

## EXPLORING THE ELEMENTS OF MARXISM IN *A DEVOTED FRIEND* BY OSCAR WILDE

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### Abstract

*Increasing social inequality is still a major and widespread problem in the world. This phenomenon can take many different forms, and it is frequently made worse by repressive regimes where authoritarian rule is the norm. Systemic anarchy is often identified as the main cause of this trend. This study employs forceful approaches to directly analyze Marxist features, whereas other research has relied on cross-sectional data. The paper analyzes Oscar Wilde's short story *A Devoted Friend* by using Marxist ideas such as class exploitation, superstructure, sign values, surplus value, alienation of labor, and commodification. The plight of the oppressed and the dishonest social dynamics are prominent themes in Wilde's story. His critique of life exposes how affluence and fabricated notions of authority are used to subtly influence human behavior. This study examines how imperialism and class exploitation are reflected in the relationships and characters in the narrative. The study also places Wilde's writings in the context of Marxist discourse by referencing Lenin's actual application of Marxism and Karl Marx's views on the evolution of society. Examining how important Marxist theory is to comprehend the socioeconomic and class dynamics, is shown in the narrative is the goal.*

**Keywords:** class exploitation, sign values, alienation of labor, commodification

### Introduction

The main focus of Marxism is on individuality and the right to act in a society founded on the ideas of fairness and equal justice. Through the prisms of literature, history, society, and literary criticism has examined class and economic ideologies in recent decades. Marxist theory, which is based on social reality, offers a strong framework for examining how the struggles of the lower classes and basic human rights intersect.

In *A Devoted Friend*, capitalism and commodification eclipse social ideals, seeing the impoverished as inanimate machines rather than unique human beings. In his short story, Oscar Wilde, a prominent representative of Romantic literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and an advocate of "art for art's sake," delves into these subjects. Wilde's interest in the intricacies of society, especially the subtleties of friendship and status, is evident in *A Devoted Friend*. Marxist themes are expertly woven throughout the narrative, which shows how Hans's terrible death results from his love for his affluent friend Miller.

*A Devoted Friend*, which was published in 1888, criticizes the social and economic structures that support these injustices and serves as an example of the disloyalty that characterizes unequal relationships. The story explores prejudice and discrimination, illuminating social ties within the framework of superstructures. The story explores a social exploitation, economic sacrifice, and work alienation via Hans's steadfast devotion to Miller. These inconsistencies and disparities are

highlighted by Marxist theory, especially in capitalist societies where egotistical ideals commodify interpersonal interactions and uphold socioeconomic inequality.

By depicting a lonely life in which Hans struggles to uphold selfless commitment, the narrative also acts as a protest against this oppression. In the narrative, the garden represents Hans's psychological conflict between his extroverted and introverted sides. This study aims to clarify the intricacies of friendship as influenced by social systems by examining *A Devoted Friend* via the prism of Marxism.

By emphasizing class exploitation and Hans's humanity being subjugated under capitalist superstructures, this study highlights important Marxist aspects of Miller's character. In addition to being a sociopolitical commentary, *A Devoted Friend* demonstrates Wilde's talent for depicting class relations and labor alienation. The study provides insights into how literature reflects socioeconomic oppression in a broken society by placing the story under Marxist criticism. In the end, Wilde's story helps us see how these repressive structures have changed human circumstances and behavior.

### Objectives of the Research

1. To examine how *A Devoted Friend* navigates themes of commodification, class conflict, and the concept of devotion within a capitalist society.
2. To analyze how loyalty and honesty are influenced and affected by the dynamics of a capitalist society.

### Literature Review

Marxism is a well-known philosophical framework that emphasizes class conflict, economic systems, and political ideology in order to concentrate on systemic changes. It draws attention to important sociological themes that continue to influence the socioeconomic dynamics of societies, such as individualism, class conflict, and political economy.

Yasemin (2019) applied Marxist theory to an analysis of *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. With an emphasis on capitalist exploitation and the possibility of revolution to end tyranny, the research draws attention to the difficulties encountered by workers and the working class.

In 2020, Tayyaba Bashir, Shahid Hussain Mir, and Arshad Mehmood used a Marxist perspective to examine Katherine Mansfield's short novel *The Garden Party*. From a Marxist standpoint, their analysis highlights characters who experience socioeconomic inequalities, demonstrating how social behavior and economic progress influence human conditions.

Marxist elements in Orwell's 1984 and Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* were studied by Amani Al Khodor (2024), who concentrated on how class conflicts and societal inequalities under capitalism impact literature. Her study emphasizes the power of the Victorian nobility as well as the revolutionary struggles against oppression based on class.

According to Aziz Khan Borich (2021), Marxism is unquestionably relevant to comprehending societal dynamics and structures.

Salma Shaikh used qualitative methods to examine Hashim Nadeem's novel *Parizaad*, highlighting Marxist themes such racism, ruthlessness, cultural imperialism, and societal oppression. Particularly in the context of Pakistani literature, the study sees *Parizaad* as a powerful depiction of a suppressed society shaped by socioeconomic and cultural influences.

Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* and *The Star Child* were studied by Dadasaheb Slunke (2020) as artistic representations of the socioeconomic circumstances of Wilde's era. Marxist ideas are reflected in these works' depictions of economic systems and class relations.

Mehmood (2019) used Marxist feminism to examine Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, emphasizing how patriarchy oppresses women and how society limits their access to higher education and career advancement. Within a capitalist context, this study emphasizes oppression of both gender and class.

Matt Perry (2021) offered a historical perspective on Marxism in his book *Marxism and History*. The book explores the relationship between social reproduction and gender inequality, providing insightful analysis of the development and use of Marxist philosophy.

Karlina Arum (2016) examined Nicholas Sparks's book *The Best of Me* from a Marxist perspective. Examining class strife between the upper and lower classes, the study highlights the societal suffering brought about by these divisions.

These studies, which concentrate on issues of class conflict, economic systems, gender inequality, and societal oppression, jointly demonstrate the flexibility of Marxist critique in examining literary works. This study expands upon these tenets by examining the Marxist components of Oscar Wilde's *A Devoted Friend*, including its depiction of worker alienation, commercialization, and class exploitation.

### Theoretical

### Framework

Marxism is a critical theoretical approach to analyzing social and economic processes in society, according to James Alexander M. Deza. Marx demonstrates that commodification results from private ownership of the means of production, which puts the owners' profit ahead of workers' in his groundbreaking book *Das Kapital* (Volume 1). Employees work long hours for meager pay, underscoring the exploitation that comes with capitalism institutions. Marx highlights how workers are frequently viewed as commodities, not as people with rights and dignity but as instruments for generating money.

Marxism also emphasizes how history and literature interact, arguing that historical circumstances have a big influence on how art and culture are expressed. Marxism's emphasis on the lower classes, who are frequently marginalized or disadvantaged in society systems, makes this relationship especially clear.

### Key Concepts in Marxism

1. **Surplus Value and Class Exploitation:** The difference between the bourgeoisie, or owners of production, and the proletariat, or working class, is criticized by Marxism. The creation of surplus value through worker exploitation highlights the economic inequalities that capitalism upholds. Marx argues that the dominant class shapes cultural narratives to uphold their superiority and controls literature, art, and ideas. In order to reveal its flaws and sociopolitical ramifications, Marxist critics recognize and evaluate this intellectual effort.
2. **Alienation:** Marxist ideology emphasizes how workers felt alienated under capitalism. Workers are cut off from their own humanity, the end results of their labor, and the production process. Discontent and dehumanization are fostered by this estrangement and are topics covered in a variety of literary works.

3. **Sign Values and Commodification:** As discussed in Wilde's writings, commodification lowers interpersonal connections and values to commercial trades. For example, rather than being true friendships, human ties are portrayed in *A Devoted Friend* as instruments for achieving personal goals.

Oscar Wilde's examination of social structures and class relations is a prime example of Marxist ideas. His writings, like *A Devoted Friend*, criticize the sly ways in which the ruling class exploits the working class. Themes of class exploitation, surplus value, symbol values, and commodification are examined in this book as ways that materialistic society obstruct real human connections.

In a similar vein, Marxist theory can be applied to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). With love and morality pitted against material and social restraints, the battle between the Montagues and Capulets represents class distinctions and societal conflicts. The complexity of class conflicts and cultural hegemony is reflected in this moral dilemma.

Marxist criticism links historical materialism, social consciousness, and economic processes to help us comprehend literature. It highlights the ways in which prevailing economic classes shape societal ideas in order to hold onto power and affect cultural production. By using this approach, it is possible to examine Wilde's writings as mirror images of the socioeconomic conditions of his era, providing valuable perspectives on class conflicts and the human condition.

### **Research Methodology**

This study examines Marxist aspects of *A Devoted Friend* using textual analysis and qualitative content analysis. The dialogues, character relationships, and story structure are all examined through textual analysis, which reveals themes of class exploitation, commercialization, and labor alienation.

Hans is the main character, and his hardships are representative of the fate of the working class under bourgeois rule. The research draws attention to the commodity of friendship and systemic injustice by examining his relationship with Miller.

This study shows how Marxist ideas like class conflict and surplus value are woven throughout the story by closely analyzing Wilde's language and symbolism. A greater comprehension of Wilde's criticism of socioeconomic disparity and capitalist exploitation is provided by this dual-method approach.

### **Textual Analysis of *A Devoted Friend* by Oscar Wilde**

*A Devoted Friend*, a short story by Oscar Wilde, is a humorous and morally instructive examination of human relationships. Marxist analysis, on the other hand, can also be used to uncover themes of class conflict, sign values, exploitation, the ideological defense of injustice, and the power struggles between the bourgeois and proletariat. By combining these Marxist ideas, Wilde offers a thorough analysis of human nature and the intricacies of class while also criticizing societal structures.

