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## 'THE PURE AND THE FALLEN'

### THE UNIVERSE IN THOMAS HARDY'S *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES* AND CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S *JANE EYRE*

#### *A Comparison*

Comparing the two heroines of the two novels: Thomas Hardy's *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is not an easy task to undertake but by all means an exciting one. One could raise objections to the drawing of parallels in the first place, arguing that the two characters have nothing in common, and an educated, highly intellectual and accomplished, but rather 'plain' governess can hardly be compared to the physical, very sensuous, natural peasant girl. Yet in my work I would like to point out the parallels and contrasts in their lives and characters, in their circumstances and their destinies. Although many scholars writing about Hardy might argue with me and accuse me with misunderstanding and thus misinterpreting him, I will especially endeavour to elucidate the two author's depiction of the world around us, of man's place and role in the universe, and of the invisible, underlying forces that rule and influence our lives.

Examining the characters' lives a certain parallelism can easily be detected and shown. Nevertheless, at the most critical, the most crucial turning points Jane's life seems to take a different course than that of Tess - I will talk about this in the second part of my essay. To begin with, I will first point out the parallels and the similarities between the lives of the two characters.

of her hostile and mean aunt, and the wicked and spoilt cousins, and Tess coming from a rather disordered family with an alcoholic father (who worked harder in digging a grave for his horse than he had worked for months to grow a crop for his family [*Tess*, 73.]), and a disorganised mother. They both have to leave their homes at a fairly early age; Tess going to Trantridge to look after Mrs Durberville's fowls, and Jane going to the orphanage in Lowood. Later a period starts in their lives when they seem to have reached a haven, an almost idyllic and very promising and favourable situation, where they find pleasure and satisfaction and even success in their works and where they both find love and acceptance among the people around them; Jane at Thornfield and Tess in Talbothays at the dairy.

Mr Crick was glad to get a new hand ... and he received her warmly.  
(*Tess*, 161.)

"I am so glad" - says Mrs Fairfax to Jane - "I am so glad you are come; it will be quite pleasant living here now with a companion."  
(*Jane*, 116.)

But, which is of greatest importance for them, they meet 'Love' in the person of Mr Rochester and Angel Clare, an unexpected and un hoped for happiness. Both Mr Rochester and Clare are on a higher social standing than Jane or Tess, and accordingly the two women equally doubt the possibility of the fulfilment of their love and first they both refuse to believe the sudden fortune and the prospects that open up before them. Both of them have evil forebodings about their happiness, and indeed, a past event stands in the way of both of their felicity. In Jane's life it is Betty Mason, the insane wife of Mr Rochester locked up in a small room in the attic; and for Tess, it is also a former relationship, her having been seduced by Alec d'Urberville. The past keeps haunting their lives, they can not get rid of its overwhelming, oppressive presence, they can not escape it, it is lurking behind them all the time and keeps surfacing and emerging again and again. The mad Betty Mason escapes from her imprisonment several times trying to hinder Mr Rochester and Jane's marriage, either by trying to set ablaze her husband's room or by appearing in Jane's room at the night before the wedding, tearing her veil and trampling on it. And Tess's past cannot fully be kept back either, she herself considers it as an obstacle, as something that separates her from

happiness "I cannot marry you" (*Tess* 233), and she even gets recognised in an inn just before their marriage.

They both cling to their lovers with a single-minded devotion, a childlike attachment, with a deeply committed, sacrificial love.

There was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare. To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be ... She thought every line in the contour of his person the perfection of masculine beauty, his soul the soul of a saint, his intellect that of a seer. ... He would sometimes catch her large, worshipful eyes, ... looking at him from their depths, as if she saw something immortal before her.

(*Tess*, 257.)

My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and, more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature, of whom I had made an idol.

(*Jane*, 346.)

In spite of their misgivings the day of their wedding is drawing nearer. They both get jewels from their lovers, but these jewels are in a way symbolic; they are in sharp contrast with their wearers' low social standing.

"If you were only to appear in a ball-room!" he said, "But no - no , dearest; I think I love you best in the wing-bonnet and cotton-frock - yes, better than in this , ... , "I'll take them off" she said ... They are not fit for me, are they?"

