

From Pastoral to Wilderness: An Eco Marxist Overview Over Late Capitalism Ambivalence in Into The Wild 2007

Fitra Mandela¹, Novi Dwi Gitawati², Arie Sugiyartati³

Fakultas Sastra dan Budaya / Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Gunadarma University, Indonesia

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Corresponding author*:

fitramandela@gmail.com

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Abstract: Social science studies can contribute to environmental issues, including through literature, which serves not only as an aesthetic medium but also as a critical reflection to raise ecological awareness. This paper demonstrates that works of fiction can serve as an alternative medium for raising public awareness that environmental degradation is a reality with far-reaching consequences for the sustainability of life. One example is the film *Into the Wild* (2007), which depicts Christopher McCandless' journey away from the hustle and bustle of the city to ecological regions such as rural areas, mountains, rivers, and ultimately the wilds of Alaska. By employing the concepts of pastoralism and wilderness through an eco-Marxist approach, Christopher's journey can be understood as an ideological discourse that promotes pastoral values while criticizing overly exploitative characteristic of late capitalism towards nature. However, this criticism is ambivalent because the main character remains dependent on the material products of late capitalism to survive. Thus, *Into the Wild* can be read as both a representation and a problematic critique of late capitalism and the relationship between humans and the environment.

Keywords: Eco-Marxism, Pastoral, Wilderness, Late Capitalism, Ambivalent

INTRODUCTION

In the era of global capitalism, also known in some books as late capitalism, economic growth and development are two things that signify the progress of human civilization. Societies under the strong influence of globalization can be characterized by the movement across national borders not only of people and culture but also of capital and commodities[1]. With the massive flow of capital, the quantity of commodities will also grow to reach such a massive scale. Clear evidence of the strong influence of late capitalism in determining the direction of global policy can be seen in the data summarized by Fuchs below. In 2018, there were 2,000 large multinational companies with extraordinary profits of \$84.74 trillion. This represents 48.5 per cent of total global economic activity [2]. In other words, it shows that this late capitalism shapes and influences our economic activities. Thus, for Jameson, one of the major theorists in this field, states that all forms of criticism toward late capitalism must be carried out more carefully, because late capitalism is a form of systemic development that is highly complex and problematic [3]. The implications of late capitalism for the contemporary world further led to the construction of common sense and an ideology that views the standard of a good or an ideal life as solely determined by the level of material possessions (materialism). In line with Raymond Williams' view, one of most renowned Marxist critics, all aspects of life are influenced by economic activity. This includes domains that seem unaffected by profit-seeking practices, such as culture, ideology [2] The effects of late capitalism continue to

erode society to the point where humans themselves become commodities (commodification) where humans possess a certain market value and are traded like commodities. Commodification also includes assigning a sale value to a non-material or abstract, such as information and communication [2].

When discussing capitalism, profit growth and commodity quantity are two aspects that are always prioritized by capitalists. Late capitalism as the latest form of capitalism, which is undoubtedly more exploitative towards nature. Exploitative actions towards nature can take in various forms, such as the development of mega cities along with its skyscrapers, gigantic factories, highway in all over places across developing or even impoverished countries. All kinds of activities that destroy the environment are considered normal and acceptable effort because, in capitalist values, nature is an external part of humanity. Nature does not influence human well-being. Nature is merely a commodity for capitalists to maximize their profits (Nayar, 2009).

In addition, environmental issues are closely related to the existence of late capitalism. All changes and destructions in nature, caused by or affecting humans, are the results of social, economic, and political decisions. World leaders, as explained by Royle et al.,[4], state that they are more concerned with the interests of global capital owners. A concrete example of this, is the policy of continuing to subsidize the fossil fuel industry and the denial of the issue of global warming.

When urban life, with all its complexities, is used as a factor to indicate the level of civilization, other aspects such as humanism and environmental sustainability are often overlooked. Meanwhile, rural areas with minimal development or villages are often associated with being underdeveloped. Developed areas are defined as places where infrastructure such as high-rise buildings, offices, highways, and toll roads is available, even if this comes at the cost of damaging the natural environment. In Indonesia, according to the official website of The Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions of the Republic of Indonesia, one of the main indicators determining whether an area is classified as underdeveloped or not is by measuring its level of development (Firman, 2020).

The reason often considered is that investment and development based on the ideology of capitalism are essential for the continued welfare of humanity. This perspective seems to contradict the idea that humans can live in harmony with nature and find their own version of happiness, which goes beyond mere material possessions. Therefore, this study analyses that there are other concepts of happiness and progress beyond the economic growth rates defined by the capitalist system. Is it possible that the true meaning of life can be found not in how much material wealth one possesses, but in having an ideal relationship with nature? The dimensions of space and time, which have long been considered merely external aspects of human life and work, are proven through an ecocritical reading of the subject matter of this paper to be integral to the sustainability of human life itself.

