28

ELEMENTS OF NATURALSIM IN THOMAS HARDY'S *JUDE THE OBSCURE*

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Abstract:

The aim of my thesis is to depict the naturalistic elements in Thomas Hardy's novel 'Jude the Obscure'. This thesis is about naturalism and its features and elements in general. Particularly, it captures the elements of the naturalism which can also be discovered in Hardy's other novels as well. The major naturalistic elements that we find in this novel are environment in which a person lives and plays his part and is influenced by it, the milieu which depicts the causes of the social background of a character and its effect on the life of that character through which a particular character's urges are reigned, the next is heredity which influences the behavior, the psychological inclinations of the characters, and the fate which forces a character to be in a worse condition by using its traps. In this thesis I have recognized these influences of the naturalism on the novel 'Jude the Obscure' which are quite apparent in the novel and in its characters of Jude Fawley, Arabella, Sue Bridehead and Richard Phillotson.

Keywords: *Naturalism, Fate, Determinism, heredity, milieu.*

Introduction

Naturalism is a literary movement which is to give an accurate presentation of human life. It is a form of extreme realism. It describes a kind of literature that attempts to relate scientific principles of objectivity to the study of human beings. This movement recommended the roles of a family, social surroundings and milieu in determining the human character. Therefore the naturalistic writers' writings are based on the idea that their milieu governs their character. They don't have the free will. The characters are shown helpless. There is a constant struggle for existence throughout the story as in this novel Jude struggles throughout his life.

Jude the Obscure is the last novel written by Thomas Hardy. This is the pessimistic story of a country stonemason Jude. There is no ray of hope for him in his life. Actually it is the story about the catastrophic plans, hopes, desires and dreams. It describes the youth who has to pay for inherited inclinations. It also explains us that the lives of the characters are determined by their milieu, heredity, environment, fate, etc. The novel has the impressions of pessimism in the lives of the characters. Jude makes the wrong choice of a life-partner and it ruins his whole life and after marriage it becomes worse as he is unable to fulfill his ambitions which are all the more important for him. But he is still in a hope to get the best out of his life as he never misses the chance to fulfill his old dreams. After all the catastrophic consequences he still believes in the further opportunities of success. He is prone to take erroneous decisions that prove fatal for him.

Naturalism

Philosophy defines Naturalism as the belief that the natural laws and forces act in this whole universe. It is opposed to the supernaturalism. It was developed by a school of writers with some particular philosophical thesis. In literature, it is a mode of fiction. Naturalism was developed as a literary movement in the late nineteenth century.

"The French novelist Emile Zola, beginning in the 1870s, did much to develop this theory in what he called "le roman experimental" (that is, the novel organized in the mode of a scientific experiment on

the behavior of the characters it depicts)." (Glossary of Literary Terms MH Abrams, 261). He was the leading exponent of naturalism. He defines the term to emphasize the observation and the scientific method in the fictional portrayal of reality. The naturalists were also influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Therefore, throughout the story, the characters struggle for their existence.

The naturalists have an objective point of view with completely impersonal tone. They focus on the characters' flaws and the miseries. They always depict the pessimism in their works. The characters in these novels do not progress from lower to higher esteem as they remain in the same wretched condition from the beginning. Their condition can be worse but cannot be better than before. There is a "tragic" end in the naturalistic novels but it is not the same end of the protagonist we see in other tragic novels where the protagonist dies heroically. Unlike them, the protagonist of these novels suffers throughout his life and at the end dies in his poor wretched condition.

The major themes in these novels are that the actions of the characters are always directed by their fate, heredity, environment and social conditions of the time. Determinism is also an important aspect of naturalism because everything is predetermined by fate, heredity, environment, etc. The character is deprived of his free will as his fate does not allow him to think and act freely. The idea of this literary style is to present the human life as determined by the heredity and environment that is the milieu in which he lives. Every person inherits some instincts of hunger, sexuality, social class and the milieu into which he is born. That is why; in these novels we find more elaborate descriptions of the social phenomena in an impartial manner. Their focus is more on the environment not on the thoughts of the characters.

The other naturalistic writers are Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, Jack London and it was at the peak in the time of Theodore Dreiser."Studs Lonigan" trilogy (1932-35) by James T. Farrell is one of the latest examples of naturalism.

Naturalistic Elements in *Jude The Obscure*

Jude the Obscure is Thomas Hardy's last novel published in 1895. Before its publication, it was serialized in Harper's New Monthly Magazine from December 1894 to November 1895. It had to be expurgated because of its views on marriage and sex. It was considered an offending work and was also spoiling the reputation of the family of that magazine. After this novel, Thomas Hardy did never write another novel and he completely dedicated himself to the poetry.

There are many features which prove the presence of naturalistic elements in this novel. The major naturalistic elements that we find are environment in which a person lives and plays his part and is influenced by it, the milieu which depicts the causes of the social background of a character and its effect on the life of that character through which a particular character's urges are reigned, the next is heredity which influences the behavior, the psychological inclinations of the characters, and the fate which forces a character to be in a worse condition by using its traps.

Jude's parents died in his early age and he was living with his aunt from his childhood. There are many incidents in the novel which shows that his aunt did not like him and he also received many taunts from her. In this way his life was full of stress from his early days. His condition became worse when he was departed from his favourite school teacher Phillotson who was going to Christminster. This was the greatest loss for him and afterwards he devoted himself to the books. He also made up his mind to go to Christminster and started thinking to take admission there. In his family, many of the members were obsessed with grammars of Latin and Greek languages. It proves that they had the habit of reading. And in this way, his habit of reading books is also hereditary. That was why he always indulged himself in the books. Although in his grown up age he started working as a stonemason but he did never abandon his ambitions of going to Christminster and he never left his books.

