

A CRITICISM ON MATERIALISM TOWARDS AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE IN LORDE'S "ROYALS"

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ABSTRACT

"Royals" is a song that sung by a singer, Lorde. The lyrics tell about popular culture in America which usually portrayed as something luxurious and glamorous. The purpose of this study is to know the content of the song by analyzing the lyrics and music video of the song. The study uses intrinsic and extrinsic theories to analyze the data and library research to compile the data. Library research is used to get literary and materialism theories. The finding of this study is an understanding of materialism in American popular culture which reflected through the symbols and expression in the song "Royals".

Keywords: song, materialism, popular culture, royals, music video.

1. Introduction

Songs are considered as reflections of the society and culture in which they were produced. Song lyrics are often used to help understanding the culture and the nature of the society. They often express judgements about lifestyle, values, and events. They also serve to unify groups of people and move them to an action or help them express emotions. One of the singers who expresses her emotions

through a song is Lorde. She wrote the song “Royals” to express her feeling towards the glamorous world that is portrayed in the pop culture. The song is seen as a controversial song because its deep lyrics that criticize the society especially the pop culture that has become too materialistic.

This essay aims to show the readers the concept of materialism and materialism in the American pop culture as reflected in the song “Royals”. In reference to this matter, the writer executes a study with the title of “Criticism on Materialism Towards American Popular Culture in Lorde’ “Royals””.

2. Discussion



Picture 1. The houses in the music video

The camera shows the scene from a long and landscape shot of the street. The one side of the street is so bright, contrasts with the other side of the street which is darker. This shows the contradiction of two sides of the society, the ordinary or working class of society who live their lives happily and the higher class or the materialists who do not live a happy life because they only focused on material things .

Lorde uses imagery in this song to convey her message. The first line of the song, “I’ve never seen a diamond in the flesh” gives us the image of a person who has never seen diamond in real life. “I cut my teeth on wedding ring” makes us imagine a person who cuts her teeth on wedding ring. Through the line “We count our dollars on the train to the party”, we experience images of people who count their dollars on the train to the party. This also emphasizes the idea of their poverty.



Picture 2. Close-up shot of Lorde

The shot above shows Lorde through a close-up shot. She is looking straight at the camera and making interaction with the audience. The pale pink background blends well with the white top she is wearing. She looks so simple here, contrasts with what we usually see pop stars such as Madonna and Lady Gaga who dress up very glamorously. In this verse, there is a line that says “I’ve never seen a diamond in the flesh”. The word “flesh” has two meanings. The denotative meaning of “flesh” is the soft substance of a human or animal body, while the connotative meaning of it is “in person”. It means that she has never seen a real fancy diamonds like the ones we see on television. There is also

another line that says “I cut my teeth on wedding rings in the movies”. “To cut your teeth” is a metaphor. To cut your teeth on something means to learn about something. It means that she learns about it in the movies, not in real life.



Picture 3. A medium shot of a boy in a sports hall

The picture above show a medium shot of an empty hall except for the one boy in the centre. The emptiness of the hall suggests that he feels empty and alone inside, or maybe that there is nothing ahead of his future as he looks ahead. In this verse, she mentions “Cadillac, Cristal, Maybach, and diamonds”. Those luxurious and expensive things symbolize the wealth.



Picture 4. A scene of two boys fighting

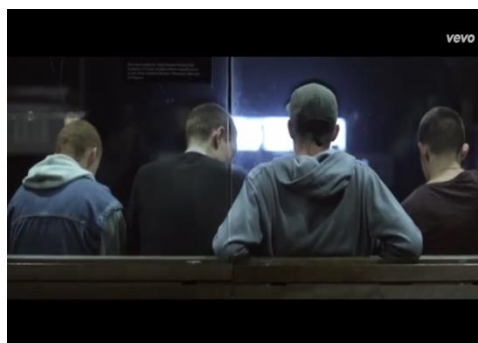
This long shot in landscape has a very little color in the room, suggesting the little happiness they have. There is also a sense of emptiness in the room as we

can only see a plant, television, and chair. The two boys fighting with each other can be implied that it is something that royals and materialists do, always compete with each other to be the best.



Picture 5. A boy lying beside the train track

The focus on this shot is the boy lying beside the train track. The background and the surrounding are blurred out. The fact that he is lying beside the train track shows rebelliousness and carelessness. It is quite opposite to something that a “royal” would do.