This unpopular idea is accommodated by a concept in ecocritical literary studies known as pastoral. Simply put, pastoralism in ecocritical studies refers to literature that generally focuses on rural life [5]. Interestingly, pastoralism has become one of the main aspects of ecocriticism not merely because of its depiction of rural life but due to its favoritism towards pastoral works and its perspective on the peacefulness of rural life, which contrasts with urban life associated with suffering and corruption.

Moreover, since the planet Earth is in a difficult and vulnerable position due to the damage, changes, and modifications of various kinds caused by humans [6], the concept of pastoralism offers one possible solution to this problem. It seems that, as of the writing of

this article, only humans possess the intelligence necessary to destroy the Earth, and ironically, only humans can save it. Criticism of capitalism can begin by questioning the established human perspective known as anthropocentrism the view that sees humans as the center of the universe, [7], thereby making humans seem capable of doing whatever is necessary for the benefit of humanity.

Meanwhile, wilderness is another key concept or topic in ecocriticism besides the pastoral concept used in this study. The concept of wilderness is generally understood as an ideal landscape in nature that is completely free from human influence. This contrasts with the pastoral concept, which has been modified by humans. Wilderness aims to protect and preserve habitats and species threatened by human existence. However, a more critical ecocritical study sees that the definition of wilderness is fluid and always changing over time. [8].

The fundamental similarity between the concepts of pastoralism and wilderness is the attempt to 'escape' from urban life. The idea of wilderness sees the concept of urbanism as having a negative impact on individuals and nature because urban areas produce material and moral pollution [9].

The object of research that corresponds to the author's initial concern is the film *Into the Wild* (2007). This film is based on a true story about the life of a character named Christopher McCandless. He gave up all his possessions to live in the wilds of Alaska. He decided to make a life choice that was unusual for most people after completing his education at university.

Although there were no major issues in terms of material possessions or relationships with his family that might have prompted him to leave his stable life, he still embarked on a spiritual journey to better understand himself. Christopher McCandless was a real person. His life wandering in the wilds of Alaska was chronicled by an author named Jon Krakauer and adapted into a film. This paper analyses the film adaptation, with the hope that the visualization of the protagonist's life journey can be conveyed more effectively to readers. The aspect of the journey that is highlighted in this study is the relationship between Christopher and nature, setting aside his relationship with humans. The life and interactions of this character are hypothesized in this study as a representation of the concepts of pastoralism and wilderness. The reading strategy, which focuses on the concepts of pastoralism and wilderness using an ecocritical approach, is expected to produce a new, more critical dimension of interpretation. The research question to be answered through this study is as follows: How can the portrayal of Christopher McCandless's journey and characterization can be seen as a promotion of pastoral values while simultaneously criticizing the values of late capitalism?

The significance and novelty of this study lie in the fact that there have been few studies on this film. Furthermore, most previous studies on *Into the Wild* have focused on the problems and psychological aspects of the film's main character. For example, Neisya and Karindrat [10] studied the psychology of Christopher McCandles in terms of his defense mechanisms against internal and external conflicts. Another study, conducted by Batat and Markus [11], was a quantitative study that highlighted the behavioral patterns of consumers who watched the film *Into the Wild*.

This research is also important because it explores the intersection of issues ranging from contemporary human problems to nature, which cannot be read separately. Issues of development, environmental degradation, and urban life, with their complex problems that not only harm nature but also humanity itself, are dirty and depressing, requiring critical analysis not only from an eco-critical approach but also from Marxism. Therefore, this

paper will theoretically apply an interdisciplinary approach known as eco-Marxism. The initial purpose of the emergence of ecological Marxism was to analyze the impact of capitalism on environmental damage and then, to find ways to overcome it, especially in global capitalism [12]. The eco-Marxist view sees global economic growth as a threat to environmental sustainability and a form of environmental damage.

The significance and urgency of applying the eco-Marxist approach in analyzing texts lies in its ability to analyze the latest forms of capitalism, which are constantly transforming with the times. Of course, this initial goal also seeks to strengthen the ideology that opposes capitalism itself, namely socialism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is an analysis and interpretation of the film *Into the Wild*. The approach used in this study is an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary ecology or literary ecocriticism with a Marxist perspective, resulting in a new theoretical perspective known as eco-Marxism. Ecocriticism is a discipline that examines the relationship between literary works and the materialistic environment surrounding them [13]. It covers a wide range of issues and problems. One of the topics discussed in this article is pastoralism and wilderness.

