

Tess of the d'Urbervilles: Hardy's Journey towards Postmodernism

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Abstract: *This research work attempts to explore the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles from postmodern perspective. Tess of the d'Urbervilles transforms the concept of Victorian society, marking a transition from Victorianism to Postmodernism. The study reveals that Hardy portrays Tess more a postmodern than a Victorian character that she challenges Victorian chastity and virginity as meta- narratives in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. She defies*

the notion of female chastity by bearing an illegitimate child and rejecting the social stigma attached to it. She challenges traditional expectations regarding women's purity, class boundaries, and the consequences of social judgment. She refuses to conform to a forced marriage, asserting her agency and autonomy in the face of social constraints. In the novel, she resists patriarchal control and dominance, including her father, Alec d'Urberville, and Angel Clare. Tess's tragic fate is shaped by social expectations of purity and virtue, which she ultimately rebels against. Tess of the d'Urbervilles transforms the concept of Victorian society, marking a transition from Victorianism to Postmodernism. This research analyses themes of Tess's rebellion against social norms: religion, morality, sexuality, and purity. Tess's character challenges such conventions, facing harsh consequences for daring to defy them. Postmodern theory is applied to the text, as such the proposed study is qualitative. This study intends to explore the postmodernist viewpoints of Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and Richard Rorty. Selected passages from the text are interpreted keeping in view postmodern theorists. Research approach is inductive. Research technique is interpretive content analysis. Tess of the d'Urbervilles can be analysed through a psychoanalytic lens, particularly in its exploration of the unconscious mind, repressed desires, and the impact of social expectations on individual behaviour.

Key words: Postmodern woman, postmodern purity, postmodern Hardy

Introduction

The mid-20th century sees the rise of postmodernism, a philosophical and cultural movement that questions established ideas about literature, art, architecture, and culture. Its resistance to binary oppositions, stress on the subjective experience, and scepticism of great narratives are what define it. There are some postmodern features in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* which mark it a postmodern novel.

Postmodern View of Ethics

Postmodern ethics also profoundly influences the narrative of contemporary literature. All concepts of morality that stress universal and unequivocal values are dismissed by postmodern ethics. In contrast to conventional ideas of moral absolutes and unchanging realities, the postmodern perspective on ethics emphasises the influence of subjective viewpoints, social constructs, and power relationships in forming ethical frameworks. The concept of a universal ethical code is questioned by postmodernism, which instead examines the variety and multiplicity of ethical viewpoints. Lyotard (1979) argues that the grand narratives and metanarratives that support conventional ethical systems have lost their legitimacy in the postmodern era. He contends that ethics should be viewed as a set of linguistic exercises in which many groups and people create their own moral codes and definitions (Lyotard, 1979).

Postmodern View of Sexuality

Postmodernism exposes the manufactured character of conventional binary distinctions like male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Butler (1990) claims that gender and sexuality are performative acts that are constantly formed and negotiated through social conventions and language. Butler's emphasis on the flexibility and changeability of sexual identities has significantly affected postmodern views on sexuality. Postmodernism also explores the power relationships and discourses that influence sexuality and sexual identities. Foucault (1976) investigates how power functions through discourses, institutions, and practices. He contends that the regulation and normalisation of sexual behaviour is how power productively acts. He casts doubt on the notion of a single, unchanging sexuality and emphasises the part that power plays in creating and regulating sexual identities (Imran & Akhtar, 2023).

Postmodern View of Religion

The postmodern view of religion comprises a variety of viewpoints that cast doubt on conventional ideas of religious authority and truth. Postmodernism emphasises how society and culture shape reality, casting doubt on the concept of absolute truth, and emphasising the variety of religious practices. According to this perspective, religion is not considered to be a universal or unchanging truth, but rather the result of human interpretation and contextualization.

Literature Review

Shehzad, Arshad, Roohi, and Parveen (2021) investigate to find out epiphanies that influence people to see the world. An epiphany is a sudden and profound realization or insight. It often involves a moment of clarity or understanding about a particular situation, problem, or aspect of life. By examining how epiphany functions as a psychological flash of insight to highlight the understanding and actions of Angel Clare, the study focuses on Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The novel exhibits epiphanic revelation of reality to highlight theoretical understanding of epiphany. Angel Clare has an epiphany, which leads to his coming to terms with the reality of things. His epiphany plays a crucial role in shaping his personality; it not only helps him grasp things better and more clearly, but it also helps him decide how to proceed. He experiences a psychological flash of insight that changes the way he perceives reality. His vision of reality changes unexpectedly; what he previously perceived as filthy or immoral is no longer immoral (Mohammad, et al., 2024).

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 have idealised perceptions of the 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 integral part of nature, and women are more sensitive to blending into the nature. In the male-dominated world, women have the same suffering fate with nature in human civilization, which tends to be isolated and lonely. This paper examines *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* from the perspective of feminism.

Peng (2021) investigates that freedom appears to be a mere fantasy for Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which is generally viewed as a reflection of Thomas Hardy's deterministic view of the universe. Determinism is the philosophical idea that every event, including human actions, is determined by preceding causes or natural laws. In other words, it suggests that the current state of the universe, along with the laws of nature, uniquely determines all future events. This concept raises questions about free will and the extent to which individuals have control over their actions and choices. Hardy seems to be influenced by the idea that human lives are shaped by external forces, such as social class and environment, rather than solely by individual choices. In his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy portrays characters who struggle against fate and circumstances, often meeting tragic ends despite their efforts. His writing suggests a belief in the power of destiny and the limitations of human agency in the face of larger forces.

Nuruzzaman (2017) investigates that Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has an intimate bond with nature. One observes the portrayal of her progressive development to live in nature's control. Her whole life is in nature's control. She struggles to change her life but nature acts against all her struggles. Her life depends on chances and coincidences. This forms her life and remains in close touch with nature at every stage of her life. Tess recognises herself as a true part of nature and always finds herself in midst of nature. The cycle of seasons correlates with the vagaries of her life, and likewise the landscape corresponds secretly with critical events of her life. Winter represents her gloomy life and spring gives her hope.

