Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present women’s experiences of love

Hardy and Hosseini both explore women’s experiences of love via romantic love, parental love and friend love. Both authors use women’s experiences of love to symbolise how it can act as a beacon of hope amidst their suffering in both Victorian day society and in modern day Afghanistan. It can be argued that Hosseini presents women’s experiences of love as more hopeful in a Thousand Splendid Suns as he uses love to portray how society is changeable, despite the extreme conditions and societal views that Mariam and Leila faced, it was their experiences with love that enabled them to withstand and endure the suffering. Hardy however, presents how societal factors limit the durability of love as women’s experiences of love is presented as more conditional in Tess of the D’Urbervilles. Tess’s experiences of love did not free her of her suffering resulting in her succumbing to Alec and internalising the patriarchal ideology, illustrating why her suffering is presented as monotonous and inescapable.

Hossieni presents the romantic love between Tariq and Leila as a microcosm of hope for women in Afghanistan. Tariq is symbolic of goodness in Leila’s life as he did not internalise the patriarchal views of society portraying him as directly parallel to Rasheed and the Taliban who shared the belief that women were inferior to men. Rasheed as a symbol of his love to Mariam gifted her a “sky blue burqa”, gifts are typically given out of goodwill and happiness as a token of love. Rasheed’s gift of the “burqa” was a means of controlling Mariam and concealing her identity behind a veil. Hosseini’s use of colour symbolism illustrates how “sky blue” can be symbolic of the sky, this can be seen as a metaphor for freedom which is ironic as Hossieni’s use of juxtaposition illustrates how Rasheed is using the burqa to restrict Mariam’s freedom, foreshadowing the future restrictions soon to be placed on women in Afghanistan. Rasheed used the gift as a way of objectifying Mariam and broadcasting his control over her. This is reinforced by Rasheed’s criticism of “modern” men like Tariq and Babi as he viewed controlling one’s wife as a depiction of “pride and honour”. Tariq instead viewed Leila as his equal which is what allowed their love to prosper. Tariq did not view Leila differently despite her marriage to Rasheed, he just wanted to “take her away” providing her with hope and allowing his love to make the worst years of her life to seem like they “never happened”. Hosseini emphasised Tariq’s respect for Leila as when she wanted to return to Afghanistan, Tariq promised “to follow” her to “the ends of the Earth”. Hosseini’s effective use of hyperbole captures strength of their love and provides hope for the future that the patriarchal Afghan society will change as Hosseini’s use of the word “follow” illustrates how Leila takes the lead, therefore foreshadowing potential progress and resistance to patriarchy in the future.

Hardy however, presents the romantic love between Angel and Tess as conditional and restricted by societal factors. Initially, Angel viewed Tess as a goddess – ‘Artemis Demeter’ – the Goddess of Chasity. After Angel confesses his past and admits to having an “eight and forty hours” affair in London, Tess immediately forgives him as her love for Angel was pure and unconditional – “there was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Claire”, the effective use of hyperbole conveys the scale of Tess’s love. Hardy’s play on words with Angel’s name illustrates his goodness as “Claire” means light in French and the pun Angel implies that he is too good to be human. This is presented as ironic since Angel drastically changes his opinion of Tess after he finds out she was raped. He refers to Tess as “another woman” portraying Angel to the reader as another man instead. Hardy highlights the double standards in society since Tess forgave Angel yet he abandoned Tess despite admitting that she was “more sinned against than sinning” as he no longer viewed her as “pure”. Despite Hardy presenting Angel as a “modern” Victorian man who appeared to have not internalised traditional Victorian attitudes, he still turned his back on Tess. This illustrates a loss of hope reinforced by Hardy when describing Angel’s heart as a “vein of metal” to illustrate that despite trying to break away from the traditional Victorian ideology it is a part of his manhood that is inescapable. The metaphor comparing Angel’s heart to “metal” conveys the restraint and unmoving attitudes of the Victorian society demonstrating how even the purest of love was unable to escape the societal ideologies instilled within them as they were deep-rooted and unchangeable. It is a microcosm for the attitudes of all Victorian men. Angel however, overcomes these unfair attitudes and returns to Tess presenting love as a powerful force however his return is “too late” reinforcing Hardy’s hopeless portrayal of love.

Both authors present women’s experiences of love through familial love. Hossieni has a more hopeful approach and presents the love between Leila and Babi as unconditional. Hosseini continuously presents Babi motivating and encouraging Laila to strive further and pursuit education to such an extent that when the external conditions in Afghanistan deteriorated due to the war and bombing, Babi took over the “teaching duties” in order to teach “Leila himself” as he wanted to pass on the value of education as a symbol of his love. This is an effective representation of Babi’s love for Leila as despite his views directly contrasting with the beliefs of the Taliban who viewed women as inferior to men, Babi did not internalise this ideology and instead instilled ambition and self-worth within Leila with the hope for her to prosper.