Thus, this research is primarily qualitative, with most of the analysis and data processing conducted through literature review. Qualitative research itself has several distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from quantitative research, particularly the involvement of the researcher as an active instrument because it requires interpretation, apart from the topics that mostly related to social issues [14].

The contribution of the Marxist literary theory in this article lies in Marx's key ideas regarding the relationship between nature, humanity, and capitalism. Specifically, the explanation of the concept of pastoral in this paper will be based on the explanation of an ecocritical theorist named Terry Gifford [5] in his book entitled *Pastoral*. According to him, there are three definitions of pastoral as follows: 1) First, this concept is interpreted historically, meaning that the use of the pastoral concept was first found in literary works of the poetry genre, then drama, and finally the novel as a genre that utilizes the pastoral concept. 2) The second understanding is that pastoral can be interpreted as all types of literary works that feature a rural setting in contrast to an urban one. However, this is more than just a setting in a narrative text; a work can also be categorized as having pastoral elements if it focuses on nature, even when the setting is urban. 3) Finally, a text is categorized as a pastoral work only if it addresses issues of environmental damage or degradation, rather than merely presenting nature as a representation. In the final interpretation, pastoral works are more skeptical in nature.

The research begins with an understanding of the complex relationship between ecological issues through the lens of Marxism, with the aim of gaining a sufficient understanding of the main ideas of these two approaches with various references relate to the two broad approaches of ecocriticism and Marxism. The reading will then focus on two key concepts of ecocriticism, namely pastoral and wilderness. The authors then attempt to understand how late capitalism leads to the hypothesis that this system poses a threat to the sustainability of life on Earth.

With an understanding of pastoral and wilderness, it will be argued that criticism can be directed not only at late capitalism but also at the complex issues surrounding it. Of course, one possible solution for the global community is to consider perspectives and ways of life that embrace the values extracted from the concepts of wilderness and pastoralism.

The data collection process began with carefully watching the film *Into the Wild* and paying attention to parts of the film that were relevant and could be interpreted using an ecological Marxism framework. After watching the film, several pieces of data were collected in the form of screenshots accompanied by dialogues and monologues from the film that were relate to the two main issues in this study. The data selected from repeated viewings was then interpreted using the ecocritical reading method to highlight criticism of the late capitalist system that destroys nature and humanity itself. This criticism can only be achieved in this paper if it successfully demonstrates how the film *Into the Wild* promotes the values of pastoralism and wilderness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

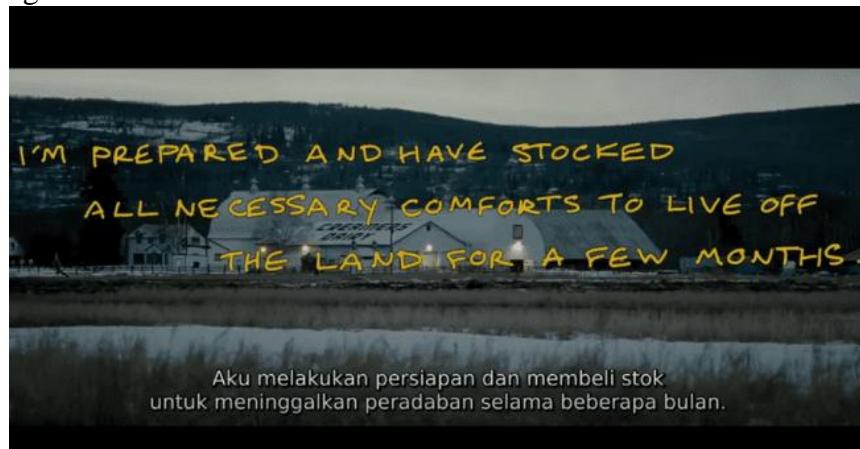
The analysis is the intertwined of two focuses of analysis. The first one is Christopher McCandless' pastoral journey to several location and the other analysis focus on his life in Alaska as the true embodiment of the wilderness. The transition from pastoral to wilderness from this journey is important to be analyzed as two phenomena that occur in late capitalism. The transition of the journey towards or escape to nature is important to reveal the ambivalence of the text towards the issue of late capitalism.