Fatima (2016) points out that Tess's parents view her as a selling product as they want Tess to give them material benefits. Not only to claim kinship, but to ensure a better life for her entire family, they send Tess to d'Urbervilles. Her family focuses on the items, Tess can get. As a seller makes his product appealing to draw customers, Tess's mother dresses her in the same way before sending her to Trantridge. Her mother is convinced that Tess can boost her family's economic condition. Her mother clearly says "her face" when asked what is Tess's main weapon. Joan's comment suggests that she is using her daughter as a means to better her own economic standing. The family treats her as an item all through the novel. After being abused by Alec, she is rebuked by her mother when she returns home for why she comes back rather than standing in solidarity with her daughter.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study provides answers to the why and how questions to analyse Victorian

morality, chastity, and purity from postmodernist perspective. Qualitative research focuses on the subjective elements of knowledge and research, emphasises on holistic coherence, and rejects the idea that knowledge can be generalized because it is based on relativism of knowledge (Nunan, 1998).

In qualitative research, the respondents' subjective, unique attitudes and beliefs in an unstructured, naturalistic environment are used to comprehend human behaviour from the writer's own point of view. This type of study is flexible, open-ended, and soft, metaphorically speaking (Nunan, 1998).

The researcher adopts inductive approach which is closely associated with qualitative research. It begins with research objectives and questions, which are then carefully analysed to find patterns through the process of critical observation, finally leading to a particular theory. It is a data-driven methodology that begins without assumptions and limits the researcher's cultural and intellectual likes and dislikes. So it does not influence the process of data collection and its interpretation, yet it has the potential to generate fresh research assumptions (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 30).

Results

Hardy depicted Tess as a troubled individual in Victorian society, but his goal was to show her as a postmodern woman who underwent Victorian torments. Tess was a postmodern woman who rejected traditional morality. Hardy could not give Tess all the characteristics of a postmodern woman because he was living in Victorian society, which was progressively giving way to a modern and postmodern world. The subtitle of his novel indicated his goal to portray Tess as a postmodern woman. Tess was cleansed by Hardy as a postmodern woman whose ideas were novel to the society at large, notably to Angel Clare on the wedding night. Hardy cleansed Tess after mingling with Victorian torments of the age. After her breakup with Angel Clare, Tess displayed the postmodern quality of mustering the guts to face society by acting like a man who had the courage to do so.

Tess had both an innate desire to enjoy herself and a contextual disinclination to do so. Tess was frequently portrayed as a haunted animal or a bird caught in a trap, yet neither of those descriptions accurately captured who she was. She possessed the ability to endure torture. She possessed both the mental and physical stamina to control herself bravely while remaining unbowed and unbroken. She was Hardy's finest achievement of a humble, peasant girl not just surrendering to the ongoing onslaughts of tragedy but also warding them off with composure, despite her pains and sufferings. She became a strong individual as a result of the prolonged pains and experiences of the world. Tess possessed capacity for adopting new ways of life. She endured suffering, yet she never lost courage. She faced bravely the brutality of men and frailty of love.

Discussion

Hardy's Depiction of Tess as a Postmodern Woman

In order to explore Hardy as a postmodern writer, the researcher examines *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* under the concepts of Tess as a postmodern woman, her revolt against Victorianism and

Victorian concept of purity. Hardy's postmodern journey is evident in his depiction of the main character Tess, his revolt against Victorianism and Victorian concept of purity.

In the postmodern views of Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault, and Rorty, the concept of the "postmodern woman" is seen as challenging traditional gender role and identity, navigating a complex web of cultural influences and power dynamics. These philosophers emphasize the fluidity of identity, the power of language in shaping reality, and the role of social structures in defining norms. From their perspectives, the postmodern woman navigates a world where truth is relative, meaning is constructed, and cultural context heavily influences understanding. Her identity and experiences are understood as fragmented, subject to multiple interpretations, and shaped by social constructs. Thomas Hardy's novels, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, depict characters challenging Victorian social norms. These works have themes of class struggles, gender roles, and the oppressive nature of social expectations, reflecting Hardy's critical perspective on the rigid social norms of his time. Das & Tripathi (2020) point out that female subjectivity is the understanding that one must forge one's own identity while challenging patriarchal social conventions.

Characteristic of a postmodern man or woman is a fragmented and hybrid identity. Baudrillard (1993) suggests that in the postmodern era, individuals are no longer confined to fixed categories or identities. They can freely navigate and adopt different roles, styles, and cultural influences, leading to a sense of fluidity and multiplicity in their identity formation. Saleh and Abbasi (2014) argue that as a supporter of oppressed women of the nineteenth century, Thomas Hardy takes an aggressive position in the face of internalized rules of the day, especially the ideal of femininity that leads to present him as one of the innovative and imaginative precursors of the "New Woman Fiction". Tess is adamant that her name must not be associated with a man. A woman's husband was her identity in Victorian society. Without a man, a woman was nothing more than a commodity. Postmodernism liberates a woman from the expectations of Victorian society. Tess rejects Victorian identity of woman that her husband is the real identity of the woman. A postmodern woman does not accept this kind of identity which is a social construct. She has her own identity as a woman. Identity is not fixed but fragmented and hybrid. Tess does not want her name to be associated with a male. She is happy to be called as Tess. She declares, "Don't call me Mrs. Clare, but Tess as before." (Hardy, 2008, p.332). Zacharias (2020) investigates that Tess Durbyfield, the primary character, is presented as a classical tragic figure who assumes the role of sacrifice in an effort to get the reader to consider how the "Fallen Woman" is portrayed and treated in the context of Hardy's modern Victorian society.