Hardy however, portrays the family love in Tess of the D’Urbervilles as flawed by illustrating how love is used as a bargaining chip. Hardy directly contrasts Hosseini’s emphasis on the importance of education as in Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Tess’s education is disregarded. Tess is only worth as much as she brings. This presents love as less hopeful as oppose to Hosseini since education had the potential to act as an escape for Tess as Hardy’s two sisters became teachers and one became the headmistress. Tess on the other hand had “standard knowledge” and was taken out of education to work highlighting that Tess’s family did not love her enough to keep her in education as they prioritised themselves first. Hardy illustrates this when Mrs D’Urberville uses Tess for financial gain as after prince’s death she guilts Tess into going to “claim kin” with Alec as “her labours in the house seem heavier”, and then later guilts Tess into becoming Alec’s mistress – “he has won me back to him”, Hardy’s use of possessive pronouns and the noun “won” illustrates that Tess has been objectified by Alec and her family, presenting Tess’s love as exploited by her mother’s manipulative nature as she uses Tess as a bargaining chip to ensure that they were “fairly provided for”. Furthermore, Mrs D’Urberville sends Tess off with Alec without educating her, Hardy emphasis this via Tess’s rhetorical question “why didn’t you warn me?” reinforcing Mrs D’Urberville’s deliberate ignorance despite doubting Alec’s intentions of whether he was “really a good-hearted young man”. When Tess returns after being raped her mother reprimands Tess for “not marrying” Alec and caving into the patriarchal society as according to Tess’s mother, working was merely a “pretence” and marriage was her real goal reinforcing her manipulative nature. This illustrates that Tess’s mother values financial security above her own daughter’s well-being and happiness therefore presenting love as corrupt and conditional.

Furthermore, both authors present women’s experiences of love via the protagonists love for their children. This is emphasised by Hosseini’s presentation of Mariam’s love for Aziza and Zalmai as despite the children representing Mariam’s failed attempts at fulfilling her duty as a woman in Afghan society and symbolising her own disastrous attempts at becoming a mother, the children act as her strength instead of her limitations which is fuelled by her unconditional love for them. Mariam is presented as “enchanted” and “admired” by Aziza, actively taking on the role of a grandmother illustrating Hosseini’s hopeful portrayal as love as it is illustrated as pure and unable to be corrupted by societal factors. This directly contrasts to Hardy’s presentation of women’s experiences of love as Hardy presents Tess as unable to move forward from her grief, she allows her pain and suffering to overcome her love for her son as she views him in a negative light as he is a biproduct of rape and a reminder of her loss of innocence causing her to no longer be considered as “pure”. The child is also viewed as shameful during Victorian society as it broadcasts Tess having sex outside of marriage presenting her in a negative light and acting as a catalyst for local gossip. Hardy emphasises Tess’s inability to overcome this stigma as she names the child “Sorrow” which connotes sadness and grief portraying her love as limited as a result of these societal factors.

Both authors also present women’s experiences of love through friendships to illustrate how it acted as a way of surviving in a patriarchal world. Hosseini presents the love between Leila and Mariam as forming a community upon which they were able to rely upon one another for safety. This is emphasised by Hosseini when Mariam is willing to “sacrifice” herself out of pure love in order to give Leila the opportunity to start her life fresh. Hosseini’s use of the repetition of “it’s alright” illustrates the uncertainty of the consequences of Mariam’s actions yet she reassures Leila reinforcing her selfless nature and the pure bond of love between Mariam and Leila. Mariam’s strength is fuelled by her love from her friendship with Leila therefore foreshadowing hope for the future of women in Afghanistan.

Hardy on the other hand, presents the love from friendships as a coping mechanism and as an escape from the monotonous nature of their lives. The friendship between Tess, Izzy, Mirian and Retty is presented as a support system in order to escape their monotonous lives as “dairy maids” and as a distraction from their bleak futures. Hardy presents their friendship as facing obstacles however they are overcome by love since although all three girls love angel, they choose to be happy for Tess instead since he “chose” her and have “no malice” towards her illustrating the purity of their friendship. The girls do not have the ability to “hate” Tess despite her taking away their symbol of hope and subject of their dreams emphasising the strength of love from friendships.

In conclusion, Hardy and Hosseini use women’s experiences of love to illustrate the hope it provides within a patriarchal world. Hosseini presents love as pure and selfless in contrast to the conditional and restricted love due to societal factors that Hardy presents.

Their love story began as innocent children, their friendship and unbreakable bond evolved into great love as they grew older.

Hossieni presents the romantic love between Tariq and Leila as a microcosm of hope for women in Afghanistan.