



Ulusallararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 7 Sayı: 32 Volume: 7 Issue: 32

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

## 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,

wanted and loved by no one. He forms his relationship with Arabella out of need for affection and attention but after their marriage he still feels lonely because there is no mutual understanding, friendship or emotional attachment between them.

Despite having hard and harsh life, Jude preserves his gentle and sensitive character. He is kind and caring towards humans and animals, but this positive characteristic is always punished, not rewarded. Feeding birds on the farm as a little boy, he is kicked and humiliated by the farmer. Jude's kindness can also be seen in the scene of pig killing. He sees the killing as "hateful business" (51). Being sensitive to women, Jude cannot hurt Arabella's feelings and is double deceived into marrying her.

Jude lives in the world of dreams. From his childhood he has been obsessed with dreams of entering university, becoming a scholar or bishop of some sort. "It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to; for some place which he would call admirable. ...It is a city of light, he said to himself. The Tree of Knowledge grows there" (19-20). Mr. Phillotson, the schoolmaster, in his farewell with Jude tells him about the dazzling life of city and exciting academic life: "You know what a university is, and a university degree? It is the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching. My scheme, or my dream, is to be a graduate, and then to be ordained" (4). This statement arouses Jude's zest for knowledge and academic achievement. From that moment on, he starts the assiduous process of self-education, self-cultivation and finally self-punishment. He undertakes to learn Greek and Latin in spite of their difficulties in order to acquire the necessary qualification to be recognized as a scholar. His painstaking study combined with work devoid of any rest or leisure is disciplines and punishment in the form of exercise. "The disciplinary systems favor punishments that are exercise intensified, multiplied forms of training, several times repeated" (Foucault, DP 179). All his endeavors are doomed to fail. But, the dream of education occupies his mind up to his death and is the source of suffering for him.

Jude's insatiable longing for knowledge soon begins to be replaced by traps of love and sexual affairs. "The replacement of the Platonic ideal by the very earthy Arabella marks the transition in Jude from dreamer to struggler" (Blok 155). As soon as Jude is actually married to Arabella, his desire for her virtually ends, due largely to his realization of her deceptions. The revelation of Arabella's "mistake" in declaring herself pregnant is the necessary condition for Jude's transition to a truly tragic figure (156).

Shortly after Jude's separation from Arabella, he finds his cousin Sue Bridehead. Sue is a woman who loves and adores Jude but their relation cost them separation and exclusion from the whole world. "The joyless pain evoked by Sue and Jude's relationship is not cancelled or even dented by Sue's strained assertion at the Great Wessex Agricultural Show as they saunter around the flowers, [that they are] unable to evoke even a spark of pleasure in Little Father Time" (Ingham xix). Little Father Time, the reflective son of Jude and Arabella and the most lugubrious and isolated character, experiences major detachment from the world. Abandoned and ignored by his mother, he starts his short-lived life hunting for a matriarchal figure. Finally being handed over to Jude and Sue, he regards himself and his siblings as burden to them. "If we children was gone there'd be no trouble at all!" (Hardy 353). Father Time feels guilty and blames his existence, "I wish I hadn't been born!" (323). He finally hangs himself and Jude and Sue's children, ironically, to relieve family's suffering.

Sue blames herself for the tragedy since she believes her discourse with the boy motivates him to do this murderous/ suicidal act. But most importantly she associates tragedy as a punishment for flouting religion and conventions. She reverts to passive and submissive Christian and she says, "Arabella's child killing mine was a judgment; the right slaying the wrong" (338). Inflicted by the pain of guilt, Sue ends her relationship with Jude and yields to a loveless but morally valid marital relationship with her former husband. Through her act of self-punishment Sue suffers from states of contrition, failure and loneliness. Sue, Jude's soul-mate and fellow-sinner, "has never found peace since she left his [Jude] arms, and never will

again till she's as he is [dead] now!" (397). It is only through death that she can be granted freedom and peace.