(*Tess*, 288)

And neither of them can eventually enjoy their respective marriages, the 'ghost of the past' reaches them in the end. Both Jane and Tess has to leave their lovers, leave the place of security and joy, they have to break with their former ways of life, they have to break off every contact and every tie and set out in search of a new new life, in search of a new job. After a long and exhausting journey they both find a place to stay, a new job; and what is more, a family. Jane in Mary and Diana in the Moor-House, and Tess among Iz and Marian on Flintcomb-Ash Farm. They are both proposed marriage by men who consecrated themselves for the service of God, and who wish to marry for higher spiritual causes and who plan to take their wives to the missionary field.

"I intend to...devote myself to missionary work in Africa. ...what I want to ask you is, will you put it in my power to do my duty - to make the only reparation I can made for the trick played on you: that is, will you be my wife and go with me?"

(*Tess*, 394.)

"Jane, come with me to India: come as my help-mate and fellow-labourer."

(*Jane*, 513.)

Another similarity in their lives is that though they both started out moneyless and poor, they both rise to a certain level of social rank and financial stability. With Alec on her side Tess can support her family and she can afford herself to wear nice clothes and jewels, she is not lacking anything. (Or is she?) And we can also see Jane settled in a nice stately house in the circle of a loving family in complete satisfaction.

Seemingly similar life, yet what a difference. In spite of all these parallels, at the most crucial points of their lives, things suddenly take a unexpected curve and they arrive at an utterly different position. Tess seems to be right when she says: "I don't quite feel easy....All this good fortune may be scourged out of me afterwards by a lot of ill. That's how Heaven mostly does." (*Tess*, 271.) World and nature seem to be against her, her life is full of small incidents, fatal coincidences, incalculable events that seem to drift her towards her fate, that seem to set and decide the course of her life, incidents that change the whole direction of it. She is no longer in a position to be able to make right decisions, morally and rationally right choices. She has no option, but to do what life dictates for her, what it compels her to do, what she is bound to, what she is doomed to do. Only thus can we explain the fact, that though given the very same conditions in life, Tess is after all not 'a pure woman', that she is a fallen girl who was not strong enough to resist the seducer, who does not have the strength to confess her past to Angel. Then she is a deserted wife, who surrenders and marries her former seducer, and eventually she ends up killing him. Yes, she is not a pure woman measured with the rules and standards of society. And, what is just as much, or even more painful and embarrassing, she is not a pure woman in the eyes of Angel, measured with his standards (who is after all not that enlightened and radical in breaking with the old and obsolete rules and constraints of his time.) I certainly do not want to shift the responsibility and blame Fate or Destiny or Chance, whatever we call it, yet I believe that Hardy's is a hostile universe, a place where

things work together against the individual, where one feels trapped and deluded. Some accuse Hardy and label him an 'angry fatalist', and there seems to be some truth in that. Tess is limited in practising her free will (if she has any!) - she is far too much bound by the occurrences of her life. And here I am not talking about genetical or social determinism, but explicitly about a malign or at least indifferent, nonchalant force of some kind.

Charlotte Brontë's universe, on the other hand, is a benevolent one, helping Jane through life, secretly co-ordinating and organising the smallest details and occurrences or the progress of events, giving warnings, signs and insights when needed. Doors get opened for Jane, obstacles clear out of her way so that she is free to make the right choices, to choose not to live in sin, to go through life remaining pure and virtuous. Her life seems to be directed and guided by a benevolent will or force or power, call it Provision or God or Mighty Spirit. (*Jane*, 537.) Her life also proceeds, heads in a certain direction, towards a certain goal, but in her case this goal is a settled life, financial and social independence and a loving relationship in which the partners can mutually give and receive love and respect.

In the rest of my essay I would like to expose these coincidences and unfortunate or fortunate incidents in the two novels, thus supporting my observation and providing a base for my argument.

The unfortunate death of Prince, the family's horse makes it even harder for the Durbeyfield family to eke out a living, consequently Tess has to leave her home and go and work for Alec d'Urberville to earn some money for the family, and that is where her fate is actually decided, where she is unable to resist her nature (she is a woman after all!) and the strong temptations of the flesh and she falls prey to the shameless, lustful young man.

But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked. Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was *doomed* to receive ... As Tess's own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: 'It was to be' [!]. There lay the pity of it.