Technically and aesthetically, this film uses a non-linear or back-and-forth plot. Sean Penn's choice as the director seems to be used to capture and explain to the audience how Chris made the radical decision to leave his old life behind before embarking on his journey to the wilds of Alaska. Meanwhile, the story is told from the perspective of Chris and his sister. This article aims to demonstrate that Chris did not hate his family or his life as a personal matter, he unconsciously hated the capitalist system that shaped his parents and his former life. Chris' escaped from his capitalist reality began with the erasure of his identity. The film symbolically shows him cutting away all form of his initial identities.

Chris embarked on his pastoral journey, moving around rural areas, mountains, lakes, and farms, essentially avoiding urban areas. He often hitchhiked with strangers, and eventually their relationship grew closer by chance. He would learn as many survival skills as possible, or any life lessons he could pick up along the way.

The film opens with a quote from a poem by Byron as seen in figure 1 below, an English Romantic poet. The poem quoted in the film explains the importance of human relationship with nature compared to other humans This is a typical anti-anthropocentric portrayal of ecocriticism. Anti-anthropocentric works, besides presenting representations of nature as a central aspect, also go to the point of completely eliminating human presence [15]. Throughout the film, the audience will witness Chris's individual efforts to survive in a pastoral environment.

The pastoral imagery is evident through the choice of words in the poem, such as 'pathless woods' and 'lonely shore.' The portrayal of life that strengthens the connection between humans and nature indirectly criticize the industrialization of the 18th century by romanticizing the re-established interconnection between humans and nature, which had



not yet been exploited for industrial purposes.

Figure 1: The opening of the film and its anti anthropocentric view toward nature

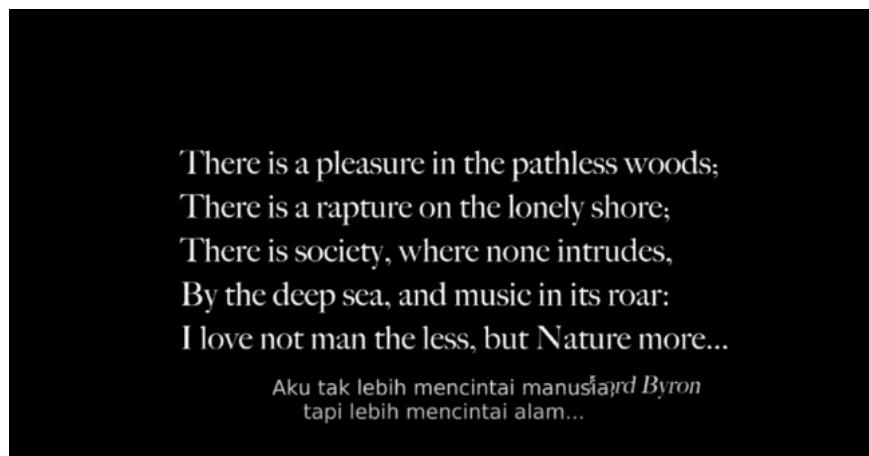


Figure 2: Explanation of Christopher McCandless' Monumental Plan

In Figure 2, the movie showed a note saying that Chris left his life behind to live in the wilderness of Alaska, far from civilization. Alaska represents the concept of wilderness from Greg Garrard's eco-critical book. Chris went to Alaska not to exploit natural resources but simply to live the life he desired. A life free from civilization built on the logic of capitalism. As seen in the quote displayed at the beginning of the film above, it is clear that Chris cannot completely escape the influence of capitalism. Chris left civilization but was unable to survive entirely on the wild. He still carried some products made through manufacturing processes.



Figure 3 Alaska Wilderness

At the beginning of the film as can be seen in Figure 3, the audience is immediately presented with a scene that is the main topic of the film, namely the process of heading *Into the Wilderness*. Most part of Alaska is considered wilderness because it has not been fully modified and exploited by humans. In the film, McCandless is accompanied by several acquaintances who are willing to take him to a certain point which limits between pastoral and complete wilderness. If interpreted metaphorically, it can be seen as a union with nature carried out by the main character, Christopher Johnson McCandless, also known as Alexander Supertramp.

Through the scene above, we can see the contradiction that the pastoral and wilderness processes carried out in the middle of the wild cannot be completely separated from human materialism product. Chris still needs a backpack, clothes, water, and some basic survival equipment. This signifies that the process of production, or, simply put, the work humans do to survive, is an inherent part of human nature. Eco-Marxism does criticize the over-exploitative practices of nature of global capitalism, which damage the environment, but at the same time, the philosophical idea does not deny that the true essence of humanity is to live, to work, and to produce goods, or to be part of the production process. This shows that as a form of artistic expression, the film *Into the Wild* can indeed be interpreted as a form of criticism of the logic of advanced capitalism, but on the other hand, it can also show that contemporary postmodernist texts cannot be completely free from the strong influence of advanced capitalist ideology.