According to Lyotard (1984), postmodernism is defined by its incredulity towards grand narratives that claim to provide universal truth. Postmodern men and women are critical of overarching

theories or ideologies that purport to explain the world, recognizing that knowledge is shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. They question the authority and objectivity of institutions, including academia and science, and acknowledge the influence of power structures on knowledge production (Foucault, 1972). Tess challenges the concept of Victorian virginity which is a social construct. This concept was taught to women to convey that men were powerful and women were the weakest creature. Victorian society followed that rule of virginity. But Tess rejects Victorian concept of virginity. She gives birth to a child without a proper marriage. She looks after her child without paying attention to the concept of virginity. She struggles to save the life of her illegitimate child. This is a change in Tess. She disregards all social laws in order to protect the child and “The baby’s offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl mother; her soul’s desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child ” (Hardy, 2008,p.109). It seems that in thinking about the future of her child she acts like a modern woman where the child is referred to by the mother’s name. For her the baby is innocent of all crimes. However, the baby dies. She tries to take a new start when her child dies and shifts to a dairy farm. No one knows about her history there, and she is willing to start a new life. She is permitted to feel happy even after all.

Postmodern individuals embrace the fragmented nature of reality and resist attempts to create coherent, unified narratives. They appreciate the plurality of perspectives and recognize that there are multiple ways of interpreting and experiencing the world (Lyotard, 1984). This fragmentation is reflected in various domains, including literature, art, and architecture, where postmodernism celebrates eclecticism, pastiche, and hybridity (Jencks, 1991). Tess believes in fragmented nature of reality. She rejects Victorian reality of virginity that a woman should be virgin before marriage and no virginity for man. After the disclosure of her past relationship with Alec, Angel’s attitude towards Tess confirms once again the presence of double standards in Victorian society when it comes to men and women. The sharp turn of his feelings explores the rigid social norms. He feels fragmented by the knowledge and is unable to ask for any further explanation. He does not give her allowance so that she may relate how she was exploited. After Angel reveals about his short extramarital affair, Tess is encouraged to confess to her past troubles relating to Alec d’Urberville. He refuses her his forgiveness though Tess so willingly forgives him, even though Tess should not be blamed for what happened to her. Tess reveals her relationship with Alec at the same time as Angel Clare reveals his relationship with a girl. Tess forgives Angel Clare, but he does not. It is because Tess is not a Victorian woman anymore. Angel accepts that Tess is not virgin and informs Tess “ I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you. Another woman in your shape”(Hardy, 2008,p.269). He seems to forget that he himself was not the same man after his own affair. He refuses to accept her and decides to abandon her, so he is completely entitled to judge her.

Tess believes in postmodern concept of “liquid love” and rejects Victorian concept of extramarital

relationship. Only one act of her relationship with Alec does not mean that she is bad and cannot be accepted as a wife. She knows about so many cases in the world where both husband and wife live happily without any complaint. Tess tells Angel that purity is not meant only for woman. Tess has postmodern ideas here. She enlightens Angel and tells him "O Angel- my mother says that it sometimes so! She knows several cases where they worse than I, and the husband has not minded it much" (Hardy, 2008, p.272). Tess is one with whom one can sympathize and she is right. Angel and Alec are merely products of their time, and the victim of their time is Tess. It is noticed that the acts of Tess are never portrayed by the writer as those of an immoral woman. An act of despair is her arrangement with Alec. Tess stays true to Angel. She must do anything to provide food and shelter for her family. Hence, by deciding to live with Alec, she makes a great sacrifice. Her acts should be rejected from the perspective of Victorian culture, but the characters around Tess do not express those feelings. Most of the characters prove to be more forgiving and compassionate than Angel when it comes to Tess's actions. Gracia (2017) observes that at some point in the novel, Tess's transformation also poses different changes that may suggest a process of moral deterioration stemming from a deep sense of self- sacrifice in order to understand this conflicted or equivocal evolution (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024).

The postmodern man or woman engages in critical reflection and interpretation, recognizing the constructed nature of reality and the multiplicity of perspectives. This requires a certain level of openness, tolerance, and reflexivity to navigate the complexities of the postmodern world. Postmodernism questions the existence of a universal and objective reality. Thomas Hardy's portrayal of women in his novels often reflects the constraints and challenges faced by Victorian-era women. His heroines often struggle against social expectations and patriarchal norms, showing resilience and inner strength in the face of adversity. Characters like Bathsheba Everdene in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and Tess Durbeyfield in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* grapple with issues of love, independence, and societal judgment, embodying the complexities of womanhood in the Victorian era. Hardy's heroines are often depicted as multidimensional, flawed, and ultimately human, challenging the traditional Victorian ideal of femininity while also highlighting the injustices and limitations imposed upon women of that time. Ninčević (2022) highlights the fact that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* also has a wide, universal significance, despite the fact that critics have generally seen it as a critique of Victorian values and double standards.

Lyotard (1984) argues that grand narratives, such as religion or science, are metanarratives that claim to provide universal truths but are inherently flawed. In the postmodern context, reality becomes a collection of multiple narratives, each influenced by subjective perspectives. This fragmentation of reality challenges the postmodern man or woman to navigate a world where diverse narratives coexist. Tess defies Victorian social conventions and thinks them to be obsolete. She informs Angel that she is not his property that he owns her at all times. She is not bound to wait for him. Tess informs Angel, " You didn't come back to me, and I was obliged to go back to him" (Hardy, 2008,p.448). Tess is free to

make her choices which indicates that she has always been a free individual. Borgohain (2013) explains that it is important to note that the social and economic contradictions that prevail in Tess's life give rise to her sense of identity and self-determinism.

One of the most radical postmodernists, Jean Baudrillard, asserts that we must accept the second revolution of the twentieth century of postmodernity, which is the extensive process of the deconstruction of meaning at par with the earlier destruction of appearances. Anyone who lives by meaning also dies by meaning (Ashley, 1990). Meanings are unstable and change with changing times. Tess has a unique perspective on Victorian morals. She does what she believes is right. There is nothing moral and for her "moral sorrows were passing away a fresh one arose on the natural side of her which knew no social law" (Hardy, 2008, p.109). Tess deconstructs the meaning of Victorian social norms. She has sceptical and relative approach towards social norms. She does not accept that social norms are fixed and those who deviate are considered violators. She does not live by meaning but unfortunately dies by meaning (Ahmad, et al., 2024).

