

**The Drama Triangle in *Tess of The D'urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy
and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison**

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Abstract

The drama triangle, a modern concept of psychology that involves three roles, the victim, the rescuer and the persecutor, occurs in many dysfunctional relations. This study aims to analyze how the drama triangle reveals itself in the selected novels and its main reason, which is a system of power dynamics that labels one as “the superior” and the other one as “the inferior.” The power dynamics and the drama triangle in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison will be explained and evaluated through Feminist, Marxist and postcolonial theories. In fact, these theories are the most efficient in explaining why specific characters have certain roles in these novels. To clarify how the characters of the novels experience the drama triangle in their relationships with their dysfunctional families and others, prominent psychologists’ definitions and explanations will be used. The clarifications of other concepts, which are ‘the Switch,’ learned helplessness, addictions and dependency, will also enlighten how the drama triangle works in the novels. With these analyses, the thesis aims to indicate that the drama triangle is not a cultural concept proposed by various scholars and psychologists but a common concept of psychology, which is clearly apparent in all of these novels although they were written in different centuries. All these analyses emphasize that the drama triangle should be applied to more literary works and should not be overlooked in the field of comparative literature, as it is widespread in both literature and true life.

Keywords: Feminism; persecutor; postcolonial theory; rescuer; the drama triangle; victim.

INTRODUCTION

The novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison surely reflect different eras and portray their own characters who do not seem to have much in common. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, written by Thomas Hardy, a white male author, portrays young Tess's misfortunate experiences and how she ends up a victim in an unfair way at the end of the novel. On the other hand, *The Bluest Eye*, written by Toni Morrison, a black female author, describes how Pecola, a little black girl ends up a victim because of her dysfunctional family and the black community's racist and cruel attitude. Despite the protagonists' differences and their unlike experiences, the drama triangle reveals itself in both novels and the characters, including the protagonists, do not only enact the drama triangle with other characters but also enact it with themselves through their addictions and deep feelings. Considering these, the reader may wonder what makes the drama triangle apparent in both novels. The answer to this question is definitely unjust systems that label one person as "the superior" and the other one as "the inferior." These unfair power dynamics usually result in the superior one's oppressing the inferior one and thereby, the superior one generally turns into a persecutor and the inferior one ends up a victim. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, these unjust systems are patriarchy and capitalism, while in *The Bluest Eye*, these unjust systems are racism and patriarchy. These certainly victimize some characters and make some others persecutors and some others rescuers.

What is common between these novels is not only their vivid descriptions of victimization and persecution because of these unjust systems but also male oppression that both protagonists Tess and Pecola go through. It is obvious that Tess and Pecola are both silenced and cannot express the male oppression, especially rape, which they have gone through. In fact, they and some other characters cannot even articulate that they are victims; however, the reader can certainly understand that they are literal victims when their actions and feelings are analyzed through Feminist, Marxist and postcolonial theories. Contemplating the novels' contexts, one could see that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* should be evaluated through Feminist and Marxist theories, while *The Bluest Eye* should be analyzed through postcolonial and Feminist theories. Consequently, the reason why these novels are open to interpretation based on the theory of the drama triangle is that they both portray unjust systems, which could be

analyzed through the mentioned theories. In addition, the fact that the novels were written in very different eras demonstrate that the drama triangle is not a psychological theory that is visible in only recent literary works, but it is rather a widespread theory even visible in the novels that were written a long time ago. Therefore, one of the reasons why these novels are compared in this study is to emphasize that they both reflect unjust systems that cause one to be the victim and the other one to be the persecutor, while another one may be the rescuer. Another reason why these novels are analyzed and compared in this research is to highlight that the time that a novel was written and the authors' characteristics are not effective in the way that the drama triangle manifests itself in the novel. More concretely, although *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* were written in the last decade of the nineteenth century, it still reveals the drama triangle, just as *The Bluest Eye* does. The main reason behind this is both novels' vivid and detailed portrayal of oppression and existence of the systems that are behind this oppression.

