

Humanism in Hardy's the Mayor of Casterbridge

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Abstract

In this paper I have examined Hardy as a humanist and Michael Henchard, the hero of the novel, as a human being who follows his desire. One of my findings is that Michael fails as a capitalist and as a father because he perceives the personal and the social aspects of individual development to be split rather than symbolic relationship

Keywords: Humanism, magnanimity, Laxity, Auction, Disillusioned, Punishment.

Introduction

Humanism has been in the centre of every philosophical thinking since the Renaissance in Europe. When Hardy started his literary career as a novelist, scientific developments and Industrial Revolution have forced the British government to bring second reform bill in 1867 for the betterment of human life. Hardy was a stout believer of human beings, so humanism became a centre theme of all his novels.

In his novels Hardy generally dealt with human instincts that bring about a man's downfall under the given circumstances. Along with his humanism, destiny plays a very important role in the making or marring of the protagonist in his novels.

The Mayor of Casterbridge was written in 1884-85 at Shire Hall Place Dorchester and published by Smith, Elder in an edition of 758 copies on 10th May 1884. Hardy added a preface for Osgood McIlvaine's edition of the Wessex novels in Feb. 1895. The preface was slightly rewritten in May 1912 for the Definitive Welfare edition. In the very preface he says-

Whatever the success of this intention and the value of these novels as delineations of humanity, they have at least a humble supplementary quality of which I may be justified in reminding the reader, though it is one that was quite unintentional and unforeseen. As the dates represented in the various narrations things were like that in Wessex: the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages. And in particularizing such I have often been reminded of Boswell's remarks on the trouble to which he was put and the pilgrimages he was obliged to make to authenticate some detail, though the labour was one which would bring him no praise. Unlike his achievement, however, on which an error would as he says have brought discredit, if these country customs and vocations, obsolete and obsolescent, had been detailed wrongly, nobody would have discovered such errors to the end of Time. Yet I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life.¹

The Mayor of Casterbridge

A Man of Character is one of the greatest novels in the history the of novel. It is a novel that is widely read on account of the man sketched in the novel called Michael Henchard. The hero of the novel Michael Henchard is not a man but a man of character who makes and mars his life on account of his own outlook on his own interests. In the novel he is a man who has the supreme object, in his life to concern himself to be supreme. His character is an expression of a man's concern for himself and afterwards his fellow beings. Perhaps he is a man whose supreme interest is in his own fulfillments at any cost. The novel has all the elements of humanistic outlook towards life in some form or another. Every page of Michael Henchard's life presents man's social and intellectual developments.



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Michael Henchard, The Novel's protagonist, is young, hot tempered hey-trusser while intoxicated at a village fair, he impulsively sells his wife and infant child at auction for the sum of five guineas. Waking up the next day; he experiences extreme remorse and makes a solemn vow not to touch alcohol for the next 21 years.

After a gap of 18 years Henchard's wife Susan, and her daughter Elizabeth Jane track Henchard down. Though hard work and Iron self-discipline, he has become wealthy and socially influential man as the mayor of Casterbridge a town in Wessex. Susan agrees to remarry him. In due course of life Henchard makes friendship with Donald Farfrae, a young newcomer from Scotland, who helps Henchard to prosper in business.

Soon, however Henchard and Farfrae part ways, becoming better rivals. Susan becomes ill, and shortly before her death she writes a letter to Henchard telling him Elizabeth Jane is not really his daughter. Her father is the sea captain Richard Newson, the man who bought Susan at auction. Henchard is badly disillusioned and comes to treat Elizabeth Jane with cold indifference.

A new character now enters the scene: Lucetta Templeman. Lucetta and Henchard romantically linked the past. Henchard presses this claim, but Lucetta is captivated instead by young Donald Farfrae. Her shift of affection enrages Henchard and he becomes obsessed with ruining Farfrae to get his revenge.

Henchard miscalculates, however, and suffers huge losses in the grain business, while Farfrae prospers. Henchard is finally forced to declare bankruptcy. He also becomes a social outcast when everyone learns that he sold Susan at auction.

Meanwhile, local enemy and gossip lead to Lucetta's downfall as well. Both she and Henchard are publicly humiliated in a "skimmity ride", a raucous procession organized to bring disgrace on people suspected of adultery or other sexual laxity. Lucetta is so unnerved that she becomes fatally ill.

After Lucetta's death, Farfrae and Elizabeth - Jane are married. This is the last straw for Henchard, now an impoverished, embittered wanderer. He dies a lonely death in a poor cottage.

The novel presents a vivid picture of human beings under the given circumstances. The novel is a struggle of Michael Henchard against his own human qualities that are not only that of Michael Henchard but that of the human beings. Like most of his Wessex characters that have held generations of readers spellbound. Henchard is a commoner with uncommon qualities and like them he is remarkable for certain unsophisticated, elemental and rugged characteristics that were common to the men of the Wessex countryside.

