

**AN ANALYSIS OF “ALIENATION” IN REBECCA HARDING DAVIS’
LIFE IN THE IRON-MILLS**

**A MASTER’S PROJECT
BY
MRS. KHANTHAPORN CHANGPRASERT**

**Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts degree in English
at Srinakharinwirot University**

October 2004

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AN ABSTRACT

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This study attempts to explore the main male character, Hugh Wolfe, in the novella of Rebecca Harding Davis' Life in the Iron-Mills. To do so, the researcher employs the theories of alienation: Marxist's concept, and psychological perspective of alienation. Since the context of the story was set in the nineteenth century industrialization age, the study uses historical context of society and economic systems to analyze the text.

The study finds that the main male character feels alienated from work or productive activity, from the product of labor, from other people or fellow men, and from human nature. This reason causes him to feel powerless, estranged, and isolated. Such feeling leads him to commit suicide finally.

It is also found that the theme of the study is still up-to-date and be universal even though the text used was set far back date to the nineteenth century.

การวิเคราะห์ภาวะ “ความแปลกแยก” ในเรื่อง Life in the Iron-Mills ของ รีเบคกา ฮาร์ดิง เดวิส

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

นางคันทร ช่างประเสริฐ

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา

ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

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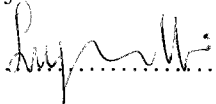
งานวิจัยฉบับมีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อวิเคราะห์ตัวละครเอกชาย ฮิวจ์ วูล์ฟ ในนวนิยายเรื่องสั้นของ รีเบคกา ฮาร์ดิง เดวิส เรื่อง *Life in the Iron-Mills* ในการวิเคราะห์ดังกล่าว ผู้วิจัยใช้ทฤษฎีภาวะความแปลกแยกตามแนวคิดของมาร์กซ์ และมุมมองทางด้านจิตวิทยาเป็นกรอบงาน และเนื่องจากบริบทในเนื้อเรื่องเกิดขึ้นในสมัยศตวรรษที่สิบเก้า ซึ่งเป็นยุคแห่งความเฟื่องฟูของการปฏิวัติอุตสาหกรรม การศึกษานี้จึงใช้ข้อมูลทางประวัติศาสตร์ สภาพสังคมและระบบเศรษฐกิจสมัยนั้นควบคู่ไปกับการวิเคราะห์เพื่อให้ผู้อ่านสามารถมองเห็นสภาพที่เกิดขึ้นกับตัวละครในเนื้อเรื่องได้อย่างชัดเจน

การศึกษาพบว่าตัวละครเอกชายในเนื้อเรื่องนั้นมีความรู้สึกแปลกแยกจากงาน แปลกแยกจากผลผลิตของแรงงานของตนเอง แปลกแยกจากผู้คนในสังคม และแปลกแยกจากธรรมชาติของความเป็นมนุษย์ สิ่งเหล่านี้เป็นสาเหตุทำให้เขารู้สึกไร้พลังหรืออานาจ รู้สึกห่างเหินจากผู้อื่น และรู้สึกโดดเดี่ยว ภาวะความรู้สึกเหล่านี้ชักนำเขาไปสู่การตัดสินใจฆ่าตัวตายในท้ายที่สุด

นอกจากนั้นแล้ว การศึกษานี้ยังพบว่าใจความหลักในเรื่อง ไม่ได้มีความล้าหลังแม้แต่น้อย ถึงแม้ว่าเนื้อเรื่องได้ถูกแต่งขึ้นตั้งแต่ศตวรรษที่สิบเก้า ประเด็นของภาวะความแปลกแยกยังสามารถพบได้ทั่วไปในสังคมปัจจุบัน

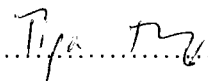
The Master's Project Committee and Oral Defense Committee have approved this master's project as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

Master's Project Advisor

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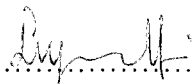
(Supaporn Yimwilai, Ph.D.)

Chair of the Master of Arts degree in English

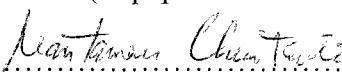
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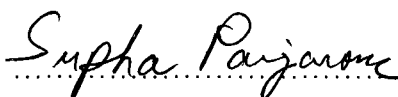
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This master's project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

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(Associate Professor Supha Panjaroen)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

A historical perspective of the nineteenth century depicts that century as being one of upheaval, change, progress, and a changing and developing society on both sides of the Atlantic. The nineteenth century was considered as the era of remarkable social transformation known as the industrial revolution. This transformation began early in the century and initially spread throughout Europe and the United States. Rural farmers transformed themselves into factory workers, and the agrarian countries became industrial states. People from rural areas migrated to industrialized cities. In the United States, there were huge demands for a growing labor force to serve rising industrial needs. It was a nation that attracted many groups of poor immigrants such as Irish and German. A popular emigrant song illustrated the mythic image of America:

They say there's bread and work for all,
And the sun always shines there.

(qtd. in Tindall and Shi 499)

A wide range of sciences and technologies were discovered and introduced during this period. In The Elements of Technology, Dr. Jacob Bigelow, a Harvard botanist, argued that technology constituted the chief superiority of moderns over the ancients, effecting profound changes in ways of living (Tindall and Shi 487). Science and technology discovered in the industrial age changed the way people live.

According to Tindall and Shi, all aspects of life – social, cultural, economic, and

political were shaped by it (487). Moreover, there were many great thinkers, philosophers, and scholars born during this period. Inherited from them were theories or ways of thought, such as Darwinian evolution and the “survival of the fittest” which sometimes was distorted and applied for self- benefit by some unethical but successful businessmen and industrialists.

There emerged a new group of rich capitalists including tradesmen and factory owners, stockbrokers and professional managers that characterized the greed of the industrial society. Businesses competed for property as well as power. This social transformation led to a large number of social problems including the development and distinction of different classes, exploitation of the poor, and a general inequality among the growing population. While the industrial revolution brought about higher living standards, generated unprecedented wealth, and created new possibilities of business for capitalists, in contrast, it forced hardships on the new industrial working class in the form of poverty, and insecure and unsafe working conditions. Irish workingmen, for instance, toiled at the docks or warehouses fifteen hours a day, seven days a week (Tindall and Shi 500). Such working conditions contributed to a feeling of pain, powerlessness, oppressions, and ignorance. All these are horrible major social problems created during the industrial age.

Many insightful writers paralleled this era of social change, for example, Mark Twain felt it was a period of revolutionary upheaval, industrialization, imperialist expansion, political reform, and the so-called disappearance of God (Gilbert and Gubar 161). Bret Harte portrayed the social decadence on his first successful short story “The Luck of Roaring Camp” (1868). This story was set in a dirty mining camp, filled with gamblers, prostitutes and drunks during the Gold Rush. Then it was shortly

followed by Outcasts of Poker Flat (1869) in which Harte described the fate of two prostitutes, a professional gambler and a teenage girl in a snowstorm.

William Dean Howells, a well-known realist novelist, is the one who realized that business and businessmen were at the center of society, and he felt that novels should depict them (High 86). Howells wrote that romantic literature or some kind of historical romances made one forget life and all its cares and duties (qtd. in High 86). By the late nineteenth century, he began striking at the evils of American capitalism as well as adding in his novels a new law to his ideology of realism, that is art and the artist must serve the poor people of society (High 86). One of Howell's famous realist novels is A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), which talked about a man who gradually learned the terrible suffering of poor people in society. Edward Bellamy produced the most famous American utopian novel Looking Backward, 2000-1887 (1888) with the intent of criticizing capitalist America of the 1880s (High 87). In addition, there are many writers in this period, who profoundly felt the decline of modern society (which was in fact the industrialized society), then presented it through their novels such as Stephen Crane's Maggie: A girl of the Streets, Jack London's Martin Eden, and Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy. All these stories portrayed the damage of the economic forces and alienation on the weak or vulnerable individual (VanSpanckeren 2).

