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Postmodernism: A Revolt Against Victorianism in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

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Abstract: *Postmodernism embraces ambiguity, and challenges fixed meanings and universal truth. Tess of the d'Urbervilles represents the morality of the time. Tess of the d'Urbervilles can be read as a pointer to this problem. Hardy pleads, like the postmodernists, to employ more than one hermeneutic approach to decipher the meaning and purpose of Victorian morality. Hardy portrays Tess as a postmodern woman who rejects socially constructed values and truth in order to attack Victorian morality. Tess is more postmodern than Victorian in the sense that she opposes Victorian chastity and virginity as meta-narratives. Tess believes what she believes to be right or wrong, disregarding Victorian society and societal norms. Because postmodern theory is applied to the text, the proposed study is qualitative. The novel is the primary source of data collection. Secondary data sources include books and journal articles. Selected passages from the text are interpreted with a view to postmodern theory to address research questions. The research technique is interpretive content analysis.*

Key Words: Postmodern Woman, Postmodern Ethics, Postmodernism

Introduction

Postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural movement that emerged in the late 20th century, questioning the validity of grand narratives and objective truth. In the realm of ethics, postmodernism rejects the idea of universal and timeless moral standards and instead emphasizes the diversity of moral perspectives and the influence of power dynamics. Postmodern ethics and postmodern morality are used interchangeably. Postmodern morality, like other aspects of postmodernism, is influenced by the philosophical and cultural shifts that emerged in the late 20th century. Postmodernism is characterized by scepticism towards fixed norms, a rejection of absolute truth, and an emphasis on subjective experiences and cultural relativism. In this context, postmodern morality is understood as a departure from traditional moral beliefs and a re-evaluation of moral values and ethical systems.

For postmodernists, a continuous, unique, and eternal truth is meaningless. Jean-François Lyotard is associated with the concept of postmodernism. He argues that postmodernism is characterized by a scepticism toward metanarratives. Lyotard suggests that postmodernism questions the existence of universal truth and instead emphasizes the diversity of local knowledge systems (Lyotard, 1979). Everything and all that happens in our surrounding world is relative, according to postmodernists. Realities are numerous, complex, and varied and are the result of temporary traditions. Deconstruction is a term Derrida's philosophy frequently refers to, and his ideas may be seen as an ideal representation of postmodern philosophy in general (Sweetman, 1999). As a result, it may be assumed right away that "deconstruction" and "postmodernism" can be used interchangeably for the sake of simplification. All identities, presence, and prophecies, in Derrida's view, depend on something that is absent and distinct from them for their own existence. At this level, neither an identity nor a reality exists. Identity is merely a mental construct that mostly uses language (Bell, 2020). Truth is dependent upon social and linguistic practices, and there is no transcendent, universal foundation for truth or moral values. Rorty advocates for

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a "conversation of mankind" where different perspectives and narratives are chosen for conversation rather than seeking a single, ultimate truth (Rorty, 1979).

Postmodernists are divided into two broad groups: sceptics and affirmatives (Rosenau, 1991). Postmodernists who are sceptical of the modern subject are quite critical of it. They view modern subjects as a linguistic quirk (Rosenau, 1991, p.43). They reject all theories of time because, in their view, the way that modern theories of time evaluate and regulate people is oppressive. They reject theory because there are so many of them, and none of them are thought to be more accurate than the others. They state, "Theory conceals, distorts, and obfuscates; it is alienated, divergent, and dissonant, and it serves as a tool to exclude, order, and subjugate opposing energies" (Rosenau, 1991, p.81). By contesting assertions of truth, affirmative postmodernists also reject theory. However, they believe that theory should only be changed rather than being completely abandoned. Postmodernists who are affirmative as opposed to sceptical are less rigid. They promote efforts for feminism, ecology, and peace (Rosenau, 1991, p.42).

Baudrillard points out that postmodernism marks the dissolution of the boundary between reality and simulation. He explores that contemporary society is characterized by the proliferation of signs and images, where the distinction between truth and simulation becomes increasingly blurred. Baudrillard investigates the hyperreal nature of modern culture and the impact of media and technology (Baudrillard, 1981). The desire for truth, according to Foucault, is the assumption that a particular kind of truth is acceptable in a particular culture. A whole layer of practices, such as pedagogy, a system of books, and laboratories, such as scientific communities in the past or laboratories in the present, enhance and simultaneously recreate the drive to truth. The manner in which knowledge is rooted in society, by which it is given meaning, is, of course, what allows for a deeper replication of this will (Reza, 2016).

Victorian era was marked by strict social and moral codes that emphasized sexual purity, rigid class divisions, and the importance of conforming to societal expectations. In contrast, postmodernism emerges as a reaction against these traditional norms, seeking to deconstruct and challenge established ideologies. Postmodern morality is characterized by scepticism towards universal moral values and an emphasis on subjectivity, diversity, and the deconstruction of grand narratives. Postmodern thinkers argue that moral standards are not fixed or absolute but rather socially constructed and contingent upon individual perspectives and cultural contexts. Postmodernism is a broad intellectual and cultural movement that emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to the dominant ideas and values of modernity. While it encompasses various disciplines, including art, literature, philosophy, and sociology, postmodernism may also be a rejection and critique of many aspects of Victorian social norms and values. Victorian society, which refers to the period during the reign of Queen Victoria in the 19th century, was characterized by strict social hierarchies, moral codes, and a belief in Christianity and sexuality. It emphasized concepts such as order, stability, chastity and morality. However, postmodernism challenges these notions by questioning the stability of meaning, truth, and identity and by embracing fragmentation and deconstruction of meaning. Postmodernists challenge the traditional values and social norms that were prevalent during the Victorian era. While it is important to note that the term "Victorian social norms" encompasses a wide range of ideas and practices, there are several aspects that postmodernism seeks to reject and subvert.