By applying Marxist theory to Wilde's story, we can reveal deeper socio-political conflicts that are evident in the text. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels investigated the role of class in society. The story portrays a friendship that, on the surface, appears selfless but is ultimately a mechanism of exploitation, where one character, Miller, manipulates the other, Hans, for his own benefit.

### 1. Class Exploitation

Miller and Hans's relationship is a metaphor for capitalism's exploitation of class. Hans, a working-class character, is exploited by Miller, the wealthier character, without receiving just compensation. This dynamic is exemplified by the following quotation:

"For when people are in trouble, they should be left alone and not be bothered by visitors" (p.118).

By ignoring Hans's hardships, Miller, who is preoccupied with his wealth and power, exhibits class indifference. However, Hans is left to face suffering on his own, signifying the predicament of the working class in a capitalist society. The assertion,

"There is no good in my going to see little Hans as long as the snow lasts" (p.118),

illustrates Miller's indifference to his friend's pain. According to Marxism, capitalism paralyzes society by destroying human values and turning people into nothing more than manufacturing equipment. Miller illustrates the Marxist criticism of labor exploitation in the novel by taking advantage of Hans's hard work and devotion without providing anything in return. Hans puts in a lot of effort, but all he gets in return is adulation and hollow promises; this is a clear example of the exploitation Marx spoke about.

### 2. Sign Values and Surplus Value

Marxist theory also discusses the idea of sign values, which is the idea that material possessions and status symbols have social meaning. Miller confuses his worldly affluence with moral superiority because he is oblivious to the moral consequences of his conduct. He defends his actions by arguing that aiding Hans would be more like charity than true friendship:

"If the little Hans came up here, and saw our warm fire, and our good supper, and our great cask of red wine, he might get envy" (p.118).

Miller views Hans's poverty as a source of personal shame in this instance, but he chooses to conceal his feelings behind material belongings rather than providing genuine assistance, thus escalating class differences. Marx's idea of surplus value, which reduces the value of interpersonal connections to transactional exchanges, is reflected in his devaluation of true friendship and use of it for selfish objectives. A key Marxist criticism of the commodification of human connections is represented by Miller's refusal to assist Hans in his hour of need.

### 3. Alienation of Labor

Marxist theory is based on the idea of alienation, which holds that capitalism separates workers from their labor's output, their working methods, and eventually, themselves. This is reflected in Wilde's portrayal of Miller and Hans' interactions. The following interaction demonstrates Hans's estrangement from the results of his labor:

"I will give you, my wheelbarrow. I am sure you would like to give me some in return. Here is the basket and mind you fill it quite full". (P.119)



This conversation demonstrates how Hans's labor is underappreciated and commercialized, reducing it from a meaningful deed to a simple trade. Workers like Hans are treated like mere industrial tools in a capitalist society, with little regard for their humanity. Miller exemplifies the alienation of work as Marx envisioned it when he demands that Hans continue to serve him without providing a true reciprocal relationship. Hans eventually dies as a result of his allegiance and service to Miller, highlighting the detrimental effects of alienation in capitalist civilizations.

#### 4. Commodification

Wilde criticizes the way capitalism commodifies interpersonal connections in *A Devoted Friend*. Miller portrays himself as Hans's loyal friend throughout the narrative, but in practice, he takes advantage of Hans's devotion for his own benefit. Miller uses the appearance of friendship to cover up his selfishness, which he then uses to his advantage. He advances his personal agenda by using Hans's convictions of compassion and respect for one another:

"But I am afraid you don't understand the poetry of life" (p.119).

This passage demonstrates how Miller defends his exploitation of Hans by claiming moral superiority. The commercialization of friendship turns it into a simple transaction in which Miller gains from Hans's allegiance but Hans gets nothing in return. The moral deterioration brought about by capitalism, where interpersonal connections are characterized by self-interest and material gain, is highlighted by Wilde's depiction of this exploitation. The genuine worth of human connection and devotion is undermined by this commodity of friendship, which is ultimately lost in the chase of individual gain.

#### Conclusion

Oscar Wilde's *A Devoted Friend* is a critique of class systems that examines the dynamics of village life through a pastoral narrative. This realistically based study exposes elements of class exploitation and commodification by interpreting the story as an allegory for society systems. Marxist analysis of *A Devoted Friend* reveals that it is a mirror of capitalist exploitation, where materialism and self-interest obfuscate the value of friendship. A potent illustration of the dynamic changes in class, power, and commodification in capitalist society is the interaction between Miller and Hans. Miller takes advantage of this dedication for his own gain, while Hans, who represents the working class, is finally destroyed by the false promises of friendship. Wilde's depiction highlights the detrimental consequences of unbridled authority, revealing the unfairness and oppression ingrained in hierarchical systems.

It is clear that Wilde explored capitalism exploitation and surplus value when analyzed within a Marxist context. In addition to serving as a warning about friendship, the story offers a deep societal critique that highlights the dehumanizing effects of socioeconomic injustice.

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