

# The Roles of Women and Femininity in *This Tender Land* by William Kent Krueger

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### Abstract

This article discusses the multifaceted portrayal of women and femininity in William Kent Krueger's novel *This Tender Land*. We investigate how women challenged societal expectations during the Great Depression via characters like Emmy, Sister Eve, and Aunt Julia, using the subaltern lens of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *This Tender Land* (2019) is a bildungsroman tracing the journey of four orphans from hardship, while experiencing diversity, searching for a home, and finding resilience. This article presents the idea of the 'new woman' via an analysis of this novel.

**Keywords:** femininity, gender differences, subaltern, intersectionality, patriarchy

### Introduction

The 'new woman' is a concept that emerged during the third wave of feminism; it voices the importance of the female sex as equal. This idea aimed to balance society, negating superstition and prejudice, and providing opportunities for women to participate as equals of men. Rights for women are necessary to combat patriarchal systems, and the 'new woman' herself was a woman who recognized herself not as a subaltern but as an equal individual with her own voice. *This Tender Land*<sup>1</sup> by William Kent Krueger is a bildungsroman narrated by Odie O'Bannion, which traces the journey of four orphans from the hardships of Lincoln Indian Training School, through a diversity of indigenous cultures, searching for a home, and discovering resilience. The novel displays elements of friendship, love, care, and unity while discussing memories of the past and present events, so as to ensure a safe future while letting the scars of time heal. This novel presents many of its female characters as beacons for change and voices against traditional stereotypes.

### The Roles of Women and Femininity

Femininity is a collection of traits, behaviors, roles, and characteristics that are typically attributed to women in a particular community, and are culturally and socially produced. Though they might differ throughout cultures and eras, these qualities frequently include those of caring, empathy,

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<sup>1</sup> William Kent Krueger, *This Tender Land* (London and New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019).

tenderness, and submissiveness. Femininity has been discussed by many authors, including Virginia Woolf. Femininity should not be considered as purely conceptual, but as comprising a distinct set of traits. Distinctions between people based on their gender identities, roles, expectations, and behaviors (gender differences) include elements of biology and social construction. Numerous facets of life, including social, cultural, psychological, and physiological factors, might be affected by these differences. Subaltern is a term often used in postcolonial studies and critical theory to describe individuals or groups who occupy marginalized or subordinate positions within a society or power structure. Subaltern voices are frequently unheard or suppressed, and subaltern experiences are often obscured or misrepresented.

Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak discusses the idea of intersectionality, which acknowledges that identities, particularly those of women, are molded by several elements, including race, class, and gender.<sup>2</sup> Intersectionality is a concept within feminist theory and critical studies that acknowledges the complex ways in which various aspects of an individual's identity intersect and interact to shape their experiences of privilege, discrimination, and social dynamics. Patriarchy is a social system or cultural framework in which men hold primary power, authority, and dominance, while women are often subordinated and have limited access to positions of influence and decision-making. Patriarchy can manifest in various forms and degrees in different societies. Patriarchal dominance is one of the most crucial and deeply ingrained fears within the society which is prevalent even today. Many men, concerned to protect their ego and superior position, deny equal treatment to women believing it to be a threat to their dominance.<sup>3</sup>

Since the first wave of feminism,<sup>4</sup> women have experienced prejudice at every turn as a marginalized sex denied their rights; they have frequently been considered as subalterns to men, fit only for domesticity. Women have long been regarded as dependent on males; the ideology of patriarchy has been prevalent, colonizing females to obey and comply.<sup>5</sup> With consciousness raising, many women started to stand for their rights as equal to their male counterparts. This helped them to gain freedom not only physically but intellectually. The new woman played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights and suffrage. By challenging gender inequality and demanding equal rights, she became an active participant in social and political movements, pushing for changes in laws and societal attitudes. The emergence of the new woman coincided with increased access to education and professional opportunities for women. She aspired to intellectual growth, pursued higher education, and actively sought professional careers, challenging the belief that women were primarily suited for domestic and nurturing roles.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Piermarco Piu, "The journal of subalternity in Gayatri Spivak's work: Its sociological relevance," *The Sociological Review*, vol. 7, no. 6 (2023), pp. 1258-1276.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Acker, "The Problem with Patriarchy," *Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1989), pp. 235-240.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Schofield, "Review of Reassessments of First Wave Feminism," *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 13, no. 6 (1984), p. 746.