Hardy sets certain social and literary norms at risk that perpetuate the introduction of sexual amnesia in women in Victorian England based on tradition. Women have been held in denial about their own bodies since childhood to undergo puberty, defloration and sexual relations as a mystery. The physical fact of fatigue leaves women as it leaves men. Hardy's women struggle and labour. Hardy starts where most Victorian novelists have left off and provides a fitting place for the kind of new concept of a noble woman. In his novel *Tess of d'Urbervilles*, Hardy seems to depict Tess as having postmodern ideas. Tess does not believe in what Alec preaches after his conversion to become a true Christian. Tess is well aware that he preaches Christianity to impress people. Tess rejects his preaching of Christianity. Alec wants Tess to believe in what he preaches but Tess rejects all his beliefs. Therefore, Alec asks Tess, "you don't believe that you ought to preach my doctrine" (Hardy, 2008, p.376).

Postmodernism supports the idea that there is nothing like morality and chastity. Chastity and morality are individual's relative ideas. Tess rejects Victorian concept of chastity for women. Chastity has no fixed meaning. As a postmodern woman, Tess questions, "Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? She would ask herself" (Hardy, 2008, p.117). It was the end of the Victorian period, and Hardy, though maintaining his own essentialist ideals seem to be torn between his desire to depict women as competent and intelligent. Hardy gives his woman a voice through his novel, expressing the anxiety and complexity of her shifting place in society. In terms of gender, postmodernism challenges essentialist notions and recognizes the performative nature of gender identities (Butler, 1990). Postmodern men and women question binary constructions and embrace fluidity and variability in gender expression (Halberstam, 1998).

The tragic end of his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* raises the question of Hardy's level of comfort with the postmodern figure he depicts in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, likely taking her down as a

consequence and retribution for her ability to break the standards of free society. It is time to thrash the last of the wheat. Tess is stuck in a rut of drudgery when Alec admires her stylish attire. Tess gets irritated when she sees him because he refuses to leave. He has an evil eye on her all of the time. Because she is a forsaken wife, he offers to take her away and marry her. Tess smacks him in the face with the glove. It is heavy and thick, and it hits him square in the mouth. He quickly regains control and pulls his handkerchief from his pocket to dab his bleeding lips. Tess informs Alec that she is prepared to face whatever consequences as a result of this action. As a postmodern woman, she is not afraid of Angel and faces him like a brave man. She is ready to accept any kind of physical punishment. She challenges Alec to “whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim- That’s the law”(Hardy, 2008, p. 388).

It seems as if Hardy works under two separate norms, denying each of them. He treats the sexual act itself as neutral in value, but when it happens between two persons who have no real love for each other, it is wrong and unnatural. According to Hardy, what is obviously incorrect is the artificial development of marriage when there is no love involved. Hardy argues that Victorian ideals are not favourable to marriages, a practice as simple as the subjugation of women by men, is artificial, a commodity, a product of society, in many cases involving unhappiness for both husband and wife, without affection and equality, nothing more than a legitimacy. After her separation from Angel, Tess goes home. She is received by her mother. Tess tells her mother about her separation from Angel. Her mother believes that she has made a mistake by revealing her past to Angel. Tess does not admit that she has made a mistake and tells her mother that she has requested for divorce. Tess rejects Victorian concept of marriage that a woman should remain in wedlock for the whole of her life. Angel does not divorce her as this act is against Victorian concept of marriage. Tess tells her mother, “I thought he could get rid o' me by law if he were determined not to overlook it" (Hardy, 2008,p. 301).

Tess of the d'Urbervilles describes the life of a beautiful girl from the rural working class of England who knows how to live while still confined and according to Rousseau “in chains”. When Angel discovers Tess in a rich district of Sandbourne, a resort town on the English Channel, he is surprised to see Tess. She is well-dressed and attractive, and her hands are no longer red from hard work when he last saw her. She treats him coldly and tells him it is too late. She lives with Alec in a beautiful house. As Angel has abandoned her, she decides not to wait for Angel to come back as all the Victorian women used to do. Tess has changed from a Victorian woman to a postmodern woman who believes in subjective reality. When Angel sees this change in Tess, he is surprised to say, “I did not think of you- I did not see you as you were! He continued to plead. I have learnt to since, dearest Tessy mine!” (Hardy, 2008, p.440). While Hardy gives Tess many positive qualities, such as elegance, intellect, bravery, and diligence, he cannot give her all attributes of a changed woman because he lives in Victorian society. He lets her suffer to become a postmodern woman.

Derrida (1978) suggests that postmodernism introduces the concept of "deconstruction," which questions and destabilizes the certainties of religious texts and beliefs, emphasizing the fluidity and ambiguity inherent in religious discourse. This approach encourages a continual re-evaluation of religious meanings and interpretations. Tess is inspired by Angel's religious beliefs. Angel does not follow Bible what is literally described in it. Angel believes that there is more than what is literally conveyed to us through Bible. Tess follows Angel in her religious beliefs and explains his religious beliefs, "I looked at it in this way; what he believed, after inquiring deep into doctrines, was much more likely to be right than what I might believe, who hadn't looked into doctrines at all" (Hardy, 2008, p. 375). Hardy seems to convey that most of the Christians read Bible for its literal meaning and do not focus on its deep meaning. Therefore, they interpret Bible and Christianity in its literal meaning which is wrong. However, Hardy's treatment of such topics in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* varies substantially from his previous works (Ingham, 2003). Blake(1982) opines that Hardy sometimes portrays fragile, changeable and erroneous female characters. Hardy is also alarmingly keen to make generalisations from woman to woman.