Chris embarked on his spiritual journey without sufficient experience to survive in the wild. He acquired survival skills by learning from several people he met along the way. These encounters can also be examined in relation to life under the influence of late capitalism. Chris was able to quickly become close with strangers compared to his parents. From an Eco-Marxist perspective, this reality is influenced by the late capitalism system, which has reified human relationships. Reification itself is a condition in which all things must be valuable and have exchange value, including relationships between humans. (Lukacs in Akmal[3]). Chris could not bear to continue pretending to be comfortable living with his parents, who prioritized money and career over true happiness of their family.

Alaska was the ultimate destination for Chris after two years of travelling, having left his home, identity, and family behind. In the wilds of Alaska, Chris found an old, unused bus that he later used as his home as seen in figure 4 below. Chris made the old bus livable

enough for himself to use as a shelter that protected him from the savagery of Alaska. The presence of this bus in the Alaskan wilderness symbolizes as an ambivalence critique of late capitalism. To live in harmony with nature, as per his greatest aspiration, Chris ultimately still required products or at least remnants or parts of products from the system he harshly criticized, as this system had transformed people, including his own parents, into hypocrites. Chris is shown here still needing a shelter created by humans through the production process capitalism. In this case, Eco-Marxism does not completely reject the ideology of capitalism in a simplistic manner. In other words, Chris never fully escaped from late capitalism, even though he fled alone to the Alaskan wilderness. This problematic representation is evident when Chris is portrayed as choosing a simple life in the wilderness, when he still relies on a rifle to hunt and survive in Alaska.



Figure 4 the abandoned bus where Chris survived in Alaska

Etymologically, the word wilderness comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *wilddeoren*, which means wild animals [9]. These wild animals live in wilderness. Wild nature here is defined as areas that have not been transformed into places for farming. Through this film, it is evident that the wild nature of Alaska is the only area traversed by the main character, which is not a place used for farming, although this does not mean it is completely untouched or unaffected by humans.

At first, he appeared quite excited to be in the wild ecological area of Alaska. Not interacting with other humans did not seem to bother him. In the harsh and savage wilderness, humans cannot survive alone by venturing *Into the Wilds* of Alaska, Chris not only left behind modern civilization but also abandoned his social interactions with the people he knew. During his journey, Chris was indeed shown to encounter several other individuals. What distinguished the strangers he met along the way was their societal characteristics. From an eco-Marxist perspective, Chris left his family and life driven by the monotony of city life with all its routines and societal characteristics, not solely caused by personal disagreement with his parents.



Figure 5 Alexander Supertramp's ideal life

As shown in Figure 5, Chris decided to consciously rejects some products of capitalism such as phones and swimming pools. Under his pseudo name 'Alexander Supertramp', Chris even rejected his old identity, which had been shaped by capitalism through family, education, money, and status. With his new identity as a 'Supertramp', which cannot be interpreted literally as a vagrant but symbolically as a rebirth into a human being closer to nature through his travels, he considered a phone unnecessary, dismissed the pleasure of a swimming pool, and even refused the idea of keeping pets. By doing so, he felt free from the influence of capitalism and more symbolically free to embark on his pastoral and wilderness journey.

From an ecocritical perspective, the concept of pets itself can be problematized. For eco-criticism that firmly rejects anthropocentrism, the practice of domesticating animals is neither normal nor natural; rather, it legitimizes the belief in human superiority, a notion deeply rooted in the values of classical humanism that emerged in Renaissance Europe. Chris's true inner satisfaction comes from seeing wild animals in Alaska running freely, to the point that he sheds tears. Witnessing this in the era of late capitalism is an incomparable blessing. As can be seen in Figure 6, for Chris, living in the wilds of Alaska is a process of becoming his true self, leaving behind the falsehoods of late capitalist society.

