

A Social Class in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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ABSTRACT

This study is about a social class that plays a very important role in the life and death of the main character in Thomas Hardy's *the Mayor of Casterbridge*. It is called to have an important role as it triggers the character to survive though eventually; he must die for it. Using the capitalist mode of production and descriptive and dramatic approach to picture the social class in the society as well as the effect of it, the study shows that the main character's life is triggered by the social class in the society, that is, wealth possession. The more property a man gets the more respects he gets from the society. On the contrary, the less property he gets the less respects he gets. It, then, becomes the main issue of the people in the novel to behave according to the social class driving the main character to the downfall. Finally, although the study has the novelty since no previous studies use the same theory as the researcher's study, the study gives the readers moral lesson that sometimes in a society, wealth is worth more whilst in another society is not. Besides, this novelty is to develop the study of literature.

Keywords: Social Class; Marxist Literary Theory; Capitalist Mode of Production; Downfall

INTRODUCTION

Experts have different opinion about social class. Further, social class refers to the local division of employment, the food set as well as consumed as well as the system and dialog's content (Atkinson, 2017), the economic class presence (Lust, 2019, see

also Méndez, & Gayo, 2019), salary or education (Rennwald, 2020, see also Nissanov, 2017, also Lewis, 2017, also Küchle, 2019), capitalism (France, & Roberts, 2017, see also Burczak, Garnett, and McIntyre Knowledge, 2018, also Robertson, and Roberts, 2022), the person's position in the process of production as well as in political and ideological relations" (Gürcan, and Peker, 2015), elementary groups of persons within the social order, in contrast to one another based on the role the society play in the process of production, regarding the associations they found amid themselves in the labor organization as well as in property respect (Das, 2017).

Social classes are noticeable till the time Hardy takes a breath for the first time especially in the sending of mails. On one hand, the working classes seem to be difficult to send letters as it costs too much. On the other hand, the parliament members enjoy the sending (Koehler 2026). Hardy's works offer noticeable visions to attitudes one of which is class (Bownass, 2016) that refers to male as well as female involved in the physical labor of farming (Hensen, 2017). Merryn and Raymond Williams identify Hardy as being in the middle class amid landowners and laborers (Hughes, 2018). However, the work of Hardy sustains an agenda of ruling-class since he does not feel comfortable with the middle class (Clark, 2015).

From the explanation above about social class referring to an author, Thomas Hardy, the researcher is interested in discussing one of his works, *the Mayor of Casterbridge*. It, then, tells the life of a struggling farmer, Michael Henchard, influenced by a social class in the society in the novel. From the beginning of the novel, his actions have something to do with a social class in his mind referring to wealth possession. Therefore, wealth possession desire triggers him to conduct uncontrollable actions that lead to his downfall. Then, how social class is pictured and how it leads him to his downfall will be discussed in this research.

Besides, this research is inspired by the gaps in previous studies: the analysis of social class in *Scarface* (film) by Hafiedz, Natsier, and Muhajir (2021); in *Crazy Rich Asians* (novel) by Pahlevi and Sagimin (2020); and in *Parasite* (film) by Dianiya (2020). However, all these studies overlook the application of the capitalist mode of production, which is the theoretical framework employed in this research to establish its novelty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Hafiedz, Natsir, and Muhajir (2021) in their article *Social Class Reflected on Tony Montana in Brian De Palma's Scarface Film* (1983), conduct a study on phenomena in a society in the movie. Using sociological approach and characterization's elements,

the study shows that the main character, Tony Montana, is influenced by the capitalist social class. Pahlevi and Sagimin (2020), in their article *Social Classes Reflected by the Main Characters in Kevin Kwan's Crazy Rich Asians*, conduct a study on causes and effects of social class experienced by the main characters. Using qualitative method, the study shows the difference in social class can lead to a lifestyle, way of thinking, and friendship selection. Dianiya (2020), in her article, *Representation of Social Class in Bong Joon-ho's Parasite*, conducts a study on different classes of two families. Using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis, the study shows that five main points are perfectly found its scenes, properties as well as cinematography: life's ease, fashion, boundaries, body odor, as well as color.

