the author himself was very conscious of the pressure of market forces and dehumanizing logic of capitalistic expectations. Nevertheless, a detailed, textually based, Marxist treatment of this aspect of *Bartleby* has never been given.

This paper thus endeavours to fill this gap by analyzing *Bartleby, the Scrivener* using a convergence of theories of Marx, Lukacs, Althusser, and Marcuse. The theory of alienation by Marx offers an understanding of psychological fragmentation of workers in capitalism. The idea of reification created by Lukacs sheds light on how the workplace environment turns people into the functioning objects. The idea of ideology by Althusser (1971) can be applied to understand why the narrator strives to transform *Bartleby* into a successful subject, and the concept of one-dimensional labor by Marcuse (1964) makes the suppression of resistance under capitalism quite clear. A combination of these frameworks makes it possible to better understand the way in which Melville goes about developing capitalist power, labor discipline, and resistance possibility.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the broad range of studies on *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, most of them are based on psychological or existential analyses, instead of the material aspects of work. The absence of a continuous Marxist commentary, however, makes unresolved how Melville criticizes the contemporary structure of capitalistic work, ideological power, and alienation that are produced within bureaucratic settings. *Bartleby* withdrawal must then be explained in a systematic Marxist reading to shed light on which economic and ideological forces shape the withdrawal.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What does Melville do to alienate the capitalist labor system?



2. How does the office environment place demonstrate capitalist power and ideological control structures?
3. What effect does Bartleby's repetitive refusal; "I would prefer not to," serve as one way of resistance?
4. How can Marxist ideas make sense of human consequences and labor relations described in the story?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to examine the alienation, exploitation of labor and capitalist power as portrayed by Melville using a Marxist critical perspective. The study will attempt to show how Bartleby rejects ideological assumptions inherent in the capitalist labor system and how the refusal by Bartleby is a sophisticated mode of resistance by combining the textual evidence with the Marxist theory.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is valuable to the Melville scholarship in that it provides a consistent Marxist reading based on theory and text. It draws attention to the persistence of the relevance of the critique by Melville in modern discussions of labor, bureaucracy and emotional cost of capitalism. The study can be useful in showing the ways in which the literature envisions and explains the forms of contemporary work, by placing *Bartleby* in a wider economic and ideological context.

1.5 Methodology

The approach used in this study is qualitative, a written study based on Marxist criticism. This analysis draws upon the main ideas of Marx (1978), Lukacs (1971), and Althusser (1971), as well as Marcuse (1964) and uses them to apply them to Melville text by closely reading through descriptive passages, dialogues, and relationships of characters. The contextualization of the story in terms of the labor conditions of the 19th century and modern theoretical discussions is provided with the help of secondary scholarship.

1.6 Structure of the Study

The study has been designed into five chapters;

Introduction; defines the background, the relevance and objectives of the study.

Literature Review; reviews important literature on Melville, labor theory and Marxist interpretations.



Theoretical Framework; gives the Marxist concepts that are applied in the analysis.

Analysis and Discussion; interprets the story on the basis of theoretical tools and textual evidence

Conclusion and Findings; sums up what has been learned and how it applies to future studies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Critical interpretation of Herman Melville *Bartleby, the Scrivener* has seen a tremendous array of interpretations, in response to the narrative ambiguity and thematic richness of the story. The text has been looked at through an existential, psychological, legal and linguistic approach but Marxist interpretations have been relatively inadequately explored. According to Delbanco (2005), Melville has always challenged social and economic tension that occurred in the nineteenth century America, and *Bartleby* is not an exception. This review covers the key lines of thought, pertinent to the topics of alienation, labor and capitalist ideology in the story by Melville, pointing at the gaps that require a more radical Marxist interpretation.

2.1 Critical Studies on *Bartleby, the Scrivener*

Early critics were inclined to think of *Bartleby* as a symbol of literature, but not as a worker in material labor conditions. *Bartleby* was famously interpreted to be a symbol of modern alienation by Leo Marx (1953), who paid considerable attention to the existential aspect of his withdrawal. On the same note, Richard Chase (1957) portrayed *Bartleby* as an ethical antithesis to the stagnant system of capitalism, as symbolized by the narrator. Even though these readings acknowledge estrangement themes, they are not quite as concerned with the economic forms that define the labor of *Bartleby*.