The novel is about issues of morality, social class, and the double standards that Victorian society imposed on women. Tess' tragic end serves as a reminder of the unfairness and hypocrisy that were pervasive in the society at the time. As one of Hardy's most well-known works, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is recognised for its potent depiction of a woman's battle against society's expectations and the catastrophic outcomes she encounters.

Literature Review

Qureshi (2021) explores that scholars have not yet examined the negative impact of expectations on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. On the night of their wedding (Angel and Tess), both people reveal secrets that cast doubt on the fundamental foundations of their union. Both Tess and Angel had idealised perceptions of each other, so they are forced to change or risk having their relationship end. Whereas Angel adopts a rigid, inflexible attitude toward his beliefs, Tess adapts her views and behaviour, carrying this over into her relationship with Alec d'Urberville. When faced with circumstances she cannot control, Tess does not show

herself the same respect. Instead, Tess internalises judgements about her actions that lead to unfair judgements and exaggerated self-expectations. Thomas Hardy believes that women are an integral part of nature, and women are more sensitive to blending into nature. In the male-dominated world, women have the same suffering fate as nature in human civilization, which tends to be isolated and lonely. This paper examines *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* from the perspective of feminism.

According to (Jiang, 2020), Hardy has achieved considerable literary success in recent years. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, considered to be his best work, is a realistic novel that chronicles the misery of Tess, a young peasant girl. It is a genuine exposure and forceful denunciation of social injustice and capitalist morality, as well as a profound sympathy for the ordinary country's people. As such, this novel stands out among English works of critical realism. Tess, the protagonist of the novel, is deeply in love. But every time, her love for her family is what pulls her into a painful swale. She fights against the painful contrast. Life continues to mislead her even though she never gives in to her unfortunate fate. She spends a few joyous days with her sweetheart in the end. But it comes at the expense of her life. She faces a number of psychological tests as she navigates the contradictions of her existence and battles fate with tenacity. This article aims to explore the heroine's mental growth from endurance to ultimate resistance. Additionally, this article reveals the societal relevance of her mental development. Mental growth in psychology refers to the cognitive, emotional, and intellectual development and maturation that individuals experience throughout their lives. It encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, the development of problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to adapt to new challenges and experiences. Mental growth is influenced by a combination of genetic factors, environmental stimuli, learning experiences, and social interactions. It is a dynamic process that continues from infancy through adulthood, shaping a person's thoughts, behaviours, and overall mental capabilities.

Fong (2019) points out that Tess's life symbolises her loss and destruction, like the flowers on her child's grave. Tess, who loses her child, requests permission from the local priest to give her baby a Christian burial. Thanks to the pride and foolishness of Tess's father when the child is ill, the baby Sorrow is falsely baptised and is thus not given proper service under the laws of the church as her father decides not to give permission to any priest to baptise the baby. So Tess decides to baptise her child herself. The priest is also not willing to baptise an illegitimate child. Tess requests the priest to tell her if her baptism of the child is the same as the priest himself. They (Tess and the priest) agree on the important point that her doing of baptismal performance is exactly the same as if he had done it on his own, and her child is safely placed in paradise. When the young mother pushes the priest to do it practically, he refuses to do it. She needs to bury her child herself. At night time, Tess buries her child next to the graves of the unchristened with only a container of flowers and a wooden cross to mark the place.

Chen & Shi (2019) believe that Thomas Hardy is a very popular and the last prominent author of the Victorian period in England. His novels and poetry have had a massive impact on literature in the twentieth century. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the most popular one of his novels. The novel portrays the sad and rough life of a beautiful and innocent girl, Tess, after she is seduced by Alec. Tess's unfortunate fate is caused by several factors, and it is the product of the pressures of society. Apart from this, her own fatal flaw in character cannot be detached from her tragedy. She clearly has a double nature that is opposition and agreement. After her bad experience with Alec, she separates from him but goes back to him. As a miserable teenage farmer, Tess once attempts to fight with fate, but she loses. Tess reveals her past to Angel, but Angel does not forgive her for her past sexual relationship with Alec. So she loses. In the end, she becomes a killer and also the target of society who refuses to obey the rules. As a result, she is isolated from her husband and is executed. A lovely and innocent girl comes to a wretched life and tragic outcome.

Fatima (2016) points out that in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, economics is a key theme. The current investigation supports Marx's theories that every social and political action is motivated by obtaining and retaining economic gains. The study supports Marx's theory that human nature is such that the most basic demands of life are for food and shelter and that Tess' tragedy revolves around these basic necessities. She has been used as a commodity, a way to gain money, throughout her entire existence. Her downfall is not caused by the aristocrat Alec taking advantage of her; rather, the family's sole source of income, the family horse, passes away. Following this, a series of things happen that bring Tess to her demise. According to the research, classicism is the ideology that establishes an individual's value in relation to the class to



which he or she belongs. Tess' declining financial situation and low social standing spell her fate. The report also raises the important issue of marriage being seen as a way to achieve financial stability. According to the research, the proletariat is exploited and victimised through the use of surplus labour and variable workday lengths. Tess belongs to the proletariat.