<sup>5</sup> G. Henry Freeman, *Feminism* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Ann Heilmann, "The New Woman in the New Millennium: Recent Trends in Criticism of New Woman Fiction," *Literature Compass*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2006), 32-42.

## The Roles of Women in *This Tender Land*

*This Tender Land* primarily explores themes of resilience, friendship, and the idea of belonging, against a backdrop of the Great Depression and memories of the Great Sioux War. Feminist themes are provided within the text, especially the idea of a ‘new woman’, through characters like Emmy, Sister Eve, and Aunt Julia. *This Tender Land* invites us to consider women’s capabilities by portraying women who navigate the complexities of their lives in a changing world. Whether it is Aunt Julia's transformation from conformity to defiance or Emmy's journey of self-discovery, the characters embody the ongoing evolution of women's roles in literature and history.

Rache Stroup presents the idea of new women as seeking greater independence, education, job opportunities, and so on. All three characters display this progress through a pattern of defiance and conformity where they rely on the male-dominated society temporarily, but ultimately pave their way into the world. In short, Aunt Julia, Emmy, and Sister Eve can be viewed through the lens of the New Woman rhetoric as they each exhibit a blend of defiance and conformity to societal expectations. Their characters reflect the multifaceted nature of women's experiences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as they navigated a changing social landscape and sought to redefine their roles and identities.<sup>7</sup> All three were vulnerable due to their circumstances yet did not accept defeat. As women, they do not care about the expectations that society has for them. Their thought is always to make themselves known without faltering. This can be connected to the bridge between the fictional and factual world. If studied from this perspective, characters illustrate the intricate interplay of conformity and defiance in the lives of women during a time of social change and the pursuit of autonomy and self-determination. These characters reflect the multifaceted experiences of women as they negotiate the evolving roles and expectations of the New Woman in both literature and real life.<sup>8</sup>

Rache Stroupe's exploration of the rhetoric of the New Woman movement from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century offers us a historical backdrop against which to situate the characters of Aunt Julia, Emmy, and Sister Eve. While the novel is set in the 1930s, the echoes of the New Woman movement can be discerned in the actions and choices of these characters. Aunt Julia's defiance of convention, Emmy’s resilience, and Sister Eve’s unorthodox leadership within the church all reflect elements of the New Woman ethos, as they challenge traditional gender norms and expectations. Each of the characters goes through a journey of self-realization, overcoming weakness and understanding their strengths. During the Great Depression, many families found it difficult to survive without a breadwinner. This made most of the women seek work. Due to a superstitious idea that women were incapable of contributing to the workforce, most women resorted to irregular means to sustain their families, like prostitution. Some unmarried women took up evangelism as a way to earn a living.

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<sup>7</sup> Rache Stroup, *The Rhetoric of New Woman 1890- 1920* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak proposed the subaltern perspective, which recognised the subordination of women and advocated for their right to education and jobs.<sup>9</sup> Spivak considered women as marginalized due to social circumstances. In her initial work, she advocated this thought specifically for widows, but soon due to the emerging feminist movement this work was generalized to every woman possible, trying to understand the power dynamics of a society that can provide an equal status to women. Spivak advocates that every subaltern, including women, deserves respect and equal treatment.<sup>10</sup> All three characters, Emmy, Sister Eve, and Aunt Julia, display traits of being subalterns due to their subordination. They challenge society by taking initiative on their own, like Emmy displaying resilience against the Brickmans' intention to groom her as a prostitute, Sister Eve working in the Gideon Crusade as an evangelist, and Aunt Julia accepting Odie as a mother and leaving prostitution to take up dressmaking. Each goes through a tense and hardship-filled journey to understand themselves as free and choosing their destinies.<sup>11</sup>

Aunt Julia is a complex character who challenges expectations concerning the multifaceted portrayal of society, by leaving Odie in the care of others because she runs a brothel. Her subsequent revelation to Odie that she is his mother further deepens the complexity, as she grapples with the maternal role. Her character arc is based on a transition from conformity to defiance. Her final decision to care for Odie as her son demonstrates her desire for redemption. Emmy, while initially appearing as a vulnerable victim due to her innocence, defied societal expectations anyway. She displays resilience and independence by rebelling against the Brickmans, who adopt her to groom her as a prostitute. Her arc represents free thinking and fighting for herself, which leads to her growth as a multifaceted character.