Psychological and deconstructive approaches were later brought in by scholarship. Castiglia (1995) investigated the emotional undertones of the story, and Matteson (2008) put the story of *Bartleby* in context of the humanitarian discussions of his age. Such works enhance our knowledge about the narrative method used by Melville, but through them--as Dimock (1993) notes, we tend to perceive the socio-economic background on a metaphoric level, instead of a material one.

Recent critics admit that capitalism is relevant in *Bartleby*, however their criticism often lacks systematic treatment of Marxist theory. Indicatively, Brown (1990) talks about the bureaucratic practices of the Wall Street but does not read them as examples of alienated labor. Likewise, Arac (1986) remarks the ideological pressures that influence the professional workplaces, but he does not directly implement such



notions as reification or class dynamics. This disjointed involvement suggests that there is a necessity to formulate a unified Marxist explanation that would integrate alienation, exploitation of labor force, and ideological domination.

2.2 Marxist Criticism and Melville Studies

Melville is not necessarily considered a Marxist, but his works fairly often foreshadow Marxist criticism of the capitalist society. Delbanco (2005) believes that skepticism over market forces and the commodification of human values that prevails in the fiction works of Melville. Similarly, Parker (1996) observes that Melville was personally exposed into the pressures of a fast commercializing literary industry and this influenced his description of dehumanizing working conditions.

Although this has been aligned, there are only sporadic Marxist interpretations of *Bartleby*. In the discussion of alienation, it is most commonly put across in general terms and not put into the context of the structure of capitalist production. Tally (2015), in his turn, presents *Bartleby* as a character that opposes economic rationalization, but he does not base this opposition on the fundamental categories of Marxism, like estranged labor or commodity logic. It demonstrates the necessity of such a study that refers directly and consistently to the Marxist theory instead of metaphorically.

2.3 Alienation and Modern Labor: Marxist Foundations

The works of Karl Marx on alienation compose an important basis of the psychological impact of labor in *Bartleby*. According to Marx (1978), alienation is one of the conditions whereby workers lose a sense of ownership of the product of their labor, the labor process, their own human potential, and other people. Later on, Ollman (1976) explains that alienation is not just emotional but rather structural: it is the result of the relation of labor organization in capitalism.

These dynamics are reflected precisely in the scrivener office of Melville. Employees reproduce documents that they do not own or comprehend; they also work in a mechanical fashion; and their social relationships are also constrained with strict hierarchies. According to Fromm (1961), the contemporary capitalistic labor produces workers who are disempowered and detached to meaningful human activity. *Bartleby* represents this state of extreme alienation, and therefore, there is no way his withdrawal can be analyzed without the help of Marx.

2.4 Bureaucracy, Ideological Control, and Capitalist Power

The theory of ideology of Louis Althusser can be used to shed some light on how capitalist systems create obedient workers. People, according to Althusser (1971),



are interpellated by ideology and are allowed to become the subjects who view the established power relations as a state of nature. The office of the lawyer in *Bartleby* serves as an ideological machine that frees obedience by courtesy, habit, and professionalism. The norms of the workplace are supposed to be internalized by the workers not to be questioned.

The idea of reification by Lukacs (1971) also gives a better understanding of how the capitalist work diminishes people into object. Reification undermines the worker sense of autonomy by objectifying the human capabilities as economic functions. The scribes in the story by Melville are characterized in a manner that, they serve as functions rather than individuals as it would support the argument of Lukacs that the capitalist society converts human relationships into commodity relations.

Marcuse has criticized the one-dimensional man, which is also relevant. Instead, Marcuse (1964) insists that the modern capitalistic world subjugates dissent through the reduction of the spectrum of acceptable thought and behavior. *Bartleby* defies this ideological containment by being unwilling to do what is expected at work, therefore, revealing the constraints of capitalist rationality.

Although these theories are relevant, there are limited critics who have used them in unison with the story by Melville, creating a wide gap in the interpretation.

