

Concept of Individual in *Jude, the Obscure*: A Foucaultian Look

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the concept of power in the works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. First, Foucault's definition of the term is given and his digression from the old understanding of power is discussed. The second part focuses on the normalization which is considered to be the most important strategy of disciplinary power to exercise its effects on individuals. The next part deals with power and its relation to resistance and 'care of the self'. Also, it gives Foucault's notion of the individual as a free agency capable of resisting power relation through applying techniques of 'care of the self'. This paper further tries to clarify the process of power in the novel and also the reaction of the main characters to it.

KEYWORDS: individual, Foucault, power, self

INTRODUCTION

The struggle to gain power can be seen in all aspects of life and in all kinds of relationships among people, either public or personal. This struggle can be traced in the relationships between parents and children, teachers and students, lovers and friends and also between government and groups. The aim of this struggle is to gain victory and dominance over others and to confirm one's own superior position and authority. At the same time the others try to reserve this position to their own advantage. Different definitions of power have been given at different stages of history. There have been many interpretations of it, and this makes it impossible to give a clear definition of power. Throughout history power has mostly been considered an object, as something that is in possession of the powerful through which they oppress the powerless and force them to do things that they are not willing to. It has been known as the ability of some people who can control and influence the choices of the other people to their own personal benefits. Therefore, power has mostly been seen as something evil and unjust.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the growth and care of population increasingly became the primary concern of the state and this brought about the emergence of a new mechanism of power in Europe. This new mechanism of power was not compatible with the relations of sovereignty. It was "more dependent upon bodies" and what they did than "upon earth and its products" (Foucault, 1980, P. 104). What this mechanism of power aimed at was to extract from bodies, time and labor, whereas "the theory of sovereignty is something which refers to the displacement and appropriation on the part of power [...] of goods and wealth" (ibid). The new mechanism of power centered on administration and management of life and came together around two poles. One pole is concerned with the control of population as a whole and focuses on the management of the population's life process. It involves regulating phenomena such as birth, death, sickness, disease, health, sexual relations and so on. Foucault calls this pole "bio-power". The other pole is called "disciplinary power" and treats the human body as an object that is to be manipulated and trained through institutions such as schools, barracks, hospitals and etc". (Rabinow, 1991, pp. 262-267).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examines the way that power operates at particular historical periods. The book is a history of the penal system. Foucault investigates how the exercise of power in Europe has changed through time. He starts by giving a detailed description of the stages through which a victim was tortured and executed in public. Then he cites a list of rules for the regulation of the time of the criminals in prison about eighty years later. By this juxtaposition he tries to show the enormous change that has taken place in the way of treating criminals during this period. One important feature is the disappearance of torture; the body of criminal disappeared from the view. Punishment as spectacle disappeared; the exhibition of prisoners, the pillory and the public execution ended and the old system of public execution changed into confinement and surveillance. However, Foucault believes that this change is not an improvement, but only a change in kind: "it is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage the crime" (9). In other words, people do not obey the law as the result of their fear of severe physical punishment; their conformity is created by the application of power-relations and the setting of norms so that subjects themselves monitor their own actions and conform to the laws and conventions of their society because of their fear of being labeled abnormal. As Miller (1970, P. 43) asserts

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“Foucault does not believe that lethal injection in the United States, in which no pain is experienced or the electronic tagging of criminals in Britain are necessarily more civilized than inflicting intolerable pain”

Foucault argues that this change in the form of punishment has caused a shift in the forms of power which function within society. One clear example is the shift from the power of sovereign to the exercise of power within the social body. Foucault does not see this shift from absolute monarchial power as a result of greater democracy. As mentioned before, he believes that the new, local, capillary forms of power have eliminated the need for a court and a king (ibid). We can say that the power is still present, only it is disposed differently.

According to During (1999, P. 130) “The modern definition of power then starts with Foucault’s construction of what we can call a new ontology of power” which is against the traditional or sovereign power. He tries to change this view towards power as an object that is owned by the powerful and by means of which they oppress the powerless. “He considers it more a net or chain and tries to examine the way that power operates between people and institutions in everyday relations” (Miller, 1970, P. 33). To him it is something which is done and performed in a certain context, and as Mills states, “Foucault does not define power as something “which can be held onto” but as something that is performed “something more like a strategy than possession” (35). Foucault (1980) explains his view in an interview entitled “The Eye of Power”:

One doesn’t have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over the others. It is a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised... Power is no longer substantially identical with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes machinery that no one owns. (P. 156).