Having lost on all fronts because of his ambitious, idealistic and sentimental nature, heavily imbued with a passionate sexual appetite which clashes with an equivalently forceful spirituality, Jude seemingly loses in his battle and he becomes a self-loathing outcast (Inglizi 216). He regards himself as "a wicked worthless fellow" (Hardy 85). He is in "constant internal warfare between flesh and spirit" (185). Although Jude is depicted as a young man endowed with great ambitions, he remains all his life the obscure, poor and naïve 'stone-mason' and ends up as an invalid and alienated man.

Ironically, the academic ceremony of conferring degrees takes place at the day when Jude dies. "It's Remembrance Week, you know. The cheers come from the young men.' 'Ay, young and strong-lunged. Not like our poor boy here" (396). His death is indication of the death of dream, hope and ambition once and for all. Death is the only avenue for Jude, the tortured prisoner, to break his mental prison and to put an end to this unending punishment.

## 2- Panoptic Societies

*"The most sacred thing is to be able to shut your own door."*— G.K. Chesterton

Hardy illustrates how Victorian society of *Jude the Obscure* is a coward prisoner of barbarous superstitions, traditions, and conventions. Jude's aunt keeps warning him against getting tied into bonds of marriage: "Jude, my child, don't you ever marry. Tisn't for the Fawleys to take that step any more" (8). She believes that failed marriage runs in their family. After deciding to enter a college, Jude labors to learn dead languages of Latin and Greek since that is what a student is "asked" to do.

At a very young age Jude is forced to marry Arabella because she mistakenly thinks she is carrying his child. He unwillingly marries her to fulfill social conventions and customs:

He knew well, too well, in the secret centre of his brain, that Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind. Yet, such being the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences. (51-2)

Jude has been impacted by rigid orthodox and social principles and values. He is ready to give up his dreams and desires to satisfy the demands and expectations of society. He believes that "For Sue to be the loved one of a man who was licensed by the laws of his country to love Arabella and none other unto his life's end, was a pretty bad second beginning" (92). Clearly, he is instilled by stern Christian doctrines which stipulate that once a person gets married, he should be loyal to his partner till they are parted by death.

According to Foucault, one mode of exercising control over multiplicities is via binary division and branding: normal/abnormal, sane/mad, moral/immoral, etc. Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* claims "power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means ... that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden" (83). Victorian society by the power of church and religion enforces this law: legal and permitted use of sex for married couples and for the sake of reproduction and illegal and forbidden sex outside matrimony for pleasure. "Power acts by laying down the rule: power's hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law" (83).

For Sue marriage is not a religious but a legal ceremony. She argues "If a marriage ceremony is a religious thing, it is possibly wrong; but if it is only a sordid contract, based on material convenience... which it seems to be—why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her?" (Hardy 201). Sue sees no difference

between business in the market place and legalistic marriage in the church. In this sense, "the British novelist D.H. Lawrence argues that Sue considers marriage as a submission, a service [and] slavery" (qtd. In Ihaddadene 26). She regards marriage as "vulgar legal institution—a sort of trap to catch a man" (Hardy 261). Unlike Sue, Arabella believes only through conformism to conventions can she satisfy her sexual desires and material needs. She incites Sue to legally marry Jude because she thinks "Life with a man is more business-like after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you" (259).

Sue tries to represent herself as liberate character as she says "I shall do just as I choose!" (148). Although Sue believes in artificiality of the standards and mores of society and tries to revolt against them, most of the times she bends to them and represents perfectly docile and well-normalized woman. "An awe, or terror, of conventions I don't believe in. It comes over me at times like a sort of creeping paralysis, and makes me so sad!" (319). Society has dictated its discourse into Sue's thought. This "creed-drunk" (378) woman has internalized the society's dogma that her sex is inferior one, "but I was a coward—as so many women are" (213). In fact, she falls tragically in her life since society has shaped her mind into closing her eyes to her true sexual desires and needs and to sheepishly obey all its demands and codes. Sue fails to express her love for Jude since loving a cousin is not normal thus against her heart, She marries to her teacher, Phillotson, to act according to the norms of morality.