Sister Eve challenges traditional gender norms through her leadership, individuality, unconventional practices, financial independence, care for the vulnerable, and intellectual engagement. She leads the Gideon Crusade, a religious group that handles snakes, challenging the traditional notion of women as subalterns.<sup>12</sup> Sister Eve's decision-making abilities demonstrate her self-determination and willingness to challenge societal expectations. Her unconventional practices, such as snake handling and faith healing, demonstrate her determination to push boundaries. If seen from the perspective of Spivak's concepts, all three characters are subalterns trying to emerge as equals despite the circumstances of their society. Each character has his or her vulnerability, which makes it difficult for them to stand against society and pre-existing notions.

Emmy challenges traditional gender roles by displaying resilience and independence despite her vulnerable circumstances. She defies the expectation of helplessness often associated with young girls during the era. Her constant fits and visions in *This Tender Land* are symbolic of her transition from innocence to experience. Her character's journey serves as a profound

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<sup>9</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "What Is It for?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on the Functions of the Postcolonial Critic," *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, vol. 18 (1994), pp. 71-81.

<sup>11</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Die Philosophin*, vol. 14, no. 27 (2003), pp. 42-58.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Burton, *Serpent Handling Believers* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

exploration of the complexities of femininity and the transition from a state of innocence to one of experience, which aligns with the broader discussion on the roles of women and femininity in the novel. Emmy begins the story as a vulnerable and seemingly innocent young girl. She is orphaned and adopted by the cruel Brickman couple, who intend to groom her as a prostitute. This initial vulnerability and the traumatic experiences she witnessed at the Lincoln Indian Training School reflect her innocence. However, her fits and visions, which emerge early in the narrative, serve as symbolic manifestations of her growing awareness and the profound impact of her experiences on her psyche.<sup>13</sup> As the story unfolds, Emmy's fits and visions become more frequent and intense. These episodes are moments of heightened perception and revelation, often occurring in times of emotional turmoil or when faced with challenging situations. They symbolize her transition from a state of innocence to a state of experience, where she begins to confront and grapple with the complexities of her environment. Emmy's fits and visions also serve as a narrative device that allows readers to delve into her inner thoughts and emotions. They provide a window into her evolving consciousness and her growing understanding of the world around her.

Through these symbolic episodes, the novel explores the process of maturation and self-discovery, which is integral to the theme of femininity and the roles of women. Emmy's character challenges societal expectations of women in multiple ways. Her resilience and independence, as evidenced by her escape from the Brickmans and her determination to survive the arduous journey with Odie, Albert, and Mose, defy the traditional portrayal of women as passive and helpless. Her fits and visions become a source of strength, guiding her through the challenges she faces. Spivak's postcolonial lens reminds one that the struggles and voices of subaltern women, often marginalized and silenced by dominant narratives, are critical in understanding the broader context of gender and femininity. While *This Tender Land* primarily unfolds in a distinct geographical and temporal setting, the characters within it echo the struggles of subaltern women, particularly through the character of Emmy. Her journey from vulnerability to independence, marked by defiance of social norms, resonates with the voices of subaltern women striving for agency in a postcolonial world.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the fits and visions may also be seen as conformity to societal expectations of children during the Great Depression era. They initially portray her as a helpless victim who relies on others for protection and guidance:

Emmy suffered these fits that resembled epileptic seizures but, doctors had assured her, were not. In fact, they had no explanation. The fits didn't seem to harm Emmy in the least, and after she came out of them, she was just fine and remembered nothing. Mrs. Frost didn't want this information broadly known, and she had sworn us to secrecy. As far as we knew, no one at Lincoln School was aware of Emmy's condition. I thought that if the Black Witch had known, she'd never have wanted to adopt the little girl.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, "Both Sides Now," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2017), p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Bishnu Bahadur Mahara, "The Issues and Aspects of Women Empowerment: Feminist Perspectives," *Journal of Durgaxmi* (2022), pp. 63-74.

