

An Overview of The Politics and Economics of Gender and Patriarchy in Thomas Hardy's Far From The Madding Crowd

Abstract

For giving overview of the politics and economics of the gender and patriarchy in Hardy's Far from the Madding Crowd, first of all, it would be used to examine the feminist implications of some Marxist concepts and theories, including the Marxist concept of Human Nature, Theory of Economics, the Marxist theory of the society and the Marxist theory of the politics. It would also include a discussion of Friedrich Engels "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State". This paper will deal with the basic tenets and beliefs of contemporary Marxist Feminism, which fully explain the implications of the politics and economics of gender and patriarchy in Far from the Madding Crowd. Hardy has presented his interpretation of the issues of gender and patriarchy through the personality of major characters of the Novel Far from the Madding Crowd.

Keywords: Marxist Feminists, Gender, Patriarchy, Sexual Politics, Discrimination.

Introduction

The basic features of the politics and economics of gender and patriarchy by Marxist feminists, have much in common with socialist feminists. There is however, one major point that divides these two traditions, whereas socialist feminists believe that gender and class play an approximately equal role in any explanation of woman's status and function in society. Under Capitalism, then, is that it invites every woman, whether proletarian or bourgeois, to understand women's oppression not so much as the result of the political, social and economic structures associated with Capitalism. For giving an over view at the Politics and Economics of Gender in Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd. It would be useful to examine the feminist implications of some Marxist concepts and theories, including the Marxist concept of human nature, the Marxist theory of economics, the Marxist theory of society and the Marxist theory of the politics.

Aim of the Study

This paper will deal with the basic tenets and beliefs of contemporary Marxist feminism, which fully explain the implications of the politics and economics of gender and patriarchy.

Just as the liberal concept of human nature is present in liberal feminist thought, the Marxist concept of human nature is present in Marxist feminist thought. Liberals believe that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is a specified set of abilities, such as the capacity for rationality and for the use of language; a specified set of practices, such as religion, art, science; and a specified set of attitude and behaviour patterns, such as competitiveness and the tendency to put self over other. Marxists reject this liberal theory of human nature emphasizing instead that what makes us human is that we produce our means of subsistence. We are what we are because of what we do specifically, what we do to meet our basic needs in productive activities such as fishing, farming and building. Unlike bees, beavers, and ants, whose activities are governed by instinct, we create ourselves in the process of intentionally, transforming and manipulating nature.

In his Introduction to 'Marx and Engels', Richard Schmitt cautioned that the statement "Human beings create themselves" is not to be read as "Men and Women, individually, makes themselves what they



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are "Rather it is to be read as "Men and Woman through production collectively create a society that, in turn, shapes them. "This emphasis on the collective accounts for the Marxist view of history. For the Liberal, the ideas, thoughts and values of individuals accounts for change over time. For the Marxist, material forces that is, the production and re production of social life are the prime movers in history.

In the course of articulating this doctrine of how change takes place over time, a doctrine usually termed historical materialism, Marx stated that "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. In other words, Marx believed that a society's mode of production-that is, its forces of production (the ways in which the production process is organized) generates a superstructure (a layer of legal, political, and social ideas) that, in turn, bolsters that mode. For example, American think in certain characteristics ways about liberty, equality, and freedom because their mode of production is capitalist.

Like Marxists in general, Marxist feminist also believe that social existence determines consciousness. "Woman's work is never done" is for Marxist feminists more than an aphorism; it is a description of the nature of women's work. Always on call a woman forms a conception of herself that she would not have if her role in the family and at the workplace did not keep her socially and economically subordinate to men. Thus, Marxist feminists believe that to understand why woman are oppressed in ways that men are not, we need to analyze the links between women's work status and woman's self image.

The economics of patriarchy and gender and can be understood with reference to the Marxist Theory of Economics. To the degree that Marxist feminists believe that woman's work shapes women's thoughts and thus "female nature," they also believe that capitalism is a system of power relations as well as exchange relations, it is described as a commodity or market society in which everything, including one's Labour power, has a price and all transactions are fundamentally exploitative. Thus, depending on one's emphasis, the worker employer relationship can be looked at as either an exchange relationship in which equivalents are freely traded-labour of wages or as workplace struggle where the employer, who has superior power, coerces workers to labour ever harder for no discernible increase in wages.