Jude and Sue are necessarily at war with dogma, with regulations, with rules of conduct (Millgate 331). Their ideas about marriage and religion fly in the face of long-established definitions and codes of Victorian atmosphere. To put it differently, their resistance to comply with the dominant discourse of conventional marriage, renders them minorities the marginalized, the "others".

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* states that lepers and plagues were treated as abnormal individuals who should have been branded or altered. "Leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion" "and then the plague gave rise to "disciplinary project" (198). Foucault notes that Panopticon is the architectural figure of these two leprosy-stricken and plague-suffered societies. He emphasizes that even in the modern time the government, alter or brand abnormal individuals via the same mechanisms: surveillance and the discipline.

Jude and Sue like lepers and plagues stand as dangerous and abnormal individuals that community must brand and alter. Every single step taken by them is followed by thousands of eyes. Jude and Sue's attitudes towards marriage as a social institution are antithesis of dominant views of society therefore they must be ostracized. "They renounce the subject positions of husband and wife to fashion themselves in the way they desire...not in accordance with the models prescribed by society" (qtd. In Tanoori 158). They are singled out for punishment and receive their penalty through surveillance and control of community. "Nobody molested them, it is true; but an oppressive atmosphere began to encircle their souls" (Hardy 288). They are like Foucauldian prisoner "object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault, DP 40). These two social outsiders are depicted as prisoners in the world in which they desperately struggle to let themselves free of its shackles.

Sue enters Training College by the help and influence of Phillotson. Training College stands as a site of constraint and repression wherein obedient individuals are subjected to habits, rules and orders. In Training College "the girls in the class sit with folded arms" (Hardy 136) and Sue is transformed into "a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline" (136). Sue is reported deviant and sentenced to confinement by the Training-School authorities for being with Jude. "She had been severely reprimanded, and ordered to a solitary room for a week" (136). "Solitude must be a positive instrument of reform" and "is the primary condition of total submission" (Foucault, DP 237).

Phillotson's decision to let Sue go with Jude is made out of sympathy for her. He says "it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won't be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!" (Hardy 222). He believes humans should be given freedom to act and think as they like, as long as it does not hurt anybody. Moreover, Phillotson equates law with cruelty and cannot bear "to be cruel to her in the name of the law" (226). However, Phillotson is condemned by Victorian society for condoning his wife's adultery. He is degraded and stripped of his position as a schoolmaster. "The distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role... it punishes and rewards" (Foucault, DP 181). Accordingly, he is punished, deprived of his 'rank' (subject position) as a respectable man and is assigned a lower rank in discourse as a dishonorable man (Tanoori 164). He is called eccentric and immoral. "He is subjected to the disciplinary power of the Foucauldian gaze and normalizing judgment, operated by the educational system and religious community, and is conceived to be the transgressor of the norms of morality" (164). These pressures imposed on Phillotson by society, put him in conflict between his own decision and social expectations. His dilemma reveals that human beings are restricted to exercise free will in social environment.

To produce law-abiding citizens, society has constrained freedom of thought and action of its members. Sue has to hide her naked and pagan statues from the eyes of people. "she wrapped up her burden as well as she could in these, so that what she carried appeared to be an enormous armful of green stuff, gathered by a zealous lover of nature" (Hardy 88). It is also Sue who states: "the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns" (197).

