

THE CONCURRENCE OF THE
SPATIO-TEMPORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
PLANES IN *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*
AND *MRS DALLOWAY*

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For one who has read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy,¹ the atmosphere created by Virginia Woolf in the opening scene of *Mrs Dalloway*² brings back to his mind the atmosphere prevailing in the "second beginning" in the novel by Hardy. Even though the phrase "second beginning" may sound puzzling, it seems to be an appropriate expression, because we can feel that Chapter XVI was conceived by Hardy himself as another beginning in the life of his female protagonist; the previous chapters being the germ of the tragedy that, were the ideology of the author a different one, could have been avoided.

The two scenes are thus presented by the authors:

On a thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning in May, ... she [Tess] left her home for the second time. ... Tess had never before visited this part of the country [Weatherbury], and yet she felt akin to the landscape. ...

Her hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere which surrounded her as she bounded along against the soft south wind. She heard a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a joy. ...

The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess. ...

And thus her spirits, and her thankfulness, and her hopes, rose higher and higher.

Tess, pp. 155-58

For it was the middle of June. The war was over ... over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; ... wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them ... and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans ... and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion being part of it. ...

(June had drawn out every leaf on the trees. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. ... Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. ...)

Mrs Dalloway, pp. 5-8

Oddly enough, the similarity between the atmosphere – which is dependable upon the emotional, psychological, and spiritual involvement of the character and her environment – seems to be intensified when we consider the diversity of point of view used by the two novelists and its realization on the ideological, phraseological and spatio-temporal planes.³ Therefore, before comparing the characteristics which approximate the two scenes, let us focus our attention on these distinctive features in the novel, having in mind, however, the rewarding impossibility to establish definite boundary lines amid the levels, but making use of them for the sake of clarity.

Ideological Level

Hardy was writing in the second half of the 19th Century and *Tess* was published in 1891. In this novel, like in his major works, Hardy "evoked a tragic view of life" by creating a fictional universe based on his belief "that man is an alien in an impersonal universe and at the mercy of sheer chance."⁴

Therefore, although Hardy insisted that he was a meliorist, and by implication we can agree with this idea, his fiction depicts with strong fidelity a deterministic and fatalistic vision of the universe, a universe determined by one's past and governed by the Immanent Will. Besides that, in *Tess*, Hardy's reaction against the invasion of agricultural machinery in the fields which began to compete with manpower – the result of the Industrial Revolution – is overtly demonstrated. Amid these controlling elements and unequal forces, *Tess* succumbs, as any reader of Hardy would expect. She is, as the novelist himself defines people who do not fit their environment, a "caged bird." There are moments in the novel, however, like the one quoted above, in which we "see" the protagonist being raised by the hands of the "author"⁵ above his own evaluative vision of the world. It is a moment of "tragic relief," entirely Wordsworthian, marked by a harmonious meeting of the spirit of the character and the landscape which envelops her. This fusion becomes the narrator's focus and for a moment character and reader are freed from the gears of the author's ideology.

Virginia Woolf is a 20th-century writer, an admirer of Thomas Hardy but not his follower. She is included with the experimentalist modern writers – the stream-of-consciousness novelists, who rely on the works of man's mind as the material for their fiction. But, while she was thinking of writing *Mrs Dalloway* (published in 1925), she entreated, besides this desire to reproduce the mental process of her characters, other concerns as well. "In this book," she says, "I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense."⁶ In a more subjective perspective, the novel reveals at its core the need of a sensitive woman to protect the privacy of her soul, the need to become invulnerable to the passions, desires, and appeals of the world. So it is Mrs Dalloway, not the girl Clarissa, who coexists with the married woman. This girl is still, within the 52-year old woman, caught by an awkward and passionate drive "to live most intensely," found in Peter Walsh. But, as Mrs Dalloway, she has "ordered" her life – her inner life, her familiar life, her social life. In relation to her inner life, the ordering seems to have brought peace but also a nostalgia for "the road not taken." In relation to her family, there seems to be an emptiness at its core. In relation to the social life, she seems to find pleasure, as the final scene – the party – demonstrates, in being capable of joining in a harmonious whole most incompatible people. This picture is not too far away from the peculiarities of the writer herself. In the passage quoted above, however, Mrs Dalloway finds pleasure and relief in walking up Bond

Street after an illness that has kept her home for about six months. This feeling of belonging with, of becoming one with what surrounds her, envelops her with "an absurd and faithful passion" and with "waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved." And this passion and vitality are, in a sense, loss of invulnerability and of quiet privacy.

Phraseological Level: Naming

The protagonists of the two novels are not always referred to by the names as they appear in the title.

On p.465, when Angel is looking for *Tess* in Sandbourne, he inquires about a "Teresa d'Urberville or Durbeyfield." But throughout the novel *Tess* is called just Tess or Tess Durbeyfield.