2.5 Resistance and the Politics of Refusal

The refusal of *Bartleby* has been seen as anything but it is not that it is not explored on the political front. Deleuze (1997) assumes that I would prefer not to is a linguistic practice that destabilizes the normative structures, and he fails to identify explicitly how the destabilization is connected to the capitalist labor conditions. The theory of passive resistance proposed by Marcuse (1964), however, implies that even minor refusal can cause disruption of the systems that are based on conformity. In a Marxist approach, the withdrawal of *Bartleby* is not merely a personal one, but also a critique of the ideology of labor that determines the value of human beings in terms of productivity.

This aspect of non-conformity has not been developed in the literature sufficiently, which often focuses on psychological or metaphysical explanations rather than materialistic ones. A Marxist interpretation of the world therefore gives a more grounded explanation to the behavior of *Bartleby* that in one way or another defies capitalist power even in an unintentional manner.

2.6 Summary of the Research Gap



It can be concluded that there are a number of gaps, which are based on the literature reviewed:

The alienation of *Bartleby* has received recognition and not examined in a long-term Marxist approach.

The exploitation of labor, bureaucracy, and ideological control have seldom been discussed as mutually dependent forces.

The refusal of *Bartleby* is frequently referred to symbolically, without any connection with Marxist theories of opposition.

Existing scholarship is limited in the number of close textual readings that are supported by theoretical analysis.

The current paper solves all these gaps by providing a holistic Marxist analysis of alienation, work, and capitalist authority in the story by Melville.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

To have a Marxist interpretation of *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, it is essential that it has a theoretical foundation which would explain the material, ideological and psychological aspects of work under capitalism. Inspired by Karl Marx, Georg Lukacs, Louis Althusser, and Herbert Marcuse, this chapter describes the methodological instruments with the help of which alienation, reification, ideological control, and resistance in the story by Melville are discussed. All the theorists have their unique insight into the ways in which capitalist regimes influence human actions, identity, and interpersonal relationships.

3.1 Karl Marx: Alienation and the Capitalist Labor System

The withdrawal of *Bartleby* to work is the subject that can be interpreted by the theory of alienation, which was developed by Karl Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, as the main basis. Marx (1978) claims that workers are alienated in the products they produce, the process of production, their human capabilities and the way they relate with others in the capitalist system. This alienation comes about when the labor which is being dealt with becomes a mechanical, repetitive action not by the creative agency of the worker but by the other forces.

Ollman, (1976) elucidates that Marx considered alienation as the structural situation and not a psychological symptom; it is the result of the structure of capitalistic production and not by individual discontent of dissatisfaction. In *Bartleby* the copying work, the strict office schedule and coolness of the workplace are the



symptoms of alienation as outlined by Marx. According to Fromm (1961), capitalist labor usually leads to the sense of helplessness and emotional staleness-both the experiences that Bartleby acquires with his silence, passivity, and the ultimate refusal to do the job.

The framework of Marx is thus essential to perceive Bartleby as a worker whose alienation to labor turns so extreme that he cannot participate in the process of capitalistic labor.

3.2 Georg Lukács: Reification and the Objectification of the Worker

Georg Lukacs extends the Marxian thought into the notion of reification, which was first put forward in *History and Class Consciousness*. According to Lukacs (1971), the capitalist societies alter the relationship between people into real, object like relationship in which people are commodities whose value is defined by their economic role alone. The worker living under reification sees himself not as a complete human person, but as a labor machine.

This idea is more or less parallel to the way Melville depicted Bartleby. The way capitalism objectifies workers can be seen in Bartleby, his lack of expression, his robot-like reactions, and the manner in which the narrator describes him as pallidly neat and dead wall (Melville, 1990). Lukacs suggests that eroding selfhood by reification creates a situation whereby workers internalize the meaning of being replaceable components in a bigger economic mechanism. We can understand the ultimate rejection of this reified existence by Bartleby as the rejection of the object-status that capitalist labor subjects him to.

3.3 Louis Althusser: Ideology and the Production of Obedient Subjects

The theory of ideology by Louis Althusser, helps to have a proper perspective of the authority of the narrator and the hierarchical organization of the office. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser (1971) goes on to state that social institutions, schools, workplaces, legal systems, etc. condition individuals as subjects who perceive dominant values as normal. The functioning of ideology is not based on coercion, but interpellation of individuals into positions that reinforce power positions.