During (1999, P. 119) claims “Whereas in classical society, power was fixed, visible, mappable” Foucault’s radical revision of what power is considers it as “uncontainable, untheorizable and productive”. The fixed and visible sovereign power was embodied in the presence of the king, queen, prince or the ruler, and their physical being itself symbolized power. The sovereign usually exercised his/her power by using destructive force like executions and violent suppressions; his/her aim was to destroy the enemy. However, once this “new mode of exercise of power” was established its “local, capillary form... impelled [the] society to eliminate certain elements such as the court and king” who now seemed fantastic personages “at once archaic and monstrous” (Foucault, 1980, Pp. 38-39). This new form of power that has emerged in modern times is productive which means it is rooted in the social texture, circulates through it and controls people through normalization.

What is normal in a society is defined through different sciences and through social trends. They set standards of normality and consequently classify individuals as normal and abnormal. Hence people constantly try to regulate themselves in order not to be categorized as abnormal. In other words we can say that modern power does not operate by being visible but by making its non-conformist target flagrant or too visible.

Foucault considers power a general condition in society: “Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted ‘above’ society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. In any case, to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible – and in fact ongoing” (quoted in During, 1999 P. 131). Although some people may control the actions of other people, still in Foucault’s terms power is not possibly possessed by an agent or the state, since “as a precondition for an ‘action upon action’ power is ‘relational’” (During, P. 132). It is spread throughout the society and circulates through it like a “network” or a “net of relations” (Miller, 1970, P. 30). Foucault (1980) explains:

In speaking of domination I do not have in mind that solid and global kind of domination that one person exercises over others, or one group over another, but the manifold forms of domination that can be exercised within society. Not the domination of the king in his central position, but that of his subjects in their mutual relations: not the uniform edifice of sovereignty, but the multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism (96).

According to this we can conclude that the dominant themselves are confined within the power network.

For Foucault, power is something which is present in all types of relationships and should be analyzed as something which circulates or something that

functions in the form of a chain”. It is a net like organization in which individuals “are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power”. They are not just the targets of power, but the means through which it is exercised. They help in articulating power and are not only “its point of application” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, P. 98).

So rather than considering it an entity locating in a centralized position, Foucault “is interested in local forms of power” (Miller, P. 36) and in the way that they are met by individuals and organization:

I am not referring to power with capital P, dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have

different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration. (Miller, P. 35).

So all kinds of relations between among are power relations and in each interaction power is negotiated and, no matter how flexible it may be, a hierarchy is established (Miller, P. 49) and this hierarchy is constantly being challenged.

This everyday challenge, in which power is continually performed and completed, is foregrounded by Foucault. This way, individuals are presented as active rather than passive and weak subjects, and power is not viewed in a negative way as something that only constrains people, censors individuals and limits freedom but as something that can be productive by bringing about new forms of behavior.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault presents disciplinary power whose aim is to create certain types of individuals. The central technique of disciplinary power is the constant surveillance. Its initial aim was to discipline the body, but Foucault describes the way of how it takes hold of the mind by creating psychological state of "conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, P. 201). Observation and the gaze became key instruments of power. They create a sense of constant self-awareness that defines the subject.

Individual (Subject)

In rejecting the notion of power as a primarily repressive and negative force, Foucault insisted that power is fundamentally productive. Power as Foucault puts it

does not only weigh on us as a force that says no; it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body..." (quoted in Piomelli, 2004, P.436)

To Foucault, the relationships in which people and groups shape the behavior and conduct of others do not just stop or prevent behavior, but often affirmatively create or motivate it. According to him, power teaches; it molds conduct; it incites desire. Our superiors, peers, and situations do not just prevent us from doing things they encourage us to think, act, and understand ourselves in particular ways. In all of these ways power is productive: it produces behavior, traits, values, and desires, etc. It is important to recognize that "productive" for Foucault, does not necessarily mean constructive or beneficial; in his view modern forms of power have often produced misery. Nonetheless, when Foucault spoke of power as productive he deliberately sought to detach it from negative connotations of power as evil. For Foucault power is always dangerous; it can result in good or evil- neither is guaranteed.

In Foucault's view some of the most important things that power produces are subjects. Foucault intended this term in at least three different senses. First, in what one might think of as the grammatical sense, power produces subjects who act, rather than simply objects upon whom others act. The distinction is between an active agent rather than a passive victim. Second, as an echo of the sovereign-subject relationship, power produces subjects who are tied to others by modifiable bonds of obligation or control. And third, power creates subjects as a philosophical term for a self: a person (or group) with an identity and self-understanding –in Foucault' more pejorative formulation, a subject "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge".(p. 437). Thus, who we are, how we relate to ourselves, even our very identities and actions are all products of power-products of our interactions in human relationships.