Since Tess regularly continues to violate social conventions, it can easily be observed that some find her behaviour to be abnormal. Alec chases Tess. But she is shocked to find that he has become a preacher. Alec informs Tess that it is his responsibility and desire to save people from God's wrath. Alec wears a mask of religion. He becomes a convert. Tess is aware of his religious mask. Alec tells Tess that he wants to save people from the danger which is near to come. He tells Tess that he wants to change minds of people to a right path. Tess inquires of Alec, "Have you saved yourself? Charity begins at home, they say" (Hardy, 2008, p. 360). Here Tess rejects preaching of Christians when they used it to deceive people (Imran, et al., 2023).

Tess writes a long, desperate letter to Angel in tough circumstances, alone but a changed woman. Tess claims she has undergone significant changes. He will see she has changed. She has forgotten about her past and is just connected with the present. Marriage seems to be a mere contract between the two. Separation from Angel gives her the courage that a Victorian woman was not able to have. A Victorian woman was supposed to be in wedlock. Once she was rejected, she was not able to live in Victorian society. Tess asks Angel, "What was the past to me as soon as I met you? It was a dead thing altogether. I became another woman, filled full of new life from you. How could I be the early one?" (Hardy, 2008, p.393). postmodern view of marriage is characterized by a departure from traditional, fixed notions of marriage and an embrace of fluid, evolving relationships. Postmodernism challenges the idea of a single, universal definition of marriage and encourages individualized, diverse interpretations of this institution (Gergen, 2001). In this perspective, marriage is seen as a social construct that can be deconstructed and reconstructed according to the unique needs and desires of the individuals involved (Weeks, 2007). This view rejects the notion of a single "correct" way to be married, emphasizing the importance of personal

experiences and subjectivity in defining marriage. Furthermore, postmodern scholars argue that the traditional power dynamics within marriage, such as gender roles and hierarchy, should be questioned and reshaped to create more egalitarian partnerships (Butler, 1990).

The nineteenth-century period is remembered for its facetious approach to sexuality, the dual ideals of morality, and women's oppressed role. Consequently, the age of the nineteenth century is marked by the twentieth century as the age of dictatorship. It was assumed, because of the double standard, the sexuality in men was an instinctive trait. It was not appropriate for women, however, to show signs of sexual desire in Victorian society. Therefore, it was often assumed that emotional and passionate women were immoral. Alec tells Tess that she is tempting him to sin and requests to make a solemn pledge not to lead him astray. This shows Victorian double standard of morality. Alec has tempted and made Tess astray. He blames this on Tess. Alec labels Tess as unbeliever and warns her, "I am sorry you are not a believer, he continued; that some unbeliever should have got hold of you and unsettled your mind" (Hardy, 2008, p. 364). Tess is not an unbeliever but a postmodern woman who believes in what she sees and feels.

A postmodern man or woman embodies complex characteristics that challenge Victorian notions of truth, reality, and identity. They embrace scepticism towards metanarratives, appreciate the fragmented nature of reality, engage in self-reflexivity, and adopt a playful and ironic attitude towards culture. By recognizing the constructed nature of knowledge and the diversity of perspectives, postmodern woman navigates a world that is characterized by uncertainty and complexity. The concept of a postmodern man or woman reflects the transformative impact of postmodern thought on identity and reality. In a fluid and fragmented world. They are ready to embrace the freedom to redefine themselves while navigating a multiplicity of narratives. By accepting these postmodern challenges, Tess has developed a postmodern understanding, having a sense of agency and adaptability. She accepts these challenges and becomes a postmodern woman. As a postmodern woman, she describes herself as "yes, perhaps I am capricious" (Hardy, 2008, p. 232).

Analysing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* from a postmodern perspective reveals the novel's engagement with postmodern themes and concerns. Tess's fragmented identity, her rejection of metanarrative, her belief in hyperreality and her symbolic representation of cultural and historical dislocation all contribute to the postmodern reading of the character. Through this analysis, the novel emerges as a work that challenges traditional narrative forms and explores the complexities of identity and society in the postmodern era. In a postmodern context, the character of Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is a complex figure challenging traditional notions of identity, truth, and morality. Tess as a postmodern woman is despised by Angel as she is not virgin according to Angel's concept of virginity. Angel rejects her as his wife by calling her "a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one" (Hardy, 2008, p. 269).

Postmodernism often embraces ambiguity, fragmentation, and the deconstruction of established

narratives. Tess's character embodies these postmodern characteristics through her experiences, struggles, and the contradictions she faces in Victorian society. The fragmented identity of Tess, the presence of multiple realities and perspectives, and the rejection of grand narratives align with postmodern principles. This interpretation highlights the complexity and ambiguity of Tess's character and experiences. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess is seen as a postmodern woman in several ways. As a character, she challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Tess is independent and seeks personal fulfilment, which contrasts with the conventional idea of women being submissive and solely focused on domestic roles. Her agency in making decisions about her own life, relationships, and sexuality reflect a postmodern outlook, questioning traditional norms and asserting individual autonomy. Tess's experiences and struggles highlight the constraints placed on women during that time.

Hardy's Revolt against Victorianism

Derrida challenges the notion of a fixed, stable meaning and emphasizes the fluidity of language and interpretation. He rejects the idea of absolute truth and argues that multiple interpretations and perspectives exist simultaneously. Language can never perfectly represent reality and is always subject to interpretation and reinterpretation (Derrida, 1967). Angel Clare deconstructs the meaning of what Tess tells him. He knows that there is no permanent meaning of what Tess says when she is requested to marry him. Denial from marriage with Angel Clare appears to be both positive and negative. Therefore, he asks "Tess, why did you say "no" In such a positive way? He asked her in the course of a few days." (Hardy,2008, p.205).

Baudrillard's view of postmodernism centres on the idea of hyperreality, where simulation and media images replace genuine experiences and blur the line between reality and fiction. He explains that postmodernism undermines traditional notions of truth and values by creating a world of simulacra, where representations become more real than the reality they represent. According to Baudrillard (1988), postmodernism challenges the idea of objective truth. Tess challenges Parson's authority and baptises her child herself. It is her revolt against Victorian Christianity. When the priest rejects her request to baptise her child, Tess herself manages to baptise her son. Hardy attacks Victorian Christianity as the source of creating problems for her. He also rejects Victorian Christianity as the sole source of authority. The parson does not want to baptise her child on the basis that Tess's child is illegitimate and Tess herself "set about baptizing her child"(Hardy, 2008,p.III). Shyam (2020) investigates that the novel *Tess of d'Urbervilles* chronicles the life of Tess, a young woman who battles against Victorian societal mores.