Rebecca Harding Davis was also "one of the most popular writers in the nineteenth century" (Stoner 1) who was sensitive to the radical and terrible transformation of the society at that time. Her style of writing provides subtle social commentary about many of the issues facing society.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar indicate that Davis was the author who was able to envision the grim realities of mid-nineteenth century industrialization in America. In her novels she portrayed labor's alienated relations with managers and owner, the degradation of ignored and unjust poverty, and the pollution caused by industrial waste (903).

One of Davis' distinguished novellas concerning the plight of the poor industrial workers of that age is Life in the Iron-Mills (1861). The story depicts the impoverished life of Hugh Wolfe, and other Irish and Welsh immigrant laborers in a small dirty mill town somewhere in Virginia. Wolfe, the male protagonist, possesses an untrained genius for sculpture, though he needs to earn his living as a furnace tender in Kirby & John's rolling mill. The weak Wolfe has to bear the hard work in the mill, and this circumstance makes Deborah, his cousin, sympathize and offer the compassion he needs. Late at one night during the discussion of the overseer and the mill owners, Deborah grasped one of the mill owners' money as it accidentally fell from his pocket, and gave it to Wolfe for the sake of his better life. A month later, Wolfe was charged as a thief and imprisoned. Shortly after the trial, he committed suicide.

Life in the Iron-Mills was often criticized for its sentimentality, for being written from a historical context rather than a literary perspective. It went largely unread after Davis' death in 1910, but was rediscovered by Tillie Olsen, a contemporary writer, and republished in 1972 for the sake of its quality of writing and the subject matter. Since Olsen's rediscovery, Life in the Iron-Mills has regained its significance through the study in depth of contemporary writers and critics.

Life in the Iron-Mills first appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in April 1861, where it received national acclaim (Perkins et al. 418). It seemed to be particularly written for educating the upper-middle class and upper-class audiences, who were the elite readers of the Atlantic Monthly in the country at that time, for their knowledge of the hellish conditions that industrial workers faced. It was recognized immediately as a pioneering achievement for American literature and was widely applauded by a majority of its readers. This novella is considered one of the first examples of literary realism, a genre that flourished in the United States between 1870 and 1900, and Davis herself was praised as a pioneer of realist fiction in American literature. Walter Hesford says that Life in the Iron-Mills was the first notable work of realistic fiction concerning itself with the life of the factory worker in an industrial American town (70-85).

Currently, Life in the Iron-Mills is studied from many perspectives such as the genre of American Realism and Naturalism; the historical and cultural contexts demonstrated in the writing; gender issues; and, general social classes and problems in American society. Kathryn VanSpanckeren points out that as industrialization grew, so did alienation (2), and this point can be associated within the context of Life in the Iron-Mills. However, it is found that the issue of alienation has not yet been studied in depth, and is still overlooked by many researchers.

Therefore, the researcher aims to study alienation in Life in the Iron-Mills. The assumption of this study is that alienation is the cause that brings forth the unhappy state of the human soul and the frustrations of working class laborers. According to Bertell Ollman, alienation is the theory in which Karl Marx intellectually portrays the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings,

on their physical and mental states, and on the social processes of which they are a part (131). Alienation is a term widely used to describe and explain a state of estrangement of the individual from the natural environment, from society, from other people or from himself.

The researcher strongly believes that Hugh Wolfe, the main male character, is the alienated person. He is not only the alien in a foreign country like America, but also feels self-alienated within. This feeling eventually drives him to his suicidal death. Consequently, this study will analyze Wolfe's alienated character by employing Marx's concept and psychological perspective of alienation.

In this study, the researcher attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that constitute Wolfe's sense of alienation?
2. What are the characteristics of an alienated individual like Wolfe?
3. What drives Wolfe to commit suicide at the end of the story?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate Hugh Wolfe, the main male character in Life in the Iron-Mills, as an alienated person.

Procedures

1. Accumulation of Information
 - 1.1 Study research related to Rebecca Harding Davis
 - 1.2 Study the concept and application of alienation
 - 1.3 Study Rebecca Harding Davis' biography
2. Information Analysis

3. Conclusion and Recommendation for the further study.

Scope of the Study

This study concentrates on Wolfe, the main character in Life in the Iron-Mills.

The Benefits of the Study

1. The study of “alienation” in Life in the Iron-Mills helps the reader to better understand the milieu of laborers in the nineteenth century.
2. The study can be applied to investigate the contemporary situation of working class individuals or even white-collar officers in society.
3. The study can be employed as a tool for further studies or as a guideline for review of related literature.

Definition of Term

“Alienation” refers to the state of deviant feeling of estrangement or separation within the individual. Some scholars believe that such feelings result from the social structure of capitalist society and economic forces. Some state that alienation results from individual psychological attributes. These factors make the individual who may be a common laborer feel disharmony with the essence of himself. Thus, he becomes alienated due to the lack of his potential for fulfilling his own aspirations.

Additionally, he does not have the power to manage his own life but depends on external forces. Consequently, the alienated individual feels disparity, powerlessness, and isolation from society and others. According to the conceptual term defined above, this study denotes alienation in four aspects as follows:

1. Alienation from work or productive activity.
2. Alienation from the product of labor.
3. Alienation from other fellow men.
4. Alienation from human nature.

Chapter 2

Review of the Related Literature

This chapter concentrates on three major parts. The first part discusses the research concerning Rebecca Harding Davis and her works. Part two demonstrates the concept and theory of alienation. The last part provides a biography of Rebecca Harding Davis.

Related Research

There is a volume of research that integrates Rebecca Harding Davis' Life in the Iron-Mills into various aspects and perspectives.

In "Suicidal Naturalism: Self-Murder in Late Nineteenth-Century American Literature", Daniel Edward Hickey studies instances of suicide in American literature with an attempt to clarify the characteristics of American Literary Naturalism. Hickey analyzes both the characteristics of American Naturalism and an instance of suicide in the plot of four works: Rebecca Harding Davis' Life in the Iron-Mills, Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, and Edgar Watson Howe's The Story of a Country Town. Hickey found that suicide is another formidable genre presented as American Naturalism.

In "Aliens Within: Immigrants, the Feminine, and American National Narrative", Nina Gudrun Bjornsson examines Davis' Life in the Iron-Mills and Willa Cather's My Antonia to determine how women and female immigrants are treated in texts produced within the United States in times of national disharmony. Life in the Iron-Mills uses the immigrant iron workers to subtly argue against abolition and My

Antonia presents a personal solution to the divisive debate surrounding Eastern European immigrants, suggesting that the Bohemian woman immigrant serves as keeper of a museum enclave, preserving an original America in the face of industrialization.

In “For Love or Money: Women’s Wage Labor and Domestic Ideals in Antebellum American Texts”, Stacy Ann Steinberg analyzes the main female characters in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Blithedale Romance and Rebecca Harding Davis’ s Life in the Iron-Mills and Margret Howth. The result of the study shows that although the textual figure of the antebellum woman wage earner was constructed predominantly as a deviation, she was in fact central to the formation of the American concept of both wage labor and domestic womanhood. Also, she was central to the development of a uniquely American notion of social class.

