

Naturalism and its Nature in Hardy's Works

Talha Mohammed Elzebear Suliman
Alzaem Alazhari University, Sudan

Abstract

The English novelist Thomas Hardy tends to some extent to the tendency of naturalism within certain literary features. In addition to the features of naturalism in his works, he has some other features, though not contradictory, but is interwoven with literary works with an uneven rate. This paper aimed at the literary style of Hardy novels in terms of naturalistic tendencies that tend to present their subjects with objective scientific positions and with detailed documents, often including frankness and almost hovering around the activities and physical functions that are not usually mentioned in the literature. The paper assumes that these novels do not tend to give great weight to the psychological complexity of characterization, i.e., an idealistic direction, a fictional form, or a presentation of an individual personality with a free will to find a very clear literary message. This is the same impression with the novels of Thomas Hardy in one form or another at least with the novels of Emile Zola and some writers of naturalism, later such as Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser and James Farrell. In contrast to these books, the book of naturalistic tendencies, Hardy tends to show these unnatural tendencies along with his natural characteristics, but in a balanced manner, where his modern literary sensitivity, which expresses itself in the depiction of loss, alienation and revolution, seems to be a literary enhancement clearly in the works of Hardy. The paper sees Hardy's reality as a way of looking at life from its real perspective and portraying it with sincerity and objectivity, in contrast to the romance in which the writer portrays life as he wishes. It is a kind of revolution against the self, idealism, and sometimes ambiguity towards the romantic, but is also a kind of pursuit of literary objectivity and the employment of narrative work through the tendency of naturalism.

Keywords: Naturalism – Literary Style - Deterministic Plot – Naturalist

1. Introduction

One way of looking at modernism may be from the standpoint of form rather than of content, and the general impression seems to be that modernism is after all a large genus with realism or naturalism as its one of the leading species. This formal aspect, realism or naturalism as the case may be, is of some help in explaining the content of modernism primarily consisting in a sense of loss and alienation as well as a sense of revolt. Hence, it is intended to discuss in some detail naturalism in general and Hardy's affinities as a naturalist with Zola and some American naturalists.

Before discussing naturalism, it is worthwhile to discuss realism, the source from which naturalism originates, though as a rival thesis. Realism is a mode of writing that aims at a faithful representation of life as it runs in sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure, misery and mirth, and ugliness and beauty. The doctrine of realism has been issued by Buckner B. Trawick (1961:117) who compares it with romanticism. According to Trawick, the problems and imponderables of life may be responded to in two main ways. One is to keep our eyes shut to them; and allows our emotions and imaginations to lead us elsewhere to external nature, to fantasies and the land of dreams; and this is the way of romanticism. "The other way is to face of squarely, perhaps stoically; sad to try to see all there is to be seen, even though some of it may be drab and ugly and painful. That way is realism.

2. Statement of the Problem

Basically, the paper studies the phenomenon of Naturalism at Thomas Hardy's works in terms of comparing Realism, Zola perspective and Naturalism, as a rival thesis of realism.

Realism is, thus, a way of looking at life in its true perspective and its depiction objectivity opposed to romance in which the writer depicts life as he wishes it to be. It is precisely a kind of revolt against the subjectivism, idealism, and occasional vagueness of romanticism; it is also a kind of striving for impersonality, objectivity, verisimilitude, and accuracy and minuteness of details.

In an attempt to discover and depict the real, the writers of the realistic school often turn to the present, to the commonplace, to science, to materialism and in consequence to pessimism. It may also sometimes share the romantics' humanitarianism, passion for social reforms and democracy. In England, if not in France, realism has come to be associated with a positive geniality, even at times with sentimentality.

Naturalism, as a rival thesis of realism, is however a late development in literature not only in England but also in France. This is a term originally used by the French novelist

Emile Zola to make his method of realism distinct from the realism of Balzac and Flaubert. According to Walter Allen (1963:282) "It was an attempt to define, on a theoretical basis, what before had been called Realism". Flaubert preferred to be known as a French classicist to a realist or a naturalist.