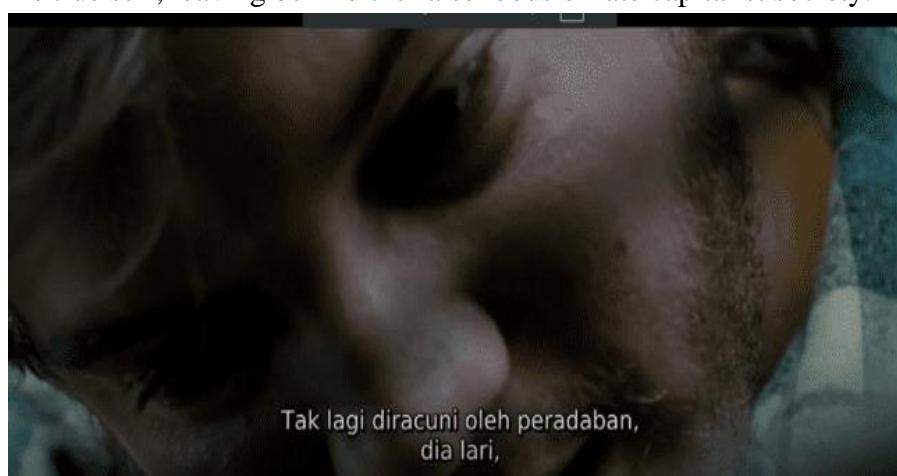


Figure 6 Chris's view of society under the influence of capitalism

The scene above represents the pastoral civilization that Chris criticizes from an eco-Marxist perspective as a civilization raised on the logic of late capitalism. Chris's previous life, including the bachelor's degree he obtained from Emory University, was part of late capitalist civilization. This film depicts the graduation ceremony in a very serious manner, showing many graduates. It is worth noting how the filming process is highly contradictory, shifting from highlighting the snow-covered landscape of Alaska to the graduation ceremony at Emory. This also suggests that for director Sean Penn, this graduation scene is significant in opening a symbolic representation of the discourse between the pastoral, wilderness, and late capitalism. Although Chris attends this ceremonial event, he ultimately criticizes it. In capitalist society, these graduates are skilled workers needed by capital owners. In 1992 in America, when Chris embarked on his spiritual journey, the effects of late capitalism in shaping normative thinking within society were already very apparent.

The importance of a skilled and ready workforce, as depicted in *Into the Wild*, relates to the reliance on technology to accelerate and streamline production. This reflects an impulse of late capitalism, particularly in the context of transnational corporations, where production is no longer centered in a single country but dispersed across several nations [16].

Other impulses related to capitalism, such as class struggle, alienation of labor, and environmental damage due to excessive exploitation, remain significant issues in the phase of late capitalism. While undergoing transformation, the scale of certain issues such as labor exploitation is likely to increase. Logically, transnational corporations will continue



to expand their operations and establish factories beyond the borders of the country where the parent company is headquartered.

Figure 7: Chris's view of his parents' hypocritical lifestyle

Graduation, marriage, adulthood, and a stable career are often seen as the ideal way of life in mainstream society. However, for Chris, this kind of lifestyle is not ideal. As seen in figure 7 above, his parents did not live in economic hardship, though they were not wealthy either. That is precisely what Chris regrets: they were trapped in a same life scenario education, career, marriage, work, and family a normative trajectory produced by capitalism. For Chris, the life his parents lived was not a true life, but a suffocating and exhausting simulate prison. As explained by Grundmann [17], in his article entitled *The Ecological Challenge to Marxism*, even though humans do not appear to suffer from an exploitative system, they are essentially still "slaves" in the capitalist system.

Within the framework of eco-Marxism, the internal conflict between Chris and his parents can be understood as more than just a domestic issue or individual psychological disorder. From a Marxist perspective, a text always reflects the socio-political reality of its

time, allowing for a more holistic and comprehensive reading. From this, it becomes clear that Chris's decision to leave his family was not solely triggered by internal family issues, but rather stemmed from the alienation arising from the capitalist economic system. A comfortable life with a caring family was merely a façade for Chris, concealing his true desires. For four years of university life, he played that role reluctantly, solely to complete his education before embarking on his planned pastoral journey. Thus, family life and university served as a transitional phase that had to be completed before he could truly break free from the social order he sought to criticize and leave behind since the life lived by his parents and most modern humans is a form of alienation that limits human creativity and the ability to achieve optimal self-actualization [17].

Chris' conflict with his parents continued until he refused a new car as a graduation gift. This refusal is not merely a matter of individual characteristics, but rather a representation of criticism against late capitalism, which reduces human activity to mere ownership of goods, a phenomenon that Marx referred to as reification or commodity fetishism. The concept of commodities in Marxist discourses encompasses all things, both material and non-material, that are believed to be capable of satisfying and fulfilling human needs [18]. This event also triggered the emergence of the concepts of pastoralism and wilderness, which were manifested in Chris' journey.



Figure 8 Characteristics of Capitalist Society

Chris's escape to a more pastoral, friendly, and natural environment can be understood as a form of resistance against capitalism, a critique that Marx has voiced since the industrial revolution and remains relevant in the context of late capitalism. As shown in Figure 8, the base structure, namely, the means of production and economic system, determines and controls the superstructure, which includes human cultural products such as history, law, and institutions. Thus, Chris's escape to pastoral place is a reaction to the pressures of late capitalism, which he finds suffocating and irritating.