In “Public Politics, Private God: Political Rhetoric of Religious Morality in Selected American Social Novels”, Pala Mull Cigdem analyzes the relationship of the categories of morality and ideology in the writings of ethical and political critics including Wayne Booth, Martha C. Nussbaum, Irving Howe, and Frederic Jameson. Then Cigdem employs historical, social, political, and rhetorical interpretative strategies presenting textual analyses of four American social novels including Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin; Rebecca Harding Davis’ Life in the Iron-Mills; Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward; and, John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath. Cigdem argues that the manipulative use of religious language and imagery in the context of those writers’ political arguments helps maintain the status of social change towards freedom, justice, and equality. Cigdem concludes his argument that religious

morality and ideologies of those American political novels help modern-day readers understand the past, and function as a warning in the present.

In “Novel Resistance: Cultural Capital, Social Fiction, and American Realism, 1861-1911”, Jeffrey William Miller investigates how realist fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries works to negotiate the trichotomy of rule, hegemony, and reform. In the study, Miller examines a wide range of texts beginning with the novels of William Dean Howells that were published in the 1880s-1890s; Rebecca Harding Davis’s Life in the Iron-Mills and Margret Howth; Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward; and, fictional works by Albion Tourg, Charles Chesnutt, Thomas Dixon, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Miller concludes that fiction is distinctive among cultural texts because it has the ability to condense issues with which it is concerned into models or ideals, and fiction is concerned in ways that are more powerful than other cultural forms.

In “Witness to Self-Destruction: Suicide and Class in Post-bellum American Realist Fiction”, Kevin Ross Grauke examines Rebecca Harding Davis’s Life in the Iron-Mills, Stephen Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, Theodore Dreiser’s Sister Carrie, and Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome. Grauke argues that the representation of suicide becomes a means of negotiating the complex and irresolute feelings that the middle and upper classes held for the working class.

There are additional studies that focus solely on Davis’ written works. For example, in “The Fiction of Rebecca Harding Davis: A Palimpsest of Domestic Ideology Beneath a Surface of Realism”, Jane Atteridge Rose examines Rebecca Harding Davis’ fiction in its cultural context. Rose points out that Davis’ fiction stands as an artifact or a female writer’s mediation of realistic and domestic values.

Davis' fiction reveals itself as a nineteenth-century female palimpsest of domesticity under a surface of realism.

In “ ‘Led by a Woman’s Hand’: Rebecca Harding Davis’ Gendered Economies as a Countervoice to Philosophies of Culture and Art”, Michele L. Mock examines the fiction and essays of Rebecca Harding Davis in order to illustrate how Davis employed her canon as a distinct and deliberate countervoice to reigning philosophies of culture and art. The study reveals that Davis’ works not only served as a call for awareness and reform, but also as a means to confront the egoism of a Romantic tradition that excluded women writers as artists while invalidating their work as art.

In “Writing Before the Ending: Art and Gender in the Work of Rebecca Harding Davis”, Jennifer Meta Robinson analyses discourses in dialogue, process over ending, meta-social perspectives, and considerations of the limits of representation in Davis’ works which can be instructive for some literature by nineteenth-century women, authors of color and other canonically under represented groups. The study reveals that at the end of Davis’ stories, both male and female characters surrender to cultural norms and give up the artistic creation that represents their efforts to generate a distinct and unique self.

Notably, the studies discussed above stress various aspects in Davis’ works such as pioneer of realist and naturalist fiction, cultural and social contexts, gender, representation of self-making through art and so on. However, the study of alienation in depth, particularly in Life in the Iron-Mills is still neglected. Therefore, the researcher undertakes to study alienation in Life in the Iron-Mills.

The Theory of Alienation

Alienation as a concept originated from the early Christian Era when man, by his innate sinful nature, alienates himself from God. Since the nineteenth century, the term alienation has been analyzed and applied in a wide range of contexts. It is considered an elusive term uprooted from the stream of thought concerning the spheres of modern society as depicted by the industrialized society of the nineteenth century.

In everyday usage, alienation denotes separating or isolating from friends, associates, a peer group of people, natural environment, social life, or the self. In this study, the term alienation is concentrated in two main aspects: Marxist's concept, and psychological perspective.

Marxist's concept of alienation

Karl Marx developed the concept of alienation from his philosophical predecessors, G. W. F. Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx seems to be the most famous in usage of the term alienation. He discusses alienated labor under the capitalist economic system, and suggests that work is brought about by force rather than spontaneity and creative mind. Alienated labor becomes like a powerless slave. Workers possess less control over the work process. The product of labor is taken away by others to be used against the worker. The worker himself is gradually transformed as a commodity in the labor market. Labor is the objectification. The ways and conditions in which working class people earn their living affect their bodies and minds. This is the starting point of Marx's concept of alienation. Alienation in

the context of Marx's analysis of capitalism originated from the fact that man did not fulfill his "species being" in work.

Based on Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, alienated labor is distinguished by four major aspects as follows:

1. Alienation from work or productive activity: According to Marx, under the capitalist system, alienated labor is a result of a worker who lacks control over the process of production and power to organize his performance. The conditions of work are not determined by the worker himself, but a capitalist. The process of work is beyond the control of the worker; it is in the control of forces hostile to him because capitalist and manager drive him to work harder, faster and for longer stints (Cox 6). Labor is assumed to be the private property of non-workers, that is capitalists. Then the work performed by the worker is external to the worker himself and it is not a part of his nature.

Consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless.

(qtd. in Luper 309)

His work is not voluntary but imposed and forced labor. The worker burns physical and mental energies, but his personal life for the activity of work is for someone else. Therefore, the labor becomes external to the worker and alienated to him. Due to the rigidly repetitive process of work, the worker's individual talents or

special skills are lost. In accordance with Marx, Ollman reveals that what the capitalist labor has done to the worker is that it mortifies his body and ruins his mind (138). Ollman identifies that laboring work causes physical deviance described as stunted size, bent backs, overdeveloped and underdeveloped muscles, gnarled fingers, enlarged lungs and death pale complexions (138). Also, the nature of the worker's task decays his mind. According to Marx, capital industry produces in its laborers 'idiocy' and 'cretinism' (qtd. in Ollman 138).

2. Alienation from product of labor: Under capitalism, the products of labor become alienated to the worker and confront him as a form of power. The object produced by a laborer is transferred to the hands of capitalists and becomes the producer's master. He cannot use what he produces nor partake in any activities related to those products. The products are entirely owned and consumed by others. Thus "workers produce cash crops for the market when they are malnourished, build houses in which they will never live, make cars they can never buy, produce shoes they cannot afford to wear, and so on" (Cox 5). Marx explains that alienation from the product of labor is a consequence from the fact that the worker is related to the product of his labor as to an alien object (qtd. in Luper 308). The labor of the worker is objectified, then becomes an object and stands opposed to him as an external existence. Marx explains that the alienation of the worker from the object he produces is expressed in the law of political economy as follows:

The more the worker produces the less he has to consume; the more value he creates the more worthless he becomes; the more refined his product the more crude and misshapen the worker; the more civilized the product the more barbarous the worker; the more powerful the

work the more feeble the worker; the more the work manifests intelligence the more the worker declines in intelligence and becomes a slave of nature.

(qtd. in Luper 309)

As the law above implies, the worker is alienated from the product because he can never use or possess the product of his own labor. In contrast, the product is transferred and belongs to someone else. The value of a worker and his labor are reversed with the value of the products. While the products produced by the worker are most precious, the worker himself is considered to have the least value. The fact is that the worker has to put all his labor and energies into the process of production in order to bring up the highest quality of product, but the better the product the lower the esteem in which the worker holds himself. In other words, the worker's physical and mental energies are consumed, and his figure becomes weak and unpleasant. Also, the potential of his mentality is never developed in any other ways because his personal life and the process of thought are lost in the workplace. When the worker is not able to exercise his brain, it becomes impossible for him to escape this grim cycle of life; instead, he needs to hold on to the job that makes his life exist. This is the reason why Marx says that the worker becomes a slave to the nature of work.