The office by Melville is one such ideological machine. The use of politeness, professionalism and references to the duty by the narrator demonstrates the fact that ideology disciplines the subjects as it frames their expectations and actions as expected. Employees are not forced to conform; they are brainwashed into thinking that being submissive, productive and decent is part of their person as workers.



Bartleby interferes with this process. His unwillingness to work or to adopt workplace conventions is a demonstration of what Althusser refers to as a breakdown of interpellation, a point at which ideology cannot the more successfully influence a subject into compliance. The fact that ideological systems are weak against opposition shown by Bartleby is a revelation of the fragility of ideologically based systems that depend on blind obedience.

3.4 Herbert Marcuse: One-Dimensional Labor and the Suppression of Resistance

The refusal of Bartleby is further elaborated on by Herbert Marcuse in his criticism of the advanced capitalist societies, which is presented in *One-Dimensional Man*. Marcuse (1964) is convinced that capitalism discourages critical thinking by turning people into cogs in a machine and thus producing what he refers to as one-dimensional workers who cannot conceive of any alternative to the current social structure. Capitalist rationality requires efficiency, obedience, and conformity, and there is not much room to feel or be imaginative.

The mere utterance of Bartleby which states that he “would... not” rather would be a radical act in this respect. His rejection goes against the demands of one dimensional labor which necessitates blind obedience. The theory formulated by Marcuse assists us to understand why the narrator is so disrupted by the actions of Bartleby: not only is Bartleby rejecting his work, but the ideological identity which capitalism is trying to force upon him.

Another point that Marcuse makes is that resistance in the form of withdrawal or refusal is a common form of resistance in a capitalist system, and Bartleby takes this exact route. His idleness turns into attack on a system that provides no chance to view other forms of existence.

3.5 Integrating the Framework

By combining these theoretical approaches, they present a unified basis of the analysis of *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Marx (1978) makes clear what is alienated labor; Lukacs (1971) makes clear how workers are objectified by reification; Althusser (1971) makes clear how ideological structures are used to carefully shape the behavior of workers; and Marcuse (1964) makes clear how the rationality of capitalists suppresses nonconformity.

The use of these frames to the story of Melville will allow a more profound insight into the state of Bartleby. His escape is not simply a subjective crisis or an existential



shot, but a structural exposition of the structural forces of the economic, ideological and psychological of contemporary capitalistic work.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion

This chapter examines *Bartleby, the Scrivener* using the Marxist concepts, which are presented in the theoretical framework by showing how Melville dramatizes the human impacts of capitalist work. The interaction of alienation, reification and ideological power of authority is unearthed through Bartleby and his refusal coupled with the mechanization of office work and the role of the narrator.

4.1 Alienation and the Mechanization of Labor

The Wall Street law office described by Melville shows what Marx (1978) refers to as alienated labor: labor that alienates a person to self, to labor, and to human relationship. The work of the scriveners is repetitive and mechanical, which makes them an instrument of production and not a person. According to Ollman (1976), these forms of alienation are not brought about by a failure on the part of an individual but rather the way the capitalist labor is organized. The fact that Bartleby has a folding screen around him which is introduced by the narrator as a kind of privacy is a symbolic illustration of the physical and emotional disintegration brought about by the work place. His initial denial, "I would prefer not to," breaks the rhythm of machine labor in the office and is an indication of not accepting alienated labor. According to Fromm (1961), alienation causes emotional withdrawal and the absence of genuine selfhood, which is what happens to Bartleby as he becomes more and more estranged to his job and to the world around him.

4.2 Capitalist Power, Hierarchy, and Ideological Control

The ideological power of capitalist institutions is present in the position of the narrator. Ideology operates as Althusser (1971) believes it makes individuals obedient subjects internalizing social norms. The narrator appeals to the sense of duty in Bartleby several times, a fact that presupposes the compliance in case of the use of moralized language. The fact that he cannot understand why Bartleby refuses to show the level to which he has normalized capitalist logic and accepted it as a given truth. The idea of one-dimensional thought that was introduced by Marcuse (1964) is reflected in the reaction of the narrator: he cannot think of the world where a worker would just refuse to engage in labor. The office can be considered an ideological machine in which productivity, politeness and routine are imposed not by coercion but by anticipation. The refusal of Bartleby is thus a danger to the whole ideological framework which supports the authority of the narrator.