As Evelyn Hardy said, "Henchard is the virile of the Hardy's men." In the portrayal of Michael Henchard, Hardy has put many important characteristics of his own. Henchard like a wild bull roaming the hill side triumphant in his prime, subdued and driven for the herd by a younger more agile rival, attracts us through his animal strength. There is not

any character like him in Hardy's works. Perhaps the writer saw some such red and gray volcanic man in one of the Dorchester inns or streets, who set him pondering on his life, characters and fortunes. "I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its dozen countries here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose. So far was I possessed by this idea that I kept within the frontiers when it would have been easier to overleap them and give more cosmopolitan features to the narrative". 2

In the novel, Hardy emphasizes the characteristics of the novel by providing it with the sub-title 'A Story of a Man of Character.' That is to say, it is not our physical power but moral power which makes it remarkable. Henchard has great energy, and an equally great ambition. He gets rid of his wife to pursue this and single handed by his own effort he becomes the richest man in Casterbridge, the most powerful, finally its mayor. But more than this kind of power he has a moral power. He has no moral weakness for the fair sex. He has greater endurance than most brave men, how many men or women you know can say in the face of such sufferings as he had in spite of his best efforts. "My punishment is not greater than I can bear!" An old hand at suffering in calm he shut his lips when they had half parted to begin an explanation of the end; he would twitch his lips, compress his frame, as if to bear better. Such suffering and such endurance! Tremendous power, massive organ - like character!! He is a man of amazing physical energy too - his laugh and look, his stentorian voice and stern manners his strong likes and strong dislikes - all are nothing as compared to his powers of endurance, dignified defiance of whatever he may have to suffer on account of his own faults or the scourings of blind fate.

The two principal male characters in the novel Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae present two aspects of humanity. Michael Henchard is a man deeply rooted in traditional way of life. He makes and mars his life just by the adopting traditional way of life, while Donald Farfrae is a man with modern progressive sensibility. He establishes the foundation of his life on the scientific way of living. He changes himself with the passage of time and the need of the hour. While Henchard sticks to the traditional way of living, he upholds the human values when required the most. Though he sells his wife in a state of complete intoxication but as soon as he comes to his senses, he realizes his mistake. He searches for her and does not marry Lucetta with the hope that he might get his legitimate wife. When Susan comes to Casterbridge and meets him, he remarries her to mend the mistake, he had committed. When as a mayor one day he fills the chair of the Magistrate and recognized by the firmity woman he accepts the truth boldly without hesitation, while his clerk and attendants were opposing her. When the clerk said, 'Tis a concocted story, so hold your tongue." But

Michael Henchard said, "No, tis true. Tis as true as the light. An upon my soul it does prove that I'm no better than she! An to keep out of any temptation to treat her hard for revenge, I'll leave her to you."³

And his confession mars his life. Since he confessed his guilt of selling his wife, his reputation deteriorated by leaps and bounds and he decided to leave Casterbridge in the same predicament he had entered it.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a fine gem of humanism. The whole story of the novel revolves round the central character of the novel Michael Henchard who is acting for the well being of his own life as well as his fellow beings by the time his personal interests are not disturbed. He is always thinking for his social and intellectual development. Not even a single piece of work is done by Michael Henchard for other than welfare of himself or his other fellow beings. He never thinks of anything other than earthly pleasures. In the novel Hardy seems to be a stout supporter of humanism. He is such as stout supporter of human interests in this world that he is always ready to fight even against God.

Both the leading male characters in the novel Michael Henchard and Farfrae are the men living their lives with their individual interests. The difference between them is that one Michael Henchard is living it in a traditional way. He is violent and a liar. In one sense, "He is violent and a liar and in one sense intensely selfish, but his generosity is true magnanimity and he has reserves of affection and humility that they quite lack. The essential is something else, though: that his whole nature, good or bad is centred upon a deep source of vital energy. The rich stream of life still issues from life's traditional order. It does not bring success, but it brings greatness and in a sense goodness. Farfrae prospers through skill which the new mode of life has impersonally taught him, Henchard is able to struggle on, though defeated not because of what he has leaned but because of what he is. He blocks out something like the full contour of the human being."⁴

In the novel, Michael Henchard 'stands out as a human rather than a man'.⁵ Farfrae is another human being in the novel but he does not have the same course of life. 'From the beginning to the end Henchard's course of life is downward. Whenever his older way of life meets the new, it is defeated.'⁶ He is a man who takes Farfrae for all in all. Then the struggle between Farfrae and Henchard begins that becomes a struggle between a man and an animal. This begins with the animal in possession of its territory. But gradually he (Henchard) loses his ground and Farfrae starts winning it with the help of his own way of life.

Though the novel as the subtitle suggests deals with the life history of a man of character, the women characters in the novel are also more representative of human being than women. Susan, Elizabeth Jane, Lucetta and the furmity woman all have their individual interests. None of them care for anything other than her individual gains and losses in this world. If Susan goes away from Henchard with

Newson, she does not do so with any moral or divine cause. She hopes for a better life with him. As soon as she comes to know that perhaps Newson is no more, she sets out to search of Michael Henchard with a hope of better life. Lucetta marries Farfrae in spite of making a forced confession from Michael Henchard with the hope of better life. With Farfrae Elizabeth Jane keeps on changing her residence thinking that the next one is better than the previous one and finally marries Farfrae with a hope of better life.

Aim of the Study

In this paper I have examined Hardy's Humanism and immanent will.

Conclusion

In this paper I have explored that the novel is a fine picture of human beings fighting against odd conditions where "happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain."⁷

"Hardy's method is exemplified perhaps most completely in Michael Henchard. Of course (as in all genuine novel and drama where the central action is the expression of the central characters), the essential substance of the man is manifested in the main currents of his career."⁸

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