3. Alienation from other fellow men: In this case, alienation happens from the base of the class structure of society. In a capitalist society, the worker is alienated from those who exploit his labor and control the things he produces. Marx states that:

If his activity is a torment to him it must be a source of enjoyment and pleasure to another...If he is related to his own activity as to unfree activity, then he is related to it as activity in the service, and under the domination, coercion and yoke, of another man.

(qtd. in Luper 311)

In a capitalist society, Marx views the relationship between men as one of alienation. Labor and products serve as the capitalist's power over the workers. The worker's real relationship is with the capitalists merely because of interests and benefits are objectified by the worker's labor. The worker is said to produce the degrading social relations (Ollman 149). Marx further states that:

The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realized and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men. Hence within the relationship of estranged labor each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the position in which he finds himself as a worker.

(qtd. in Ollman 149)

4. Alienation from human nature: Marx views human nature as species in which are constituted consciousness and will. Conscious activity is the species-character of human beings, and also conscious life activity distinguishes man from the life activity of animals (qtd. in Luper 310). People realize their human potential in the conditions of private property, but in Marx's concept, the worker does not. He describes this concept by noting that:

Labor certainly produces marvels for the rich but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It

replaces labor by machinery, but it casts some of the workers back into a barbarous kind of work and turns the others into machines.

(qtd. in Luper 309)

In capitalism, work is the necessary pre-condition that makes the workers stay alive, to have the opportunity to do work, not to own any property. Ollman says that the greater part of man's consciousness in capitalism is used to direct his efforts at staying alive (152). While working, the worker is set apart from his real self and becomes all that he is not. This phenomenon degenerates the worker to the same species of animals: eating, drinking, and procreating. Therefore, man (worker) becomes alienated from his human species or nature.

Psychological perspective of alienation

In psychological perspective, alienation is a source of the symptom of malaise toward oneself and life, in other words, the feeling of illness or mental uneasiness. Psychiatrists view alienation as a symptom of an individual's maladjustment to society (Warren 294). The alienation of a person is manifested through mood, thought, and appearance. In Encyclopedia of Psychology, Raymond L. Calabrese states that alienation is in the sense that "things are not exactly as they should be and that life should be better" (116). In addition, a person's personality expressed in different figures is also called the phenomenon of alienation: a self of a person can play different roles each day. This is called an alienated or fragmented self where the very true self is never found. This kind of alienation would respond to what the immediate environment requires so that the self can exist but loses awareness of what he or she is doing and is uncertain of a unique identity. For example, one day the self

is the servant, the next the overseer, and the next the factory worker. This fragmentation constitutes the feeling of alienation, and consequently, is the result of the search for one's true identity in a world where answers cannot be trusted (117). According to this alienated self, an individual cannot identify oneself and will never reach the idealized self that is set in one's mind, thus, the quest always ends in failure (117). The more the quest ends in failure, the more the individual deeply senses estrangement with the true self and the inner conflict, and the sense of alienation spring up because of the attempt to search for becoming the idealized self. Such individuals often feel a deep frustration from not being fulfilled to connect to the illusory ideal. Thus, this kind of alienated individual would feel separateness and express their senses in a variety of symptoms or characteristics which might be associated with three types of personalities: the compliant, aggressive, and detached types (117). The expressions of alienation that adhere with these types are emptiness, estrangement, and isolation, respectively.

In other words, if alienation is referred to emptiness it means that individuals can never trust themselves, that they sense a lack of purpose in life and live their lives simply, whereas healthy individuals innately pursue the full purpose and the meaningful life. Conversely, those who are empty suffer from melancholy and despair. The whole world of the empty-alienated person becomes dull and useless. Such an individual escapes to forget the milieu in which he finds himself.

If alienation is explained as estrangement, the individual may manifest anger toward self, social institutions, and authority (118). The individual becomes estranged because of the lack of trust among surrounding people or institutions, and the individual marks his or her personal boundary to keep out the different world of

enemies and sinister plots that would provide harm. In this case, the estranged individual requires love and acceptance from others whereas his or her behavior contrasts from such wants.

If alienation denotes isolation, individual totally confronts the sense of loneliness, and separation from others. This situation misleads the person to the way of being different, to feel that the others are not like him or her. Such feeling drives the isolated person to move far away from the connection to others and tends to be difficult to cure the state of severe isolation.

Moreover, those who feel the sense of alienation are often the ethnic minorities in foreign countries such as Latinos, Mexicans, African Americans or immigrants in the United States. Those people experience the sense of not belonging or feeling that they cannot trust the group. Some of those people have sought integration and compatibility with the country, though some trust neither the government nor the majority population. Their deep sense of alienation is often expressed in creative endeavors such as music and writing (118).

According to the concept of alienation described above, the alienated person can be characterized as follows:

1. Lacks power to control and manage one's own life and activities.
2. Lives a meaningless or purposeless life.
3. Lives an abnormal life that leads to insanity or distrust of others.
4. Estranges or removes his/herself from culture and values in society.
5. Feels the loneliness or exclusion from social relations with others.
6. Estranges or feels separated from the soul of oneself.

The characteristic of the alienated person summarized above mostly signifies the symptoms of mental sickness, and according to the psychological perspective, this causes him to put an end to his life.

In relationship to the story in Life in the Iron-Mills, the researcher will apply the concept of alienation from both Marxist and psychological perspectives as discussed above, to analyze Wolfe, the main male character who is believed to be an alienated person.

Biography of Rebecca Harding Davis

Rebecca Harding Davis was born Rebecca Blaine Harding on June 24, 1831 in Washington, Pennsylvania. She was named in honor of her maternal aunt, Rebecca Wilson Blaine. Davis was a daughter of Rachel Leet Wilson, a member of a prominent Pennsylvania family; and Richard W. Harding, a successful English businessman from Ireland. The middle-class Harding family first settled in Big Spring (Huntsville), Alabama for almost six years, and then in 1837 moved north to settle in an industrial town in Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia). Davis received her literary enthusiasm from her English father reciting Shakespeare and weaving romantic tales. After being educated at home by her mother, Davis was sent to her birthplace, Washington, Pennsylvania, and graduated as the valedictorian of her class at the Washing Female Seminary in 1848 at the age of seventeen. She returned from school with the enthusiasm for writing and reading, though remained inside the family, helping, as the eldest daughter, with household chores and the education of the younger children. The lifetime in Wheeling made Davis experience and absorb the life of cotton mills and iron-pressing workers in factories.

Davis spent some years after her graduation pursuing her writing talent as a poet, reviewer, and sometimes editor for the Wheeling Intelligencer, the largest newspaper in western Virginia.

At the age of thirty, Davis emerged and was acknowledged as a highly intelligent woman and the innovative writer (Harris 20) when her first novella Life in the Iron-Mills was published as the second article in April 1861 issue of the Atlantic Monthly, the prestigious magazine of that time. Mary L. Doyle says that in Life in the Iron-Mills Davis does indeed write to expose and to explore the very “real” complications of industrialization, and that it came as both a “shock” and a “revelation” to the readers (16). She not only disclosed the reality of worker’s impoverished lives, but also proposed her activist intervention in the problem of individual workers (Perkins et al. 419). Davis herself has been called one of the pioneers of American literary realism since then. Sharon M. Harris points out that there are two factors in Davis’s personal life that makes her visualize the function and form of realist literature: first, being raised in a rapidly growing mill town, and second, experiencing at first hand the brutal realities of war (1). Life in the Iron-Mills was not only immediately recognized as a startlingly experimental story (Harris 20), further it brought Davis the fame, the acquaintance of many eminent New England authors, a valued, lifelong friendship with Annie Fields, wife of James T. Fields, editor of the Atlantic Monthly. And by the time of her national reception as a famous author, Davis published her first novel, Margaret Howth: A Story of To-Day in 1862.