For Foucault individuals and groups are "neither preformed before they engage in power relations, nor unchanged by those relations" (ibid); in Foucault's view our participation in power relations literally makes us who we are. For him it is the push and pull of human relationships that shape us as individuals and groups- as others seek to manage us, we succumb to and resist those efforts, and in turn we seek to steer the conduct of others, as well as to mold ourselves. Foucault stated in a 1976 lecture:

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike... in fact it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. (quoted in Piomelli, P. 438)

Hence, individual to Foucault is dynamic and capable of change. S/he is not the absolute slave of the conditions s/he lives in; but there is enough space to act and perform one's own ethics. The individual that Foucault has in mind is a free subject who can either succumb to the norms of society or act in one's own way. Since according to Foucault power is dynamic and productive, and resistance is inherent to it the individual has the space for acting in the power relation in a way that s/he can be far from the docile body who simply acts as normalized society demands. The Foucaultian individual is one who can be both the slave of normalization and the free subject who acts according to his/her own ethics while still lives within the very normalized society.

Foucault urges his readers to refuse or resist being governed in the ways we currently are, to reject the identity and subjectivity- "the manner in which we behave and in which we become conscious of ourselves"- that is presented to and imposed on us. He encouraged us, by applying techniques of the self, to practice our liberty to invent new forms of subjectivity; that is, he urged us to think, act and relate to ourselves differently than in the ways we are programmed or managed. As he wrote in 1982: "we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of... [the] kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries." In his words "liberty is a practice ... Liberty is what must be exercised." (quoted in Piomelli, P.444) Just as said in the above section of Power, Resistance, and Care for the Self, Foucault believes that one cannot get rid of the normalization process and the normalized society unless s/he makes a self, an identity that is purely self-made and conscious of the condition surrounding him/her.

DISCUSSION

Sue and the Illusion of a New Self

Sue seems to be a different woman, a woman who has not succumbed to the conventions and arbitrary norms of her society. She may seem to have already gone through the process of self-formation successfully. When we see her just as Jude gets surprised by her liberal ideas, we cannot help it but to believe that she is "a striking model of advanced womanhood, aligning herself with Mill and striving to attain a high and beautiful level of existence" (Hardy, 1998, P. 156); she herself describes her this way:

My life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them-one or two of them particularly-almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel-to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue; for no average man-no man short of a sensual savage- will molest a woman by day or night, at home or abroad, unless she invites him. [...] However, what I was going to say is that when I was eighteen I formed a friendly intimacy with an undergraduate at Christminster, and he taught me a great deal, and lent me books which I should never get hold of otherwise. (72)

As it is evident from this quotation, Sue is brought up in an environment that allows her to practice other alternatives than the immediate expectations of her class. She is brought up by her father in town— her mother's early death hardly leaves any impact upon her life. Christminster is a big city that offers plenty of opportunities to people desiring to practice new realms. Sue has been free from a rigid discipline; it seems that her father did not care a lot about her conduct that she has been able to move among men so freely. She has received plenty of education that has helped her to form a sort of intellect quite different from other women.

This quality of her personality she herself confesses that is due to her graduate friend: "I have no respect for Christminster whatever, except, in a qualified degree, on its intellectual side, [...] My friend I spoke of took that out of me. He was the most irreligious man I ever knew, and the most moral. And intellect at Christminster is new wine in old bottles. The medievalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go." (73) It means that she has not acquired this view of world by her own searching and penetrating into world but by imitating her graduate friend who seems that she has been fascinated by his novel ideas and conduct. Hence, Sue has not been able to take advantage of her encouraging environment effectively. She has only touched the surface and has not been able to go to the depth of realities. She has a critical view which is not truly her own but a sort of illusion. She criticizes the conventions and norms of society but whenever it comes to act seriously she fails to perform her own views; that is "Sue falls far short of her modernity. Her penchant is decidedly for discussion rather than action." (156)

She assumes she is liberal both in thinking and action but deep in her personality she is a well normalized woman who could not resist norms of society actively and effectively. In fact, Sue has been familiar with new revolutionary ideas and has been fascinated with them without being prepared actually to practice them. She has never been able to effectively use the three elements necessary for "care for the self" which Foucault believes one should consider so that create a new self-capable of resisting the norms within the very normalized system. She is familiar with critical thinking and has a good knowledge of her time yet she is not well aware of the condition she lives in, the consequence of her decisions, and above all her own identity as a normalized individual.