In the second chapter of this study, concepts that are necessary to understand the drama triangle will be elucidated based on prominent psychologists' and scholars' definitions. In the third chapter, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* will be analyzed through Feminist and Marxist theories and in the fourth chapter *The Bluest Eye* will be evaluated through postcolonial and Feminist theories. With these analyses, this study aims to elucidate many different characters' roles in the drama triangle and why they subconsciously choose their roles. This research also aims to demonstrate how the drama triangle manifests itself in both literary works and that it is a common theory, which could be used to interpret many more novels, since the main reason behind it is the existence of unjust systems that bring about oppression.

RESULTS

These analyses suggest that although these novels were written in different time periods and by authors who did not have much in common, they both reveal the drama triangle in detail. The reason behind this is surely unjust systems that enable the stronger one to persecute the other one, which brings about the oppression of the weaker. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess is generally oppressed and ends up the victim, because of Alec's misogynistic insults, rape and patriarchal Victorian society that she lived in. She is also oppressed because of capitalist Victorian society and could be considered an exploited

worker, who makes less money than she deserves and also earns less money than her male counterparts. The unjust capitalist system and her family's consecutive poverty have also forced Tess to accept Alec's immoral proposal of becoming his mistress. While Tess's being a victim of Alec due to his patriarchal and misogynistic insults and rape has been analyzed through Feminist theory, Tess's exploitation as a worker and almost obligatory and unwilling decision to become Alec's mistress have been analyzed through Marxist theory. Social classes of the characters and their families have also been elucidated based on general categorization of classes in Victorian England, which constitutes of the aristocrats, the middle class and the upper class, and Marx's categorization of classes, which are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. At the end of the novel, Tess makes a courageous act by murdering Alec, which could be figuratively interpreted as her rebel against the unjust systems. Despite her rebellious act, she cannot destroy these unfair systems and ends up a victim and has to settle down for an ending that she has never deserved.

In *The Bluest Eye*, just like Tess, Pecola is generally a victim and ends up the ultimate victim at the end of the novel and has to accept a fate that she does not deserve, which is reminiscent of Tess's unjust ending. In a strikingly similar way to Tess, Pecola is also victimized by the greatest form of male oppression, which is rape. Both Tess and Pecola cannot articulate their unfortunate experiences and cannot stand up for themselves, which cause them to be even more victimized. This also demonstrates how the female are usually silenced in patriarchal society and end up victims, since they are regarded to be weaker than the male, because of patriarchal beliefs and upbringing of youth. It is apparent that Pecola is persecuted not only because of his father's rape of her, but also due to unsympathetic and cruel attitudes of the black community that she lives in. As the black community embraces patriarchal beliefs, most of them blame Pecola for the rape and does not show any sympathy for her and her dead baby, which is really similar to the reaction that patriarchal Victorian society has given to Tess's rape and her illegitimate child. Both societies' responses to the protagonists clearly demonstrate that despite the different eras, both societies are patriarchal and the black community in Ohio has not become more modern and feminist, although *The Bluest Eye* was written more recently than *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Pecola is also victimized because of internalized racism most characters in the novel embrace. In fact, they do not only victimize Pecola but also victimize one another with their racist stance. Therefore, although Pecola is the ultimate victim in the novel, she is