The publication of Life in the Iron-Mills also led to a correspondence between Rebecca Harding and a Philadelphia journalist, L. Clarke Davis, whom she married on March 15, 1863. The Davises’s first home in Philadelphia was with Clarke’s sister,

Carrie Cooper, and her family. By the time of their marriage, Davis entered into the responsibilities of nineteenth-century wifedom and motherhood assuming the primary care of the three children. Clarke was then a practicing lawyer. He supplemented the family income by working as a postal clerk and continued his editorial work for the prestigious Legal Intelligencer. Clarke became the editor of Philadelphia Public Ledger and an activist for abolition. Davis was pleased with Clarke's public involvement, but she also sought for her own time for writing. She showed her intention to continue writing as she told Annie Fields,

“I must have leave to say my word in the Atlantic as before, when the spirit moves me. It is a necessity for me to write—well or ill—you know every animal has speech and that is mine.”

(qtd. in Harris 104).

While Davis continued to write and to publish, her family often confronted the financial needs, this led her to produce stories and serialized novels including mysteries, gothics, and thrillers, for the popular magazines of that time, such as *Peterson's* and Lippincott's, which paid better than the Atlantic Monthly. She also wrote for New York Tribune and a children's magazine, Youth's Companion.

Early in 1870s, Davis published two novels and one novella and serialized four others. She also extended her journalistic endeavors to include both the New York Daily Tribune and the Independent; and published more than 140 articles and short stories in sixteen periodicals, including literary journals, children's periodicals, and religious magazines. Harris points that in the 1870s, it was a decade in which Davis wrote some of her most courageous political and social fiction (152). She described

the obsolete legal and social attitudes toward marriage, women's right to work, and other inequities.

In the 1880s, which was a period of literary and social transition (Harris 203), Davis published one previously serialized novel, ten short stories, five essays, and a numerous children's stories, and her reputation was still firmly constituted by the decade. The themes that had concerned Davis for most of her years of writing were stifled lives, the consequences of speculation and greed, shameful glorification of war. These themes returned their significance again in the 1890s as the country faced the high unemployment, insurrections, colonization, and military involvement in other countries. One of Davis first major works was the short story "An Ignoble Martyr" published in 1890 by Harper's New Monthly Magazine, a leading publishing firm. At the end of the nineteenth-century, Davis's non-fiction and fiction were considered well-written, insightful commentaries (Harris 242) because the theme and subject matter of those works were also shifted to the modern period.

Throughout her career, Davis continued to introduce and explore new subject matter in accordance with her announced literary purpose, "to dig into this commonplace, this vulgar American life, and see what is in it." Her well-known fictions are Waiting for the Verdict, dealt with educational, political and economic needs of the newly emancipated slaves; John Andross, one of the earliest novels that treated political corruption in the nation's government; Earthen Pitchers, explored the reality of women earning their livings professionally.

Davis continued her career as a professional author until the time of her death. She died of heart failure at the home of her son Richard Harding Davis, a famous journalist and writer, in Mount Kisco, New York in 1910.

Chapter 3

An Analysis of Hugh Wolfe as an “alienated person”

In this chapter, the theory of alienation and psychological perspective of alienation as discussed earlier in chapter two are employed to analyze Hugh Wolfe. Since the story is set in the age of nineteenth century capitalist society, references are made to the societal context of economics and other related forces of those times.

Hugh Wolfe: An Alienated Person

According to Marxist’s theory of alienation, Wolfe is considered alienated in four aspects as follows:

1. Alienation from work or productive activity

Under the capitalist society in the industrialized country of America, all means of production including money, lands, machines, factories, raw materials, labor, and other objects used in production are possessed and controlled by capitalists or the bourgeoisie which is the dominant or ruling class. The bourgeoisie control the social relations of production (McClelland 1), but the so-called proletariat (less property) or workers are exploited and are paid only enough money to keep them alive. The only property of the proletariat is their own labor time, which they sell to the capitalists (McClelland 1). They have neither power nor right to make decision on the production process while laboring.

In Life in the Iron-Mills, Hugh Wolfe is in the category of those fellow workers in such society. The one who determines the production process of the

railroad-iron or other requirements of work is not Wolfe, but the overseers and Kirby. Since Wolfe's labor is merely assumed as a commodity and property of the capitalist, he lacks control over how his labor will be used. Wolfe is viewed as a mill laborer whose decision on work process depends on his employer. While working, he is unable to develop other talents or special skills he may have. He could only concentrate on his immediate job as described "*Wolfe, while Deborah watched him, dug into the furnace of melting iron with his pole, dully thinking only how many rails the lump would yield*" (913). The message being conveyed by Davis is that Wolfe must always keep his eye on the job, and his responsibility must be done as well as possible each day. Despite the harsh conditions of work, as described by Davis, is that the mill is a hot and miserable environment in which to work, Wolfe has no right to determine or control any of his working conditions. Whether the job is hard or hot, he must bear it. Working in the mill is like an external force that controls his very being. Wolfe is unhappy with his job, and as Marx indicates; it is a feeling of misery rather than well-being. The situation makes Wolfe becomes more like a working robot that lacks a human soul since he functions by programs set by others.

Davis also describes Wolfe's alienation from work activity clearly. "*Wolfe, while Deborah watched him as a spaniel its master, bent over the furnace with his iron pole, unconscious of her scrutiny, only stopping to receive orders*" (912). All that Wolfe can do, as a labor, is wait for orders from the capitalistic owner. The work itself is something external from Wolfe. His right of decision making that might lead to increased productive activity or any improved process is deprived by the system of capitalistic society. The creative mind is lost with the constant and hard work. In this way, his mental capacity steadily declines since he is not given the opportunity to

exercise his process of thought. Also his physical condition deteriorates because of the daily hard work in the mill. Wolfe becomes an exhausted laborer. This is in keeping with Marxist philosophy that a capitalistic society causes laborers to become subject to idiocy and cretinism “*He had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man, his muscle were thin, his nerves weak, his face (a meek, woman’s face) haggard, yellow with consumption*” (912).

Throughout the story described by Davis, it is clearly perceived that Wolfe does not feel happy or is delighted while working. Again, Marx states that the laborer feels happy only when he does not work, but on his off-hours. When Wolfe returns to work, it becomes the moment of misery for him again. The hardship Wolfe experiences from work affirms his wretched life in the mills as noted in the following quote: “*He had been so hot and tired there always in the mills! The years had been so fierce and cruel!*” (932). It can be said that the process of production is also another way that causes Wolfe to be alienated from his work. The activity of work is not a part of Wolfe, he simply does it to meet his economic needs.

As discussed above, it is clear that what makes Wolfe alienated from work or productive activity is caused through his lack of power over the job method, work process, and other job conditions at the mill. The power to change these conditions is beyond Wolfe’s control. On the other hand, those who have decision-making power are the overseers and mill owners. The working class man depicted by Wolfe is not eligible to make decisions on work or controls his own performance. Thus, this plight leads Wolfe to the sense of powerlessness, which is the inner conflict that undermines Wolfe’s human soul and his feeling of self-esteem. This sense of powerlessness also causes Wolfe’s character and personality to dissipate. His sense of value as a person

existence is maintained only when he is working on his craft art. In the furnace, Wolfe not only melts the metal but also his power, his existence, and his self and spirits are all melting together into the furnace.

