

Exploring Elements of Naturalism in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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Abstract

This paper explores the elements of naturalism in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (2004) from Emile Zola's dimension of naturalism. The major issue of the paper is that hereditary and environment control human's actions. It also investigates how these two elements change our destiny and course of life. Emile Zola's ideas have been used as tools for collecting data in this qualitative study. The paper found out that person's own actions are not totally responsible for his failure, however human nature has significant role in changing their life too. Besides, the paper observes that nature, however unseen, dominates over all aspects of human life. The paper opens up the new ways of knowledge in the mainstream studies.

Introduction

In Experimental Novel, Zola (2015) justifies that every action and incident is predetermined. There are two main elements: Heredity and Environment that work together in everybody's life to bring him towards his predetermined fate. He has made his own framework containing human's struggle for survival by using experimental method. Hardy mainly deals with human condition and their struggle in a specific society for the purpose of their survival and betterment. Hardy gives this naturalistic concept that people get chances in their lives but their freedom ultimately bring them toward the destiny. Thomas Hardy focused on the Victorian society and on the deteriorating status of British rural society represented in his novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The novel is a story of a tragic figure named Michael Henchard who sells his wife and daughter in auction and after that he faces worst changes in his life. Hardy believes that man is solely held responsible of his deteriorating conditions. He thinks that hereditary and surroundings are equally accountable for his actions.

In this context, Zola (2018) asserts that the author observes the life in natural setting. He paid much attention to ‘experiments’ which deals with the study and observation of natural circumstances. Experimental novels deal with truth and reality based events and there is no mixture of lies and errors. Naturalists believe that social environment play significant role in shaping character’s destiny and a person is also influences by society. He gets more chances to do pretty well if he is born in a rich family and if he has a poor background, he gets less chance to do progress. Naturalists try to find out the answers that how social environment helps in shaping lives of human beings and their behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

This research investigated the role of heredity and environment in shaping man’s destiny in Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* under the vision of Naturalism. The study revealed that man is not free, and is controlled by an absolute power. Many works have already been done on this novel from different aspects. This research has presented a new and different aspect of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Literature Review

Different scholars and critics picked up their pens and wrote down their own point of views about Hardy’s works according to their own perceptions. Everyone tried to give some innovative points and concepts by analyzing his works independently. Some of them depicted him as a reformer and other portrayed him as a realist. Some gave light to his characters and some focused on ironical parts in his works. Thus it is clear that different scholars enrich the ocean of literature by putting their own ideas and concepts in it. Hermansyah (2009) calls the novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* a complete tragedy because of having tragic incidences which destroys lives of many characters as in case of Henchard who suffers a lot after his mayor ship end. Silmana (2016) discusses the problem of fate and free will and its effects on people’s lives. There are two main elements chance and predestination which work together to make a tragedy. Chance plays considerable part in the development of female characters like Lucetta. She was very doomed not to marry Henchard. Lemardele (2013) took Hardy’s fiction for the purpose of focusing on it from the perspective of silence, secrecy and sacredness. He interprets the role of silence in different ways proving that there are number of scenes in which silence prevails everywhere and that silence has its own significant meanings. Ting Zhang (2013) has analyzed the novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* ironically within the framework of speech act theory. Verbal irony, dramatic irony and situational irony are used by Hardy in the novel to make readers understand the real meaning that are hidden behind the sentences. There are countless evidences of ironical situations through which the characters are dealing with. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has been discussed by many researchers, hence there is little work done on exploring elements of Naturalism in the novel through the perspective of Zola’s concept of heredity and environment (Furst & Skrine, 2017).

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature because it attempts to identify the occurrences and the message they transmit. Thoughts, sentiments, behaviors, events and dialogues are the main objects of the study. This research closely reads the text of the novel viewing the text from Emile Zola's perspective of naturalism. Moreover Content analysis is used for analyzing the data. The primary source of data is the text of the novel to explore the role of naturalism in human life in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* from naturalistic perspective. The study analyzes the role of environment, heredity, and chance.