We know that women should remain virgin before marriage in Victorian society and, once violated, they were deemed immoral, even if girls were forcefully molested. Tess, a poor girl, is unaware of human lust. She is so innocent that she cannot save herself from Alec, who embodies lust. She is taught that she cannot speak against a masculine society. She goes further to hide her rape because it is considered bad

for a girl even if the girl's intention does not exist. Tess is therefore forced to hide the stigma. Her mother urges her not only to cover up this rape but also to deal with this non-serious act. Her mother warns her, "why should you trumpet yours when others don't trumpet theirs?" (Hardy, 2008, p.226). Such girls were taught not to reveal their rape as it was considered a shame. This was partiality and objectivity of truth in Victorian society. Men were given freedom and they were not forced to follow Victorian patterns of truth. Rorty criticizes the idea of an objective truth and views that truth is subject to historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Rorty (1979) believes that postmodernism challenges traditional notions of truth and aims to create new social values that are negotiated. Knowing this false social notion well, Tess tries to hide her tragic and shameful past as much as possible. First of all, she is trying to hide her past from her lover Angel Clare and she is being cruelly treated, which she does not expect, after telling her husband about it on the night of the marriage. Tess feels satisfied that she has told all about her past. Tess does so to reject Victorian social values. Tess tells her mother "you said to me, and wrote to me, that I was not to tell him. But I did tell him- I couldn't help it- and he went away!" (Hardy,2008, p.301). Her mother is a strict Victorian but Tess does not follow her and tells Angel about her past and considers herself right. She rejects Victorian concept of sexuality that a woman should be virgin and no rules for male's virginity (Rehan, et al., 2024).

By referring to their own traditions and their own different and varied contexts, people prefer to determine morality and moral imperatives, since moral principles derive from the very essence of human lives. Values and morals are not universal. What we do strengthen values. In general, values and morals follow a historical aspect (Kohly, 1995). There is therefore, continuity and gradual improvements in values and morals. Dewey (1939) is a pragmatist philosopher who speaks about the change of values and desires. Essentially, postmodernism holds the view that morality is a local and social construct. There are no universal moral values. Victorian morality was based on the fixed meaning of virginity. Women were supposed to be virgin before marriage. After their marriage, their return to their parents' house was unacceptable. When Tess comes back to her parents' house after her separation from Angel, there is no bed to sleep in and is surprised to see, "there was no place here for her now"(Hardy,2008, p.302). She needs a place to stay. She strives to create a space in her parents' house.

Foucault views that knowledge and truth are shaped by social and historical contexts, reflecting the interests and values of those in power. Foucault (1980) explores that postmodernism challenges the notion of an objective truth and instead highlights the ways in which truth is constructed and used as a tool of social control. Alec becomes a convert to control and deceive Tess. He becomes a religious man and a preacher. But Tess is aware of his tactics this time. Alec asks Tess, "you don't believe me?" (Hardy, 2008, p.362). Tess does not reply. He asks once more "what don't you believe?" (Hardy, 2008, p.362). Tess replies this time, "your conversation. Your scheme of religion" (Hardy, 2008, p.362). Tess rejects

Christianity as a sole source of truth. Rorty (1982) does not believe in a completely separate world that is distinct either. In transforming the human world, he pays attention to the importance of metaphors, language, and creative poetic concepts as ordinary matters. Behaviourism aims to establish values that are universal and common, not local and particular. Postmodernism does not promote this (Beyerand,1998). Rorty attacks the idea of an objective truth as an unattainable and irrelevant goal. He points out that truth should be seen as a social and linguistic construct that serves specific purposes within a community. Rorty (1989) observes postmodernism as a rejection of foundationalism and the search for ultimate truth.

Tess's life is a revolt against Victorian social norms. Victorian society rejects a child who is born without wedlock. Tess gives birth to an illegitimate child but knows unlike others that it is no fault of the child to be born under such circumstance. Her natural emotions of motherhood never even once fail. She considers the child pure and innocent human and as such tries to baptise him. On the refusal of the priest, she takes the matters in her own hands. She baptises the baby herself, an act which is a clear indication of her denial, rejecting traditional Christian morality. She personalizes her religion. She finds solace and courage in her idea of a God who understands the humiliations, sufferings, and problems of human. God does not punish her by bringing a further misfortune in her life. Rather the death of the baby Sorrow is the death of Tess's sorrows. Then onwards she restarts her life as a different person. Tess rejects Victorian social norms and adopts a new way of spending life because "the baby's offence in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl- mother; her soul's desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child" (Hardy, 2008,p.109).

Postmodernism questions the idea of a fixed, stable truth and challenges the binary oppositions that structure our understanding of reality. Language itself is inherently unstable, and meaning is always deferred and contextual (Derrida, 1976). Every act is permissible, and everyone is correct. In postmodern society, everyone and everything is sanctified. Tess converses with herself, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband" (Hardy, 2008,p.371). Tess rejects Victorian concept of sin which considers the fallen woman as sinful. Angel accepts the fallen Tess as his wife and Tess accepts Angel who abandons her as her husband because the changing circumstances have changed their perspective.

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 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.

A plurality of voices is typical of postmodernism. Postmodern ethical norms allow those voices of people to be heard who were previously silenced by marginalisation and denial of their identities, or by assimilation and destruction of their identities. These voices include those of the colonised, non-white or European ethnic groups, women, and religious groups that were historically marginalised due to their minority status or otherwise, and the rural and urban poor. Tess suffers a lot. She considers herself beyond blame because she has no intention of committing sins in the first place. Her transgressions, however, have resulted in a punishment. She has a heart that is free of impurities. Hardy makes an observation "Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently"(Hardy, 2008,p.416). Hardy rejects Victorian concept of sins and accepts intention while committing sins. If intention is not involved for him, it is not a sin at all.

