Comparison Of Hardy And Wharton Style

Thomas Hardy and Edith Wharton have many similarities in their style of writing. Wharton is comparatively more of a modern writer than Hardy, however she admired Hardy and her writing style is influenced by his literary writings. The two given extracts are from classic realist novels. In such novels, the writer appeals to the reader by mirroring the lives of ordinary people and ordinary lives. This comparative essay explores the difference between the writing style of Hardy and Wharton, in the passages taken from ‘Far from the madding crowd’: FFTMC and ‘The Custom of the Country’: TCOTC. In both extracts the use of third person omniscient narrator is an essential genre convention of the classic realist text. It is important for the narrator to guide their reader, signposting the moral dilemmas, peering into the souls of the characters and passing judgment. In this way, the effect of the omniscient narrator creates a voice of authority and reliability in the text allowing the narrator to hold the hand, so to speak, of the reader and directing them how to respond to the characters.

Wharton may have been influenced by Hardy’s novels because he often presented to the reader powerfully vivid female protagonists. In both these novels, Hardy and Wharton choose as their central characters strong female protagonists who are at the heart of the action. They craft their female protagonists with intricate detail through the use of the third person omniscient narrator. Bathsheba is debated to be ‘headstrong’(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) by the farmers and think ‘tis’ is a pity’. This suggests that Hardy’s female protagonist is fiercely independent, challenging the comfortable patriarchal beliefs of conventional Victorian readers. Bathsheba is illustrated to be a female figure within a traditional landscape, who is continually struggling to assert her identity within this repressive back drop. Undine is suggested to be ‘too clear-headed’, which again affirms Hardy’s representation of female protagonist. In both extracts the way female protagonists are presented to show that they make deliberate choices and are ready to face the outcomes of their actions. Being ‘headstrong’(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) and ‘clear-headed’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) reflects the variation in women traits required for different societies. Bathsheba is displayed to be firm and aggressive, who is being rumoured by the farmers to ‘do everything herself’ (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2), which helps her to maintain her position among the farmers. Whereas, Undine is suggested to be manipulative, who exploits the ‘advantages of marriage’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) and gains popularity among the elite class.

Additionally, in FFTMC, third person narrator’s point of view presents Bathsheba to have ‘elasticity in her firmness which removed it from obstinacy’(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2), the word ‘firmness’(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) expresses her independence and fierce behaviour, but the noun ‘obstinacy’(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) is used paradoxical to ‘firmness’ (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) and foreshadows flexibility in her characteristics. ‘Firmness’(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) is an assertive word; making sure that Bathsheba is not a stubborn character, who in future will have to make compromises to complete this love story. The use of word ‘elasticity’ (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2)

in the beginning of the sentence, again emphasises that the character will change their traits, according to Hardy's stencil of the Narrative. The narrator confesses unequivocally here, and has moved away from his own point of view.

Further in the extract Hardy directs the reader to believe that Bathsheba is a fiercely independent women, however she is actively looking to find love and, in some ways, exploit it as well. The quote: 'alarming exploits of sex' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) foreshadows Bathsheba's future involvement with several men in her life. Hardy is almost contradicting himself to portray that no matter how independent a woman may be, she is still treated in a traditional and cultural way. Hardy's narrator is passing his judgement on to the reader and is leading the reader to believe his point of view. The verb 'exploit' shows that Bathsheba is actively looking to have 'sex'(Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2), which is a formidable concept for Victorian readers. It is a situation of predicament for the reader, if to agree or disagree to the narrator's point of view. A sense of uncertainty is created in the reader's mind, and they will start questioning the reliability of the narrator.

Similarly, Wharton uses third person omniscient narrator, illustrating her point of view about the characters in the novel. The statement: 'He thought Undine too clear-headed' (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6), suggests that Undine is portrayed as a strong woman, mirroring Bathsheba's character. However, unlike Bathsheba, for whom the word 'naivety' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) is used by Hardy predicting the exploitation of her innocence, whereas Undine makes deliberate and conscientious choices to exploit other characters. The narrator's credibility is compromised here, as their bias can be seen clearly via their opinion about the protagonist. This makes Wharton's narrator unreliable and untrustworthy, as compared to Hardy's narrator in the extract.

Hardy's use of direct speech: 'swears that she'll do everything herself' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) suggests that Bathsheba is an independent woman, who is able to handle everything herself. However, later in this extract, Hardy contradicts himself to highlight the conventional mind-set of the society. There is a dialogue from one of the supporting characters in the extract: 'tis a pity she's so headstrong' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) demonstrating the stereotypical chauvinist approach of the farmers. The etymology of the word 'pity' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) is piety. Hardy knowingly uses this word to serve dual meaning in the narrative. Piety was and is something that is part of a desirable woman in a conventional society, and if a woman is pious then she should do as she is told and does not have the luxury to be a 'headstrong' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) woman. Hardy's use of 'pity' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) for being 'headstrong' (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) in the extract foreshadows the struggles and hardships Bathsheba will face, due to the 'firmness' in her nature.