Analysis and Discussion

The Mayor of Casterbridge is one of Hardy's masterpieces and its story revolves around the protagonist, Michael Henchard who sells his wife (Susan) along with their infant (Elizabeth) in an auction to a sailor named Newson. This is the story dealing with human nature and social environment that influences them. The protagonist is shown leading an isolated life fighting against his fate. Henchard discovers that Elizabeth is not his daughter and died after few months of auction as stated by Hardy:

“Since the issues of the individual life are in great part determined by what the living creature is or has to start with, in virtue of its hereditary relation to parent and ancestors...attaches to Environment in the widest sense, food, climate ... in the widest sense but all these potent influences act upon an organism whose fundamental nature is determined, though not rigidly fixed, by its heredity that is, we repeat, by its genetics relation to its forebears”.(Hardy, 2004:1-2)

There are several incidents in the novel which give the clear description about how naturalism affects the life of protagonist and other characters associated with him, and ultimately affect the characters' lives (Furst & Skrine, 2017). Man's helplessness can be observed in the auction scene.

Auction Scene

The trusser and his family proceeded on their way and soon entered the Fairfield where hundreds of horses and sheep were sold in the forenoon. At present, it was observed that the chief absolutely refused to sell the animals in auction to the traders, who came and went early (Hardy, 2004:4). Henchard, a part of this world (ibid, 23), was a poor unemployed hay trusser who became the victim of predetermined fate by influence of his rashness and the social environment and sold his wife due to the reason that he was overdrunk and being thrown into those situations near to the futility as he said in euphoric state of mind:

“For my part I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses, said the man in the tent, Why shouldn't they put 'em up and sell 'em by auction to men who are in need of such articles. Hey, why, begad, I'd sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her!” (Hardy, 2004:8).

This defiance directly effects of the environment befell on the woman. That's why he acted as he watched happening around and Susan was not the first rustic lady who was facing her husband's roughness as he had no natural feeling of love and affection for his wife. This was a matter of Henchard's nature that he considered his marriage a mistake and a burden. In this way he opposed the law of nature and in the result he suffered a lot in his life ahead. And it was all the working of fate that he got negative results of his actions as a punishment. As Hardy states the internal point of view of Susan:

Yet she knows I am not in my senses when I do that! He exclaimed. Well I must walk about till I find her... Seize her, why didn't she know better than bring me into this disgrace! He roared out. 'She wasn't queer if I was.' 'Tis like Susan to show such idiotic simplicity. Meek, that meekness has done me more harm than the bitterest temper!"(Hardy, 2004:17).

Henchard was in habit of taking rash decisions and his bad temper was not controllable for him and Susan was by nature so simple and timid who was victimized by her husband's bitterest temper. Knezevic (2011) says that "Inherited constitution must ever be the chief factor in determining character: as Disraeli says, more epigrammatically and less correctly, "Race is everything" (2). Relating this line, it can be justified that inheritance is somewhere responsible in determining Henchard's behavior(Zhang, 2010). There is not any single factor but his inward personality and the social environment became the cause of his first mistake as stated by Henchard:

"I began life as a working hey trusser, and when I was eighteen I married on the strength o' my calling. Would you think me a married man?"
(Hardy, 2004:89).

In poverty, man also becomes helpless in which he has to commit blunders. So, Henchard cannot be blamed for "his circumstances as well as the willful hostilities of mankind are very apparent at this place in man" (Hardy, 2004:13). Behaviors are the part of one's nature which he can't control as it is transferred to man genetically but these are sometimes socially constructed. In case of Henchard, it is just a matter of his inborn nature affected his decisions. Zola (2018) opines surroundings have effects on human's action. Here, poverty is a major element which made him worse as Henchard said:

"Well I lost my wife ...I was traveling for employment and she was walking with my side, carrying a baby, our only child. We came to a booth in a country fair. I was a drinking man at that time" (Hardy, 2004:89).