The novel has been discussed from different perspectives as needed in the literature review. However, the researcher finds that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has not been reviewed from a postmodernist perspective, which can explore Tess's character and the novel itself from a different angle.

Research Methodology/Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study focuses on providing answers to the why and how questions to examine Victorian morality, chastity, and purity from a postmodern standpoint. Qualitative research emphasizes the subjective component of all knowledge and research, places a premium on holistic coherence, and disdains the idea that knowledge can be generalized because it is based on the fundamental relativism of all knowledge (Nunan, [1998](#)).

The inductive methodology, which is closely related to qualitative research, is adopted by the researcher. It starts with developing research objectives and questions, which are then carefully examined to discover patterns through the process of critical observation, ultimately leading to a particular theory. It is essentially a data-driven methodology that starts without assumptions and forbids the researcher's cultural and intellectual prejudices from influencing the process of data collection and its interpretation, yet it has the potential to produce fresh research assumptions (Shohamy, [1989](#), p. 30).

This exploratory study, which seeks to interpret *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* through the prism of postmodernism, uses interpretation as a method to arrive at a conclusion. It has also taken a close look at earlier studies on the topic to identify any discrepancies in their conclusions and to establish the basis for the current investigation. The text of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which has been examined in depth for components of postmodernism and interpreted in the context of the objectives of the study, serves as the main source for data gathering. The secondary sources considered in this study are pertinent books, research papers, and journal articles written by various writers.

This study intends to explore the postmodernist viewpoints of Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and Richard Rorty, applied to the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Findings

Tess's rebellion against Victorian social norms was found in her sexual agency and the moral implications surrounding her. In Chapter 4, Tess became a victim of sexual assault by Alec d'Urberville, an event that significantly impacted her life. However, instead of succumbing to societal expectations of shame and silence, Tess spoke out and confronted the injustice. This act of resistance was a rejection of the Victorian notion that women were passive objects and should remain silent about their experiences. Tess's attack on Victorian social norms was her pursuit of love and happiness outside the bounds of traditional marriage. Tess fell in love with Angel Clare, and they engaged in a passionate relationship. However, Tess's previous sexual encounter with Alec became an obstacle when she confessed her past to Angel before their marriage. Despite the Victorian emphasis on purity and the sanctity of marriage, Tess's desire to be accepted was a revolt against Victorian social values. Tess's rebellion against Victorian social norms was further exemplified through her rejection of religious orthodoxy and its restrictive moral codes. After the death of her child, Tess questioned the fairness and justice of Victorian society, which punished her for her past actions. She rejected the conventional notion of Victorian morality and asserted her own moral agency, challenging the Victorian belief in the absolute authority of religious institutions.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy portrayed Tess as a character who defied the conventional Victorian notions of morality and sexuality. Tess's experiences and choices throughout the novel have been conveyed as a subtle critique of the rigid moral standards imposed by Victorian society. One aspect that challenged Victorian social norms was Tess's sexuality. In the novel, Tess became a victim of sexual assault, which led to her pregnancy. In Victorian society, sexual purity and chastity were highly valued, especially for women. However, Tess's sexual encounter and subsequent pregnancy were depicted as the

result of her victimization rather than her own moral failing. This challenged the Victorian notion that women should be held responsible for any sexual transgressions. Another way in which *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* challenged Victorian social norms was through Tess's pursuit of personal happiness and fulfilment. Victorian society placed a strong emphasis on duty and self-denial, particularly for women. However, Tess refuses to conform to societal expectations and instead seeks her own happiness. She rejected the notion that she should endure a life of misery and sacrifice for the sake of social acceptance. Tess's decision to leave her abusive husband, Angel Clare, was a rejection of the Victorian ideal of female submissiveness. Despite the societal pressure to maintain the sanctity of marriage, Tess chose to prioritize her own well-being and asserted her agency by leaving an unhealthy relationship. Furthermore, Tess's tragic fate has been conveyed as a critique of the deterministic and moralistic worldview of the Victorian era.

The Victorian era was marked by religious piety and strict moral codes. However, Hardy's novel questioned the effectiveness of religious institutions in promoting true morality. The character of Angel Clare, who represented the ideal Victorian man, was morally conflicted and failed to display the forgiveness and compassion associated with religious teachings. Tess challenged the Victorian ideals of female purity, as she was depicted as a complex and flawed character who experienced sexual assault and faced societal judgment. This portrayal challenged the Victorian notion of female virtue and demonstrated the hypocrisy and oppression inherent in Victorian social norms. Tess's relationship with Alec d'Urberville was seen as a critique of Victorian sexual mores. The novel portrays the power dynamics between men and women and questions the sanctity of marriage. Tess's affair with Alec was not condemned solely based on moral grounds but rather highlighted the patriarchal dominance and exploitation that characterized many Victorian relationships. Tess, the protagonist, was condemned for her sexual encounters, while her male counterparts faced minimal repercussions. For instance, Alec d'Urberville seduced Tess, leading to her ostracization by society.