The film explicitly shows a scene in which the main character burns money during his pastoral journey, as seen in Figure 9. In another scene, when Chris met a hippie couple, it is emphasized that he no longer needed money. In another scene, he stated that living completely without money makes everything easier. His rejection of money is also a rejection of the economic system. This action can be interpreted as a symbolic critique accompanying his pastoral journey, a critique directed at the root of his own escape, namely the corrosive influence of capitalist society that subjugates humanity to the fetishism of money and elevates the principle of exchange value as the hegemonic foundation of social life.



Figure 9: Chris burns the rest of his money

Before embarking on his monumental journey *Into the Wilds* of Alaska, Chris first stopped at Lake Mead, Arizona (as seen in Figure 10). This part is significant because Chris cannot simply set off for Alaska immediately. He must first go through an initial phase that gradually prepared him. This phase represents the early form of the pastoral journey as understood within Terry Gifford's framework, namely as a movement away from urban spaces toward landscapes perceived as purer and more natural. In this film, criticism of urban life does not only concern physical pollution but also the decline of abstract values such as sincerity and authenticity of life. The simple life by the lake can thus be read as an effort to romanticize humanity's closeness to nature, while also serving as a symbolic critique of the alienation produced by urban modernity.



Figure 10: Chris's initial pastoral journey

The second ecologically pristine location with minimal human intervention featured in his film is the Pacific Crest Trail in Northern California (in Figure 11). The forest is still pristine and teeming with wildlife, but the area is not entirely wild, as it has been influenced by human activity. Survival skills of advance level are not required to survive here. Chris was shown in his film to be happier and more spirited in this environment.



Figure 11: Other pastoral locations visited by Chris

Another pastoral escape location is the beach, where he enjoys nature with strangers more than the familiarity he experienced with his parents. The beach here is significant and part of the pastoral setting because there is no pollution or excessive exploitation. The beach became a place where he sought self-discovery and got to know himself better. Unlike the hustle and bustle of the city, the beach in *Into the Wild* is calming.

On the beach, Chris met a hippie couple, the first couple he had encountered since beginning his pastoral journey. Chris seemed to be able to form a closer relationship with them, who loved adventure and were not tied to material possessions. From this hippie couple, he seemed to find authentic human beings who were able to enjoy life to the fullest. Interestingly even among radical adventurers, Chris' actions were considered more extreme and daring, as unlike the hippie couple, he had abandoned his entire identity and possessions. That brief encounter, though it lasted only one night formed a strong bond between them. Simply put, Jan and Rainey, the hippie couple Chris met, embody the development of his pastoral work while also serving as a critique of late capitalism.

In the first few weeks of his life in Alaska, Chris began to experience difficulties due to the harshness of the wilderness. In addition to the extreme cold weather, he was also shown to be unable to grow crops independently. As a result, he began to struggle to obtain food. Rice, his primary food source, was a product of the capitalist system. Thus, what initially appeared to be a promotion of the simple life characteristic of pastoral ideology became problematic and ambivalent when he arrived in Alaska. Despite rejecting the economic system, Chris remained dependent on rice produced by capitalism, a rifle for hunting, and the wreckage of an abandoned bus as shelter. This underscores that humans, at least modern humans, cannot fully survive in the wild without the influence or legacy of the capitalist system.

Alaska is the only ecological territory that can be categorized as coming closest to the simplest definition of wilderness, which is also open to criticism. For example, according to Cronon [19], wilderness is one of the few ecosystems on planet Earth that has not been infected by human presence, a place that has not been influenced by modernity and industrialism driven by capitalism. In this sense, it means that humans must be able to save and protect wilderness from destruction caused by humans themselves. Humans are antagonists in the context of the existence of this kind of wilderness. Cronon's definition of wilderness is inaccurate because, for him, the concept of wilderness itself is completely unnatural; humans created this idea or concept. And because of this unnaturalness, the concept of wilderness is always changing depending on the context of the era. And these contradictions related to wilderness are seen when Chris McCandless lives in Alaska but

still needs shelter from an old bus and rice from agriculture. Alaska is not completely wild. And wilderness is not an antidote to the problems and inner turmoil experienced by Chris McCandless.



Figure 12. Chris still managed to smile in the harsh Alaskan wilderness

Figure 12 shows Chris was still able to smile and appear happy despite facing difficult conditions alone, including when he began to run out of food. At this point, the reading and critique of capitalism becomes problematic. The film seems to critique the profit-driven system through Chris's pastoral journey and his encounters with individuals who refuse to be slaves to money, but the turning point occurs in the wilds of Alaska. Chris's inability to survive there reveals that modern humans still require a capitalist system that transforms nature and relies on communal living.