Realization of Foible and Useless Search for Wife and Daughter

Nature played great role for bringing Henchard's downfall. His searched for his wife to pay back proved a useless struggle against his fate. As it is a matter of fact that nature has absolute power over all and human's decisions are also set by it so he couldn't find them anywhere at the time he wanted them. By that act of misfortune, he suffered a lot in the life ahead because the nature scarcely proved favorable for him. According to Zola's point of view, there is an absolute

determinism in both external and internal world for all human phenomena and everything is defined by it (Hardy, 2004). Keeping it in view, it is definite that heredity plays its important role in shaping person's intellect and demonstration as clear from his speech:

“By this time he had arrived at a seaport, and there he derived intelligence that persons answering somewhat to his description had emerged a little time before. Then he said he would search no longer, and that he would go and settle in the district which he had for sometimes in his mind” (Hardy, 2004:19).

Role of Naturalism in Susan's life

Society, family and environment shape human's characters (Furst & Skrine, 2017). It becomes true in case of Susan who was fated to be sold to a sailor with her child which caused her difficulties as stated:

“But she was by no means the first or last peasant woman who was religiously adhering to her purchaser, as too many rural records show. The history of Susan Henchard's adventures in the interim can be told in two or three sentences. Absolutely helpless she worked as hard as any woman could to keep their cottage cheerful and well provided”. (Hardy, 2004:26-27)

A Part of Nature in Henchard's Mayorship

The day when Susan and Elizabeth came back to Casterbridge, Elizabeth came to know that Henchard was now a Mayor and a successful businessman. In fact Henchard was abashed and his conscience never let him get escape of his past memory of auction. He improved his life better on getting a chance as Zola (2018) says that a person is never isolated because he is a part of a society and is directly affected by the social conditions. That's why he has direct effects of a society.

“Now I am not the man to let a cause be lost for want of a word. And before ye are gone forever and I'll speak. Once more will ye stay... I'll agree to' em willingly and without a word of gainsaying for, hang it, Farfrae, I like thee well!” (Hardy, 2004:72).

Hiring Farfrae was his unlucky step as he had to lose his own positions he asserts:

“I never expected this... I did not! He said. It's providence! Should any one go against it? No I will not go to America; I'll stay and be your man!” (Hardy, 2004:73).

Susan's Reappearance in Henchard's Life

It was a chance when Susan and Elizabeth came to Casterbridge. They stayed at the same hotel in which Farfrae was staying. Henchard's visited there to meet Farfrae and Susan overheard their discussion about his regret and oath taking that made her feel sorry for him and she took decision to have meeting with him for the purpose of reconciliation. She sent Elizabeth to Henchard with a message of desire to get an appointment to have a meeting with him. The whole incident gives

a clear concept that it was nature and co-incidences as the result of universal forces and mighty fate that was struck the character (Hardy, 2004:154) as Henchard speaks out:

“No wife could I hear of, I say, till this very day. And now she had come back. Come back has she! This morning, the very morning, and what’s to be done? Can ye no’ take her life with her and make some amends? That’s what I’ve planned and proposed but Farfrae, said Henchard gloomily, by doing right with Susan, I wronged another innocent woman” (Hardy, 2004:89- 90).

Nature’s Role in Elizabeth and Farfrae’s Relationship

These dialogues of Elizabeth show that she remains in complexity and she feels insecurity about her relation with Farfrae just because of her personality and position in society. There comes the role of those circumstances and her position without father which left negative effects on her personality by which she remained insecure throughout her life. She remained insecure about her love affair with Farfrae because of her early suffered poverty and oppression.

“No, no Elizabeth Jane such dreams are not for you!” She tried to prevent herself from seeing him, and thinking of him succeeding fairly well in the former attempt in the latter not so completely” (Hardy, 2004:128).