not the only victim. Mrs. Breedlove, Soaphead Church and Geraldine are also victims, since they adopt values concerning whiteness –which a clear demonstration of their internalized racism—but cannot comply with them. Because of their embracement of binary oppositions concerning whiteness and blackness, these characters make a lot of pressure on themselves in order to conform to these values and feel like victims, as they are unable to comply with them. These characters and also many others embrace white beauty standards, which is an understandable result of their internalized racism, and persecute anyone, including themselves, who does not comply with these beauty standards. Therefore, Pecola is persecuted and sometimes ignored but eventually ends up the victim many times, just as Mrs. Breedlove also does. However, some characters who have light skin and can comply with white beauty standards to some degree, are admired and idealized by others. Although Pecola is not fully aware of these values, she is racially discriminated since she cannot comply with white beauty standards and considered to be ugly, which also affect the way people living in the black community treat her. Since she has a dark skin and cannot comply with white beauty standards, she is treated badly and subconsciously believes that her having blue eyes could change her own opinion about herself and also the other characters’ demeaning attitudes towards her. Consequently, it can be argued that Pecola is the ultimate victim of the novel because of the black community’s internalized racism and embracement of white beauty standards, as well as due to her dysfunctional family and her father’s rape. Besides Pecola, other characters occasionally become victims and sometimes become persecutors because of these unrealistic standards that they adopt.

Considering these analyses, one could claim that what is common between these novels is definitely the protagonist’s victimization and oppression because of unfair systems and the characters’ embracement of these systems, which create the drama triangle. However, what is really different in these novels is the fact that the characters in *The Bluest Eye* become victims both because of the other characters’ attitudes and also their own attitudes and beliefs. The same characters also become victims because of some others but also persecute some other characters, while “the Switch” happens less often in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. As another difference, the reader could see that although both Tess and Pecola are ultimate victims, the focus of the drama triangle is not only on Pecola when *The Bluest Eye* is analyzed based on the theories of feminism and postcolonialism. The focus is also on the other characters, since most of them become

both victims and persecutors in different incidents, unlike Tess, who is generally the victim and unlike Alec, who is generally the persecutor.

DISCUSSION

This research firstly explains the three roles of the drama triangle, which are the victim, the rescuer and the persecutor. Then, it focuses on the main concepts concerning the drama triangle, which are dysfunctional families, ‘The Switch,’ learned helplessness, addictions, and dependency. In the following chapters, this study analyzes the roles of the characters –whether they are the victim, the rescuer or the persecutor—in the novels *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *The Bluest Eye* and explains why each character embraces a specific role. There are, in fact, many different reasons why each character adopts a specific role, such as their dysfunctional families, addictions, dependent personalities and personal beliefs. This research thoroughly explains the reasons why each character adopts a specific role or roles, since a character may embrace more than one role at different times. This study also focuses on the eras that the novels were written and elucidates the unjust systems that the characters lived in. The unjust systems that oppress some characters and glorify some others in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* are patriarchy and capitalism, while the unfair systems that persecute most of the characters and idealize some others in *The Bluest Eye* are patriarchy and racism. Throughout this research, these unjust systems and their adverse effects on the characters are discussed by referring to the roles of the characters and through the theories of feminism, Marxism and postcolonialism.

CONCLUSION

At the times that both of these novels were published, the drama triangle was not known and research about its place in the field of literature had not been done yet. What is interesting here is that although the drama triangle was not known to exist in the field of literature at that time, it still manifested itself in the selected novels for the reader who knew the theory. The reason why the drama triangle is prevalent in these novels is the power dynamics between the characters, which enable some to be victims and other ones to be persecutors or rescuers. These power dynamics emerge because of any unjust system, which causes one to be “the superior” and the other one to be “the inferior.” This study has aimed to analyze these power dynamics in both novels based on the theories of feminism, Marxism and postcolonialism. Besides these, concepts related to

the drama triangle, which are dysfunctional families of the characters, ‘the Switch,’ addictions and dependencies have been explained based on distinguished psychologists and scholars’ descriptions and how they emerge in the novels have been elucidated. As these analyses suggest, it is obvious that most of the time, the characters switch their roles in the drama triangle but sometimes a few of them subconsciously choose to remain in the same role. With these explanations and analyses, this study emphasizes that the drama triangle was existent long before it was proposed by Karpman and it should be paid more attention and used as a theoretical framework to analyze more literary works.

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