One aspect of postmodern morality evident in the novel was the rejection of fixed moral absolutes and the exploration of moral ambiguity. Tess's actions, such as her sexual encounter with Alec d'Urberville, challenged the Victorian notion of female purity and chastity. Hardy presented Tess as a complex and flawed character, defying the traditional binary of moral virtue and sin. This moral ambiguity served as a critique of the rigid moral standards imposed by Victorian society. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* questioned the influence of social class and the limitations it imposed on individuals. In the Victorian era, social class was a determining factor in one's status and opportunities. Tess, being from a lower social class, experienced the oppressive effects of class divisions. Her aspirations for upward mobility were met with rejection and exploitation. This depiction challenged the Victorian belief in the inherent superiority of the upper class and the notion that social mobility was limited or impossible.

During the Victorian era, women were expected to adhere to strict moral codes of behaviour and maintain their sexual purity before marriage. However, Tess's story unfolded as a series of unfortunate events that resulted in her loss of virginity outside of wedlock. This transgression of societal norms was central to the narrative and challenged the Victorian ideals of feminine virtue. Tess's actions and experiences throughout the novel were interpreted as a critique of the Victorian double standards that punished women for their sexual transgressions while excusing or even glorifying the behaviour of men. Her character embodied the complexities and contradictions of human experience, defying the black-and-white moral judgments of the Victorian era. Tess's struggle for autonomy and self-fulfilment in the face of societal expectations was seen as a postmodern rebellion against the rigid social hierarchies and gender roles of Victorian England. She resisted conforming to the prescribed roles of a submissive woman and asserted her agency and individuality. By portraying Tess as a flawed and morally complex character, Hardy challenged the Victorian belief in moral absolutes and explored the relativity of morality. This has been aligned with the postmodern rejection of grand narratives and a more nuanced understanding of ethics.

During the Victorian era, society was governed by strict moral codes and norms that emphasized social hierarchy, sexual purity, and adherence to religious values. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy explores the life of Tess, a young woman who becomes a victim of societal judgment and double standards. Tess challenged the Victorian notions of morality and the oppressive social order through her experiences



and choices. One example of the revolt against Victorian social norms in the novel has been examined in Tess's sexual agency and its consequences. In Victorian society, women were expected to uphold their sexual purity before marriage. However, Tess's encounter with Alec d'Urberville led to her seduction and subsequent pregnancy, which brought shame and judgment upon her. This event reflected the clash between Victorian ideals of female chastity and the postmodern view that emphasizes personal autonomy and sexual liberation. Hardy portrayed Tess as a victim of social and economic circumstances, highlighting the arbitrary nature of the Victorian moral framework. Despite her inherent goodness and pure intentions, Tess was condemned by society due to her past actions. This critique of Victorian morality aligned with postmodern ideas that questioned the fairness and objectivity of traditional moral judgments.

One of the key ways in which postmodernism revolted against Victorian social norms was through its rejection of grand narratives or meta-narratives. Victorian society was grounded in the idea of progress and the belief in a single universal truth or purpose. In contrast, postmodernism argued that these grand narratives were oppressive and excluded marginalized voices. Postmodern thinkers highlighted the existence of multiple perspectives and argued for the recognition of diverse identities and experiences. One aspect of Victorian social norms that postmodernism challenged was the hierarchical social structure and the rigid gender roles. Victorian society was characterized by a strict division between the public and private spheres, with women primarily confined to the domestic realm. Postmodernism critiqued these gender roles and sought to deconstruct binary categories such as male/female, public/private, and reason/emotion. It emphasized the fluidity and multiplicity of identities and challenged the fixed notions of gender and sexuality. Postmodernism rejected the idea of a unified and coherent self. Victorian society placed great importance on individualism and the notion of a stable, essential self. In contrast, postmodernism argues that the self is fragmented, constructed, and influenced by various social, cultural, and historical factors. It emphasized the idea of the "death of the author" and the role of intertextuality, where meaning is derived from a network of references and influences rather than from an autonomous authorial voice.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy criticized religion. Morality and Victorian Christianity were ridiculed by Alec. The virtues of life made him chuckle. He coloured himself in Christianity. In the postmodern context, this could also be explained when he once more fell for Tess's charm, and the change in him was simply superficial. His religious clothing was taken off, and he revealed his actual self. Tess thought that it could not be a permanent phenomenon because she expected this. She explained to Alec that he had experienced all of the delights of this world and was now seeking to find happiness in his afterlife. Hardy spoke about what he believed to be right; hence, he was opposed to the traditional morality of his time.

Hardy rebelled against Victorianism in his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The novel has a postmodern touch because of Hardy's postmodern ideas. Hardy attacked primarily female-focused Victorian social conventions. Men could do whatever they wanted, but women had to maintain their chastity and purity. Women were expected to stay inside their houses and were not permitted to leave them. The majority of women suffered greatly from the severe social rules of Victorian culture. Hardy was against these principles that were set in stone and had no exceptions. He wished to transform those notions. Postmodernism rejects the socially constructed, universal notions of chastity, virginity and purity. The postmodernist view of reality held that there were neither absolute nor socially constructed norms.