Nevertheless, the theory of naturalism leaves out a great deal that is cardinal to him; it leaves out perhaps what is most important in him, his insistence on style, on the conscious making of a work of beauty. Zola as a naturalist seems to have felt that his method is similar to that use in natural sciences. "This technique is a combination of minute and impersonal observation and the experimental method used in science".

3. Research Questions

- 1) Does naturalism tend to make a special selection of its subject and to follow a special literary manner in Hardy's works?
- 2) To what extent the character of a naturalist's fiction may sometimes lack in a psychological complexity and a potential for change or surprise?
- 3) Are the features of naturalism discernible in Hardy and include the predominance of heredity and environment; a causal sequence of narrative assertion?

Objectives of study

- 1) To shed the light on the probability of certain features of Hardy's works as an ONLY naturalist.
- 2) To probe the naturalist tradition that often chooses characters exhibiting strong drives, such as, greed and brutal sexual desires, and death.
- 3) To tackle the naturalist major themes and motives like determinism, survival, violence, sexuality, and taboo in Hardy's works.

As a literary movement, naturalism tends to make a special selection of its subject and to follow a special literary manner. It is a model of fiction developed in accordance with a thesis, the thesis being the product of post-Darwinian biology in the mid-nineteenth century. It asserts that man belongs entirely to the order of nature and does not have a soul or any other connection with a religious or spiritual world beyond nature. Man is merely a higher animal whose character and fortunes are determined by two kinds of natural forces, heredity and environment. Heredity gives him his personal traits and compulsive instincts, especially hunger and sex, while environment gives him his impersonal traits and his social and economic instincts.

The objects of this literary movement are that the naturalists being men of science must admit of nothing occult, and that they should accept that man is but a phenomenon and also a product of natural phenomenon. A naturalist uses his character as a model of heredity and puts it into a setting as if it were a direct copy of the environment; and accordingly he seems to make his fiction as a kind of experiment or demonstration of the interaction between man and nature.

The character of a naturalist's fiction may sometimes lack in a psychological complexity and a potential for change or surprise, for its plot comprises mainly a causal sequence of the narrative assertion. It is this kind of rigid determinism in its plot that essentially distinguishes naturalism from other varieties of realism.

The writers of the naturalist tradition often choose characters exhibiting strong animal drives, such as, greed and brutal sexual desires, helplessly subject both to their glandular secretions within and sociological pressures without.

The end of a naturalistic novel may be either tragic or comic as the forces of heredity and environment may make it to be; but generally it ends in a tragedy, though not like the classical or the Elizabethan tragedy, because of a heroic but losing struggle against enemies and environment or circumstances.

Its protagonist is a prey to multiple compulsions, and he merely disintegrates or is wiped out. Since such novels are more concerned with the less elegant aspects of life, the slum, the factory, the farm appear as their typical settings.

Thus, naturalism may be regarded as an extreme, rather a radical, form of realism, based on the conception of man as an animal without a soul and a free-will, whose behaviour is determined by heredity and environment. It is a reflection of life in its rawness, sordidness and gloom. The writers of the naturalist tradition are disposed to call their fiction a slice of life. As it is Just merely a 'slice of life, it

It seems obvious that such a novel has very little concern with form. The English followers of Zola and Maupassant do not Modernism in Literature as Edited by Bender, Armstrong Briggum knobloch (1977:15) that seem to carry their naturalism to such extremes, principally because their attitude to man is not deterministic. Man is regarded by them as an individual person with individual peculiarities or idiosyncrasies.

4. Hardy's View of Man Is However Deterministic and Individualistic

From the standpoint of origin, naturalism is not supposed to differ much from realism which has given rise to it. Nevertheless, there is seemingly a difference existing between the two; and it is perhaps the same difference as it existed between Flaubert and Zola in their respective view of things.