<sup>15</sup> Krueger, *This Tender Land*, p. 103.

However, her growth and adaptability throughout the story challenge these initial expectations. Sister Eve challenges traditional religious and gender norms through her leadership within the snake-handling church, which includes unconventional faith healing practices.

Sister Eve portrays two roles and is honest in both. Her dual lives are intertwined with her leadership within the snake-handling church, known as the Gideon Crusade. In her religious role, she is a charismatic preacher and faith healer, conducting services and performing miraculous healings. The congregants look up to her as a spiritual leader, and she embraces her position with fervor. Despite the unconventional and often fraudulent practices used to maintain the illusion of faith healing, Sister Eve is committed to her role within the church. This demonstrates her dedication to the religious community she has created. Yet, Sister Eve's honesty extends beyond her religious role. When confronted by Odie about the fraudulent nature of the healings, she admits to the deception. "I have never claimed to heal anyone, Odie. I have always said its God who heals, not me."<sup>16</sup> This moment of truth reflects her willingness to acknowledge the complexities of her actions. It is important to note that while she is honest about the fraudulent practices, she still believes in the power of faith and maintains a spiritual connection.

Sister Eve's honesty in both her religious role and her personal life contributes to the multifaceted exploration of women's roles and femininity within the novel, as discussed in the previous paragraph. Sister Eve's personal life is marked by her genuine care for the children she travels with, including Odie, Emmy, and Albert. She takes on a maternal role, providing them with guidance, protection, and a sense of belonging. Despite her unorthodox religious practices, she is sincere in her affection and concerned for their well-being. Her actions reflect her honesty in the personal relationships she forms. In the broader context of the discussion on the roles of women and femininity in *This Tender Land*, Sister Eve challenges traditional gender norms through her leadership within the church. Her honesty in both her religious and personal life underscores the complexities of her character. While she may employ deceptive practices within the church for pragmatic reasons, her genuine care for the children and her willingness to confront the truth when confronted demonstrate her commitment to her beliefs and her role as a spiritual and maternal figure. Sister Eve's dual lives are emblematic of the broader theme of identity exploration and adaptation in a postmodern context. As she leads her congregants and cares for the children, she navigates the complex terrain of faith, deception, and maternal love, adding depth to her character.

### **Challenging Gender Roles and Navigating Complexities**

Dele Bamidele and Blessing Abuh provide a framework for examining how the female characters in *This Tender Land* challenge traditional gender norms and navigate the complexities of a postmodern context. In the novel, characters like Emmy and Sister Eve defy conventional gender roles as previously noted.<sup>17</sup> They challenge traditional gender roles, embrace ambiguity

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<sup>16</sup> Krueger, *This Tender Land*, p. 211.

<sup>17</sup> Dele Bamidele and Blessing Abuh, "The Predicament of Women in a Postmodern World: A Reading of Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*," *Matatu* vol. 49, no. 1 (2017), pp. 182-200.

and fluidity in identity, and navigate the intersections of gender with other factors such as race, class, and religion. Bamidele and Abuh underscore the complexity of postmodern femininity, where women confront both challenges and opportunities within a rapidly changing society.

Societal expectations play a significant role in shaping the characters' choices and actions. Emmy's initial vulnerability and conformity to societal norms reflect the constraints placed on young girls during that era. Emmy, the young orphan, is a beacon of resilience and adaptability. Her journey from vulnerability to independence encapsulates the essence of femininity in a world marked by hardship. Initially portrayed as a helpless victim. In the novel, She defies these expectations by escaping the clutches of the Brickmans, who intend to groom her for prostitution. Her escape alongside Odie, Albert, and Mose is a courageous act of rebellion against the constraints imposed upon her as a young girl. “‘I know,’ Emmy said. ‘And I want to go with you.’ ‘You knew?’ Albert asked. ‘How?’ ‘I just did. And I’m going with you,’”<sup>18</sup> Emmy's character exemplifies the capacity of women to transcend stereotypes and chart their paths.