Discussion

The denial of objective reality, freedom of the human mind, and the rejection of reality and social values are fundamentals of postmodernity. All human beings have a constructed and ever-changing identity in postmodern terms that leaves them without a permanent identity. Postmodernists give room to chance, incident and fortune (Farmahini, 2010). The belief in pluralism is the rejection of definite and eternal truth. Pluralism, therefore, is considered to be one of the most important postmodern philosophical foundations in various fields. Foucault argues that truth is not a fixed and objective entity but rather a product of power relations and discursive practices. Foucault (1966) explores how different epistemes shape knowledge and truth. Postmodernism contradicts "totality" and the related topic more than any other school, and it seems totally non-existent even in the human mind. Therefore, postmodernists oppose all fundamental ideals and values. Postmodernism, due to its post-constructive background, opposes every

persistent and single truth and rejects every parallel of resemblance (Farhamini, 2010). Alec d'Urberville reflects the conventional, genteel culture that does not embrace Tess's morality in contrast to Tess's attempt at moral evolution. Tess has moved towards natural morality, and as a result of this, she sees the shortcomings of conventional religion and seeks to find her own happiness. Tess is an atheist who despises Christianity. She is a non-believer in a certain religion. She is agnostic about Christianity. She does not believe in anything that can be defined or specified. When Alec asks Tess if Angel knows she is an infidel, she responds, " No- I never told him- if I am an infidel (Hardy, 2008,p.376). Her growth, and thus her performance, can be viewed as postmodern. Angel's development, on the other hand, is almost the polar opposite of Tess's. He is initially seen as adhering to natural morality, then returning to conventional theology, and eventually adhering to natural morality again at the end of the novel, making him a good character. Tess rejects Victorian morality and accepts natural morality. Natural morality is based on intention. In natural morality, an action is not considered bad if intention is not involved.

By virtue of their formal values, postmodern novels do not have to be interpreted as dismissing the value of moral experience in human existence or as advocating an immoral lifestyle. They, on the other hand, broaden moral ideas that already exist in a realistic form to incorporate ethical issues relating to the systemic constraints of human moral understanding and their repercussions in postmodern discourse. Moral concepts have little or no role. Angel is startled at the depth of Tess's thinking after several conversations with her. In the sense that truth is relative but not scientific is what in which Tess believes. Truth is subjective, and it cannot be tested in a laboratory. Tess is right in what she believes to be true, and her feelings are "the ache of modernism" (Hardy, 2008,p.146). The notion that a person can go outside of oneself to apply a moral norm derived from logic to a given situation is false. What is commonly referred to as morality of the immoral is defined as "The sort of thing we don't do" (Gowen, 1991,p.194). The norms of social behaviour should be derived from a free and open encounter in the ethnocentric community. A communicative consensus within the community is required to gain validity and justification. We should reject the notion of knowing about the criteria we choose and what criteria we have to assess progress (Rorty, 1991,p.37). Tess accepts subjective truth. This subjectivity in truth is a revolt against the objective truth of Victorian society.

Postmodernism advocates diversified moral experience, large moral divergence, and profound and apparently new, popular and cultural differences among people. There are expectations of people as if they were the great saviour to trash the mess left by modern morality. Postmodernism goes to the extreme of relativism. As a result, the moral universality has to be reduced. The main thing is that morality is no longer the necessity of human beings. There is no fundamental standard for judging the good and evil nature of human conduct. Tess wants Angel to take care of her sister Liza-Lu after she is no more. She asks him to marry Liza-Lu, claiming that she has the best of Tess without the bad. Even though Angel reminds her that marrying his sister-in-law is against the law. Tess assures him that many people do it nonetheless. She explains, " That's nothing, dearest. People marry sister-laws continually about Marlott" (Hardy, 2008,p.459). Tess seems to reject Victorian moral standards of marriage. She believes in relativism. She does what she considers good for her. World War II allowed relativism to secure status in many different fields, including politics, economy, culture, thought, philosophy, etc. Relativism has become more prevalent in postmodern morality. Our age is often called the relativistic age (Binkley, 1983,p.6).

Postmodern relativism and moral values hold that moral concepts, moral opinions and moral choices of persons should be judged within a specific period according to the context. The results of this assessment are inevitably based on a particular context in which the theory and practice start. This is evidently one-sided and mechanical, as it only perceives the individual particularities in particular moral circumstances and ignores the existence of a universal and valuable moral practice in the great history of Western society. Morality is produced through contextual adaptation, and one kind of morality is good for one environment but not for others. This type of moral awareness or judgement is separate from the individual and moral character. Tess has assassinated Alec. Alec has mistreated her, and she claims that through her, Alec has hurt Angel. On the other hand, Angel is appalled by her act, but Tess is happy and in a hurry: "To tell you that I have killed him!" (Hardy,2008,p. 448). She smiles after telling him that she has murdered Alec. If morality departs from the moral quality of people, it probably deviates from moral self-building. If we advocate normative contextual morality, people can only make their own decisions, and their effects can



be disastrous when facing a changing social context. Moral relativism is attractive, as it recognizes the notion that there is no one way to live life (Lukes, 2013, p.158). Tess rejects the idea that there is only one way to live in Victorian society. She can kill a man when she considers her act as good and moral. There is not the best way to live. Modern moral and social crises have been the result of radicalizing moral relativism, and the loss of traditional human virtue is the loss of objective and impersonal standards. The price of liberating moral actors from the external authority of traditional morality is to lose all the powerful content of any so-called moral words of new self-disciplined agents. All moral actors can express themselves without the external authority which restricts them (Mac Intyre, 1985, p.87).