4.3 Reification and the Reduction of the Worker to an Object

According to Lukacs (1971), reification is the process whereby the capitalist society objects human beings by only defining them by their economic value. Melville brings this state to bear in the accounts given by the narrator of *Bartleby*, who looks like pallidly neat, pitifully respectable- virtually identical with the office. The fact that *Bartleby* is likened to an inanimate object is shown by the fact that when the narrator refers to him as inert as a dead wall, is indicative of how capitalistic labor is turning workers into mere cogs and not complete human beings.

Delbanco (2005) in his biography of Melville points out that the writer was very conscious of the dehumanizing effects of modernization through capitalist means. The stillness and silence of *Bartleby* can be discussed as the mental effects of reification: even before he cannot work physically, he no longer exists in the capitalist system socially and emotionally.

4.4 Refusal as Resistance: The Politics of “I Would Prefer Not To”

The repetitive phrase used by *Bartleby* can be viewed as a linguistic and political protest. Despite the fact that Deleuze (1997) understands the formula as the subversion of the normative structures of language, Marxist criticism places the refusal of *Bartleby* in the context of the wider labor resistance. Marcuse (1964) explains that capitalist rationality has changed so that even minor rejections will reveal the instability of systems that require complete obedience.

The saying of “I would prefer not to” is disruptive of power relations in the workplace with each repetition. The narrator, who assumes obedience to be an inherent element of work, is more and more disturbed by the unemotional rejection by *Bartleby*. It is established through the concept of failed interpellation by Althusser that *Bartleby* is a kind of subject that does not accept the ideological requirements of work, and thus, he undermines the basis of capitalist power.

4.5 The Collapse of Human Connection Under Capitalism

Melville depicts a system of capitalism as one that undermines sympathy and relationship with humanity. According to Fromm (1961) the capitalist alienation divides the social bond by diminishing the interactions to functional one. This loss of relationality in the narrator is portrayed by the fact that he cannot meaningfully understand or help *Bartleby*. Sympathy is something he only feels when it does not disrupt profit and workplace order.

The ultimate alienation, which *Bartleby* experiences, is represented by the last retreat in the prison yard, where he is standing in the face of the wall of the dead. Lukacs



(1971) says that extreme reification leads to the loss of all subjective possibility a situation that is manifested in the refusal to eat by Bartleby: “I do not want to eat today.” His death turns into a tragic symbol of psychological and social effects of labor systems where employees are not offered any emotional satisfaction and human understanding.

4.6 Resistance, Withdrawal, and the Limits of Capitalist Power

Bartleby’s passivity in withdrawing depicts the boundaries of the ideology of capitalism. According to Marcuse (1964), resistance is suppressed under the capitalist systems which submerges individuals into the one-dimensional ways of thinking. Bartleby does not allow this assimilation, revealing the failure of the narrator, and by extension that of society, to understand resistance not as rebellion or aggression.

The last cry of the narrator; “Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!” expresses what Marx (1978) describes as the tragic alienation of the capitalistic societies. The resistance of Bartleby does not bring the system down, but works against the ideological assumptions that it is based on. His turn away compels the narrator, and the reader, to deal with the ethical bankruptcy of a society in which being productive is more important than being a human being.

Chapter Five: Findings and Conclusion

This paper aimed at analyzing the novel *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville using a Marxist critical approach and how the work narrates the issues of alienation, exploitation of the working labor and how the storyteller power is manipulated in a capitalistic work setting. Withdrawing on Marx theory of estranged labor (1978), the notion of reification (1971) by Lukacs, ideology analysis (1971) by Althusser, and the idea of one-dimensional society (1964) by Marcuse, the analysis has revealed that Melville is making a deep commentary of capitalist cost of human labor. The results listed below are the key findings of the study.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Melville Office conditions mirror the Marx Theory of Alienation:

The narration depicts the divorce of the worker as Marx (1978) explains the alienation of labor, identity, and human bonds. Monotonous duplication of work, strict timelines and physically divided working space amplify the structural alienation of the scribes. The feeling of not wanting to engage with people or even work is familiar with Bartleby and Fromm (1961) argues that capitalist work is what will cause a deep sense of helplessness and alienation.