In the title, however, Hardy seems to be emphasizing specific concerns. The complete title of the novel is *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman*. First of all, the use of Tess instead of Teresa indicates a tenderness and intimacy between the writer and his fictional creation which is peculiar to friendly relatives. Secondly, there is also the suggestion of Tess as truly belonging to the noble Norman family of the D'Urbervilles and not to the "corrupted" family who bears a "corrupted" name. As one of the D'Urbervilles, however, she will have to carry not only the burden of her own past, but also the burden of the past of her ancestors and bear the doom that hovers over all the members of the family.

In the novel by Virginia Woolf, the use of *Mrs Dalloway* as the title and not the character's complete name seems to indicate that Clarissa as an individual with strong personality traits counts less than Clarissa as a married woman, not devoid of her personality but protected by her marital status. Throughout the novel Clarissa Dalloway is arbitrarily referred to by the narrator as Clarissa or Mrs Dalloway. In one of the moments, however, in which the material comes "straight" from Clarissa's consciousness, she ponders while walking through the streets in London: "She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway" (p.11). No doubt, the shield she wore and wears to protect herself also causes pain to the passionate girl who coexists with the apparently cold woman. First, she had avoided a marriage to a passionate and impulsive man, to protect her soul. Now, as a

consequence, she is hidden behind her bland husband's protection, because the British society wants it so.

Spatio-Temporal and Psychological Levels: Their Concurrence

The setting most explored by Hardy is the countryside, the Wessex countryside. With the exception of *The Return of the Native*, in which Egdon Heath "breathes" in the novel and is felt as an ominous presence by some characters, the composition and description of Hardy's settings follows the Romantic tradition. In the passage quoted, Tess leaves home for the second time. The previous chapters and the first trip she has undertaken contain the germ of the tragedy that is going to destroy her in the future. She is still bent under the sufferings and pain of her recent past, but now, when she leaves for the Valley of the Great Dairies, she cannot help being responsive to the scents, the touch, the sounds, the beautiful and luminous morning of May. It is spring and the appeals of the blooming season awaken within Tess feelings she believed had been lost or forgotten. The landscape does not only awaken dormant feelings in Tess, it captures from within a divine thread which is linked to nature and makes the character and the elements one. This spiritual union with what Wordsworth called the Spirit of the Universe gives birth to hopes "which mingled with the sunshine."

Unlike the rural setting explored in the works by Hardy, in *Mrs Dalloway* we find Clarissa in the heart of the city of London, walking up Bond Street. The feeling she has, however, is not unlike Tess's. Clarissa has also suffered before she leaves her house, that morning in June. Her suffering has been physical, however. And now that she is healthy again, she breathes in the lovely spring morning air and finds pleasure in everything and everyone she sees. The people who pass, the shopkeepers in their early "ritual", the sounds, the bustle of the city, touch the oversensitive woman who, like the novelist, has had "a brush with death." This response to the environment destroys her protective shield and invites her to commune with life. She loves all that "with an absurd and faithful passion being part of it." Part of the "divine vitality" which she detects in the movement of the leaves in the Park.

In both scenes, the chronological development is segmented by passages in which the "author" 1. reflects about Tess's past and 2. inserts Mrs Dalloway's past as part of her present reality. Besides that, even though both passages are narrated in the third person, they rely on the subjectivity of the protagonists. That is, although the narrator

is outside the narrative, he/she is inside the character. In *Tess*, the omniscient narrator holds Tess's consciousness as the reflector of his own. We can feel the authorial voice mastering Tess's existence as a fictional entity and his hold on the character is not weakened, in this passage, by words of estrangement, *verba sentiendi*, or even modal expressions.⁷ In *Mrs Dalloway*, this entrance into the character's consciousness reveals, like in her other novels, that "increasingly the writer eliminates herself from her books, the illusion of the all-seeing eye is replaced by the illusion that we are seeing by glimpses, with our own imperfect vision."⁸

This difference in the narrative technique, however, does not interfere with the communion which the novelists have sought to explore, nor does the difference in setting or ideology hinder the similarity of both experiences which transcend the physical, the emotional, and the psychological realms to reach towards the spiritual.

NOTES

- 1 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (New York: Penguin Book Ltd., 1978). All the other references to this book will be included in the body of the paper.
- 2 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1970). All the other references to this book will be included in the body of the paper.
- 3 This classification follows Boris A. Uspensky's in *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).
- 4 Martin S. Day, *History of English Literature: 1937 to the Present* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), p.218.
- 5 The word "author" is being used here following Uspensky's concept: "we use the word 'author' to mean the person to whom belongs the whole text we are examining. This person may be the author of a work or anyone who speaks and whose utterance forms the object of our investigation." p.33.
- 6 Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), V.II, p.99.
- 7 Joan Bennett, *Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p.27.