2. Alienation from product of labor

What Marx meant by alienation from the product of labor is that the worker loses the product of his labor at the moment that product is completed. Product is not owned by laborers but rather belongs to the capitalistic owner. Also, profits are taken from the laborers. What is left for them is a working wage that is not the same as the value of their labor. The labor of workers becomes the object that provides assets for the capitalists. In a capitalist society, workers become objects in the job market. This is the situation in which Wolfe finds himself. Since production is privately owned by the capitalist, Kirby, the product of Wolfe's labor is automatically concentrated in the Kirby's hands.

In Life in the Iron-Mills, as soon as the railroad iron is produced, it becomes the property of others and becomes alien to Wolfe, the real producer. Wolfe views himself as subordinated to the product of his labor and the product becomes the power that controls his existence. Without some kind of product that needs to be produced, it is impossible for a laborer like Wolfe to survive. He would be jobless. Wolfe's life becomes dependent on the product and enslaves him.

Marx says that labor not only creates goods; it also produces itself and the worker as a commodity. This is compatible with Wolfe's situation. His labor produces both the railroad iron, as a product and it also turns him into a commodity in the capitalist market. In this way, both the labor of Wolfe and Wolfe himself become

objects that contribute to the profit of non-laborers. In this sense, Wolfe is transformed into an object. Wolfe's labor that produces the railroad iron returns him neither the profits nor the ownership of the product nor is there an opportunity for him to use the product produced by his own hands. Hence Wolfe becomes alienated from the product of his labor and derives no profit from them. Conversely, the profits flow to the capitalist, Kirby.

Marx states that "the more the worker produces the less he has to consume; the more value he creates the more worthless he becomes" (qtd. in Luper 309). Wolfe sells his cheap labor to the mill. He suffers from working on both day and night shifts because the wages are low and he needs the money to stay alive. Just as McClelland says, "Owners are seen as making profits by paying workers less than their work is worth and, thus, exploiting them" (1). The quality of life is slowly lost in the mill during Wolfe's long hours of labor hour. All his energy is consumed into the furnace in order to produce the valuable railroad iron for Kirby. Consequently, Wolfe becomes weakened while the railroad iron he produces is seen as a quality product. The finished products are completely owned by Kirby, the capital owner, and the product consumption is transferred to the well-to-do people in the upward middle class who travel back and forth on the railroad iron Wolfe produces. Ironically, Wolfe will never enjoy the use of that which he produced. His routine life is restricted to a walking commute from the mill where he works a twelve-hour day, six days a week to the row house where he lives. In the story, Wolfe also confirms his miserable life by replying to Deborah's question "*Home, - and back to the mill!*" *He went on saying this over to himself, as if he would mutter down every pain in this dull despair*" (922).

Wolfe's labor is merely the raw material and provided for producing the finest product. In contrast, Wolfe himself become weak and loses self-esteem. The product becomes the property of others rather than of the producers like Wolfe. Instead of wealthy, Wolfe possesses poverty and starvation both physical and spiritual just as the author Davis stresses: "*A reality of soul-starvation, of living death, that meets you everyday under the besotted faces on the street, - I can paint nothing of this, ...*" (911). Davis depicts a vivid scene of the unfortunate workmen. They cannot seem to rid themselves of their tragic lives as working class people.

In sum, Wolfe is alienated from the product of his labor. He cannot own it, he cannot use it. He is powerless to do so nor can he reap any substantial gain from its profits. His wages are low. He lives a marginal and bleak existence. As the value of his product goes higher, his esteem goes lower. As the capitalist Kirby gets richer from Wolfe's product, he views himself as becoming more enslaved to his routine of tedious work.

3. Alienation from other fellow men

Since the social sphere of an industrial or capitalist society is characterized by competition for one's own interest and power, people become more self-centered and individualistic. Ken Morrison refers to Marx's reason that this type of alienation happened "when the sole aim of life is competition and all social relations are transformed into economic relationships" (97). Each one pursues one's own profit and survival, which leads to a deterioration of human relations in society. Alienation from one's fellow man is another phenomenon of a capitalist society.

Wolfe first confronts the sense of alienation from his fellow man in his disassociation between his employers and himself. In other words, Wolfe is alienated from the capital owners. This is evidenced by minimal conversation between Kirby and Wolfe in the story. Human relations or other interpersonal actions between labor and capitalists are mediated by profits of production. This type of relationship is sometimes referred to as object relations. This is made apparent by the capitalist Kirby's expression that "*If I had the making of men, these men who do the lowest part of the world's work should be machines, -- nothing more, -- hands*" (918). This statement is made while Kirby is talking about the work with Dr. May, one of the town's physicians, and Wolfe. It is clear that the capital owner's mind is focused on profits, and not his workers.

Davis writes of the distant relationship between Wolfe and the capital owners as follows "*Never! He had no words for such a thought, but he knew now, in all the sharpness of the bitter certainty, that between them there was a great gulf never to be passed. Never!*" (915). As Marx indicates, the relationship and tie with other men in a capitalist society causes worker's alienation with capitalists. This can be seen clearly in Life in the Iron-Mills. The conversation between Kirby and Mitchell, another capital owner, depicts the distant relationship between Wolfe and his employers "*Wolfe stammered, glanced appealingly at Mitchell, who saw the soul of the thing, he knew. But the cool, probing eyes were turned on himself now, - mocking, cruel, relentless*" (917). It is clear that Mitchell is not sympathetic to the working class as represented by Wolfe. This occurs because of the difference in terms of social class, status, and power. Wolfe is not only aware of the difference between himself as a laborer and those who hold ownership, he exhibits a certain curiosity about it: "*He*

seized eagerly every chance that brought him into contact with this mysterious class that shone down on him perpetually with the glamour of another order of being. What made the difference between them? That was the mystery of his life” (913).

The two parties, worker and capital owner, are wary of each other, like strangers. This state of estrangement is enhanced by the disparity of wealth. Kirby, the capitalist, is the sole owner of the product produced by the labor of Wolfe. Wolfe himself holds nothing. He is aware of the disparity between himself and the capitalistic owner Kirby. This feeling gives Wolfe a sense of alienation from others like Kirby and his business partners. When Doctor May encourages Wolfe to think about the right to live his life as others, he becomes more conscious of his plight and longs for a different life. This shows that Wolfe realizes the alienation and separateness from others of the “upper class.”

In addition, Wolfe is also alienated from his peer workers. He finds the workplace to be competitive, and he is forced to work even harder in order to retain his job which is crucial to his survival. Wolfe is not the only one who needs to survive, the other peer workers in the mill do also. For this reason, Wolfe has to compete against other workers in order to retain his job. Since Wolfe’s labor is viewed as an object of production, Kirby, the capital owner, holds the power to select the best quality of labor that will contribute the greatest to his profits. Wolfe can be laid off easily unless he creates qualified products. Therefore, he must work hard or another mill-worker may replace him. In this way, relations with other workers become competitive and a sense of estrangement from them develops. Wolfe and other workers become more self-centered. They are obsessed with their own survival, and fiercely compete.

