



POSTMODERN MINI NARRATIVE: HARDY'S *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*: A PURE WOMAN AS TEXT AND CONTEXT

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Abstract

Thomas Hardy is a protean writer who cannot be classified within a fixed category due to his layered writings with multiple perspectives. Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, with its sub-title, *A Pure Woman*, situates the novel as a rich site for postmodern readings. The novel is considered to be a post-modern text before its time. A close study of Hardy's *Tess*, as text and subtext, that seeks to validate petit Recits or mini narratives pitted against the grand narratives of normative morality, institutionalized religion, and limitations of judiciary system, can be rewarding. In challenging accepted notions of what is pure, Tess convinces in ways that are memorable and particularized. Interestingly, a mere gist of the character in the story's plot will show her to be a woman who births an illegitimate child out of wedlock; a cast-off wife; a mistress, a murderer. The mini truth of Tess is localized in Hardy's Wessex world which he called it a 'partly real, partly dream-country'.

Keywords

Tess, Postmodernism, Mini Narrative, Text and Context, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928) straddling two centuries is a protean writer who escapes fixed canonical classification due to his layered writings with multiple perspectives. His literary output has been the site of various critical studies – as traditional, transitional, modernist, now as Postmodernist, and into the digital Humanities with about eight film adaptations of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (abbreviated as *Tess*) alone. The novel is considered a “post-modern text before its time” (Widdowson, 155). The most problematic aspect of this novel, one which has raised diverse voices and viewpoints, rests on the controversial subtitle, *A Pure Woman*, since its publication in 1891. Is Tess a pure woman? Feminist readings of *Tess* were varied, and appeared at the forefront with the rise of the Feminist movement in the latter part of the 20th Century with its evolving intensifying waves. Some labeled Hardy, the male author, as the very male gazer himself. However, polarizing feminists' readings alone run the risk of extremism in the understanding of Tess's experiences. So, how do we take up the complex issues that this protagonist raises? A mere gist of the character in the story's plot will show her to be a woman who births an illegitimate child out of wedlock; a cast-off wife; a mistress, a murderer. To even begin to consider such a one as a pure woman would seem implausible by any standards, be it religious or secular, but that the novel has set off many contrary debates is a testament of the creative art of Hardy. The most frequently asked question begs the answer of whether Tess is seduced or raped, complicit or coerced, which leads to the birth of the short-lived child and defines the course of her tragic life which ended on the gallows. The text itself does not give clarity on that. However, that the



answer of Tess's purity does not lie on that seemingly crucial question, will be discussed, as that becomes irrelevant in the understanding of her character, her truth, in the sense of a Postmodern critique.

In general, a shared focus of postmodern thinkers and theorists is to challenge grand narratives by embracing fragmentation, subjectivity, and multiple perspectives. Postmodernism critiques the idea of universal explanation of history or reality, which excludes the marginalized viewpoints. Emphasizing on subjectivity, truth is seen as relative and dependent on individual or cultural contexts, rather than objective or absolute truths. Postmodern stance encourages readers to question established norms, embrace plurality, and engage with the complexities in a world that is increasingly fragmented. Postmodernism is characterized by a skepticism and rejection of grand narratives that seek to explain everything in sweeping statements.

Lyotard's Petit Recits and Postmodern Mini Narratives:

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924 – 1998) whose well-known seminal work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, published in 1979, was originally written in French, and translated into English in 1984 by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Lyotard simply defines the postmodern as 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. Modernity is assigned to be the age of metanarratives, and postmodernity as the period in which metanarratives have lost their credibility. In modernity, the Hegelian metanarrative is seen to be dwelling on the eventual totality and unity of all knowledge, and the Marxist metanarrative on the emancipation of humanity, even towards a utopia. Lyotard rejects the totalizing projects to bring into focus the singular events (Alleganza). Postmodernists oppose the homogenizing representations that suppose fixed stabilities, viewing them as potentially oppressive and exclusionary. Lyotard argues that metanarratives marginalize petit Récits or little narratives, often personal stories that focus on specific experiences. Along with the postmodernists, he acknowledges the complexity of human experience and resists such tendency that reduces things to a single explanation to be the objective absolute truth.