Jude is offered the job of repainting the Ten Commandments in a little church. Sue intends to render assistance so she accompanies him. The Church is empty and quiet but they are monitored with religious people such as vicar, bishop and churchwarden who found the couple queer people with strange history. Afraid of posing threat, authorities dismiss Jude and Sue from the job. Sue expresses her surprise: "I had no idea that anybody was going to intrude into such a lonely place and see us!" (292). They are subjected to the Foucauldian power of the gaze, judged according to the norms of Victorian moral and religious discourses, labelled deviants and excluded (Tanoori 160). People refuse to give them accommodation and order since as Jude says "even a baker must be conventional, to get customers" (Hardy 225). Reduced to nomadic life, they move from place to place on interminable search for home but the existence of gaze like oxygen in the atmosphere of any point of the world is inevitable. Jude in an answer to Father Time explains the reason for their leaving: "Because of a cloud that has gathered over us" (297). Jude is gradually pushed from public domain into the margins of it and at the end to the confinement of his room altogether.

Every member of their community is representation of single surveiller that cast its disciplinary gaze on Jude and Sue; they are spied, gossiped and judged. Foucault points out that "[Panopticon] had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attention ever on the alert" (DP 214). Member of the society seem to be endowed with perpetual control which is result of unceasing surveillance. They cast their eyes on those that seem to evade the set of norms and ordinances rooted in the community.

Jude and Sue's final notoriety is gained by shocking death of their children: "Accounts in the newspaper had brought to the spot curious idlers, who stood apparently counting the window-panes and the stones of the wall. Doubt to the relations of the couple added zest to their curiosity" (Hardy 329). Sue's self-sacrificing return to Phillotson's bed after losing her beloved offspring clearly reveals her normalized and docile identity. "We must conform! She said mournfully. All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us. His poor creatures and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!" (331). Sue at the end of the novel defines herself as "a poor wicked woman who is trying to mend" (349). She prefers conformity over her romantic union.

The tragic fate of Jude and Sue can be used as an evidence to show repressive Victorian period does not welcome or support the unconventional, nonconformist and iconoclastic discourses of marriage and sexuality. As Jude says, "the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us" (388). The marginalized characters are helpless victim of the age which does not approve of purely physical love and unwed parents. Hardy shows how restricted society interferes with the private lives of suppressed and defeated Jude and Sue and causes suffering and pain.

### Conclusion

Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* compares power relations in different societies from different epochs. In the Middle Ages application of power used to be visible, punishment public and corporeal. In the Modern age power has become hidden and the so called 'humanized' punishment deeply penetrates into the heart, the soul, the thought. In essence, this is the "gentle way in punishment" (Foucault, DP 104). Surveillance is another instrument or mechanism of power to which Victorian society are subjected. Discipline is outcome of surveillance which monitors and controls the way we behave, talk, hear, or see the world. Characters in this story are depicted as self-disciplined individuals who are fabricated by interiorized codes, discourse and norms of various institutions in their society. All human beings, ancient or modern, white or black, man or woman, are all slaves. We are born enchained, we are born into bondage. We live in prison that we cannot see, smell or touch.

### REFERENCES

- Blok, Marijke C. *Fate and the Hand of Hardy: A Comparative Study of Five of His Works and Their Relative Success*. Diss. U of Brunswick, 2000. Canada: UMI, 2000. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- . "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", in *The Ethics of subjectivity and truth*. vol. I of *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley and others, New York: New Press, 1997.
- . *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Foucault, Michel and Colin Gordon. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Ihaddadene, Boussaad. "The Conflict between the Ideal and the Social in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*". Diss. U of Mentouri, 2010. Print.
- Ingham, Patricia. Introduction. *Jude the Obscure*. By Thomas Hardy. Oxford: UP, 2002.
- Inglizi, Yousif N. "Negotiating the Gothic in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy". Diss. U of Birmingham, 2002. Print.
- Millgate, Michael. *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*. London: The Bodley Head, 1971.
- Tanoori, Khatereh. "Men and 'Presence': Constructions of Masculinity in Selected Novels of Thomas Hardy". Diss. U of Newcastle, 2012. Print.
- Zolfagharkhani, Moslem. "The Panoptic World of Lord Jim: A Foucauldian Approach". Diss. U of Shiraz, Oct. 2002. Print.