The sense of alienation from his peers leads Wolfe to another aspect of alienation, that is alienation from the social community. Wolfe is not well integrated with anyone in the broader community or society. He feels this sense of estrangement and isolation, which results from competition and lack of association with one another. According to Morrison, when such competition occurs in capitalist society it is called “universal competition” (97). It becomes the norm of society. Once Wolfe is isolated, he becomes detached. Wolfe’s detachment from the collective community and his peer workers at the mill sets him apart from them. Davis writes “*He was never seen in the cockpit*” (912). Even though this sentence is included to represent Wolfe’s feminine-like characteristic, it also provides an insight to the lack of association between him and his peer at work. The cold relationship with others emerges within Wolfe as Davis describes, “*His brain, greedy, dwarfed, full of thwarted energy and unused powers, questioned these men and women going by, coldly, bitterly, that night.*” (924). This sense of alienation is depicted even more clearly once Wolfe is imprisoned and looking outside on the street market. None of the community members are aware of Wolfe’s existence in the jail above the street. This scene is symbolic of Wolfe’s alienation from others. He is set apart from society while the world represented by what he sees on the street goes by.

4. Alienation from human nature

This type of alienation is a derivative of the three types previously discussed. The sense of human nature, or species being as Marx labels it, is lost because Wolfe loses power and control over his own labor; loses the product made by his own labor;

and, prohibits development in relations from the others in society. As a result, Wolfe is alienated from human nature.

Wolfe loses the essential capacity that constitutes human nature. Marx believes that “human beings live in an active relation to the natural world and in this sense have certain characteristics which mark them off from other species” (Morrison 96). In contrast, Wolfe’s sense of humanity dwells in the passive relationship to all his social spheres. The natural world of Wolfe becomes the external forces that compress him within a strict boundary. For example, he does not enjoy the right to make decisions on his activity at work or to control the way he functions in the mill. His world deprives him of the capacity to relate to human nature.

Marx also stresses that human nature, or species being, constitutes conscience and free will, and that any kind of human activity is conducted by realization of human potential within spheres of free actions. But Wolfe’s activity at the mill is running against his free will. Davis describes Wolfe’s hunger for freedom and the rights a human should have:

“A consciousness of power stirred within him. He stood up. A man, - he thought, stretching out his hands, - free to work, to live, to love! Free! His right! He folded the scrap of paper in his hand. As his nervous fingers took it in, limp and blotted, so his soul took in the mean temptation, lapped it in fancied rights, in dreams of improved existence, drifting and endless as the cloud-seas of color” (925).

In contrast with his desire, Wolfe’s work in the furnace does not allow him to express his full potential, but rather diminishes his capacity of being a full human.

The process of work reverses Wolfe’s human nature to be like other species. His free

will is controlled and he functions like a machine or object. At work, he is free only in those functions he shares with animals, for example, the functions of eating, sleeping, drinking and procreating. All of these functions are free and unsupervised.

Additionally, Wolfe's real self is robbed by the system of work. The product of his labor does not belong to him. He is alienated from his human nature at the mill because the activity of work he does goes against his free will. The full potential of his humaneness is lost because of the mechanical nature of his work. He has no right to express his human capacity. Since he is deprived from the full consciousness of being, he does not realize his self-worth and power as a human being. Davis's description of Wolfe helps readers understand his mind: *"Think that God put into this man's soul a fierce thirst for beauty, - to know it, to create it; to be - something, he knows not what, - other than he is"* (913).

Wolfe never meets his real human nature at work, nor is he conscious of his self-meaning. He simply puts all his efforts into being alive. There is no freedom to express himself. Thus, this situation takes Wolfe out of his human nature. His potential for being a full man is reversed; activity becomes suffering; strength becomes weakness; action becomes emasculation. All activities at work disassociate human beings and the soul of self.

According to Calabrese, the expression of creative endeavor is often caused by "the deep sense of alienation" (118). This typifies Wolfe as an alienated person since he expresses his own will to create a piece of art. His soul is filled by the passion of being an artist, though untrained and unskilled. Wolfe regains his potential on his off-hours from work, which is the unsupervised time for which he lives. He is free then to craft his work, and the power within himself is fully put on that artistic work. Through

creating and pursuing his artistic desires, Wolfe is preserving his humanity. In artistic creation, he is the one making the decisions; he holds his autonomy and uses his reasoning capacity, as a human is supposed to do. In sculpting, Wolfe determines his method and his process through which he is going to complete his work. Wolfe emancipates himself from work enslavement through art making. In art productivity, he finds that he is not in competition with others and is not in any fear of losing anything. Wolfe finds his humanity in art because he is able to function as a human, pursue his goal, and implement his ideas.

Wolfe's Alienation and Suicide

Suicide is the act of killing oneself intentionally as a result of different influences. The compulsion of economy and society, the dissatisfaction of oneself and life, or mental illness are possible reasons for committing suicide. These factors of committing suicide can be found in the book entitled Suicide and Depression in Late Life: Critical Issues in Treatment, Research, and Public Policy by Gary J. Kennedy.

Based on the preceding alienation analysis, Wolfe shows the symptoms of being an estranged, isolated, and powerless person. He becomes estranged because of his lack of trust among surrounding people. First, he does not trust one of his family members, Deborah. He also lacks trust in other people in the mills. The jeer he receives from fellow workers causes further estrangement. They laugh at his art making and at his effeminate nature. Wolfe is also uncertain of his capacity to enjoy his rights as others do, like Doctor May encourages him. He questions if he could be like people in other classes. Another estrangement is caused from the authority of the whole society of America. Since Wolfe is the immigrant, he also feels alien or

estranged from the institution of the country. The sense of being a “second citizen” of his adopted nation leads him to be estranged. The question of being equal is always present in Wolfe’s mind.

Another sense of Wolfe’s estrangement is that he is disconnected from others. Wolfe faces the disassociated relations from those fellow men in society. He is not wholly integrated with his peer workers and surrounding people. Furthermore, Wolfe faces the cold relations with his employers in the mill. All of these factors also gradually constitute Wolfe’s sense of disparity and separateness from others. Thus, he becomes more like a stranger in his own community, and realizes that society as a whole ignores him. In this way, Wolfe is like the outsider within his community, and feels the sense of not belonging.

Wolfe’s sense of estrangement then links him to the sense of being isolated, which is another symptom of illness toward himself, surrounding people, and his society. The symptom of illness toward himself is caused by the contradiction between his own will and the practical activity he has to actually bear. Wolfe’s right to pursue his happiness, to improve his life, and enjoy the right to own property is robbed by the plight of being a working class. His situation is caused by the external forces of the economy, and the impact of the capitalistic system as well as its social structure. The nature of the immediate society compels Wolfe as well as other inhabitants to be isolated from one another, and to pursue each of their private interests. Wolfe confronts the total sense of alienation and isolation when he is imprisoned. The atmosphere there causes him to become even more depressed. His isolated state increases his sense of loneliness, melancholy, and he becomes even more detached. Such feeling does not bring Wolfe happiness, instead, it ruins his

soul, and gives him a sense of slowly dying day after day. Thus, Wolfe has longed for the right to express his favorite activity, sculpting the korl, though he cannot do it freely. He can pursue his talent of being an artist only when he is on off-hours, and can express his strong will only within the limits of his time. These feelings lead Wolfe to feel his life is meaningless, with no purpose, and no hope. The sense of emptiness in Wolfe's mind also brings him melancholy. His despair becomes greater when he is arrested and imprisoned. He realizes that he has to spend the rest of his useless life in jail, and that he will suffer a slow death from being intellectually and artistically starved. During the long period of incarceration he felt he would degenerate even further. The bright future that he had longed for then becomes dim. No longer a feeling of usefulness to anyone or to any purpose. Wolfe's whole world becomes dull and dark. These feelings support Wolfe's sense of being an empty-alienated person. To escape from this misery, he ended up his life by committing suicide.