(*Tess*, 119. italics mine)

Then she goes to Talbothays, where she gets to know Angel Clare, they get to love each other, and Angel wants to marry Tess. That is the point where Tess should admit her sins to Clare and either settle it with him and ask for his forgiveness or make the choice to live without sin and give up on the hope of the marriage at all. And that is the point where again she is unable to act in a right way. She is unable to do so, but not because of weakness. We can follow all her failed attempts, which in the very last moment all get prevented. She does try to tell Clare about her history, but he mistakenly believes her aristocratic descendancy to be the secret she tried to conceal. Next time, she sits down, and in a four-page letter she writes a 'succinct narrative of those events of three or four years ago' (*Tess*, 275.) but in her haste and excitement she slips it beneath the carpet as well as beneath the door, Angel cannot find it and the incidence of the misplaced letter again prevents her confession. Lastly she makes a final, last minute, desperate attempt (still before the wedding) to confess all 'her faults and blunders' - and this time Clare himself silences her and she is '*whirled onward* the next couple of *critical hours*' (*Tess*, 280. italics mine) and when she eventually does have the opportunity to make her confession, it is already too late.

Jane also has to leave home and go to a new place, to the orphanage in Lowood, and there she also gets into a situation where the whole course of her life could be changed. She is openly put to shame and exposed by Mr Brocklehurst in front of all her fellow-pupils, and then, left to herself she is brooding over her misery:

"I had meant to be so good, and to do so much at Lowood; to make so many friends, to earn respect, and win affection. Already I had made visible progress: that very morning I had reached the head of my class; ... Miss Temple had smiled approbation; she had promised to teach me drawing, and to let me learn French, if I continued to make similar improvement two months longer; ... now, here I lay again crushed and trodden on: and could I rise ever more?"

(*Jane*, 80.)

Yes, she could. Yes, things do turn out well for her. Helen Burns stands on her side, 'imparting strength to her', and Miss Temple writing a letter to the chemist Mr Lloyd and receiving [!] his answer (here we have another letter, but peculiarly, it does not get lost on its way somewhere) assembles the whole school and Jane Eyre is pronounced completely cleared of all charges. And she does learn

drawing and she does learn French, thus she can write about herself in her advertisement when trying to get away from Lowood that

"... a young lady ... qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music...". (and "in those days...this...catalogue of accomplishments, would have been held tolerably comprehensive".)

(Jane, 103.)

Thus she gets to Thornfield, where she gets to know Mr Rochester, they get to love each other, Mr Rochester decides to marry Jane, but they are prevented before it would be too late.

In the very last minute their marriage is crossed, the sin of bigamy cannot be committed, and Jane leaves Mr Rochester, not willing to live in sin and she 'flees temptation'. But that it was not just her extraordinary strength and morality that compelled her to do that, shows also that when on second thought, in a sudden weakness she is about to turn back and return, she finds that she is unable to do so.

Oh! with agony I thought of what I left! I could not help it. ... I longed to be his; I panted to return: it was not too late; ... As yet my flight, I was sure, was undiscovered. I could go back and be his comforter - his pride; his redeemer from misery; perhaps from ruin. ... Still I could not turn, nor retrace one step. God must have led me on ...

(Jane, 410. italics mine)

Tess is drifted towards sin, Jane is prevented from it at every step.

Tess sets out to find and visit her husband's parents in the hope of receiving some help, or sympathy. After a long day's journey, she arrives in their village, but she accidentally overhears a conversation between Angel's two brothers which makes her rather uncertain about her plan, and also completely by chance somebody detects her pair of old boots carefully hidden in the hedge, and "reading the scene as her own condemnation" (*Tess*, 377.) she goes back along the road by which she came.

It was *somewhat unfortunate* that she had encountered the sons and not the father, who, despite his narrowness, was far less starched and ironed than they, and had to the full the gift of charity.

(italics mine; *Tess*, 377)

At this point she does not know that the greatest misfortune of her life was

this feminine loss of courage at the *last and critical* moment [she always has to face critical moments] through her estimating her father-in-law by his sons. Her present condition was precisely one which would have enlisted the sympathies of old Mr and Mrs Clare.

(*Tess*, 378. italics mine)

Jane Eyre also sets out in search of a lodging, in search of a job, in search of a new life and she wanders around hopelessly through 'fields and hedges and lanes', and when in utter despair and exhaustion, on the verge of starvation she is getting ready to die St. John Rivet finds her on his threshold (just in time!) and leads her into a warm family circle where again she finds love and acceptance and also respect and recognition, and what a fortunate coincidence; these kind people turn out to be her cousins, thus she is also presented with long longed-for relatives.