Focalisation is another tool used by the realist writers to make their fictional pieces more reliable. Wharton and Hardy's successful use of focalisation, leaves it to the reader to decide and judge Undine and Bathsheba's character. The use of different perspectives in these extracts, slowly eliminates the unreliability of the narrator regarding the protagonists. Wharton's use of Bowen's point of view: "glimpse of larger opportunities" (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) suggests that Wharton is exaggerating by using a hyperbolic phrase:

‘larger opportunity’” (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) leading the reader to socially superficial and materialistic goals, set by Undine. Wharton certainly creates a strong point of view and an intrusive moment in the narrative, which contrives a plot based on a manipulative character, whose goal is to climb the social ladder by exploiting the conjugal bliss of marriage. Hardy on the other hand uses Farmer’s perspective, where they suggest that ‘she lightens up the old place’ to point to the ‘naivety’ (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) of his protagonist. Bathsheba is a victim of misogyny here, and unlike Undine is making choices branching from fatalism. A feeling of sympathy arises from this perspective, and the reader will start to develop their own perspective of the protagonist, making the text more reliable and credible. Wharton in contrast to Hardy uses free indirect style in the given extract giving the extract a smooth flow. This gives the extract an informal structure, making it more relatable to the reader.

The structure and tone of any text plays pivotal point in driving the view point of any writer. Hardy and Wharton use a cynical tone, ostensibly to criticise the shortcomings of the society. The use of irony and exaggeration evoke the suppressed issues in the society. In FFTMC, the quote ‘a woman in full bloom and vigour’ (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) highlights the authority given to the protagonist by the narrator. The use of ‘full’ as an adjective add exaggerated details to portray Bathsheba’s beauty, making her the best fit for the conventional model of a perfect female protagonist. The use of ‘bloom and vigour’ (Thomas Hardy, Far from the madding crowd, chapter 12, pp. 90-2) is sensual imagery. Another phrase ‘unbroken row of teeth’ describes the physical appearance of the female protagonist. This imagery, describing perfect teeth, foreshadows that there is something ‘unbroken’ in Bathsheba’s perfect beauty. This is used to satisfy the fantasising needs of the target audience of a romantic novel.

Similarly, in TCOTC, Undine’s character entirely revolves around her ravenous desire to be among the social elite and enjoy the stylish lifestyle. The imagery of ‘coldness of the coffee’, ‘badness of the cigar’ and ‘the curiosity of the on-looker’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) is compared to the Undine’s character: ‘whether this were the real clue to Undine’s conduct’. Wharton uses dramatic irony of ‘curiosity of on-looker’ to mirror Undine’s character, which foreshadows the intrusiveness of the narrative later on. Wharton embeds exaggerated imagery to expose Undine’s character, who is ambitious, disillusioned and manipulative. Throughout the extract, lexis or semantics of looking: ‘observation’, ‘glance’, ‘noted’, ‘stock’ and ‘glimpse’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6), is implanted to depict Undine’s allusions of looking to adapt according to the elite class. This lexis bundled with imagery support each other to lead the reader to analyse the protagonist through the eyes of the writer and the narrator. Undine is labelled as a ‘gold-digger’ by some of the modern audience, which contradicts the portrayal of an independent female in Wharton’s novel.

Wharton in the TCOTC uses imagery in a slightly different way. The phrase ‘the restaurant garden opened green depths that skilfully hid its narrow boundaries’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) illustrates the setting that is close to the realistic world. It is used metaphorically to describe Undine’s character, foreshadowing her ‘narrow boundaries.’ She is shown as an open garden for which looks ‘green’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6), but has darkness hid in the selfishness of her narrow mentality. Another phrase ‘keenly pointed corners of her red mouth’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) highlight the motif of ‘red’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) colour that is woven throughout the plot. ‘Red’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp

175-6) connotes danger, and can also be associated with women who are bold and confident. Wharton has embodied this motif to keep the reader aware of the manipulative, bold but independent character of her female protagonist.

Contrastingly both stories are written in different genres, while still keeping it indifferent to achieve the same purpose and target to describe the realistic surroundings, settings, characters and situations. Hardy writes in the genre of ‘Pastoral’ which encompasses imagery, symbolism and characters related to the country life. The phrase ‘Black sheep among the flock’ brings out the genre, and the reader will be amused by the use of familiar Biblical pastoral term ‘Black sheep’. It also informs the reader that Bathsheba is a clever woman and unconsciously but through her sixth sense and gut feeling is able to identify ‘black sheep’. ‘Black sheep’ here are people with wrong intentions, which foreshadows that Bathsheba is a wise and intelligent woman, who is surrounded by dangerous people. The reader will be confused as the focalisation of Hardy’s narrative has changed from calling her ‘naive’ in the beginning of the extract to her being portrayed as a clever woman later on. Hardy uses the theme of fatalism to justify his juxtaposition of different characteristics linked to Bathsheba. The thematic use of metaphoric landscapes, in this genre evokes a sense of scenic serenity. Hardy brings out the materialistic aspect of the narrative by the use of the genre.

In contrast to Hardy, Wharton writes satirically. She uses humour, irony and exaggeration to ridicule and criticise different characters in her novel. The phrase ‘Mrs Marvell’s dying for the last news…’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) suggests that the character of Van Degen was aware of his wife’s nature and uses sarcasm and humour to break the awkwardness of the situation. This emphasises the satiric strain that is found in the writing, which depicts different mode swings of Undine throughout the extract. The sarcasm of ‘advantages of marriage’ (Edith Wharton, The custom of the country, pp 175-6) and the ‘pang of sociologist over the individual havoc’ brings out the sardonic humour which is used by Wharton to highlight the lavish life style of the elite class.

In conclusion, Wharton and Hardy uses different narrative techniques to put forward their point of view. Both writers are highly critical of their societies and the norms and values followed by them. In the extracts, the use of language features like repetition, imagery, use of irony, sarcasm and humour, creates a fictional world which depicts social, moral and ethical aspects of the real world. The use of direct and indirect speech in the extracts gives different perspectives of the characters in the novel. Both writers belong to different eras, however their purpose and target is the same. The use of structural and linguistic features is interdependent throughout the novel, contributing to the theme of ‘Realism’.