Flaubert belongs to the school of artistic realism which champions 'art for art's sake', while Zola in his attempt to apply modern science to literature, seeks out the sordid and the unsavory and describes them boldly and minutely. When a person dies and his body becomes lifeless, a realist will call it a dead body, while a naturalist a cold damned corpse. This is however a difference, not of kind, but of degree only.

However, the naturalism that was imported to England during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, thanks go partly to the example of France and partly to the relaxation of social discipline, has a real difference from the Victorian realism. A Victorian realist novel may be comic, ironic or tragic, but the Victorian realism championed by its great masters like Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith, Gissing, Brontes and others have always had a broad view of life. Whether the idea regards humor and sentiment of Dickens, the social miniatures of Thackeray, or the psychological studies of George Eliot, we find almost in every case a definite aim to sweep away error and reveal the underlying truth of human life.

Flaubert is reported to have said that characters most suited to fiction are, not the exceptions, but the more general, because they are the most typical. This is however not the English view. The English view is that a character in a novel means an imaginary person invented by a novelist; it may also mean a person distinguished by odd behavior, an eccentric. This view of characters in fiction cannot but cause its natural repercussion in Victorian realism. It, thus, follows that Victorian realism tends to paint the exceptional, the idealistic, the Individualistic, the heroic and the idiosyncratic. Naturalism, at the French instance; however tends to paint the unexceptional, the commonplace, and the ordinary. Since the French view seems to have cut right across the grain of English, except George Moore, there was no English naturalist in the French sense during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Allen rightly observes that during the period "between the mid-eighties and the period of 1914, while there is plenty of realism in English fiction there is little true Naturalism". Charles Child Walcutt, a modern American critic, observes "Literary naturalism moves among three patterns of ideas the religion of reason-nature, revealed in an enraptured contemplation of process of the attack on the dualist therefore unscientific values of the past

the recognition and slowly growing fear of natural forces that man might study but Walter Allens (1963:258) *The English Novel* (Phoenix House s London s 1963) apparently could not control".

A continuous tension exists between the ideal of perfect unity and the brutal facts of experience, and this tension is never resolved. Out of this never-resolved tension come the theses, motives, forms and styles through which naturalism finds its literary expression.

Naturalist major themes and motives are determinism, survival, violence, and taboo. The basic naturalist theme is however determinism which carries the idea that natural law and socioeconomic forces are more powerful than human will. Hence, man is not usually an agent of free will. Owing to the application of determinism to biological competition, the theme of survival grows. Survival is after all the supreme motive in animal life. It provides a point of view from which all emotion, motivation, and conflict may be approached. It fastens man to his physical roots. The theme of violence grows with the transfer of emphasis from tradition (super natural tradition) to survival. Animal survival is a matter of violence; it is a force against force. The animal motive of survival must have something to do with the expression of force and violence and with the exploration of man's capacities for such violence. It reveals, explores and emphasizes the lower nature of man. The theme of taboo emerges out of the theme of violence as an assault on a host of topics, like, diseases, bodily functions, obscenity, and depravity and so on.

Owing to the variability of styles and temperaments of individual artists, according to which, they select their external facts which equally vary from individual to individual, it is but natural that there cannot be a particular theme or a particular for a naturalistic novel. According to Charles Child Walcutt (1964:41), it may be called "scientific, experimental, objective, pessimistic, optimistic, despairing, revolutionary, sensational, mindless, and philosophical.

The naturalism exists in an experimental method, in the application of observation and experiment to literature. Zola himself is reported to have admitted that naturalism is only a method; it is a method of presenting the facts of life with scientific fidelity or of describing human behavior as closely related to the demonstrable material facts which have conditioned it.