Nature’s Role in Dealing with Lucetta

Nature has its absolute power and a control over everything (Zhang, 2010). Lucetta was a lady; Henchard naturally fell in love with once he traveled to Jersey for business tour where she took care of him as he asserts:

“This young creature was staying at the boarding house when I happened to have my lodging; and when I was pulled down she took upon herself to nurse me. Heaven knows why, for I wasn’t worth it. But being together in the same house and her feelings warm, we got naturally intimated”. (Hardy, 2004:90)

Talking about his first meet up with Lucetta was a matter of coincidence when he fell ill and was on his death bed and Lucetta took care of him and brought him back to life. His love with her cannot be taken as bad because he tried hard but failed to get back to Susan before he met Lucetta. Then their affection developed to liking and soon they indulged in sexual relationship but due to the social conditions, having fear of scandal, he had to leave Lucetta. In course of doing things well, he made more blunders and this is how he wronged Lucetta.

Role of Environmental and Genetics Determinism in Elizabeth’s life

Heredity and environment are two factors chiefly affect people. The color of Elizabeth’s hair has its significance because Henchard questions his relationship to Elizabeth Jane.

“The three members of the family were sitting at breakfast one day and Henchard was looking silently as he often did, at this head of hair, which in color was brown- rather light than dark. I thought Elizabeth Jane’s hair- didn’t you tell me that Elizabeth Jane’s hair promised to be black when she was a baby? He said to his wife”. (Hardy, 2004:101)

In Naturalism, surroundings also affect characters directly or indirectly on the personality of the character and the role of fate is very important from which a person cannot escape (Pagano, 1999). and consequently he or she has to face his destiny that has already set for him. As Elizabeth Jane tells that her mother's separation from her father was unfortunate for her (Hardy, 2004:195).

“This unsophisticated girl did it by an innate perceptiveness that was almost genius. Thus she refrained from bursting out like a water flower that spring and clothing herself in puffings and knick knacks as most of Casterbridge girls would have done in her circumstances”. It was the role of destiny despite fair promise due poverty and oppression(Hardy, 2004:100).

A Part of Nature in Henchard's Envy and Farfrae's Accomplishments

Through the process of evolution, life is affected by outer word nature and surroundings(Thompson, 2017). A person must have given free will to mold his personality. Thus their surroundings and the environment affected them in shaping their personalities(Thompson, 2017). As in Henchard's life:

“Somewhat lonely life he evidently found the young man as desirable for comradeship as he was useful for consultation” (Hardy, 2004:103).

It was natural that they possessed opposite personalities and in shaping their personalities, social environment played its role. Hardy himself called Henchard unfortunate:

“He's the best, he's the horse for my money “say they, And they said “he's the most understanding man o' them two by long chalks. I wish he was the master instead of Henchard”, they said” (Hardy, 2004:115).

Role of Weather's Condition in Henchard's accomplishments

The day when Henchard planned outdoor arrangement for entertainment on a holiday, his arrangement got failure as the weather was bad and people enjoyed Farfrae's party who arranged it under some spreading trees. This is how forces of naturalism remained favorable (Pagano, 1999). for Farfrae and unfavorable for Henchard.

“The weather changed, the sunlight, which had been like tin for weeks, assumed the hues of topaz. The temperament of the welkin passed from the phlegmatic to the sanguine, an excellent harvest was almost a certain and a consequence prices rushed down” (Hardy, 2004:215).

Farfrae's Relationship with Elizabeth

Elizabeth's and Farfrae's first meeting was a matter of chance that gradually turned to likeness. Their attachment and love was natural for both of them. It can be seen that Farfrae's attachment with Henchard's step daughter was shocking for town's people. This is also a matter of environment that how people reacted. This was the working of nature that proves that man is not free in society and social condition modifies the phenomena of his life(Zhang, 2010). A person is always affected by society and society leaves its effects on person's life. Elizabeth feeling of dejection was natural when she heard that her father had dismissed Farfrae in anger and now he

was going to leave Casterbridge. Fate was scrolling her again and again but she had nothing to do with it (Hardy, 2004:126).