Foucault studies power dynamics embedded in traditional morality. Foucault (1976) argues that traditional morality operates as a form of social control and domination, perpetuating power structures and marginalizing certain groups. Foucault highlights how traditional moral codes have been used to suppress certain behaviours and identities. Extreme moral relativism believes all morality is relative, value is subjective and personalized, morality is personal, and the choice of value is legitimate for all. Postmodernism is characterized by scepticism towards narratives that seek to legitimize knowledge and social values (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernism questions the notion of a singular truth and emphasizes the diversity of perspectives and the subjective nature of knowledge. This sort of morals inevitably results in a total distinction between social values and postmodern morality and leads to more accidental and ambiguous experiences of people, which easily leads to moral loss and moral deterioration. What matters, instead of which kind of value and type of value is right, is the formation of value and the process of obtaining value. Individuals are burdened with ethical choices (Lyon, 2004, p.7). Extreme relativism or scepticism says that power control is ineffective and primed. The ultimate source of moral value is not the foundation of culture or reason but the person. Moral thinking ultimately becomes nihilism. It is true and believed that relativism is a factor in the confusion of the mind and an extremely dangerous political game (Bloom, 1994, p.156). This is the inner pain that moral relativism cannot overcome by itself. The normative aspect of morality is retained in postmodern Western ethics. Morality is designed to help people make the best decisions. Tess rejects Victorian morality. She does what she considers right. She does not follow society to make it clear what is right and what is wrong. She follows herself, and "What she said had done, and his horror at her impulse was mixed with amazement at the strength of her affection for himself, and at the strangeness of its quality, which had apparently extinguished her moral sense altogether" (Hardy, 2008, p.449). Tess rejects traditional morality as a source of social control and marginalisation of certain groups and, especially women folks. Relativism is progressive in nature and an essential weapon in the fight against one-way hegemony.

According to Lyotard (1984), grand narratives cannot provide a comprehensive account of history, society, or human experience. Instead, postmodernism emphasizes the fragmentation and diversity of human experiences, acknowledging multiple perspectives and the subjectivity of knowledge. This rejection of grand narratives can be seen as a direct challenge to the Victorian belief in universal moral and social norms. Tess is depicted as noble and pure-hearted in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. When Hardy labels Tess as "A Pure Woman" in the subtitle of the front page of his novel, it makes her character plain to the reader. It is important to note that Hardy uses the word "Pure" to underscore the concept that, despite her sins, Tess is still a mortal woman. He seems to convey that purity is a social construct to have social control over women so that men may remain in power. Foucault provides insights into the relationship between power, truth, and social values. He argues that truth is not fixed or objective but is shaped by power structures and historical contexts. Foucault explores the ways in which knowledge and truth are socially constructed (Foucault, 1972). Tess rejects this concept of men being in power. Tess refuses to live in Alec's house when he offers it to her. She informs him that she will not be going there and that she has money at her father-in-law's house if she so desires, but she does not desire. Angel has deserted her. She asks Angel, "Why have you so wronged me?" (Hardy, 2008, p. 416). She does not request Angel for any financial help. She is in dire need of money, but she does not want to depend on men. Tess rejects the Victorian concept that women are supposed to be dependent on men. According to Lyotard (1979), postmodernism questions the notion that there is a single, objective truth or moral system that can control human conduct. Instead, morality becomes a matter of subjective interpretation and negotiation within different social contexts.

Tess is a victim, whether noble or not, not only in her death but also in her life. Rorty discusses the issue of truth and social values in the context of postmodernism. He questions the idea of universal, objective truth and goes for a more pragmatic approach. Truth is not an absolute concept but is determined by social practices and language games (Rorty, 1982). Tess is born in an agrarian working-class with so-called aristocratic ancestors, and her mother encourages her to form a bond with the Stoke-d'Urbervilles after taking on familial duty for her drunken father and demanding mother. The unscrupulous Alec d'Urberville wants to exploit her while working for him. Tess gets raped or seduced, but it is unclear. The fact that the sexual contact culminates in the birth of an illegitimate child who subsequently dies is evident. Tess meets and falls in love with Angel Clare, the son of a middle-class clergyman after she moves to an isolated farm as a milkmaid. He woos and marries her after that. Tess confesses her past to him on their wedding night. He can no longer love her. Tess begins her confession with a positive attitude, knowing that she and Angel have both sinned. However, as she narrates her narrative, the end of her simple life is replaced with something more complex. As they are both sinful, Tess announces, "O, Angel- I am almost glad- because now you can forgive me! I have not made my confession. I have a confession, too- remember, I said so"(Hardy, 2008,p. 265).