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, marginalisation of certain groups and especially women folks. Relativism is progressive in nature and an essential weapon in the fight against one-way hegemony.

Foucault explores the ways in which knowledge and truth are socially constructed (Foucault, 1972). Tess rejects this concept of men to be 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 man. Tess rejects 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 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, 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).

Postmodernists view that these metanarratives are 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 questions established truth (Derrida, 1976). For Derrida, Postmodernism challenges the notion of an absolute truth and emphasizes the play of language and the multiplicity of meanings.

The novel questions the institution of marriage and the concept of marital fidelity. Tess's marriage with Angel Clare, her genuine love interest, and the revelation of her past indiscretion disrupt the traditional expectations of marriage and the emphasis on absolute fidelity. Tess's inability to find happiness within the confines of marriage reflects the flawed nature of the institution during that time. Tess is sure that she will be apprehended and hanged to death because she lives in Victorian society. Tess has murdered Alec and she is supposed to be hanged. Tess requests Angel to marry her sister because she is "so good and simple and pure"(Hardy,2008,p.459). Her sister is good, simple and pure but she herself is rejected by the society. All these concepts are constructed by Victorian society. Her request to marry her sister seems to be real because she suffered a lot in Victorian society. Her sister is good, simple and pure but she herself has been rejected by the society who is not good, simple and pure. All these concepts are socially constructed. Victorian society did not accept a woman who had extramarital sex. Tess is targeted because she had sexual relations with Alec. Tess seems to revolt against Victorian concept of sexuality. She reminds Angel that she lives in Victorian society and Victorian society does not allow him to marry a woman who is not pure. Victorian society emphasized that a woman must be good, simple and pure.

Hardy's heroines navigate complex moral landscapes and grapple with questions of identity, agency, and societal expectations, mirroring the concerns of postmodernism. They are not merely passive victims of fate or patriarchy but actively engage in shaping their own destinies, albeit within the constraints of their social and historical contexts. Hardy's portrayal of women in his novels anticipates many themes and concerns of postmodernism, presenting nuanced and complex characters who challenge traditional notions of femininity and agency. Sue's revolt against Victorianism refers to the character Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*. Sue represents a rebellion against the strict social norms and values of Victorian society, particularly regarding marriage, sexuality, and religion. She challenges traditional gender roles, questions the institution of marriage, and embraces unconventional relationships. Sue's actions and beliefs make her a controversial and polarizing figure in the novel, highlighting the tensions between individual freedom and social expectations during the Victorian era.

Postmodern ethics and postmodern morality are interchangeably used. Postmodern morality, like other aspects of postmodernism, is influenced by the philosophical and cultural that began in the late 20th century. In this context, Postmodern morality is understood as a departure from traditional moral beliefs and a re-evaluation of moral values and ethical values. Women were bound to follow Victorian social ethics which emphasized that men were masters of women. Tess revolts against this concept of Victorian social ethics and wants to live a life without control of men. She has the freedom to choose a man with whom she can spend a happy life. Victorian social ethics taught that a married woman was the property of her husband. Tess revolts against this concept of Victorian ethics and kills Alec to live with Angel. She rejects Victorian social ethics to choose a man of her choice. She is happy what she does and informs Angel, "it came to me as a shining light that I should get you back that way"(Hardy,2008,p.448).

Hardy's Revolt against Victorian Purity

The concept of a "pure woman" in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has binary oppositions, such as purity versus impurity. This concept of "pure woman" questions the stability of these binary opposites, highlighting how they are constructed through language and cultural values. Angel believes in binary opposites. He considers pure woman acceptable and impure unacceptable. Tess is a pure woman but Angel considers her as impure because he knows about her past. Angel has the same past but he is pure. Hardy criticizes this double standard of purity and tells that Tess "was a girl whose secret he had guessed, but who had not yet guessed his; an honest girl who loved him"(Hardy, p.314). *The Mayor of Casterbridge* can also be interpreted as a revolt against Victorian values and society. Hardy challenges conventional Victorian notions of social mobility, morality, and the role of fate in one's life. The protagonist, Michael Henchard, embodies the flaws and limitations of Victorian society, and his tragic downfall can be seen as a critique of the rigid social structures of the time. Hardy's portrayal of characters struggling against social constraints and the harsh realities of life reflects his scepticism towards Victorian

ideals of progress and moral certitude.

Derrida(1967) emphasizes the deconstruction of binary oppositions in religious discourse. He critiques the hierarchical distinctions. Derrida deconstructs fixed meanings and challenges religious certainties. Religious concepts, such as good/evil or pure/impure, are constructed through language and are not fixed or absolute. Derrida's deconstructive methodology invites a re-evaluation of religious binaries, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of religious beliefs and practices. The idea of *différance*, which challenges the fixed meanings and binary oppositions is present in religious discourse (Derrida, 1978). Derrida argues that postmodernism encourages openness to multiple interpretations and the recognition of the inherent instability of religious language. Postmodernism questions Christianity as a sole source of truth. Hardy criticizes Victorian Christianity which emphasises upon the purity of women. Tess does not consider herself as a Christian and requests Alec to leave her in the name of his Christianity “ O, will you go away – for the sake of me and my husband- go, in the name of your Christianity”(Hardy,2008, p.372). These lines exhibit a re-evaluation of Tess’s faith which has changed due to her experiences of the society in which she manages to survive.

Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* also offers a critique of Victorian ideals, including the notion of purity. The characters in the novel grapple with societal expectations and norms, often facing consequences for deviating from them. Eustacia, for example, challenges Victorian morality with her desires and ambitions, while Clym's return to Egdon Heath represents a rejection of conventional society. Hardy's portrayal of these characters reflects a broader commentary on the limitations and hypocrisies of Victorian purity.