One of the reasons for the popularity of naturalistic novel in America is that, unlike much modern fiction, it is fatally and strongly plotted. From *Mo Teague* to *Lie Down in Darkness*. The narrative as a "story" is a powerful characteristic of the naturalistic novel even

when it contains various experimental techniques. Another reason for its popularity may be its sensationalism. Frank Norris is reported to have said that terrible things must happen to the characters of a naturalistic tale.

A naturalistic novel in America is more or less a detailed documentation of the more sensationalist aspects of experience with heavily ideological (often allegorical) themes, the burden of the themes being to demonstrate that man is more circumscribed than ordinarily assumed. And this is perhaps congenial to the American temperament.

Again, most of the American naturalistic novels frequently contain significant tragic themes. One such theme may be that of the waste of the individual potential because of the conditioning forces of his life. The naturalistic tragic hero is a figure whose potential for growth is evident but who fails to develop because of the circumstances of his life. A second important tragic theme arises out of the failure of comparatively successful but essentially undistinguished figures to maintain in a shifting, uncertain world the order and stability they require to survive.

A third theme concerns the problem of knowledge. Man is alone and doubtful in an unknown world of struggle; he always searches in himself and in his experience for confirmation of a traditional value. Sometimes he may feel to have discovered the truth; but this is an illusion. For knowledge is elusive, shifting and perhaps nonexistent; yet man's tragic fate is still to yearn for it.

The American naturalistic novels of different periods also do not present a single dominant form or shape, but rather several recurring forms. One such recurring form is the novel of group defeat, in which a powerful social or economic force causes the fall of a particular class or group of men, even though some individuals in this group are able to push through to a semi-physical insight.

Another continuing form is the novel of questing, in which the protagonist seeks inconclusively in a shifting, ambivalent, and often destructive world some form of certainty about himself. A third form is the fall and death of figures completely overwhelmed by the conditions of their own lives. And a final form is the massive documentation of the failure of American society to offer an adequate context for the development of the "felt life" of the individuals. The American naturalistic novels presenting these recurring forms include *The Red Badge of Courage*. *Sister Carrie*. *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Maggie*. *Me Teague*. *Life*

Down in Darkness. *An American Tragedy*.

The American naturalists, however, markedly differ from one another in their respective style and temperament. Crane, for example, is a parodist impressionist, while Norris follows the genteel tradition but consciously exploits the forms and the subjects founded by Zola, Dreiser is a romantic realist. While Anderson with the most exquisite style, tenderly penetrates into the buried life until his social zeal dilutes his effectiveness. Steinbeck, as an engaging experimentalist, tries every new form with a great skill. Farrell, on the other hand, deeply enters a segment of American life which he loves as much as he hates. It is with an extraordinary particularity that he records the life of a place and an era, with a painful intensity in his personal involvement into it but also in his public protest against it.

In spite of their differences, these American naturalists have nevertheless come to share a new concept of physical-social process

5. Naturalistic Features in Hardy's Works

Expressing truly, Thomas Hardy is neither a true naturalist in the strict French sense of neither the term, nor a true realist in strict Victorian sense. His comparatively modern mind under a Victorian exterior makes Hardy follow a middle course. He is not too conservative to throw off bias Victorian background completely, nor is he radical enough to go wholly by his modern sensibility. It seems that he is a realist in so far as he is a Victorian and a naturalist in so far as he is a post Victorian. But whether he is Victorian or not, Hardy's realism and naturalism, far from acting in rivalry or producing any duality, seem to cooperate and coalesce to produce the same end, the end toing the futility of human endeavor; and this combination, again, is significant in that it gives rise to a peculiar modern note in him. For, Charles Morgan (1961:62) says that "a predominant modern note is one of futility and vertigo.

As a realist, Hardy is made to see into the "heart of a thing", and to reproduce what he sees by means of his imaginative reason. This has reference to Hardy's note book of January, (1881:2). And what he reproduces by virtue of his imaginative reason is invariably human predicament.