Ashley Woodward shows how Lyotard in the presentation of his influential formulation of postmodernism in his *Report on Knowledge*, commissioned by the government of Quebec, focuses on the technical and technological changes over the last few decades. How the production of knowledge has come under the influence of a technological model, so much so, that Knowledge and power have become interlinked, so that knowledge has largely lost its truth-value to produce truth. The two types of knowledge that Lyotard differentiates were narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge. The former type prevalent in enduring primitive or traditional societies, based on storytelling, while scientific knowledge only admits methodical denotative statements. According to Lyotard, science has no justification in claiming to be a more legitimate form of knowledge than the narrative, and that postmodernity is characterized by the cancellation of metanarratives (Woodward).

In his review of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, Bordallo states that postmodern is above all, skepticism towards metanarratives which only admit operative self-legitimizing systems in place, and the question of what is science, what is truth, and what is objective, become suspect. That Science is not so much a disinterested search for truth, which is neutral at the socio-political level and devoid of ideological agenda, as it is often thought to be. That such knowledge is no longer destined for human emancipation, but rather for their submission to the criteria laid down by the productive system.

As Alleganza and others show, Postmodernism is the triumph of relativism, where only localized truths or points of view are available, after the destruction or deconstruction of imposing narratives which are, more often than not, Euro-centric.



Geoffrey Thomas points out that the idea of formulating a narrative that can achieve consensus about such things as justice, religion, democracy, the direction of history etc., is a fantasy, unlike the pluralistic or multiple viewpoints of different groups or individuals, which enjoy local consensus.

This study will argue that Tess's own localized truth of what is pure, will emerge when her story is assessed through the lens of the postmodernist's mini narrative, and view Tess's actions and experiences to be that of an individual's at a certain point of time and place, and not necessarily of any other. In doing so, a clarity will also follow as to why Tess touches a sympathetic chord in many readers despite being unsettled by certain experiences of this protagonist, whose life is tragically poetic. Hence, the significance of this study is towards filling a gap that exists in critical discussions, especially feminist discourse, even after many years of literary discussions on Hardy's *Tess*. As a postmodernist mini narrative, with the novel as text and subtext, Tess's truth can be better grasped as it unfolds amid competing universalizing narratives which tend to make her case unrepresentable.

The methodology is a qualitative analysis, following a close reading of the text which will also reflect where criticism can easily lose its way if the text as a mini narrative is not constantly kept within sight to capture who Tess is, wherein lies her purity, surely not as a universal model, but as a haunting presence.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman:

Reading and understanding *Tess* as text and context, places the protagonist in a clearer perspective as a pure woman. Focusing on the localized narrative of Tess's own personal story, will unravel the question of who Tess is. At the same time, it will expose the limitations of grand narratives, those of the institution of the Church, the Victorian morality, and the legal institution of the law. Towards this study, some critical junctures will be given a close study, viz., at The Chase when Tess loses her virginity to Alec Stoke d'Urberville; The confession of Tess at Wellbridge and Angel's desertion; The stabbing of Alec at Sandbourne; The hanging of Tess at Wintonchester Prison.

It will be noted that focusing on the sexuality aspect, many ignore important elements of the text, and also neglect that part of her action when she finds herself a murderer, which one would think is a serious matter and one that resulted in her tragic hanging by the keepers of the law. All these crucial events are without much details, some more so than others. However, as to who is Tess, her own selfless motives, her willed actions, and where her deep feelings lay, can be unmistakably gauged when closely assessed.