Angel emigrates to Brazil, which actually was not his original intention; he goes there "in a fit or desperation, the Brazil movement among the English agriculturists having *by chance* coincided with his desire to escape from his past existence" (*Tess*, 421.) There he rethinks and reevaluates his harsh judgement and treatment against Tess, and he realises that his values and principles need readjusting.

This growing fondness of her [Tess's] memory coincided in point of time with her residence at Flintcomb-Ash, but it was before she had felt herself at liberty to trouble him with a word about her circumstances or her feelings. ... Thus her silence of docility was misinterpreted. How much it really said *if he had understood!*

(*Tess*, 421. italics mine)

Only later does she take the courage to write to him, and Angel does return, but again, it is already too late.

"It is too late," said she, her voice sounding hard through the room, her eyes shining unnaturally. ... "Too late, too late!" she said, waving her hand in the impatience of a person whose tortures cause every instant to seem an hour. .... "But I say, I say it is too late".

(*Tess*, 446.)

It is too late for she is now no longer Mrs Clare, not even Miss Durbeyfield, but Mrs d'Urberville... Here again, one might think it was Tess's weakness or



lack of firmness and character that she accepted the proposal and money of Alec d'Urberville, this so much hated, corrupt and wicked man, but again we can see, that she did try to stand against the flow of events, for a long time she did resist the constant and cruel persuasion of Alec, but just like at the accidental death of Prince, now she is thrust to him once more, only this time not as a servant taking care of the fowls, but as a wife. Tess and her family are turned out of their house, they have to leave their property and their home, they have to move to another place, to the half-dead townlet of Kingsbere, where they have taken some room. Rather unfortunately their letter gets there too late, so the rooms they want are already let. They are turned out without lodging, without a place to sleep the children, having given their last shilling away to driver of the wagon, and Alec d'Urberville is a rich man, Tess has been fighting long enough against her fate before she gives in and marries him. "We didn't know you was coming till we got your letter this morning - when 'twas too late. But no doubt you can get other lodgings somewhere." (*Tess*, 446.) No doubt, they did; and Tess became Mrs d'Urbeville. But by that time she has already ceased to recognise her body as her own,- "allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will" (*Tess*, 447.)

Tess does not inherit suddenly and unexpectedly a large sum of money like Jane Eyre does, through which she can become an independent and wealthy woman who can afford to herself even such great generosity as to share her inheritance with her cousins. Though Mr Rochester is not in Brazil, they are also still far away from each other, and they are also to be reunited, but under what different conditions. Jane is also just about to bind herself to another man, to St. John, but she is warned in time, she is summoned by a mysterious voice, a strange calling which she follows, therefore she is not too late, she returns back to her beloved Edward and this time there is already nothing and nobody in the way of their happiness, the insane wife is dead by now, Jane does not need to fight against her any longer. Providence does not do this service for Tess and thus she takes retribution into her own hands, and she becomes the murderer of the man who 'came between Angel and her', she murders him for 'the trap he has set her in her simple youth'. Insight is not refrained from her either, but her vocation is different than that of Jane's:

I thought as I ran along that you would be sure to forgive me now I have done that. It came to me as a shining light that I should get you

back that way.

(*Tess*, 474.)

Examining all these events and the reaction of the characters and eventually the outcome of all that has happened, we can draw the conclusion again that in the two novels we have two different worlds. Hardy's is a universe which is a dreary, bleak and cruel place, where the heroine Tess is inevitably drifted towards sin and towards her fall, and Charlotte Brontë's being a helpful universe, a helpful world, guiding Jane towards virtue and moral victory. This is also shown in their assessment of the very same phenomenon: the starry sky, with which I would like to conclude my essay.

"Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?"

"Yes"

"All like ours?"

"I don't know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn tree. Most of them splendid and sound - a few blighted."

"Which do we live on - a splendid one or a blighted one?"

"A blighted one"

"`tis very unlucky that we didn't pitch on a sound one, when there were so many of `em!"

"Yes."

(*Tess*, 70.)

We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us: and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence. ... Looking up, I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty milkyway. Remembering what it was - what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light - I felt the might and strength of God.

(*Jane*, 414.)

Small Abraham is right when in his sorrow over Prince's death he asks Tess through his tears: "`Tis because we live on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it Tess."

(*Tess*, 73.)

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