The idea of a pure woman is a constructed fantasy created by society, media, and symbolic systems. Purity is not a genuine essence but a simulacrum that conceals the complexities and contradictions of real-life experiences. When Angel tells Tess that he loves another woman in her shape after revealing him her past, Tess seems to realise his words of “guilty” and “innocent” which are Simulacra. These words are copies of the original. Tess is true to say that Angel “looked upon her as a species of imposter; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one”(Hardy, 2008,p.269). Angel considers Tess as an innocent woman in the guise of a guilty woman. But Tess believes in an unconventional concept of purity. Hardy depicts Tess as a pure woman by adding a subtitle to make it clear that he rejects the Victorian concept of purity. In Tess's story, her purity and innocence are seen as symbols that have been commoditised and manipulated by society. Baudrillard argues that in postmodern society, meaning and reality become fragmented and detached from their original referents. Tess's identity as a "pure woman" becomes a simulacrum, a hyperreal representation divorced from any authentic essence. Tess's character highlights the fragmentation and instability of identity in a postmodern context. Throughout the novel, she experiences a series of transformations and changes that disrupt her sense of self. Her transitions from an innocent country girl to a fallen woman, and her identity

is further complicated by her relationships with two men and her social status. This fragmentation of identity challenges the traditional notion of a unified and stable self, emphasizing the fluid and multiple nature of identity in a postmodern world. In general, postmodernists reject any universal truth and values that place on life a constant meaning or sense.

Tess does not want her marital status to be associated with a ring. It is also a postmodern idea that social identity is really not an identity at all. Identity is an internal concept. It is simple to go with a group, but it is difficult to fly alone. When Tess's friend asks her about her wedding ring, she replies "I wear it round my neck on a ribbon. I don't wish people to think who I am by marriage, or that I am married at all; it would be so awkward while I lead my personal life" (Hardy, 2008, p. 331). Tess rejects Victorian notion of purity that only a pure woman can marry. A pure woman can also live a single life. The dichotomy between fact and fiction, words and objects, signifier and signified, subject and object, is dissolved by postmodernists. From a postmodern lens, Tess's character can also be viewed as a resistance against these oppressive structures. She embodies agency and resilience, navigating a world that seeks to define and limit her. Her struggles and choices challenge the notion of a fixed, essentialized femininity and instead highlight the complexities and contradictions inherent in women's lives.

The fallen woman had plagued the Victorians endlessly. The effects of sexual experience beyond wedlock have culminated in ruin in an era obsessed with the idealization of female virginity. Angel Clare tells Tess that he plans to marry soon and that as a farmer, he will need a lady who is well-versed in farm management. He proposes to Tess. Tess responds that she cannot be his wife. All she wants is to love him. His father is a clergyman, and his mother will not accept a female who is not pure like Tess herself. It is Christianity which constructs the concept of purity for the whole family. Church is an institution which controls women by emphasising that they must be pure. Therefore, Tess is reluctant to accept Angel's proposal and responds, "Your father is a parson, and your mother wouldn't like you to marry such as me. She will want you to marry a lady" (Hardy, 2008, p. 201).

Conclusion

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy portrays Tess as a character who defies the conventional Victorian notions of morality and sexuality. Tess's experiences and choices throughout the novel are conveyed as a subtle critique of the rigid moral standards imposed by Victorian society. One aspect that challenges Victorian social norms is Tess's sexuality. In the novel, Tess becomes a victim of sexual assault, which leads to her pregnancy. In Victorian society, sexual purity and chastity are highly valued, especially for women. However, Tess's sexual encounter and subsequent pregnancy are depicted as the result of her victimization rather than her own moral failing. This challenges the Victorian notion that women should be held responsible for any sexual transgressions. Another way in which *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* challenges Victorian social norms is through Tess's pursuit of personal happiness and fulfilment. Victorian society places a strong emphasis on duty and self-denial, particularly for women.

However, Tess refuses to conform to social expectations and instead seeks her own happiness. She rejects 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, is a rejection of the Victorian ideal of female submissiveness. Despite the social pressure to maintain the sanctity of marriage, Tess chooses to prioritize her own well-being and asserts her agency by leaving an unhealthy relationship. Furthermore, Tess's tragic fate is depicted as a critique of the deterministic and moralistic worldview of the Victorian era.

The novel seems to challenge the notion of a just and ordered universe where actions have clear-cut consequences. Tess's suffering and ultimate downfall highlight the chaos and unpredictability of life, undermining the Victorian belief in a moral and orderly world. Tess confronts the double standards of Victorian society when she confronts Angel Clare about his past sexual experiences and his subsequent judgment of her own actions. She questions the prevailing morality that allows men greater sexual freedom while condemning women for the same behaviour, highlighting the arbitrary nature of Victorian moral standards. Tess's character and her story subvert the Victorian notion of morality that is rigidly defined by social class, gender roles, and sexual purity. Her actions and choices demonstrate rejection of the idea that one's worth is determined solely by adherence to social norms. Instead, Tess's moral compass is guided by her own subjective experiences, emotions, and desires.

In a postmodern perspective, Tess, the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, is viewed as a complex character embodying various themes and ideas. Postmodernism questions traditional norms and challenges fixed meanings, making Tess a suitable subject for analysis. In this context, Tess is seen as a representation of the complexities and contradictions of human nature, challenging the notion of a pure and idealized woman. Postmodernism emphasizes the fragmented and subjective nature of reality, and Tess's experiences, struggles, and decisions reflect this uncertainty and ambiguity. Her status as a victim of social injustice and the oppressive patriarchal society align with postmodern critiques of power structures and the blurred boundaries between victim and oppressor. Tess's experiences are interpreted as a critique of the Victorian moral values, revealing the arbitrariness of societal judgments on purity and virtue. Tess's character challenges traditional notions of purity and innocence, highlighting the arbitrary nature of such categorizations. Postmodernism emphasizes the relativity of truth and meaning, and Tess's story depicts the subjective nature of morality and social norms.

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