As a naturalist, Hardy seems to move from cause to effect, showing the gradual disintegration of the hero or heroine who is the victim of multiple circumstances and is led to his or her tragic destiny. Thus, whether Hardy is Victorian or post-Victorian, realist or naturalist, a deep tragic sensibility is the central that everywhere. Realism and naturalism seem to overlap in him. However, in the context of his modernism, it is important to look upon him more as a naturalist than as a realist. So, naturalism gives not merely a sense of loss and

alienation but also a sense of revolt, the two elements of modernism mentioned by Stephen Spender (1974:119).

The features of naturalism discernible in Hardy includes the predominance of heredity and environment; a causal sequence of narrative assertion; rigid deterministic plot; characters with strong animal drives; unpleasant and often uncongenial settings; the reduction of the protagonist into a pawn of multiple compulsions, and the inevitability of his misery, suffering and annihilation. Some other features of probable naturalistic origin are faithful posture of the primitive corner of England; the state of social transition from the old method to the new method of production; and the expression of comparatively radical view are also available in the Wessex novels.

Both heredity and environment have been given a prominent role in the Wessex novels in general and in the major Wessex novels in particular. Hardy seems to have been fascinated by the idea of heredity and environment in as much as acting and reacting on each other, they provide the staple of tragedy in the lives of Hardy's protagonists. Heredity gives them a character which make them a total misfit in the environment in which they are placed, while acme ethers are forcibly fitted into their environments, though not without the attendant pain and hardships o f fighting a lost battle.

The first group comprises such figures as Eustacia, Wildeve, Henehard, Giles, Tees, Jude and Sue, while the second group include Qathsheba, Oak, Cly Yeobright, Thomasin, Venn, Elizabeth, Grace and Dr, Fitzpiers, The unwelcome and painful interaction of heredity and environment leads Hardy's men and women to smart under a sense of loss ; they are made alienated and they at times break into rebellion.

A common charge against Hardy is that his novels abound in chance events, accidents or coincidences. No doubt, of chances, accidents or co-incidences occur frequently in Hardy, but we need not take a very serious view o f them for a number of reasons; life itself is not free from such irony of circumstances; Hardy's chances or accidents do not put too much strain on our credulity; and they are bound to serve to some extent the Hardlan thesis o f the omnipotence o f the malevolent destiny. Again, a close study of the Wessex novels is bound to give us the impression of a causal sequence of narrative assertion instead of the dominance of mere chances, accidents or coincidences.

Nothing appears to have been forced, and the various incidents are bound together by cause and effect relation incident arises from another which appears to be its cause and leads

to another which appears to be its effect, Duffin rightly observes! His coincidences are not forced they are always explicable, and sometime not!

In the exposition of every novel, Hardy prepares our reception of an introduction to the main characters. In the development of action, the central characters are found engaged in an unending struggle with their destiny or with forces beyond their control, and gradually the climax is reached. In the denouement, the fall of the hero or the heroine is found complete, being the logical outcome of earlier events or the natural consequence of earlier causes. Hardy, as a naturalist, seems to apply the principle of science to literature to demonstrate that every event must have a cause, and that nothing comes out of nothing. Hardy's prominent men and women are slighted, blighted and injured by their respective circumstances. They are given to suffer a sense of loss and alienation, and it naturally inspires in them a rebellion much to the distaste and disapproval of the time they belong to. Since Hardy tends to follow the causal sequence of narrative assertion, his plot is naturally deterministic, if not rigidly deterministic. Hardy's prominent men and women are often incapable of adjustment to their respective situation due not only to their heredity and environment but also to their fatal interaction. They can throw off neither their heredity nor their environment; nor can they stop the unpleasant interaction of their heredity and environment. Eustacia, Wildeve, Henchard, Tess, Jude and Sue are perhaps the best examples of this scheme and condition of life. Theirs is a life lived in long drawn misery, agony, frustration, anxiety ending in death. Their infinite sufferings give them the dimension of a tragic world in which they can only taste the bitterness of a comparatively modern sense of loss, alienation and revolt. To present such a sad and somber theme as this, the plot cannot but be deterministic and tragic.