• At Trantridge and The Chase Incident:

A sense of what happened that fateful night at The Chase is given in such passages that narrates of how when Alec returned, he found her "sleeping soundly"; Of how some might say, "where was Tess's guardian angel?"; Why "such a coarse pattern" should be traced on her (78). Interestingly, the rejection of grand narratives follow, be it philosophy, divinities, social standards, that thousands of years of "analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order"; of how some may muse over the possibility of a retribution, of the sins of the fathers upon the children which "may be a morality good enough for divinities"; and that an "immeasurable social chasm" would separate "our heroine's personality" from her previous self (78 - 9). These may be the musings of Hardy, the narrator, but they serve to corroborate Tess's own experience, as part of the context of the text.

Problematic for critics, are Tess's expressions that come later, "about four months" after her arrival at Trantridge, and "some few weeks" after the incident when Tess flees and, as always,



Alec catches up on her way (80). Refusing to return to Trantridge, she tells Alec, "My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all – I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late" (82). When he replied, "That's what every woman says", she angrily breaks out, "Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?" which is a way of Tess claiming her own truth, as opposed to Alec's convenient generalization of things (ibid). He admitted that he did wrong, but went on to insist for a parting kiss. Tess turned her cheek mechanically, with her eyes vaguely resting "upon the remotest trees" (83). In a mood of resignation, she wished she had never been born, which speaks volume about her feelings of oppression and dejection.

Critics rue the lack of actual details of Tess's reaction, of whether to consider the act as a rape or seduction, and the editing out of the use of liquor by Alec which made him less culpable, seems to be an indication of seduction. The issue of editorial censorship in the serialization form of Hardy's novels as they first appeared and Hardy's self-bowdlerization in later editions when they appeared in book form have also attracted much attention in Hardy criticism. Gribble notes of how the manuscript version where Alec gives Tess alcohol from a druggist's bottle was omitted in the serialization, restored in the edition of 1891, removed again in 1892 edition. That by 1912 version, it is clear that post-Chase incident Tess has remained at Trantridge as Alec's lover, despite her inner resistance to him. So then, to the question of whether the text presents Tess as a spokesperson for a distinctively female self-assertion or as victim of a patriarchal society, Margaret Higgonet comments that despite the narrative silence at the major junctures of Tess's life, Hardy is able to conjure a breathing heroine. For Ellen Rooney, the very terms 'rape' and 'seduction', are part of the binaries of phallogocentric discourse, each supposing the female subject as victim, barred from desire. Gribble goes on to state that it is common in Hardy's writing to find a character considerably individualized out of the landscape, while its representative status is retained. So in generalizing the moral and the theological, Tess's individuality provides a strong counter-pull.

It must be pointed out here, even if it is perceived as seduction, it is was not willed by Tess, but the outcome of the manipulations of the man-about-town Alec who has set his eyes on the simple country girl. Tess never accepted his repeated offers to give her a ride back to the poultry farm, preferring to wait and walk back with the others. Only when tension escalated when a tipsy previous girlfriend of Alec unfairly tried to pick up an ugly fight with her, did Tess quickly get onto Alec's horse as he came on the scene, yet again, and told her to get up on the horse. Why is Tess always asleep at crucial junctures? This is another question asked, but a close study will dispel any oddity as hectic activities, even sleep deprivation, and precede her falling asleep, both at the time of the family Horse's death and at The Chase.

Much has been written about the Victorian fetishism for Virginity. But there is also a pitfall on the flip side, which is the willingness to see Tess as still pure though no longer a virgin because she was raped, which would be considered a progressive step, away from the prudish Victorian mindset. However, such a stance would still be universalizing a standard to judge a woman by, making it a kind of metanarrative. The mini narrative of Tess is much more personal than that, Tess is pure because she is selfless in her devotion for her hapless struggling family, and the turn of events have brought her to her wit's end. Tess's innocence does not help her case either, she is not her best advocate. Hardy's interest in legal matters, especially for its inadequacy, will be discussed subsequently. Tess's hardship only increases, as a result of her short stay at Trantridge, which resulted in her birthing an illegitimate child out of wedlock. Here, again, we see the limitations, even injustice, of institutionalized religion. Faced with the prospect of damnation, the distressed Tess could only ask tremulously, "suppose your sin was not of your seeking?" (Hardy, 85). When her frail illegitimate child labeled at birth, was at the point of death and faces