In the light of the discussion of the economics and politics of gender and patriarchy, and the feminist view of sexual politics, the major novel of Thomas Hardy can be analysed. In "Far From the Madding Crowd", Hardy has presented his interpretation of the issues of gender and patriarchy through the personalities of major characters. While male characters like Gabriel Oak, Bold wood and Sergeant Troy present various aspects and dimensions of patriarchy, female characters like

Bathsheba and Fanny present the intricacies engendered in their lives by gender based discriminations, especially in the matter of the expression of their sexuality.

Patriarchal values are so deeply embedded in the male psyche that those who have analysed the character of Bathsheba have revealed their male prejudice against her. For example Henry James, a celebrated writer in his own right, regards Batsheba as "inconsequential wilful and mettlesome," and comments; and we cannot say that we either understand or like her. The reviewers of the Observer liked her even less:

The first interview Troy and Bathsheba Represents the latter in so odious a light, if women in whatever rank of society are supposed to relation any trace of modesty and reserve, that we confess we do not care one straw about her afterwards, and are only sorry that Gabriel Oak was not sufficiently manly to refuse to have anything more to say to such an incorrigible hussy.:

Let us take, for example, the (offending) which may be summarised somewhat indecorously, as follows: the heroine is walking home alone through the woods in the dark, she passes someone on the narrow path so closely that she feels the heat of his male body. Then she discover that her gown has become entangled in his soldierly apparel-his spur and disentanglement involves a certain amount of touching and handling of his person (and vice versa) and a certain amount of bending over for the performance. In the meantime, her unversed eyes have taken in this 'young and slim' (FFMC, .187), whose flirtatious overtures during the scuffle have disturbed and embarrassed her. And excited her. Thus, as the protracted course of her delivery from 'captivity' is concluded, instead of walking home demurely in dignified ascertain of womanly pride, she breaks into a run. Arriving home flushed and 'painting', she sets about quizzing her maid as to who the mysterious strangers might be, and finally ascends to her bed chamber, not to kneel in penitent, maidenly prayer but to relish sweet, retrospective frissons of delight.

The cause of all the trouble is body contact between the sexes, and no doubt, Bathsheba's unconstrained delight in the event. The sensuality of the rendering is nowhere countermanded by a moralistic aside and the reader is left with no guidelines, no moral edification what so ever. The Victorian critics did step in to redress the balance, to deplore what Hardy had not deplored, but for many readers the sheer delight of the moment must have passed without a single twinge of shame or guilt.

The work environments and interior setting chosen for the intimate meeting between Bathsheba and the farmers Bold wood and Oak, openly contrast the nature settings, Hardy chooses for her erotic encounters with Troy; meadows, woods and fields; as a mirror to Bathsheba's sexual temperament, have precisely that fresh, open/air quality that Hardy sees in her own nature, Bathsheba's youthful desire is for nothing more natural (nature-like) than to express her vibrant sexuality. On the threshold of sexual maturity

her impulse is to explore and experiment freely. The embryonic Eve in her nature invokes no sin-laden Edenic archetype, but, rather, in affinity with the Eve (Green sleeves) who features in Hardy's poem 'Vocies from things Growing in a Churchyard', she is the 'pure-woman', so beloved of the author, who would give herself up to Hellenistic joy and voluptuousness to be

*Kissed by men from many a clime,
Beneath sun, stars, in blaze, in blaze, in
breeze,*

As now by glowworms and by bees.....

This is the Bathsheba of Hardy's opening passages, the 'fair product of nature' (FFMC, p.5) who, taking up her looking glass, perceives for herself that warm creature a glow with the soft heat of her sex. Her feminine sensuousness prompts first a parting of lips then a roseate tumescent glow. A dawning is clearly taking place and not only in the morning skies; but while Hardy's appreciative gaze rests upon Bathsheba's open eyed wonder and soft arousal, a second observer, the clandestine Oak, sees things a little differently. He promptly assumes vanity in place of sensuous self-delight.