Figure 13 Wheat farm, another pastoral location visited by Chris

Another pastoral location Chris visited before reaching the monumental point in Alaska was a farm in Eastern South Dakota as seen in Figure 13, where he worked processing wheat with the help of technology. Although far from a city, this location was still influenced by capitalism, because the farming depicted in the film was oriented toward maximizing production through the modification of nature and the use of technology. Thus, Chris's pastoral experience in this place is ambivalent: on one hand, it serves as an escape from the city, but on the other hand, it continues to reproduce the hallmarks of late capitalism.

The wheat fields of Eastern South Dakota can be understood as a pastoral transition stage for Chris before entering the wilds of Alaska. Rather than pursuing profit like other farmers, he interpreted this experience as spiritual development, as well as an opportunity to learn from a rural community that is depicted as more ideologically relaxed than urban society. His encounters with Wayne and a skilled hunter marked a learning process that prepared him to face the wilderness. Thus, the pastoral setting in this film serves not only

as an escape from capitalism but also as a means of preparation for a more radical experience in the wild.



Figure 14 Chris explains the life he desires most

When pastoral locations such as wheat fields no longer satisfied his main desire, Chris explained that what he really longed for was to live alone in the wilds of Alaska, surrounded by mountains, rivers, and the sky (in Figure. 14). To some people, this idea may seem absurd, but for Chris, even rural life was still part of a flawed civilization. Through this film, we can see that what is considered “rural” has been absorbed into the network of late capitalism, where even economic activities in fields are profit-oriented. Therefore, for Chris, the only way to experience a life truly free from the effects of capitalism is to try living in the wilderness. He never planned to die there, but rather to have an authentic experience. Through the portrayal of pastoral locations in this film, the audience is invited to realize that late capitalism has penetrated even the most natural corners of nature, which we once imagined as a space to escape the pressures of urban life. Ultimately, capitalism tends to transform the entire countryside into an extension of the city.

Rivers far from urban areas and massive development are not entirely free from the influence of capitalism. Indeed, the film does not show direct exploitation, but its use is still restricted by rules that do not meet Chris's expectations. These river regulations are not merely technical mechanisms but part of a capitalist system that tends to benefit certain groups. Chris, who wants to kayak, is faced with a choice: wait for permission for 12 years or pay a certain amount of money. His reckless decision to kayak without permission can be interpreted as a symbolic form of resistance against late capitalism, a system that has regulate nearly every aspect of life, including human relationships with nature.

CONCLUSION

The film *Into the Wild* (2007) can be interpreted through an Eco-Marxist lens by examining how the relationship between humans, capitalism, and nature shapes Christopher McCandless's experience during his journey. From this perspective, the concepts of pastoral and wilderness are crucial for understanding the phases of Chris's journey in his attempt to ‘escape’ from the social reality he perceives as filled with hypocrisy.

The pastoral journey encompassed all the stops before reaching his ultimate destination: Alaska. This included lakes, forests, rivers, mountains, and farms he

encountered along the way. During this phase, Chris still interacted with people, worked, and built social relationship.

The wilderness journey began when he finally reached Alaska and settled in the “Magic Bus.” Here, he was fully immersed in the wild, facing the radical challenge of survival without the presence of human community.

Chris's main motivation which he may not realize is his dissatisfaction with modern American society, that he views as hypocritical and materialistic. This criticism is particularly evident in his conflict with his parents, whom he considers to represent the values of late capitalism: ownership, social status, and prestige.

The film presents nature in a romantic light, beautiful, pure, and full of freedom, which serves as an antithesis to the world of capitalism. From an Eco-Marxist perspective, this can be read as a critique of the alienation created by capitalism, namely the separation of humans from nature and from their human essence.

Although Chris's journey is a form of resistance against capitalism, he is still not completely free from it. In fact, he still relies on capitalist products: abandoned buses for shelter, guns for hunting, even books for knowledge. Ironically, in his efforts to avoid the falsehoods of capitalism, Chris ends up reproducing the same contradictions, becoming a kind of ‘hypocrite’ like his parents.

Chris's encounters with the people he meets on the road (such as Jan, Rainey, Ron, etc.) are also an important part of his pastoral and wilderness journey. He quickly becomes close with individuals who are very different from his parents' character, those who do not live according to the logic of materialistic capitalism. This simultaneously shows how late capitalism shapes human character and complex social relations.

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