Naturalistic Determinism in Lucetta's actions

Discussing about Lucetta, when she shifted to High Place Hill, she decided not to be in contact with Henchard anymore because she was now having sufficient money and did not need his financial support. She got a chance to meet him and got impressed by his personality and she impressed him too and this is how they fell in love with each other

“I will love him! She cried passionately; ‘as for him- he’s hot tempered and stern and it would be madness to bind myself to him knowing that. I won’t be a slave to the past- I will love where I choose” (Hardy, 2004:204)

Lucetta's consciousness that Henchard may tell Farfrae about their previous relations was a social issue and one day she overheard him when he was telling this to Farfrae. This made her more perplexed because she was now in relation with Farfrae and did not want anybody know about her past relation with Henchard.

Opposing Powers of Naturalism in Case of Business

Henchard was a man of conventional style who had a faith on predictions and forecasts and he used to believe on the natural ways to forecast weather that was opposite to Farfrae who gave preference to scientific ways. Henchard risked his fortune on prophecy that proved wrong. He had to sale the grain on very low price so in this way he had to bear heavy loss. This is how nature betrayed him badly (Zhang, 2010). and it was just like a punishment given by absolute power of nature of his wrong decisions.(215)

“Henchard had backed bad weather, and apparently lost. He had mistaken the turn of the flood for the turn of the ebb”. (Hardy, 2004:216)

Nature's Role in bringing Henchard's Downfall

Reappearance of furmity woman causes Henchard's destruction. She was brought in front of Henchard when he went to the Town Hall to attend petty session; it was the working of preplanned fate that brought the woman there for revelation of the secret of his life. This disclosure of truth caused in diminishing his fortune and esteem in the social circle. Because of his bad image, creditors took possession of all his property. Socially he had received a startling fillip downwards, and having already lost commercial buoyancy from rash transaction, the velocity of his descent in both aspects became accelerated every hour (Hardy, 2004:251).

Newson's Arrival and Henchard's downfall

Arrival of Newson was another shock for Henchard who dogged himself to find love and affection for himself. He actually wronged himself by telling lies to Elizabeth and got nothing but isolation and hatred as the whole land ahead of him was as darkness itself, there was nothing to come, nothing to wait for. Yet in the natural course of life he might possibly have to linger on earth another thirty or forty years, scoffed at: at best pitied. (Hardy, 2004:341)

Henchard's Death

However, he decided his own punishment because was determined to face the results of his mistakes as Zola (2015) has pointed out the role of determinism in human's life. Hardy is content with the single march of a protagonist to his doom- the great ineluctable fatality of a series of sensational set of pieces rooted in him who seemed to be the master of his own fate because of his actions but in the last scene, it was proved that he was master of nothing.

Conclusion

The study showed that naturalistic elements prevail in almost all the situations in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and it also identified its effects on the lives of characters, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. It also examined that humanity has been controlled by heredity and environment in regard to chance, fate, free will and co-incidences. There is a chain of events helping to shape their destiny. In manifestation of man, heredity plays a vital role and people's actions are not always their own fault. Man's inheritance transferred to him by his parents and by the environment, in which he has brought up, matter a lot, which resulted in destruction and terrible fate. It is also examined that the naturalistic aspects conceived by Zola (2015) are represented by Hardy and other characters, being victims of heredity by shaping their disposition and by the environment. Naturalistic determinism finds place in Henchard's unhappy marriage, atmosphere of the furnity tent, the incident of auction, love affairs, deaths and sex and poverty. Lastly, the researcher recommends for those who are interested in Thomas Hardy's novels. They can apply the narrative theory on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Gender issues can also be investigated in the novel from feminist point of view.

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