Of the three previous studies above, Hafiedz, et.al. is like the researcher's study in the story line. Both characters are influenced by the possession of wealth desire either in their peak of success or in their downfall. In the previous study, the character is dead by the killing from the competitor, whilst, the researcher's study, the character is dead by social class itself. However, the researcher's study gets the novelty since he uses mode of production in the discussion of the social class, which is not found in the three previous studies above.

Social Class

The researcher refers to, firstly, the capitalist mode of production by Marxism. It is then a life separation between those with capital (property) and those with less capital (property) with the former becoming high social class people, whilst the latter becoming low social class ones. This kind of differences of class in society is created by the capitalist who struggles against the majority class, that is, the workers (Fanani, 2020). In short, capitalist mode of production creates the majority class referring to those selling their labor power for wages called the lower class and the capitalist (the high class) who controls the labor power (Chattopadhyay, 2016). Though capitalism creates classes in society, however, it is not the last mode of production (Dumenil, 2018). Secondly, the researcher refers to Marxist literary theory as Marxism here is applied to analyze literature. It is then the close connection of Marxism and literature, both of which is related to society (Fanani, 2020).

METHOD

Design and Sample

Since the researcher analyzes a social class through the characters' action as well as speech, therefore, descriptive and dramatic method are worthy of application here. How characters such as Michael Henchard, Susan Henchard, Elizabeth Jane, the firmity woman, and Donald Farfrae face social class in Casterbridge town will be discussed by the researcher. Through the researcher's understanding of the capitalist

mode of production, the researcher elaborates social class and the effect of the social class to the death and life of Michael Henchard in Thomas Hardy's *the Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Instrument and Procedure

Since this study belongs to literary study, therefore, the researcher himself becomes the instrument himself. Then, the researcher groups the data in the form of quotation based on the research questions, that is, how the social class is depicted and how it leads to the downfall of the main character, through which the researcher is made easy to conduct the study.

Data Analysis

To do the data analysis, firstly, the researcher elaborates the picture of the social class as well as its influence to the main character's downfall. Secondly, the researcher refers to the novel for quotations related to that elaboration. Thirdly, the researcher analyses the quotations in connection to the research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before the researcher comes to the core of the problems, the researcher insists on explaining a little bit about the life and death of the main character, Michael Henchard, the one whose mind is materially possessed as it is a phenomenal character. A character who undergoes an up and down in his career not because of his carelessness but because of a social class within the community. He is pictured as a struggling man bringing his only wife and child for survival. After a separation from his wife and child of a social class, he becomes prosperous in business, achieving a high social class. Yet, meeting and living again with them, he becomes falling due to the same social class. Accordingly, the researcher splits this sub-chapter into two, namely, result and discussion in their own sub-heading, respectively. The former refers to answer the research questions, whilst the latter refers to the validity of the theory used in this research since it develops the study of literature.

The Picture of the Social Class

From the beginning of the novel, social class referring to wealth possession has been shown in the novel. Without wealth, life is worthless in other words wealth is one of the ways to get respects from others. This kind of social class has been commonly understood by the people of Casterbridge. The novel then begins with a terrible action of selling a wife and daughter by Michael Henchard whom the researcher assumes of

having no high social class due to lack of money. This kind of strange action determines his future life.

The first picture of social class is shown by the furmity woman, the witness of the wife sale by Michael Henchard, who feels that she is not worthy of honor because of less money. *"I'm not a penny the better for him"* (Hardy, 1998:16). This is the measure of goodness attached to the mind of the people in the novel that money (property) stirs people's way of life that money becomes the sign of the people's social merit. Though the furmity woman once sees *"better days"* (Hardy, 1998:23), however, she is regarded as a low person when money does not address her again. *"Don't speak to her—it isn't respectable!"* urged the other (Hardy, 1998:23) is addressed to the furmity woman who is now economically downfall by Elizabeth Jane to her mother, who is the woman on sale. Even, the furmity woman's merchandises are not worthy of buying. *"Mother, do let's go on—it was hardly respectable for you to buy refreshments there. I see none but the lowest do."* (Hardy, 1998:25).

