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HIDDEN EYES, INVISIBLE POWERS: THE PANOPTIC WORLD OF THOMAS HARDY'S *JUDE THE OBSCURE*

Abdol Hossein JOODAKI*

Sima GHASEMI**

Abstract

The present paper focuses on the concepts of Panopticon, gaze, discipline and punishment as discussed in Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* (1975). This Foucauldian framework is applied to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) in which motifs of surveillance and discipline are present. The article further shows how Victorian society in general and the main characters in particular are susceptible to scrutiny and examination. Jude and Sue, who have violated rules and ethics of society, are undercontrolling gaze of the community. They also feel guilty for illicit acts that they have done so they are entrapped in mental prisons in which they are both warders and prisoners.

Keywords: Panopticon, Gaze, Discipline, Punish, Michel Foucault, Thomas Hardy.

Introduction

Foucault's intricate concept of power is inseparable from his whole system of ideology and philosophy. Foucauldian Power is utterly pervasive, omnipresent and diffused. "Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday life" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 39). Power covers various measures which unconsciously try to induce particular behavior or discourse. Power is not negative or repressive, but rather it is productive. "In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domain of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault, DP 194). Foucault holds that "when there is power, there is resistance" (*history of sexuality* 95). If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience (Foucault, *Ethics, subjectivity and Truth* 167). Resistance as opposed to obedience is essential to power relations. Therefore, an individual to Foucault is not necessarily trapped in power relations but he is dynamic and free to struggle and change.

* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Lorestan.

** M.A. student of English language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Lorestan.

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* traces the history or genealogy of power relations. He illustrates how the way power is executed has dreadfully changed and how Power-Knowledge is constructive and the result of a particular period. In monarchical regimes or traditional forms of power, it was the sovereign, the symbol of power, who was most visible and constantly on display. Public executions and torture as spectacle were political rituals by which power was manifested. In Modern societies power has become invisible since the brutality of these ceremonies and concentration on the body as the major target of punishment gave away to meticulously supervised prisons and disciplinary mechanisms. In fact, it is surveillance, constant visibility, which is the foundation of disciplinary mechanism.

Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is the basis for processes of surveillance. Panopticon is:

An annular building; at the center, a tower...the peripheric building is divided into cells...All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy...They are like so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. (Foucault, DP 200)

According to Foucault's line of thought, the major effect of the Panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility" (201). The warder has an extensive view of everything from above in his central tower without being seen. The presence of the supervisor or gaze always remains uncertainty so the inmate begins to behave as if he was being watched. However, the role of Panopticon is far beyond this seeing machine. Foucault elaborates on this: "The Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building; it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form" (205). The Panopticon's vigilant eye illustrates a system of power whose purpose is to discipline the body and create new docile and compliant social subjects. The panoptic mechanism above the architectural plan represents the functioning of power which has permeated every aspect of society. Taking the panoptic model of Bentham, Foucault proposed the notion of "carceral archipelago" (297). The carceral society produces individuals who have internalized explicit and implicit rules of institutions and take responsibility for their own discipline and docility.

In this essay the concepts of Panopticon, panoptic gaze, surveillance, discipline and punishment are applied to *Jude the Obscure*, the last and darkest novel of Thomas Hardy. *Jude the Obscure* is a story of Jude and Sue who try to oppose norms and conventions of repressive Victorian society so they are considered as social outcasts.

1. Panoptic Souls

'Vision' has had a remarkable and distinctive position among human's senses from old times. Its excellence and superiority is based on two aspects, one is the practical function of seeing by the use of the two eyes, and the other is the inner view and thinking. Visual expressions and words such as gaze, look, observe, view, glance, watch, etc. have all significant symbolic and metaphorical references in the world of literature. Moreover, vision is not limited to what we see or look at, but it refers to both inner and outer results of looking (qtd. In Zolfagharkhani 60).

Jude the obscure reflects inner conflicts of main characters. Generally speaking, Jude and Sue committed unforgiven sin and they cannot release themselves of its consequent paralyzing power of guilt. "Jude and Sue are caught up in drama of guilt and sin" (Millgate 318). Consequently, they are self-enclosed in prisons in which they perform both the roles of prisoners and jailers. They are confined in mental Panopticon which is composed of their own conscience as warders and their guilt-ridden souls as prisoners.

Jude Fawley is an orphan who is neglected by his aunt and considered as a burden to her: "It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too wi' thy mother and father, poor useless boy!" (Hardy7). Jude is solitary figure from titleless family who is respected,