

# Commentary on the iniquities of consumerism and materialism



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The short story *The Rocking Horse Winner* by D. H. Lawrence focuses on Paul, a young boy who is obsessed with luck in order to earn money for his family. Paul assumes, that if he wins enough money for his family through luck, he can win his mother's affection and the family's happiness. However, the financial burdens they are experiencing is due to his mother, Hester, obsession with living beyond her means. No matter how much Paul wins for his mother to earn her love, Hester is still not satisfied and shows less affection towards her family. Paul's obsession to get back on his rocking-horse and ride till he is lucky gets worse through time and eventually leads to his doom. The story illustrates the rise of consumerism and self-indulgence in the English culture society. Its conceptual structure is criticism on self-indulgence and materialism in a middle-class community by showing their subsequent adverse effects. The story demonstrates disintegration of family, isolation, and exploitation as some of the ramifications of consumerism and materialism (Bağlama 24). It is a reflective critique on the obtuse covetousness, excessive consumerism, and greediness embedded in the modern society. The story is a morality tale that incorporates dramatized actions and symbolism to make commentary on the adverse effects of financial and social pressures in the modern society.

*The Rocking Horse Winner* follows Paul's fixation on luck in an attempt to win money for his family by riding his rocking-horse and predicting the winning horses in major races. Hester's constant complaints about her family and financial problems drives Paul to fixate on riding the horse, the whispering of the house also torments Paul and his siblings about money. Paul's need to win his mother's affection and restore happiness in the family compel him to

start riding the rocking-horse to a frenzied state to make predictions. He is however unaware that the financial problems stem from her mother's extravagance and not poverty. Together with his Uncle Oscar, who doubts him at first, they use the predictions to win large sums of money from the race (Lawrence 529-530). Paul covertly shares his winning with his mother by fabricating them as a gift from someone else. Regardless of his attempts the house keeps speaking that there should be more money, this drives him to try more predictions to impress his mother and make the house stop whispering. Paul tries several times to no avail and he gets more desperate. Finally, he rides the rocking-horse with more vigor and manages to predict a win but unfortunately collapses and eventually dies.

The story expresses the negative effects of fixating on luck and money to satisfy the constant materialistic needs of family in a capitalist society. Paul uses his rocking-horse to predict wins through luck, ' Now take me to where there is luck' (Lawrence 527). Paul concludes that if he manages to win money for his mother and relieve her of financial burdens, he will earn her love and affection. In a modern political economy, families face a lot of pressure to satisfy the materialistic desires of loved ones to achieve affection and harmony in the household. The story shows the emotional turmoil an individual endures in pursuit of unrequited love, and the compulsion only leads to further alienation and exploitation. Paul loses his innocence through this emotional struggle to win for Hester's covetous desires. The yearning for her love only drives her mother further away prompting more effort from him to earn her love. Paul figures The Derby is his last opportunity to win for Hester. However, he does not achieve what he desired even on his

deathbed. In a modern society, the story expresses the destructive nature of greediness and obsession with wealth due to burdens exerted on by family's self-interests.

The Rocking-Horse Winner illustrates the rise of consumerism and self-indulgence in a capitalist society and the subsequent destructive effects. Lawrence uses the character of Hester to express the adverse impact of consumerist and materialist culture in society. The social expectations in a bourgeois society drive Hester into impulsive consumerism which translates into inept motherhood. Paul's mother Hester believes that material possessions and money will give her happiness which she has not achieved thus far. The money Paul wins for her pushes Hester to more self-indulgence and materialism; she prefers to buy more lavish possessions instead of paying off debts. She has a deep desire for approval from others which only makes her greed and avarice grow further, having negative effects on her children. Hester's commodity fetishism changes her into a detached mother and wife to her family and does not show affection at all. Hester's association of money and love has made her marriage worthless in her eyes. She isolates her children especially Paul who results to exploiting himself to fulfill the family's needs. She represents the pointlessness of consumerism and its damaging effects on families and the culture. Hester's self-indulgence and extravagance lead to the disintegration of relationships in the household.

The story illustrates the societal notions of associating affection with money; it establishes that self-indulgence inhibits expression of affection towards family. Lawrence demonstrates the discordancy between materialism and love in the story through Hester; she is unable of love: It's made known that <https://assignbuster.com/commentary-on-the-iniquities-of-consumerism-and-materialism/>

she felt like her kids were pushed upon her and she could not love them (Lawrence 525). Hester represents the greediness and acquisitiveness in modern society; she only wishes to acquire riches and approval and has no concern over the family union. The writer expresses the damaging effect extreme desire for status and wealth has on family, through the story he criticizes people's equation of happiness with fortune. Hester also struggles with expressing affection to her kids and husband due to societal notions to assume the role of a traditional woman. Hester's vices lead to the disintegration of her family; the emotional negligence of her children leads to the death of Paul. Even during her son's death, she is cold and distant; she expresses no love or affection to him as her true desires lay elsewhere. Hester's character is a commentary to the self-indulgent tendencies in the society to the extent of overlooking the most critical aspects of family. The story is reflective of the modern society; it expresses the corrosive nature of a family member's self-indulgence and materialism.

The story incorporates symbolism to express the concepts of consumerism and materialism in a capitalist society. The whisper of the house represents the people's impulsive tendencies to keep spending more than they can afford (Bağlama 25). It expresses the iniquities of excessive consumerism and self-indulgence in a modern political economy. Paul's riding of the wooden rocking-horse to earn money that is never enough is a form of societal exploitation. In the contemporary economy, the hard work of certain individuals is expropriated by family members in the expense of the individual. The narrative in its entirety urges the society to take caution while indulging in consumerism and self-indulgence by illustrating the

shortcomings involved with a capitalist setting such as exploitation, isolation, and disintegration of family.

The Rocking-Horse Winner incorporates embellished events and symbolism to express the destructive effects of excessive consumerism and materialism to a family in a modern society. It explores Paul's compulsion to acquire more wealth for Hester's materialistic vices to earn a parent's affection which only leads to his death. Hester's excessive greed fuels Paul's obsessions which further has damaging effects on the family. The story criticizes the acquisitive behavior in a capitalist society along with its exploiting, isolating and disintegrating effects on the members of a family. The story expresses the need to foster a genuinely affectionate relationship in a family to attain fulfillment and happiness. It conveys that financial and social pressures families face in a modern setting limits them from achieving true contentment.

Works Cited Bağlama, Sercan Hamza. "The Ideological Structure in "The Rocking-Horse Winner": Evils of Modernism and Consumerism." *Anglisticum Journal (IJLLIS)* 2. 4 (2013): 24 - 32. Print. 10 October 2017.

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