His aunt always mentioned that the desolation is his part of life as it is hereditary. It was an indication of his upcoming unsuccessful life. As he was thinking about his ambitions, fate came with its trap in the guise of Arabella to distract him from his aspirations. She was a very strong girl opposite to him.

She liked adventures that he never did. She was a stubborn, energetic and a passionate girl. It was customary for her to kill the pig as she belonged to the family of pig slaughters. In opposite to her character, Jude had a sensitive character which he inherited from his ancestors. He was too sensitive to hurt any living being. Even he was unable to tolerate the sound of animal's agony. But Jude got tempted towards her. Under her influence, he forgot all his studies and everything about Christminster and even he killed a pig. He wanted to spend all his time with her but she did not care. Because of her cunning nature she played a foolish trick on him by saying that she was pregnant. That was why he married her. "...if that´s the case, we must marry! What other thing do you think I could dream of doing?...It is a complete smashing up of my plans I mean my plans before I knew you, my dear. But what are they after all!...Certainly we´ll marry: we must!" (Hardy, 57). From this, it proves here that he was also well aware about his shattered dreams. But soon he got to know that they were in false relationship as they did not share any resemblance of character. When he discovered that she was not pregnant he got depressed. "Their lives are ruined…ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union…" (Hardy 69). After this, they separated mutually. Jude came to know the misfortunes of marriages that brought upon his ancestors through his aunt. His aunt's warnings were always in his mind that he belonged to the doomed family and this was the cause of his suffering. From this passage we also get to know that it was in his heredity to choose the wrong life-partners and the marriages were ended with distressing consequences.

After this, he started his life again with his old ambitions of Christminster. But soon his dreams came to an end when he received a letter from the university that he could not be a part of the university. At this time he had Sue who had all the qualities in her character which he liked the most and that was why he fell in love. Here he had another trouble that she was his cousin and therefore could not reveal his feelings for her. Sue like Jude was also doomed by her ancestors for choosing the wrong life-partner because she had to marry Phillotson after leaving the training School in Melchester. In this way she made the biggest mistake. She was not happy with Phillotson. Though she was not forced by him yet she did not like him and wanted to leave this marital relationship with him. When she asked him to let her go he allowed her as he knew her hatred towards himself.

After leaving her husband Sue began to live with Jude but when she was proposed for marriage by him she refused strongly. "I don´t like to say no, dear Jude; but I feel just the same about it now as I have done all along. I have just the same dread lest an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents." (Hardy 259). Both of them were very well aware of the consequences of their union. But she got ready for marriage when Arabella had sent her son whose name was Little Father Time to them. But then they dumped this idea. As they were living together, people started to gossip about them. They started to humiliate them. Their short-mindedness spoiled their happiness every time. As a result, they had to migrate from every place they were going to reside. It's not easy for them to live at any place. "Nobody molested them, it is true; but an oppressive atmosphere began to encircle their souls…And their temperaments were precisely of a kind to suffer from this atmosphere…" (Hardy 299)

Without marriage Jude and Sue had sexual relationships and she had already given birth to the two children and she was again pregnant for the third time. She was also worried about the future of her children. Finally when they got some place Jude had to go somewhere else. Little Father Time could understand the misfortune they were having in their lives. He was an emotional child and he was thinking of himself that he was the only one who was responsible for the poverty and asked: "I ought not to be born, ought I?" (Hardy 332)

"…´I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to ´em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about.´" (Hardy 333) This was the conversation between Sue and Little Father Time in the same evening when he was thinking of his unfortunate fate. And this conversation proved fatal for everyone. Sue confided that their next child would

come soon and this would lead to the disaster. On the very next day when Sue and Jude came back to their place, they found the dead bodies of all the children. This cold and brutal description of the act was generated by the naturalists. "It is best, perhaps, that they should be gone Yes I see it is! Better that they should be plucked fresh than stay to wither away miserably!" (Hardy 339) After this incident Sue retreated into the shell. She was in regret for the tragic death of their children as she thought that she was responsible for the cruel act done by Little Father Time. She also blamed herself for that impious life she and Jude had led. But soon she regained her strength and forgiveness for her acts of guilt. Because of her regret she left Jude and went back to her husband, Richard Phillotson. Phillotson was very glad and he remarried her.

Jude started drinking after their separation. Here again he was caught in the trap of the fate in the guise of Arabella who again made him remarry her. But his condition was miserable and Arabella did not treat him well. Then he went to meet Sue for the last time and their moments were joyful and it seemed as if they still loved each other. After this meeting he died. His death was like the death of other naturalistic protagonists as he could neither get his ambitions nor his love but he was in despair till the end of his life.

Conclusion

It is evident that this tragic novel has presented the influences of the elements of naturalism especially heredity and fate. Whatever happens in Jude and Sue's lives it's all because of their ill fates and heredity especially regarding their marriage and objectives. Jude's aspirations have been proved responsible for his self-destruction. There is a struggle for existence, one of the main features of the naturalists as every character in this novel wants to prove his existence. In fact, all the protagonists in such novels are always in struggle with their fate for the choice of their own way of life. Jude tried hard to fulfill his ambitions but failed before his destiny as he was unable to control it. He was too prone to make wrong decisions because of his heredity. And the same happens with Sue. She chose Phillotson her life-partner with whom she was living unhappily. The social status also affects the psychology of the characters especially their economic conditions. Jude's poverty at Christminter with his three children became the reason for the misery in Little Father Time and it ended up in the brutal murder of the children. Jude had to undergo many hardships; first his dream of Christminster remained unfulfilled. Then he desired to have Sue in his life but the result of their relationship was the bitter separation although they loved each other. And at the end, Jude dies peacefully after meeting Sue.

References:

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