Further, Hardy's prominent men and women are a pawn to multiple compulsions, and in consequence most of them are either doomed to death or those who finally survive are left with a broken heart. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Sergeant Troy entices Fanny Robin, forces upon the innocent maiden the motherhood of an illegitimate child, but ultimately abandons her and marries Bathsheba. But immediately after Fanny's death, Troy suffers from a mental remorse which is too deep to be easily overcome and in consequence he deserts Bathsheba for a number of years.

The Wessex novels in general and the *Mayer of Casterbridge*, the *Woodland* era *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* in particular record, among other things, the state of transition in society from backward forms of production to modern ones. These novels chart the changes and disorders in the Southern English Communities, owing to severe

economic disturbances in the agricultural and economic life of the English people in general. They explore a related dislocation of human values, resulting from the introduction of new forms of commerce, as well as the disordering of human attitudes promoted by the gradual introduction of the modern forms of occupation. According to Raymond Williams (1974:82), the slow gradation of classes is characteristic of capitalism anywhere, and of rural capitalism very clearly even before Hardy's birth, rural capitalism began to be developed, and during his life time. It assumed a distinct form to introduce new forms of occupation in replacement of the age-old occupations of the rural society.

Their general tenor reflects the predicament and the gradual destruction of the agricultural community of Southern England under the pressure of these powerful economic forces. The facts of the Wessex agricultural society presented by Hardy may be stem, sometimes bewildering, but are nevertheless faithful and accurate.

6. Findings

- 1) The sordid and painful events of the English society are explored by Hardy in his Wessex chronicles, with the accuracy of a naturalist and almost with the feeling heart of a poet and a profound novelist.
- 2) Most of Hardy's novels are in the broad sense historical novels reflects naturalism in many aspects.
- 3) The novels of Hardy derive much of their power and strength from the actual gradual destruction of a stable agricultural society by the inroads of nineteenth century industrialization.
- 4) Hardy's novels chart the changes and disorders in the Southern English Communities, owing to severe economic disturbances in the agricultural and economic life of the English people in general.
- 5) Hardy turned deaf ears to the immediate causes of those evils and their derived and motive, he prefer to treat the effects of those evils instead to draw up a plausible solution to his plots conflicts in this sense Hardy surpassed his fellow novelists of the time and is worthy of being entitled a talented novelist.

7. Conclusions

Accordingly, Hardy has chosen a setting, no matter whether rural or urban, but which is not only in itself dull and depressing but also unpleasant and unfavorable to the most of his prominent men and women endings.

This may be quite clearly manifested by Hardy throughout his novel as he made much effort to describe nature, social condition and conflicts of people from among the middle and lower classes paying special attention to women's cause in terms of the search for self-steam, justice and equality.

It is perhaps interesting enough to remark that the works of Hardy largely under the influence of realism as an artistic and literary movement which the Victorian age witness and which was itself the outcome of the combination of classicism with all its reasons, discipline, symmetry and order together with romanticism with all its emotion fantasy reverie and vivid imagination.

References

- 1) A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism (1999) Essay in Criticism. Vol. XVI, No, 3, Oxford.
- 2) Bigmouth. K. (1999) *Essays in Criticism*. A Quarterly Journal of Literary
- 3) Duffin, H, C. (1957) *Thomas Hardy*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- 4) Hardy, F.E. (1990) *The Life of Thomas Hardy*. Macmillan: London.
- 5) Hardy, Thomas (1957) *Jude the Obscure*. Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London.
- 6) Kettle, Arnold. (2001) *The Nineteenth Century Novel*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd: London.
- 7) Morgan, Charles (2011) *The Writer & His Worlds*. New Edition. Macmillan: London
- 8) Watt, Ian. (2008) *The Victorian Novel*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- 9) Williams, Raymond. (1974) *The English Novels*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.