In view of this analysis, it becomes clear that Wolfe is alienated from all aspects of his social and personal life. Firstly, he is alienated from his work or productive activity. In this sense, Wolfe is unable to make decisions related to his job nor does he have any influence over his working conditions, all job arrangements rely on the capital owners. Wolfe is powerless in his work environment. Secondly, Wolfe is alienated from the product of his own labor. This situation makes his labor and himself become objectified. Wolfe's ownership in the product of his labor is minimalized nor can he obtain any profits from his product. This state of alienation enhances his feeling of powerlessness in terms of ownership. Thirdly, Wolfe is alienated from his fellow men. He lacks any kind of social connection with other

people. He is alienated both from peer workers because of job competition, and from capital owners because of profits and class distinction. In this sense, Wolfe is estranged, isolated and detached from others. Fourthly, Wolfe is alienated from his own human nature. This leads to a degeneration of his humaneness. Wolfe's potential to do human activity by his free will is taken away by which he has no control such as economic forces and the nature of his work. For these reasons, Wolfe views his life as useless, meaningless, empty, purposeless and hopeless.

All of these symptoms of alienation are considered the fundamental cause of Wolfe's committing suicide. Kennedy argues that social isolation and loneliness are the major risk factors and earliest reasons identified behind suicide attempts (7). This evidence affirms Wolfe's symptom leading him to commit suicide.

Besides his deteriorating social relations, Wolfe also faces personal problems that enhance his drive to commit suicide. Wolfe loses his idealized self as an artist. Since he is the alienated laborer, Wolfe's laboring time is devoted to the capital owner's profit. It is impossible for him to focus on his artistic development and talent. Therefore, he can never fulfill his desire to be an artist; in contrast, the quest for being his true self ends in failure (Calabrese 117). Wolfe has longed for the improved life as Davis describes "...his soul took in the mean temptation, lapped it in fancied right, in dreams of improved existence, drifting and endless as the cloud-seas of color" (925). Wolfe desires and thinks that his life should be better and become like people in the upper class. For this reason, he accepts the money from Deborah. At that moment Davis reveals Wolfe's thought that "*The money, - there it lay on his knee, a little blotted slip of paper, nothing in itself; used to raise him out of the pit; something straight from God's hand*" (925). Wolfe hopes that this money can help his life better.

He can live better, and his wish, being an artist, will become true. Therefore, he accepts that money. Ironically, Wolfe's life becomes disastrous when he is accused of being a thief. His life is even worse than he expected. He becomes imprisoned, and this cause drives Wolfe to become even more depressed. His life in jail symbolizes Wolfe's failure in every other aspect. He feels that he has nothing left besides the wretched life he faces in jail. He feels that there is no need to live and tries several times to take his life in jail. Deborah senses that Wolfe is trying to commit suicide, she is concerned about Wolfe and visits him the night before he dies. Deborah whispers her last word to Wolfe "*Hugh, boy, not THAT!*" (930). She notices his inner agony though Wolfe smiles to her, and tells her that "*It is best, Deb. I cannot bear to be hurted any more*" (930), and then "*Tell my father good-bye; and – and kiss little Janey*" (931). This is the last sorrowful sentence that Deborah hears before Wolfe dies.

All Wolfe's feelings are caused by the sense of deep alienation, which grows into a desperate mental sickness that leads to his suicide. Calabrese states that the resolution of a personal or collective sense of alienation requires the liberating of ghosts (118). What Calabrese means by ghosts is the ego or the sense of deep alienation within individual which constantly demands individual to be aware of pain caused by the deep sense of alienation, and then try to emancipate oneself from that sense. Similarly, Wolfe who has the deep sense of alienation wants to free himself from agony. At the moment before his committing suicide "*He lay quite still, his arms outstretched, looking at the pearly stream of moonlight coming into the window.*" (932) This description denotes Wolfe's longing for freedom, for hope, but the confinement in the jail makes everything impossible, it brings him the inner pain.

He cannot fulfill the better life. Davis describes Wolfe's last hour before he escapes his wretched life:

"I think that all the low, vile life, all his wrong, all his starved hopes, came then, and stung him with a farewell poison that made him sick unto death. He made neither moan nor cry, only turned his worn face now and then to the pure light, that seemed so far off, as one that said, 'How long, O Lord? How long?'" (932).

Chapter 4

Conclusion and Suggestion for Further Studies

The results of this study lead to the conclusion that the economic woes and social environment are critical variations and factors that constitute Wolfe's alienation: alienation from work or productive activity; alienation from the product of his labor; alienation from fellow men; and alienation from human nature. Wolfe is victimized by the system employed by a capitalistic society that exploits the poor or the working class people. In this society, Wolfe becomes dehumanized because he has to sell his labor as an object for little money. Like other wage earners in the working class, Wolfe is poor. He does not have an opportunity to express his full potential as a human should. His own will is deprived from doing the activity that defines his true self. Wolfe finally confronts the feeling of being another than his own.

Due to the sense of being alienated from himself, Wolfe becomes an estranged, isolated and detached individual. He feels powerless in his job, and from the alienated product of his own labor. He is unable to have power to determine his personal life. Wolfe feels himself as a stranger in his society, and lacks a sense of belonging. The cold relationships between Wolfe and other people also make him feel isolated and lonely. In this way, Wolfe becomes detached from society.

From his sense of deep alienation, Wolfe feels melancholy and hopeless. He believes that his life has no purpose nor hope and is not worth living any longer. As he confronts these feelings he develops the symptoms an individual who is mentally

ill and detached from all aspects of life. This is the reason that leads to Wolfe's decision to commit suicide.

Modern society, as in the nineteenth century, is the time of societal disruptions. When more and more people are faced with conditions such as poverty and deteriorating traditions, they are less bound to society. When one is detached from society, he is more likely to lack guidance or support through which he can successfully progress through life. Also, with the lack of any social links to people, people are more individualistic and more likely to focus upon themselves and their problems. The nineteenth century was such a time. Urbanization and industrialization were changing society and there was breakdown of the traditional norms. Social relations were decaying, just as the people were being dehumanized. Life in the Iron-Mills shows us how society was changing and how individual were reacting to such changes and to the breaking down of society. The alienation of the laborer was taking place and the goal of self independence was being pushed further away from those people. Humanity was replaced by competition and greed. Society was not where people lived harmoniously, but became the place where fierce competition happened for each one's advantage.

The situation of laborers in the nineteenth century is not that distinct from those workers in this contemporary generation. Systems of Capitalism which serves small groups of people's profits still exist in world society today. Different social problems also result from economic inequality. Amanda Konradi and Martha Schmidt can prove this fact, and illustrate the clear portrait of such problems as well as the deep causes in their book entitled Reading Between the Lines: Toward an Understanding of Current Social Problems. Sense of alienation is still being

experienced by working class individuals of this time, whether conscious or not. In addition, not only working class individuals feel a sense of alienation, an increasing number of white-collar workers, and intellectuals. These people may feel alienated because they sense they are losing their self-identity given the pressure of their work. Just as Ignace Feuerlicht indicates in his “Alienation: From the Past to the Future” that there emerges intellectual alienation presently (133). Those intellectuals or white-collar officers have to sell their smiles, their services, or even their specific identities. When these people work, they need to transform themselves to fit into the working environment. The reason for this is the need for survival. Should one ask if that is their free will choice, the answer of “yes” may not be found from every single individual. This is the point that can be drawn from this research that is to determine how “alienation” associates with the situation of the world inhabitants in this fast paced society. There are many people in contemporary society who have deep sense of alienation. The Wolfe syndrome lies just under the surface, even in today’s society.

Suggestions for further studies

1. There should be studies of other short stories of Rebecca Harding Davis which relate to social conditions.
2. The theory of suicide should be studied in depth to find other factors that cause one to commit suicide.
3. Other literary works of different writers in nineteenth century should be studied to explore how they addressed the societal conditions of those times

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