eternal damnation for not being baptized, she prayed fervently, “O merciful God, have pity...Heap as much anger as you want to upon me, and welcome; but pity the child!” (Hardy, 99). Unable to wait for the local parson any longer, against all rules, she baptizes and christens the dying infant herself, and later seeks validation from the parson to also obtain a legitimate burial. Seeing Tess’s distress, what the parson cannot agree upon theologically, he grants it at the personal level.

To look at Tess’s own mini narrative, the reason she lands up in such a complicated situation, is due to her innocence and selflessness, first and foremost. Responsibility being thrust upon her as the oldest sibling, there is the disjunction between what she wishes to do and what is to be. She wished to stay at the May-Day Dance for a while longer but feels guilty of such leisurely time spent, while her hope of becoming a teacher was cut short due to familial struggles. With the death of their horse, Prince, which halts the small family trade, coupled with the lack of employment at Marlott, though she tells her mother, “I would rather stay here with father and you”, she finally agrees to set out to take employment at Trantridge which subsequently leads to her pregnancy and death (Hardy, 47). A glance back at the expectant and eager faces of her siblings dismissed her own last wavering doubts at the point of departure for Trantridge. Such seemingly fleeting moments, not grand narratives, unveil Tess’s devotion to her family. In fact, this characteristic feature of selflessness defines her inner purity of Soul, which appears again and again.

• **The confession of Tess at Wellbridge and Angel’s desertion:**

Characteristically, like the other crucial junctures, there is no detail of the exact narration of the confession. Tess long sought, unsuccessfully, to confess the heavy burden of her past, “the heaviest of crosses”, which finally came on their wedding night as Angel and Tess await their luggage to arrive (Hardy, 185). She narrated “the story of her acquaintance with Alec d’Urberville and its results...reassertions and secondary explanations were done” (Hardy, 232-33). When the dazed Angel turned away, Tess could only whisper, “In the name of our love, forgive me!...I have forgiven you for the same!” (Hardy, 233). Angel admits that she was more sinned against than sinning, but could not accept her, “I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you”, only another “woman in your shape” (Hardy, 234). Through it all, “Tess had no advocate to set him right” (Hardy, 240). Unlike Angel who recklessly spent forty-eight hours in dissipation in the arms of a stranger, Tess’s ‘sin’ was not willfully committed. Again, seeing Angel’s dilemma of what was to be done, Tess says that she is not afraid to end her life in the river to put an end to his misery, adding she can leave behind something to show she did it herself on account of her shame. When reprimanded by Angel for such thoughts, she tells him that as a last option, he could divorce her on the grounds of her confession. To this Angel breaks out impatiently, “You don’t understand the law – you don’t understand!” (Hardy, 243). Finally, withered by thinking, he tells her:

And let me speak plainly, or you may not see all my difficulties. How can we live together while that man lives? – he being your husband in nature, and not I. If he were dead it might be different. Besides...Think of years to come, and children being born to us, and this past matter getting known...Can you honestly say Remain after contemplating this contingency? (Hardy, 248).

Tess can only reply:

What you said has quite convinced me...years hence, you might get angry with me for any ordinary matter, and knowing what you do of my by-gones you yourself might be tempted to say words, and they might be



overheard, perhaps by my own children. O, what only hurts now would torture and kill me then! I will go – tomorrow (Hardy, 250).