The Capitalist Power Works with the Hierarchical and Ideological Control:

Melville makes the narrator a representative of capitalist power whose references to courtesy and responsibility indicate the mechanisms of ideology outlined by Althusser (1971). The narrator has made compliance a normal state of affairs, letting it be known how ingrained capitalist conventions are in the understanding of behavioral expectations. The limitations of the authority based on routine and institutional legitimacy are revealed by the refusal of Bartleby to show the weakness of this ideological framework.

Reification Deprives Workers of their Humanity:

The idea of reification as developed by Lukacs (1971) helps to shed light on the way in which Melville portrays how workers are turned into an object that is characterized exclusively by its utility. The absence of movement in *Bartleby* and the descriptions of it by the narrator as being an inanimate object like a dead wall, represents how the subjectivity of the human being is diminished to be a mere impersonal process. Delbanco (2005) says that Melville was deeply conscious of how social and economic modernization dehumanize people--the dehumanization that is clearly reflected in the downfall of Bartleby.

“I Would Prefer Not To” serves as Passive Resistance:

Bartleby is iconic in his refusal, which is a linguistic act of resistance against the ideology of productivity. Although Deleuze (1997) understands the phrase as an untypical challenge to the normative order of linguistic structures, the analysis suggested by Marcuse (1964) makes the phrase politically understandable the refusal to accept one-dimensional capitalistic expectations. The system is shown to be reliant on blind obedience and how it fails to tolerate dissent through the resistance shown by Bartleby.

Capitalism Fades Away Authentic Human Relation.

The inability of the narrator to feel with Bartleby in an empathetic way highlights the fact that Fromm (1961) describes as the loss of realness in relations in capitalism. The ultimate withdrawal of Bartleby, which involves standing up in front of the dead wall and ultimately refusing to eat, is an expression of the disastrous results of alienation in the event where the social systems fail to offer any form of recognition or unity.

5.2 Conclusion



Bartleby, the Scrivener provides a strong criticism of the ideology of capitalism through the prison of labor discipline, upper-bottom power structure, and the emotionless attitude of the worker. Using the Marxist theory, this paper has revealed that the withdrawal of Bartleby is not an existential act but a material and ideological reaction to the dehumanizing nature of work. The psychological fragmentation that Bartleby is going through can be explained by Marx (1978) analysis of alienated labor, and Lukacs (1971) explains how the process of workers becoming objectified in economic systems takes place. Among the concepts developed by Althusser (1971) is ideological interpellation whereby the narrator tries to mould Bartleby into a good worker and in the critique of one-dimensional rationality, Marcuse (1964) points out the inability of the system to accept resistance.

The recurrent statement of Bartleby who says; “I would prefer not to” can therefore be taken as a radical action that exposes the ideological assumptions on the capitalist work. His refusal upsets the sense of order in the narrator and exposes the moral shortcomings in the system. Finally, the human price of capitalism, as revealed through the story by Melville, lies outside the mere exploitation of other people which can be an economic one, and includes human psychological suffering and social loneliness as well as the loss of human dignity.

Considering these results, the work confirms that *Bartleby, the Scrivener* is still a classic when it comes to studying the forces of alienation and opposition in capitalistic culture. Its criticism still rings in the present time debates of the topic of labor, bureaucracy, and dehumanizing impacts of contemporary work settings.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research may explore; other works by Melville, especially *The Confidence-Man*, analyzed comparatively as Marxist works. The comparison of Bartleby passive resistance as opposed to the present day labor movements or anti-work philosophy. Crossings of Marxist, psychoanalytic, and existential explanations of the withdrawal of Bartleby. And parallels of Melville in attacking capitalism and the economic discussion of the nineteenth century in general.

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