When she fails to act as she thinks she relates her failure either to the normalized society or to her own gender as a woman that since she is woman she has not enough courage to exercise her unconventional ideas. Once, she reveals her distress at her marriage to Jude as follows:

...before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me- there is no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced. So I rushed on, when I had got into that training school scrape, with all the cock-sureness of the fool that I was!.. I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what

one had done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women, only they submit, and kick. When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what WILL they say! (105)

In this scene she associates her failure to two causes, first her own ignorance at the time of marriage, and then the norms of society that once one commits a mistake do not allow them to undone it. However, Sue relates her failure at marriage to her own sex when explaining her feeling to Pinion: "But I was a coward-as so many women are- and my theoretic unconventionality broke down." (109) This way she accepts her own fault as well as society's severs norms that force individuals to act against their will.

Sue unfortunately never tries to overcome her weakness and keeps standing against norms by means of her fragile new self which is more an illusion than a real new self. This makes her act timidly and always in need of Jude to help her keep her alternative pose. After leaving her husband which actually needs a great courage on her part, she cannot face world without Jude. Even to find courage to leave her husband she needs her husband's consent so that she can leave him with least twinge of conscience because she is not truly sure that she has the right to leave her legal husband on the ground that she does not love him: "Wouldn't the woman, for example, be very bad-natured if she didn't like to live with her husband; merely [...] because she had a personal feeling against it-a physical objection-a fastidiousness, or whatever it may be called- although she might respect and be grateful to him?" (102)

Sue's next endeavor to practice her own ethics and test her so-called new self is her insistence on not marrying Jude even when they are both divorced from their ex-spouses and they need to marry for the sake of their adopted son; Arabella's son. She resists marrying Jude though she claims that she loves him best. Her reason for not submitting to marriage institution is that she believes that marriage spoils their love. She criticizes marriage institution severely and rejects it absolutely. The problem with Sue is that she considers marriage institution by itself a real entity that would bring disastrous outcomes to her love. She fails to see that it is not marriage institution that is responsible for the unsatisfactory condition of married couples but their absolute acceptance of the norms of marriage without criticizing them and choosing the appropriate alternatives other than the immediate norms of marriage. She absolutely rejects marriage without considering it carefully and critically. She condemns it for being responsible for her first failure in marriage just as she considers it to be responsible for Jude's tragic marriage as well. Whereas the problem lies within Sue herself; the fact that she is deeply normalized and when accepts an institution she cannot help it but to obey its demands absolutely. She is not strong enough to shed off the norms away and choose her own way according to her ethics. In fact, unlike her modern appearance, Sue is much more normalized than Jude. She knows they are wrong but she has been so deeply accustomed to them that she cannot act according to her liberal ideas.

Sue has acquired a new self but she did not create it. The self that she has is fragile since it is only an illusion, a shadow of a true new self-made by her efforts through possessing self-formation. Sue has never truly used the three decisive elements mentioned by Foucault as necessary for creating a new self. Her environment has been enough encouraging yet instead of carefully and critically viewing the world and the reality of her time; she has imitated the intellectual pose of her graduate friend and just in a parrot-fashion repeats his views and the quotations of liberal thinkers such as Mills. She has never truly understood the meaning of what she claims to believe. Hence, whenever a test of her ethics appears she simply prefers to leave the situation instead of staying and finding some alternative within the very situation. Foucault believes that resistance is not outside power relation but it occurs in the very system that forces individual to act normally. But Sue prefers to leave the situation because she knows that her new self is not strong enough to stand against the normalization effect; hence, she leave her job and then the training school due to her weakness. Sue, who's self is still a normalized one that she has disguised it under a sort of modern mask cannot resist power relation surrounding her and only leaves situation for somewhere more safe. That is why she bitterly fears to enter another marriage relation. She cannot directly touch the situations.

She knows that how her 'self' is vulnerable and hence avoids it being tested. However, she cannot keep this strategy of escape a long time. When her children are killed by Arabella's son, she ultimately breaks down and reveals her true self; the normalized one which is an absolute servant of norms. This self is so docile that makes Jude disgust church that he believes responsible for it. However, in contrast to Jude's judgment this self is not resulted from the force of church all at once but it is the product of the normalization effect of the society, church including of course, that Sue was born to and brought up by its norms. Sue only has hidden it for a while and pretended to shed it off. In fact, she has never been able to create a new self.

The tragedy of Sue is that she knows that her identity is not a genuine one but the product of the arbitrary conventions of her society, yet she is not strong enough to go through the process of self-creation. Hence, she remains in a contradictory situation for ever. The dilemma of being a normalized subject or trying to be free by experimenting with a new mode of being a self remains with her and tortures her permanently. She is a normalized individual who knows that she must not be such a docile one but due to her wrong practice of self-formation which

doomed to defeat she dares not to stand against the norms any more. Her knowledge of her normalized subjectivity is her hell.

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