

Theme of Hunger of Materialism in Tolstoy's How Much Does a Man Need?

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Abstract

The research focuses on the theme of hunger of materialism in Tolstoy's How Much Does a Man Need? The short story conveys the theme of hunger for materialism as seen how a man who is greedy with material things that he is always hungry, and he cannot satisfy his lust for it beyond limitation. Using the allusion, the researchers can learn how Tolstoy deploys the simple understanding of Bashkir, who are illiterate and seem underdeveloped people, they are much wiser than a Russian man like Pakhom. Using this technique, Tolstoy wants to say that happiness can be found ironically in the simplicity of life that does not need a lot of things that trigger the hunger of materialism that according to Christianity, he will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Keywords: Theme, hunger, allusion

A. Introduction

One of the greatest novelists is Leo Tolstoy (Hensher 2010) for his works influence many generations after him, even for people like Gandhi. Critics on Tolstoy see that his different ages of life determine on how his works are portrayed (Darma, 2004:11). On his old ages, Tolstoy wrote the theme on religion and preaching (Darma, 2004:11). One of his famous during the last days is God Knows the Truth but Waits that discussed the bad fate of a man, but

this article does to discuss this very famous short story, but this article studies a shorter one, only one page, entitled How Much land Does a Man need? . This one-page short story was written in 1886 and even influenced James Joyce, a great Irish author who came as a following generation (Orwing, 2002: 209). Because of this importance, the writers of this article would like to compose an article about the short story.

This article discussed the theme of the short story and related to

the worldview of Tolstoy who is a devout Christian and how Christianity, especially the life of Jesus Christ influenced his life. This article is actually an intrinsic criticism in which it means it studies the text only while sees at glance the Christian aspect of the story.

Robert Eaglestone in his book *Doing English* (2007) wrote intensively about the aspects of intrinsic criticism. He pointed out that through reading the text a literary work can be understood. The way of understanding a text only (intrinsic criticism) is often associated with theme, conflict, character, setting, imagery, etc. Therefore, to understand the theme of *How Much Land Does a Man Need* is a part of this intrinsic study.

William Kenney (1966: 88) defined theme as the meaning of the story and closely related to the subject of story. The two things are different though some critics say both are the same. Kenney continued (1966:91), theme is not hidden meaning, but how the meaning of the story releases. So that theme is the total meaning discovered by the writer in the

process of writing and by the reader in the process of reading. Kenney stated that it is not easy to find a theme, but theme can be found on by a thorough and responsive reading of the story, involving a constant awareness of the relations among the parts of the story and of relation of parts of whole.

The article studies that theme of this short story is the hunger of materialism as represented through the main character, Pakhom, a Russian man who goes to a Bashkir village. The hunger for materialism is a lust of possessing material things that never ends. As the old Tolstoy was getting religious, the theme of his works was related to the modest teaching of Jesus and the early Christians. Therefore, the concept of hunger of materialism is taken from the holy book of Christianity in term of "flesh". The feeling of materialism is seen as the acts of flesh that can be seen in Galatians 5:12, stating that include "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition.. those who live like this never will inherit the Kingdom of God."

By understanding the quotation from the Bible, it can be studied that the concept of hunger of materialism is related to the act of flesh in Christianity term. The act of flesh is related to the selfish ambition or greed in the story is portrayed by Pakhom.

B. Research Method

This research is qualitative research in which this article applies the analysis by describing the data in words. This article uses a short story *How Much Land Does A Man Need* translated from Russian language in 1955 by the Foreign Publishing House. The data is taken to highlight the theme of the story. As a mimetic intrinsic criticism, this article uses the theme, setting, and character in the text, and however the teaching of Christianity is asserted to understand the meaning of the theme, hunger of materialism.

C. Result and Discussion

The only one-page story is narrated from the third point of views about a character named Pakhom, a Russian man who goes to a Bashkir

village to purchase land there. Tolstoy starts by describing Pakhom as “The ambitious Pakhom” (1955:3), who “after gaining over greater plots of land, finally heard wonderful deal in far-off the country”. The quotation shows that Pakhom is an ambitious peasant in netral view, that can be seen that he is succees and now plans to achieve more land in a bashkir village which is located far away from the main Russian land. Bashkir people are Muslims, and at the time of Tolstoy were mostly illiterate people living in hilly area and in modest way of living.