The impact of Bathsheba's auto-eroticism clearly lost on Oak but not on Hadry's is now hastily, and it seems, protectively screened by mellow, interpersonal comment that the 'picture' is a 'delicate one' a phrase that hint at intimacy but subtly defuses it by the suggestion, through 'picture' of pure aesthetic appreciation. Then in recognition of the indelicacy of the 'delicate' and after a fumbling preamble ('what whether nobody knows'), Hardy adjusts the narrative stance to permit Oak a hearing whose conventional prescriptive infirmity' and Oak's cynical inference' (FFM, p.5) of woman's vanity now tailor the narrative to a more circumspect fit. But the mirror does not lie and neither will Hardy. Bathsheba is indeed a 'fair product of nature' and artifice, vanity, has no place here.

There was no necessity whatever for her looking in the glass. She did not adjust her hat or pat her hair, or pull a dimple had been her motive in taking up the glass. She simply observed herself as a fair product of nature in the feminine kind.... (FFMC. p.5)

Oak's participation in this scene is vital. Just as the proprietary narrator's moral rectitude injects moralistic overtone into 'A pair of Blue Eye's so Oak enacts a similar role. but with considerably more strategic plotting on Hardy's part. It is critical to the success of the novel that the conventional hero should carry both unconventional heroine and unconventional author into the respective Victorian drawing-room. Hardy assists the process, not invoking a proprietary narrator but by transferring the role of censor to Oak. The very point, properly separated from the subject of his interest by a metaphorical boundary (hedge), and in the manner of the censor too, he scrutinises the unsuspecting woman with an inquisitorial eye and then announces with high moral seriousness: she has faults/ and the greated of them is/or vanity', (FFMC. p.7)

As a figure of decorum and an observer of appearances, Oak's mode of regard differ substantially from Hardy's. This point needs to be emphasized because critics overtook it entirely and tend to assume that the 'vanity' charge and Oak's moralising in genral reflect Hardy' own point of view. This is not so. Hardy established, for Oak a contrasting perspective, indeed an openly conflicting perspective, from the very outset of the novel. And no sooner does he establish it than he reinforces it. Bathsheba's self-delight and natural ease of self-perception, as Hardy sees it, changes instantly to embarrassment and unease under Oak's scrutiny, as he forces her awareness of 'the desirability of her existence' to run 'Self-consciousness' (FFMC,p.19) under his rude stare. In other words the natural manner has now become an unnaturalness of manner as the viewer shapes the view and by his mode of regard, shapes the viewed.

Oak's perspective then, most readily with Hardy's senseimpressionistic pointof view. Bathsheba's ability to 'frame' and reconstruct feeling as form in a maner analogous the artist's engagement with self portraiture has virtrosity that only Hardy, as artist, would value in this context He reserves for Oak, by contrast, a narrow point of view; the 'cynical inference' which was irresistible as he regarded the scene, generous though the fain would have been, (FMC,P.5) It is however, Oak's role as spy which clearly distinguishes his perspective from Hardy. This is not a role Hardy either choses or needs to chose for himself. Endowed as he is with the creator's knowledge of his creation.

Conclusion

Hence, in the light and discussions of the economics and politics of Gender and patriarchy, the feminist view of sexual politics andestablishing the set of clearly defined perspective, which will prove crucial to a close interpretation of his text. Hardy achieves several ends. First, Oak introduces a moral perspective that will permit readers predisposed to his point of view access to a text which deals with female sexuality. Second by means of his unobtrusive alienation of Oak the spy/censor , Hardy makes room for an ' alternative' Oak to materialize: a figure less idealized but more psychologically plausible than the 'worthy' of received interpretation. And finally, Hardy retains for himself. Not only as oppositional stance, but also the 'odioun' that might otherwise heap solely on Bathsheba were to have allied himself with Oak. Human and imperfect as she I to her author, she is not the agent of disorder in Far From the Mading Crowd.

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