With all his shortcomings of male hypocritical double standards and idealization of Tess, Angel is a person who can be gentle and caring. In fact, after her rude experience of Alec, Tess could not believe such men exist, of “the self-controlling sense of duty shown by him, a quality which she had never expected to find in one of the opposite sex” (Hardy, 146). To give Angel his due, he rose to her defense, “She is spotless!”, when his mother senses Angel’s agitation and tries to find out the reason, of whether it has to do with the character of his new absent wife (Hardy, 268). Truly, in considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, an innocent selfless person who loved him unconditionally. As for Tess, she now could not dismiss any opinion if it was held by Angel. Ironically, but unsurprisingly, we later hear the echoes of his words in what Tess has to say in their final conversations.

- **The stabbing of Alec at Sandbourne:**

What Tess herself expresses will be set down, again, in order to engage with her thoughts and feelings, her innocence and circumstances, her sacrificial love for her family and her unfailing devotion towards her misnamed husband, Angel. The mini narrative of her story, with all the bungling of uncertain, confused expressions of the things beyond her understanding, reflects the purity of her motives and actions. Tess had given up all hopes of Angel’s return amidst the fast deteriorating circumstances of her family after the death of their father who is the last holder of the lease of their house which ends with his death. So, then, when Angel turns up at her doorstep in the fashionable city of Sandbourne where she is living with Alec, she can only repeat, “Too late, too late!” and retreats from his sight (Hardy, 382). Back in the room, she breaks down grieving:

I wait and waited for you ...But you did not come! And I wrote to you, and you did not come! He kept on saying you would never come any more... He was very kind to me, and to mother, and to all of us after father’s death...I didn’t care what he did wi’ me! (Hardy, 383).

Utterly helpless at the whole situation, she moans:

And you had used your cruel persuasion upon me... they [family] were the things you moved me by...O yes, I have lost him now – again – because of – you...he looks as if he is dying! ...And my sin will kill him and not kill me! (Hardy, 385).

The narration informs that following sharper words from the man, there was a sudden rustle and she had sprung to her feet. Subsequently, she tries to tell Angel of what she did to Alec when she caught up with him: “He heard me crying about you, and he bitterly taunted me; and called you by a foul name; and then I did it” (Hardy, 389). Uncertain of the future and living in the present, they spent a few blissful days in an empty to-let mansion nestled among the woods. We hear her voice, “I fear that what you think of me now may not last. I do not wish to outlive your present feeling for me” (Hardy, 395). Readers recall how such feelings of Tess stem from Angel’s earlier reasons of why they should not remain together. If, according to Angel, Alec was her true husband as long as he was alive, he was now dead. Her last words in the novel, spoken when she wakes up at Stonehenge to find the keepers of the law, were along the same vein:



Angel, I am almost glad – yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted...and now I shall not live for you to despise me...I am ready (Hardy, 400).

Characteristically, her last thoughts were focused on those she unconditionally loved, Angel, her siblings and their mother who had been depending on her all along. For their well-being, she will leave no stone unturned, even if she had to pay the price. Angel was to realize that at Sandbourne Tess seemed to be a body drifting away in a direction which has lost its link with its “living will” (Hardy, 385). Readers recall what she once shared at Talbothays, that an easy way of making “your soul go out of your body” was to lie on the grass at night and look up at some big star and by fixing the mind upon it, one can be miles away from the body (Hardy, 126).

While lying down to rest on a stone slab at Stonehenge, she expressed her wish to Angel, that should anything happen to her he would marry her younger sister, ‘Liza-Lu, who “is so good and simple and pure...She has all the best of me without the bad” (Hardy, 398-9).

Tess’s purity is the inner purity of the soul. Defining ‘soul’ Glory Dy points out that while the body interacts with the physical world, the soul reflects our humanity – our thoughts, emotions, and will. Self dwells in the soul (Tahir). The soul is the essence of humanity’s being: it is who we are (Omran). Muhammaddizadeh points out that the Hebrew and Greek word for soul are similar, that in its most basic sense, the word means life. Alec may trap Tess’s body, rape or seduction, whatever one calls it, but not her soul which defines who she is, her true self, characterized by a loving selflessness of motives in all her willed actions.