Lyotard argues that postmodernism challenges the emphasis of Enlightenment on universal truth and instead accepts a fragmented, pluralistic understanding of reality (Lyotard, 1979). Angel Clare leaves her without providing for her. Angel is as sinful as Tess is. Tess is encouraged by her sin to reveal her past. Tess frequently attempts, and more seriously, to reveal her past as the wedding approaches. In reality, she does, but the letter is not read. Angel, on the other hand, discloses that he sinned by spending forty-eight hours in debauchery with a woman. Tess admits that she, too, has secrets, and the chapter of her life ends with sharing them with him as she has forgotten Angel for his sexual relationship with a woman. She also wants to reveal her past "because I want to forgive me, and not to be indignant with me for not telling you before, as perhaps, I ought to have done"(Hardy, 2008,p. 263). Angel separates from Tess as she has a tainted past, which is considered unacceptable in Victorian social ethics. She is alone and helpless. Alec arrives, promising to provide for her, her widow mother, and her siblings if she agrees to live with him. Tess hesitantly accepts becoming Alec's mistress after more than a year of silence from Angel because of her sense of obligation to her family. Tess is more attractive, intelligent, and charming than the average woman. However, because she is a working-class woman who can be labelled promiscuous, she pays the price for breaking the law with her life (Morris,1990,p.128). Hardy makes it plain that he does not see Tess as a criminal but rather as a mockery of justice (Morris,1990,p.129). Tess is often victimized inadvertently, despite her good intentions. Tess is pure because she is absolutely and thoroughly feminine (Morris,1990,p.127). She is the epitome of the ideal woman in every sense. Hardy throws his heroine's innocence as a challenge to hypocritical social taboos(Auerbach, 1982, p.168). Purity for women in Victorian society is meant to have social control over them. Victorian society wants to enforce its social norms through the purity of women. Truth is a product of power relations and is used to enforce social norms and control individuals (Foucault, 1977). From a postmodern perspective, Foucault's views emphasize that the revolt against truth and social values is a criticism of power structures. Tess revolts against these power structures.

Tess's story is tragic not only because she is persecuted by a society that judges her morally and legally but also because she pays the price with her life for responding to that victimization with violence(Morris,1990,p.139). Tess feels no sorrow for her crime; thus, she must die on the scaffold. Alec is no longer alive, and she has no regrets about killing him(Morris,1990,p.141). Tess commits murder in an attempt to retake control over her fate, thereby cementing her fate. Tess believes that she needs no explanation for murdering Alec. Lyotard points out that postmodernism challenges any narrative that claims to provide universal explanations of truth and social values (Lyotard, 1979). Postmodernism rejects the idea of a singular truth and embraces a multiplicity of perspectives and subjective interpretations. Hardy includes the execution in his story to express his fury at the treatment of women, particularly impoverished, fallen women(Morris,1990,p.140). Tess meets the same fate as the fallen woman. Tess is considered sinful despite displaying many of the characteristics of an ideal woman. She has the characteristics of selflessness, sacrifice and obedience. People consider her characteristics as ambiguous because of her one act of sexual relationship. Derrida explains the idea that language is inherently unstable and that meanings are constantly shifting. Traditional concepts of truth and certainty are illusory, and



texts contain inherent contradictions and ambiguities (Derrida, 1967). The nobility of her reputation has been tarnished in the minds of Victorians, and she can no longer be considered respectable. Victorian society had fixed norms. Women were supposed to follow those norms. Tess is not respectable because she deviates from the social norms of Victorian society. Victorian discourse is centred on the chastity of women and is considered true. Foucault questions the notion of a fixed, objective truth and investigates that power relations and discourses shape what is considered true in a given society. Foucault's ideas suggest that truth is a social construct and subject to historical and cultural influences (Foucault, 1972).

Angel is supposed to follow Victorian culture, which emphasises a woman's purity. He himself believes that Tess is pure. Three weeks after the wedding, Angel returns to his parents' house. He has decided to go to Brazil, and he informs his parents that Tess is staying with her parents as a result of his decision to go to Brazil. His mother inquires, "Angel- is she a young woman whose history will bear investigation?" (Hardy, 2008, p. 310). Angel's mother inquires if they have fought after his separation from Tess, but Angel responds that they have had a disagreement. Tess's mother inquires if she is truly virtuous. Angel exclaims that she is immaculate and pure. Thomas Hardy portrays her character as pure and innocent in his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Therefore, he observes that "her moral value has to be reckoned not by achievement but by tendency" (Hardy, 2008, p. 311). Tess believes in moral values that are not created by society. Her morality is based on subjectivity. She has a subjective approach towards moral values. She has her own moral values. Her single act of sexual relationship is not against her moral values because her intention is not involved in it. Rorty explores the concept of objective truth and views that truth should be seen as a social construction rather than an objective reality (Rorty, 1979). He observes that postmodernism provides an alternative to the traditional notions of truth and encourages us to focus on achieving social progress and justice rather than searching for absolute truths.