Asking about the price of the land, Pakhom is excited to know that the price is very cheap as the chief of the illiterate Bashkirs says that “ he (Pakhom) can have the land he wants for a thousand rubbles for a day”. (1955:3). Further, the chief says, “ We don’t reckon your way. We sell the day. However, much you can walk around in on one day will be yours”, It is with one condition, “ if Pakhom cannot return by sundown , the money will be forfeited.”

From the quotation, it can be studied that the chief gives a

requirement that it can be very triggering for an ambitious person (in neutral sense, while this article sees it as this temptation is an act of flesh, a hunger of materialism), like Pakhom to achieve this. And then, the hunger of materialism starts to happen to him as described by the following quotation:

After placing his thousand rubbles on top, Pakhom began walking, digging holes along away to mark his land. This going to was easy and he thought, "I'll do another three miles and then turn left. The land's so beautiful here, it will be a pity to miss any." (1955:3)

From the above quotation, Pakhom develops his character. From only an ambitious man, he develops into a man who is hungry for materialism. At the beginning he just wants to mark a land by making hole, but then he continues his way. The common thought of a man like him is that it is a pity to miss everything, he must grab everything possible.

Then Tolstoy shows how he is hungry of materialism as Pakhom "hurried throughout this morning , going out of his way to add more

land.. But at noon when he looked back at the hill where he had begun". This quotation shows that Pakhom is a man with the hunger of materialism. He just focuses on possessing land more and more. He commits a kind of selfish ambition that must be done. Then he realizes that "I have gone too far. He is worried."

As Tolstoy is a devout Christian who uses his work as a means to convey the modest teaching of Christianity, he writes Pakhom as a symbol of a man who loses in the jungle of act of flesh because of his hunger of materialism. It is described that after Pakhom feels he is worried that he cannot get back soon to the line he starts on the top of hill. He loses inside the village of Bashkir is a metaphor of how a man is tired in doing a lust for materialism only. A man with hunger of materialism cannot get back or out from the situation as he is in deep situation of greed, or when he realizes it is too late for him.

Tolstoy describes later, "As the afternoon went on, the heat was exhausting. By now his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs were

weakened. He wanted to take a rest, but it was out of the question". The quotation shows that hunger of materialism never has an end in spirit, but it is his physical body that cannot cope with. He realizes that he will lose his money if he does not wake up instantly, but he cannot. A man with the hunger of materialism just thinks about the money not about the happiness of his soul that is supposedly to inherit the Kingdom of God. The short story tells, "Pakhom struggled on, walking faster, and running. He worried that he had been too greedy, and his fear made him breathless. His throat parched and his lungs were working like a blacksmith's bellow, his heartbeat like a hammer. He was terrified". The description shows how man who is hungry of materialism is in very terrible condition mentally. he just cares on his greed and self-ambition, and when he realizes that his body does not support this ambition (the body is a material being), he loses his mind.

Finally, he walks up to the hill to meet Bashkirs who cheer and laugh at him. However, he is late, the sunset

has come, he falls and dies in the feet of the Bashkir chief. Then "The worker picked up Pakhom's spade, dug his grave, and buried him- six feet from head to heel, exactly the amount of land a man needs."

From the above quotation, the article studies that Pakhom, as a man who lives in the hunger of materialism, focuses his life on the achievement of having as much as materials he can achieve, but finally he cannot have it longer when he dies. For the real size of a man needs when he dies is a small size of a land, that is the grave.

D. Conclusion

The researchers' study that the short story conveys the theme of hunger of materialism as it shows how a man who is greedy with material things that he is always hungry and he cannot satisfies his lust for it beyond limitation. Through the use of allusion, the researchers can study how Tolstoy deploys the simple understanding about Bashkir, that while Bashkirs are illiterate, and seem underdeveloped people, they are much wiser than a Russian man like

Pakhom. By using this technique, Tolstoy wants to say that happiness can be found ironically in the simplicity of life that does not need a lot of things that trigger hunger of materialism that accordingly to the Christianity, he will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

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