• **The tragic hanging of Tess at Wintonchester Prison:**

The novel seems to have a conclusive ending with the death of the central character, Tess, but it is one that is fraught with irony that has opened up multiple viewpoints and questions. Revisiting it, one can see it as a manifestation of the failure of metanarratives which over rule, suppress and silence the mini-narratives on the margins. So much so, reading Tess as text and subtext, of the mini narrative playing out against the metanarratives can be rewarding. The novel ends:

‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess...The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer...the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on (Hardy, 402)

Several recent studies have shown that Hardy incorporated English laws into his novels in order to point out the shortcomings of specific laws and to argue for their amendment. Davis meticulously points out how *Tess* contains Hardy’s allusions to The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, a law designed to provide further protection to women against rape and indecent assault. He states that Hardy was well aware of the desertion laws and was sympathetic to women, as it was applied to and interpreted in cases in court. That the magazine *T-Day* noted on 18 August 1894 that in view of a lenient sentence given to a man for stabbing his wife, the ending of *Tess* will have to be rewritten, which many would welcome. Davis goes on to observe that Tess’s agreeing to Angel’s idea to separate would appear to be one of mutual agreement and not a case of desertion, and thus no right to support. Tess’s words to Angel, that she has no wish opposed to his, would have similar consequences and have the whole justice upturned, for it was, ironically, Angel who refused to live with Tess and deserted her. In the eyes of law, Tess commits adultery when she lives with Alec in Sandbourne, even if for the sake of her family’s survival as prior to 1896, English law was rigid in the practice of punishing adulterous women. Although Tess does



not go to the law, the law does eventually find her as a murderess and punished her by hanging. On reaching the conclusion of the novel, Davis comments that one is tempted to ask whether the English judicial system might have been able to do something for her besides execute her. Such an analysis points out how Hardy incorporates legal language and circumstances to give focus on societal limitations and the struggles of women within those constraints. Tess's hanging may seem too gruesome, but it is only Hardy looking at reality in the eye. An actual hanging of a certain Elizabeth Martha Brown, on 9 August 1856, witnessed by Hardy when he was sixteen, is said to be the inspiration for Tess. The execution prompted "a leading article in the Dorset County Chronicle advocating the abolition of the death penalty" (Gittings).

Tess's killing of Alec has been likened by some as a revenge act by a wronged woman that frequently appears in balladic tales. Arthur Field who looks into folklore with an eye to gaining insights into the psycho-dynamics of a culture, states that he studied the "murdered girl" English ballads as the theme was so popular (Hardy, 113). The theme of revenge runs strong in British folk ballads, often related with themes of injustice, love, betrayal etc. Tess may not be a ballad heroine, but there is everywhere shown the inadequacy of dominant narratives which do not understand, rather excludes, the plight of the marginalized communities, here, the old world of the rural folks which was being left behind in the fast changing world of Hardy's Wessex, which Hardy termed as a "vanishing way of life" (*Personal Writings*, 46).

Woodward comments that Lyotard develops the philosophy of language that underlies his work on paganism and postmodern most fully in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, where he analyses how injustices take place in the context of language. A differend is a case of conflict between parties that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both. Lyotard distinguishes the victim from the plaintiff. The latter is the wronged party in a litigation whose case can be presented; the 'victim', is said to be in a differend whose case cannot be presented for lack of a rule applicable to both. A victim is not just someone who has been wronged, but someone who has also lost the power to present this wrong. To apply the case to Tess's experience, in the first place, she is ignorant of law like many of her times would be. But the law finds her. Her innocence is such, she is not her best advocate, and is seen to be more of an advocate to Angel. She speaks of how Alec wronged Angel through her. Her unpremeditated murder of Alec with a breakfast knife at hand took place when he had said something harsh about Angel. We do not exactly know what was said then, but we do know that Alec had earlier taunted her by terming Angel "a mule of a husband", who had deserted her, and she had spontaneously flung her thick working glove at him which hit his lips and drew blood (Hardy, 334).