Victorian society was characterized by a belief in progress, rationality, and a fixed set of moral and social values. Postmodernism challenges these notions by questioning the existence of absolute truth and universal meanings. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy seems to deconstruct the Victorian worldview with his system of moral standards and replaces it with a postmodern one that is decentralised, fragmented, and denies having a definitive conclusion. There are no natural, internal intrinsic principles in postmodern thoughts. Mostly through social and cultural parameters and discourse, values are constructed for human beings, and Postmodernism does not believe in any universal existence that accepts the root of values. The values that a person selects are objects that are constructed. As Angel Clare declares, "I do hate the aristocratic principle of blood before everything" (Hardy, 2008, p. 222). Therefore, being a humble and respectable human being is entirely dependent on time and place and depends on social, cultural and historical circumstances (Poorshafei & Arain, 2009). Hardy helps the reader see that through dissecting older writing, a writer is able to produce a new, noteworthy piece of work. The Victorian era was known for its rigid Victorian morality. This significant morality targeted women. Tess has to maintain her chastity at all times. For her to get married, she has to be a virgin. Tess loses her virginity prior to getting married, yet Hardy still refers to her as a "pure woman". One of the key aspects of postmodernism is its rejection of metanarratives, which are universal narratives that claim to provide a comprehensive understanding of reality. Traditional morality often relies on metanarratives derived from religious or philosophical systems that prescribe universal moral principles and norms. Postmodernists view these metanarratives as oppressive because they tend to privilege certain perspectives and marginalize others. Postmodern Hardy rejects the idea of a single unifying morality. Hardy describes Tess's life and actions as "which had apparently extinguished her moral sense altogether" (Hardy, 2008, p. 449). Hardy seems to deconstruct Tess's morality to reinterpret her morality. Jacques Derrida examines the traditional understanding of truth and discusses the existence of multiple interpretations. Derrida's work focuses on challenging binary oppositions and hierarchical structures. Derrida highlights the ways in which language and writing can undermine fixed meanings and question established truth (Derrida, 1976). For Derrida, Postmodernism challenges the notion of absolute truth and emphasizes the play of language and the multiplicity of meanings.

The idea of Victorian morality is what Hardy wishes to reject. To demonstrate that Tess is still pure, he added a subtitle (a pure woman) to his novel. This new piece of art makes the point that Victorian morals and values cannot be applied to the modern world because they are fixed and not useful for the modern

world. It is a rejection of the old and an acceptance of the new. Rorty emphasizes a pragmatic approach to truth, suggesting that truth should be understood in terms of its usefulness and practical consequences rather than as a representation of objective reality. Rorty believes that social values are not fixed but rather influenced by historical and cultural contexts (Rorty, 1989). There is no set definition of morality or purity in this new world, which believes that there are many different meanings. Foucault explains the relationship between power, knowledge, and social values. Foucault opines that power structures shape what is considered truth and that these structures are historically contingent. Foucault explores how knowledge is constructed within specific historical and social contexts (Foucault, 1972). Postmodernism rejects fixed notions of truth by highlighting the contingent nature of knowledge and the influence of power in shaping social values. In his novel, Hardy uses Postmodernism to undermine Victorian ideals and establish Tess as a pure woman from a postmodern perspective. Postmodernism rejects the idea of a universal truth and instead views the existence of multiple, diverse truths (Lyotard, 1984). In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy assumes the role of a researcher and historian of the Victorian era while also feeling a part of the postmodern era, which is fresh and appealing to him. While maintaining a distance from the events taking place in Victorian society, Hardy continuously senses the influence of Victorian tradition on himself. Rejecting Victorian traditions, he also criticises their continued influence on his culture.

Hardy rebels against Victorian tradition throughout the novel with his postmodern ideas. When Angel Clare comes back to accept Tess as his wife after being raped by Alec, Tess expresses her feelings about Alec as "I didn't care what he did wi' me! But- will you go away, Angel, please, and never come any more?" (Hardy, 2008, p.441). Tess rejects sexual morality as a social construct of Victorian society. Angel considers himself to be pure and Tess impure. Tess rejects this kind of purity, which is meant only for women based on chastity. Angel rejects to accept her as his wife because she had an extramarital relationship with Alec. Tess has forgotten her past. Victorian concept of chastity and purity was a social construct to control and shape women's behaviour. The concept of chastity was based on power to prove women as less powerful than men. Foucault (1977) points out that traditional morality is often used as a tool of power and control, shaping and regulating individuals' behaviour according to societal norms and expectations. Foucault (1976) examines how power operates through systems of knowledge and discourse, influencing what is considered moral or immoral in different historical and cultural contexts. Postmodernism rejects traditional morality by challenging the idea of a fixed and universal moral code. Traditional morality often relies on the notion of absolute values and principles that apply to all individuals and societies. Postmodernism, however, accepts the subjective and socially constructed nature of morality. It argues that moral values are not objective and universal but are rather dependent upon cultural, historical, and individual perspectives.

Conclusion

In a postmodern reading, Tess has been seen as a fragmented and deconstructed character, challenging traditional notions of identity, morality, and social structures. Postmodernism emphasizes the absence of absolute truth and the influence of power dynamics in shaping individual experiences and narratives. Tess was portrayed as a victim of circumstances and societal expectations. She was subjected to the judgment of others and the rigid moral codes of Victorian society. From a postmodern perspective, Tess was seen as an example of an individual whose identity was shaped and defined by external forces. Postmodernism questions the authority of dominant narratives and seeks to give voice to marginalized perspectives. Tess, as a woman in a patriarchal society, was marginalized and oppressed. Her story was a critique of the power structures that limited individual agency and perpetuated inequality. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, there was a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity. This ambiguity was in the conflicting portrayals of Tess as both a victim and a seductress, as well as in the multiple interpretations of her actions and motivations.

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