The picture of social class referring to wealth success turns out to be in the Casterbridge people's mind. *"Ah, lots of them, when they began life, were no more than I be now!"* (Hardy, 1998:33), this humble expression is forwarded by a bystander, a townner of Casterbridge to the great people in a council including Michael Henchard, the Mayor of Casterbridge. This again shows that good position in a workplace makes a lot of money then with lots of money, high social class in the society is achieved. Even, the ex-wife of Michael Henchard is not excluded. She also has thought that wealth possession is a sign of respectable person in society indicated by the fact that when she wishes to be reunited with her former husband, she feels humble in seeing him as the Mayor of Casterbridge. *"Yes, yes," answered her companion hastily. "I have seen him, and it is enough for me! Now I only want to go—pass away—die"* (Hardy, 1998:35). It seems that Marx's mode of production is applicable here that those with capitals live in separation from the workers that this notion is spread among the society. It is told that despite being the Mayor, Michael Henchard has been a successful man of business with workers employed in his company. Due to his wealth, he is appointed as the mayor. His position as the mayor confirms him as the highest-class person in Casterbridge.

That wealth becomes the measurement for the high class in Casterbridge can also be traced in the words of Elizabeth Jane. When she and her mother try to be back to Michael Henchard after about eighteen years of separation for the sake of Elizabeth Jane's life, she questions her mother's words that underestimate Michael Henchard socially as well as economically. *"What a gentleman he is, isn't he? And how his diamond studs shine! How strange that you should have said he might be in the stocks, or in the workhouse, or dead!"* (Hardy, 1998:35). The word 'gentleman' attached to Michael Henchard by Elizabeth Jane after seeing his position as the top man in

Casterbridge as well as his wearing diamond confirms the researcher's assumption above that social class is determined by property possession.

In mode of production by Karl Marx, the capitalists overpower the workers in that through their property, they play an important role in managing the workers; the capitalists by sitting at home can make decision that determine the fate of the workers, on one hand. On the other hand, the workers must work hard to make ends meet. This condition then creates gap in society; the society with less property which is the most one, belongs to the low social class, whilst the opposite belongs to the high social class. Such happens to Susan when she understands Michael Henchard's social condition. She wants to retreat from the meeting. *"I don't think I can ever meet Mr. Henchard. He is not how I thought he would be—he overpowers me. I don't wish to see him anymore"* (Hardy, 1998:35). Even, she does not become a respectable person compared to Michael Henchard's (Hardy, 1998:44).

Further, in mode of production, the capitalists and the workers cannot live together. They live in separation, instead. This condition is also spread in the society of Casterbridge in that the respectable person cannot live together with the disrespectable one. It happens to the relationship of Michael Henchard with Elizabeth Jane known as the stepdaughter of Michael Henchard. As told in the novel that before living with Michael Henchard in prosperity, Elizabeth Jane works as a maid in an inn and when she is with him, she lowers herself by acting as a workwoman in front of the other workwoman. Besides, the words uttered by disrespectable people should not be uttered by her for example *'bide where you be'* (Hardy, 1998:130). Thus, Michael Henchard gives approbation to the mode of production above by saying *"if it goes on, this house can't hold us two"* (Hardy, 1998:136).

Other example of the mode of production creating gaps in society is shown by Donald Farfrae. Donald Farfrae is Michael Henchard's manager, but he makes a mistake by trying to abolish gaps in society by his action of defending a workman from Michael Henchard's bullying, through which Michael Henchard is offended (100). Besides, Donald Farfrae feels humble by approaching his step-daughter by referring to the 'wealth' as the indicator of high class person in society, *"I wish I was richer, Miss Newson; and your step-father had not been offended; I would ask you something in a short time—yes, I would ask you to-night. But that's not for me!"* (Hardy, 1998:111). In a nutshell, all the quotations mentioned above refer to the idea that property desire is in the mind of the people of Casterbridge. Those with lots of property belong to the higher class, those with less property belong to the lower class. Consequently, the high-class people are reluctant to live together with the lower one which is the effect of the capitalist of production.