Picture 6. A scene of four young men

In this shot we see four young men who have been featured throughout the music video. The camera shows them from behind at a mid-shot angle. It appears

that they are waiting at the bus stop. We can assume that they are leaving their place in order to succeed. The verse above means that they will never be like the rich people they see on television.

2. 2. Contextual Analysis

“Royals” is about Lorde’s conflicting feelings towards the glamorous world portrayed by pop culture. In the chorus, Lorde mentions gold teeth, *Cadillac*, *Cristal*, *Maybachs*, diamonds, jet planes, islands, and gold leash. Those are the general symbols of excessive wealth. Upon reading the lines in the chorus, we can think of many different things, from rich kids on social media who like to brag about things they own, mainstream rich family and musicians, such as the Kardashians, Kesha, Lady Gaga, and many more. Gold teeth, *Cristal*, and *Maybach* symbolize wealth and American cultural exports. Blood stains and ball gowns make people can be associated with celebrity socialities. *Cadillacs* is a luxury car brand which mostly driven by rich old people. And “trashin hotel rooms” refers to the lifestyle of pop stars. It is true that “gold teeth” makes people think immediately of mainstream pop culture, especially hip hop. She lists some material things that signify wealth and describes how the aim of society today is to become as rich as they can. This is in accordance with what Karl Marx said that material production has a powerful effect on a culture. Nowadays, people are getting obsessed with materialistic things because they think that those things make them happier and cooler. People are starting to define their worth from what they possess.



Picture 7. *Cristal* wines

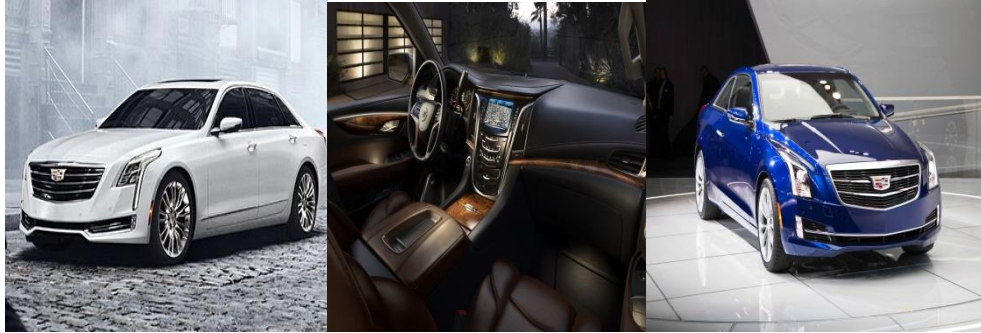
She mentions on material items that are extremely expensive. The pictures above are examples of the expensive wine *Cristal* that costs \$200 per bottle. It is a wine from South America which has been known for its smooth and sweet taste.



Picture 8. *Maybach* products

The pictures above are examples of a luxurious brand item which she also mentions in the song, *Maybach*. The brand produces a lot of luxurious items such as accessories, eyewear, leather goods, etc that could cost to \$350 to over a million dollars. The costs of jet planes and private islands which she also

mentions in the song are similarly bloated. She indirectly criticizes the society who glorifies this kind of lifestyle.



Picture 9. Cadillac cars and interior

The pictures above are *Cadillac* cars and its interior. It is a luxury American car brand which mostly driven by rich people. The “Cadillacs in our dreams” in the song makes it sound like that eventhough Lorde and her friends do not live the wealthy life, they are fine with it because they can fantasize about it in their dreams. In the last verse of the song, she seems to say that she’d rather wants something else in her life that the royal or high class status. She uses “we” here to imply that she is with a group with the same mind as her. It means that they will never like those rich folks that they see on tv. They have to work hard in order to succeed.

3. Conclusion

“Royals” which was released in 2013 is a very interesting song. It has deep meaning in the lyrics and music video. From the song, it is clear that Lorde rejects the overly materialistic values in popular culture because they are not part of her

reality. She and her friends are happy by just living the ordinary life. They realize that they will never be royals because they do not come from aristocratic family. They also do not need to actually have money and expensive things to feel the same happiness that come from luxurious things. Look at America today, there are many people who are obsessed with unnecessary luxurious products. There is no end to the products that people want, such as the latest expensive cars, branded stuffs, and many luxury goods. Popular songs, movies, advertisements, and TV shows are bombarding people and telling how a certain brand of stuff will make them happier, cooler, and more fulfilled. People are starting to define their worth from what they possess. While more people are getting obsessed with materialistic things because they can make them feel royals, Lorde can just live in her own ordinary world because it makes her feel special.

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