Today, one may think Alec can be charged on many counts, being in the position of employer; as a dangerous stalker who cannot take 'No' for an answer etc. English law now considers as rape if a sexual act is committed while sleeping even by a partner in the bedroom (Moore). However, there is still the real problem of accessibility to law especially for many women around the world, as also the problem of presentability of cases for the marginalized communities whose narrative is outside the parameters of the dominant established groups.

Adaptations of Tess as other Mini Narratives:

Hardy's *Tess* has inspired many film adaptations. There are a number of Indian Hindi films: *Dulhan Ek Raat Ki* (1967) /Bride for One Night, *Prem Granth* (1996) / Scripture of Love, *Nishiddha Nodi* (2000) in Assamese. Dutta considers ways in which Hindi Bollywood, has responded to *Tess* by adapting it to Indian socio-cultural milieu. The latest is *Trishna* (2011) scripted and directed by Michael Winterbottom, with Freida Pinto, of the *Slum Dog Millionaire* fame, as the protagonist named, Trishna, set in Rajasthan. Kao points out that Winterbottom's adaptation retains the novel's foregrounding of the tension between modernity, conceived as



capitalist ideology of progress, and modernity as a method of self-determined engagement with one's heritage and present social realities.

Interestingly without the subtitle, *A Pure Woman*, none of these films ran into troubled waters. Award-winning Roman Polanski's film simply entitled, *Tess* (1979) is considered a romantic epic. Roger Ebert states that the film is not a faithful rendering of a classic, but a wonderful film that comes alive, evincing sympathy for its heroine who is the victim, the prey, and also the lover of many men, without quite comprehending what it is that those men want of her. To MacCabe, Polanski's film is more effective with an ending which offers no false consolation without the appearance of Angel and Liza-Lu. It is generally agreed upon that Polanski developed Hardy's sexual themes. Hence, all the film adaptations, with their own respective focus, can be seen as independent mini narratives. Hardy's own unique sub-title, *A pure Woman*, holds its own as a powerful statement towards the need for deconstructing notions of purity.

Conclusion:

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, with its sub-title, *A Pure Woman*, situates the novel as a rich site for postmodern reading that stresses on an 'incredulity towards metanarratives', for their over-riding, exclusionary and rigid nature. Specific experiences and perspectives that mini-narratives facilitate, acknowledge the diversity and complexity of human life. Mini narratives or *petit recits* are seen to withstand the homogenizing tendency to reduce things to a single fixed explanation as the stable objective truth. Hardy's *Tess*, as text and subtext, is a challenging story that seeks to validate a localized mini narrative pitted against the grand narratives of morality of the Victorian society, institutionalized religion, and limitations of judiciary system that fail to see the inner beauty of the soul that can deeply feel selflessly. In a significant way, the mini truth of *Tess* is localized in Hardy's Wessex which he called it as a 'Partly real, partly dream-country' (The Life, 8-9).

The novel continues to be a haunting novel that engages energetic criticism of differing perspectives and approaches. Digital Humanities offer innovative tools and new perspectives for Hardy criticism. It will further facilitate Hardy's own mapping of Wessex which so captivates fans. Hardy's legacy is widespread, appearing in different media and forms of art. In an interesting way, Ockham Razor which is a contemporary circus company premiered their show on *Tess* in 2023. Their website informs that it weaves together acrobatics, aerial, physical theatre, spoken word and an inventive, evocative set to conjure Hardy's world which continues to resonate as it "explores questions of privilege, class, poverty, agency, female desire and solidarity" (ockhamsrazor.co.uk/tess). As such, avenues for the study of Hardy's enduring literary legacy continue to expand. Thomas Hardy remains the protean writer who cannot be fixed permanently.

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