Michael Henchard's Downfall by Social Class

It turns out that Michael Henchard's downfall is the only effect of social class desire. Further, the social class playing an important role in the life and death of the Mayor of Casterbridge is wealth possession. In the beginning of the novel, the main character, Michael Henchard, is stirred by wealth. *"I married at eighteen, like the fool that I was and this is the consequence o't."* (Hardy, 1998:10). Teenagers are not economically productive that marriage should not pass in their mind. The quotation shows that Michael Henchard feels sorry for his young marriage, therefore, he does not make a success in economic merit. That he feels stupid to get married at earlier age is shown by his action to sell his wife and only daughter (Hardy, 1998:10). This action is the terrible step of Michael Henchard's downfall in the future, though he is still a great man his reputation as well as business start falling when people know his terrible action through the testimony of the furmity woman on trial by Michael Henchard as the judge. *"That bears on the case. It proves that he's no better than I and has no right to sit there in judgment upon me"* (Hardy, 1998:202). Business as well as romance no longer believes in Michael Henchard; the position as Mayor of Casterbridge, his business and his great house fall on Farfrae, his former manager. Likewise, his beloved girl engaged to get married with him falls on Farfrae since she is afraid of the terrible wife sale.

The picture of wealth possession, good position as high social classes are still attached to Michael Henchard's mind. He still feels that he has the right to give opinions on the public hearing held by the council that he is no longer in. *"I hardly see that it would be proper, Mr. Henchard," said he. "The council are the council, and as ye are no longer one of the body there would be an irregularity in the proceeding. If ye were included, why not others?"* (Hardy, 1998:263). The words from Farfrae discredits Michael Henchard as his former manager as well as the former Mayor of Casterbridge since having a property and good position means possessing a high social class in society that can be traced in the following quotation. *"Now," said Henchard quietly, "we stand face to face man and man. Your money and your fine wife no longer lift 'ee above me as they did but now, and my poverty does not press me down."* (Hardy, 1998:272). It shows that money has power to control people as money has been posited in a higher place that Michael Henchard feels fair to be against Farfrae in physical dispute as Farfrae is alone without money supporting him. This action is another thing that his downfall runs in a high speed.

Michael Henchard's complete downfall is noticeable on the day of his death through a letter written to Elizabeth Jane. Elizabeth Jane has become a wife of a very respectable person in the town of Casterbridge, Donald Farfrae, the Mayor of Casterbridge as well as the owner of a great business, both of which belong to Michael Henchard before. Then, Michael Henchard feels so humble in the eye of Elizabeth

Jane that his decease should not be known by Elizabeth Jane especially and by people commonly.

"Michael Henchard's Will.

"That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.

"& that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground.

"& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.

"& that nobody is wished to see my dead body.

"& that no murners walk behind me at my funeral.

"& that no flours be planted on my grave.

"& that no man remembers me.

"To this I put my name.

"Michael Henchard." (Hardy, 1998:333)

All in all, the social class referring to wealth possession has put the Mayor of Casterbridge in complete downfall; his terrible action of the wife sale for money draws people's disbelief of his business and leadership as well as estrange him for the marriage with a rich woman. "While I, an outcast, an encumbered of the ground, wanted by nobody, and despised by all, live on against my will!" (Hardy, 1998:321).

As explained above that the theories used are both Marxism, namely, the capitalist mode of production and Marxist literary theory, both of which becomes the challenges of the researcher. The researcher is doubtful, in the first application of the mentioned theories, because of the characters in the novel do not belong to workers in companies. However, the researcher convinces that the research goes in the right way; the social class noticeable is that with property that can be seen in the way Mrs. Henchard is separate from her husband followed years later by the way Elizabeth Jane behaves noticing her mother buying to a humble woman.

Then, the confession of the furmity woman who feels humble because of having no money twenty years later her trial by Michael Henchard. Such an attitude is also followed by the people of Casterbridge who regard money is everything. All the facts of the separation of the life of the haves and the have-nots do not prove that the capitalist mode of production theory is valid insomuch as it creates social class referring to the property possession. Those having more property are categorized as the high class, whilst those with less one is categorized as the low one.

CONCLUSION

From the result and discussion above, the researcher comes to two conclusions; first, the capitalist mode of production has put people's life in a gap, the majority belonging to the low social class and the minority belonging to the high social one. The two kinds

of class have been undergone by Michael Henchard, once he is a humble person, becoming a wealthy one and coming again to humble one due to a wealth possession desire. Secondly, this study has a novelty insomuch as it is the only study using the capitalist mode of production theory compared to the above previous studies, none uses the capitalist mode of production in discussing the social class. Finally, the researcher is in a considerable hope that there are researchers discussing a social class with different theory, for example, a social class theory by Axel Honneth that states that class conflict happens as one class does not admit the other class, in order that the literary study comes to a speed development.

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