Sister Eve's use of fraudulent practices to maintain the illusion of faith healing reflects the pressure to conform to societal expectations for success and recognition. Emmy's character transforms conformity into resilience and independence as she adapts to the challenges of her journey. In the novel, when the narrator secretly visits Sister Eve, he finds her living two lives; as an evangelist she projects herself as a kind savior for the destitute, while as a modern woman she smokes and enjoys music. On one side the narrator finds her angelic in her simple and devoted faith, whereas on the other he finds her taking all that which is stereotypical for men:

Sister Eve no longer wore a white robe but was dressed in a western shirt with snap buttons. Her blue jeans were rolled up at the ankles, and I could see that on her feet were honest-to-God cowboy boots. They were playing a song I'd heard on the radio at Cora Frost's house, “Ten Cents a Dance,” a sad melody about a woman paid to dance with men but desperate for someone to take her away from all that.<sup>19</sup>

Sister Eve's unorthodox practices may include elements of deception, but her dedication to her congregation and the children she cares for is undeniably sincere. She navigates the complexities of spirituality and identity, reflecting the capacity of women to redefine their roles to advantage.

Aunt Julia initially challenges societal expectations by leaving Odie in the care of others due to her involvement in prostitution, defying conventional motherhood. Her decision to raise Odie as her son reflects a transformation from conformity to defiance, as she seeks redemption and independence from her past. Aunt Julia's determination to leave her past behind was a significant factor that drove her to fight with Thelma in *This Tender Land*. When Thelma tries to drag Odie away, Julia says “I will kill you if I have to, leave Odie.” Her words help ignite the idea of a bond in Odie's heart; he accepts her as his mother saying, “I am not leaving you.” He adds the word “Mother” at the end.<sup>20</sup> This pivotal moment in the novel reflects the complexities of

<sup>18</sup> Krueger, *This Tender Land*, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Krueger, *This Tender Land*, p. 163.

<sup>20</sup> Krueger, *This Tender Land*, p. 378.

femininity and the roles of women, particularly in the context of personal redemption and the pursuit of a new life. Aunt Julia is a woman with a complex past. She had been involved in prostitution and had left Odie in the care of others. Her initial decision to leave Odie reflects her desire to distance him from her previous profession and create a different future for him.

This determination to break free from her past is the core of her character. In this context, the fight between Aunt Julia and Thelma is a symbolic and physical manifestation of Aunt Julia's determination to sever ties with her past and protect the family she has chosen to. It underscores the theme of redemption and transformation in the novel. As the story unfolds, Aunt Julia's revelation as Odie's mother adds depth to her character and highlights her ongoing struggle to reconcile her past with her maternal role:

“I named you Odysseus because Rosalee and I had grown up listening to our mother read Homer’s epic story to us. You know your namesake, Odysseus?” “A Greek hero. Cora Frost, a teacher at Lincoln School, told me about him.” “He was a great leader, and I knew that you would be, too, someday. But also I named you that because you were born on Ithaca Street. It seemed a sign.” “My mother named me,” I declared. She gazed at me silently. In the end, I gazed right back at her, and a look of understanding must have dawned on my face, because she nodded and said in a whisper, “Yes.”<sup>21</sup>

Her determination to be a mother to Odie becomes a driving force in her life, symbolizing her commitment to creating a new, more conventional family structure. The conflict with Thelma, who was once a prostitute like Aunt Julia, is a culmination of these complex dynamics. Thelma represents Aunt Julia's past, and their confrontation becomes a symbolic battle between their shared history and Aunt Julia's determination to leave it behind. Thelma's actions, including her attempt to harm Odie, trigger Aunt Julia's protective instincts and ignite the fight.

From the perspective of the roles of women and femininity in *This Tender Land*, Aunt Julia's character embodies the complexities of personal agency and the pursuit of a new identity. Her determination to break free from the confines of her past profession challenges societal expectations of women who have experienced such a background. She seeks to redefine herself as a mother and protector, reflecting the evolving roles and choices that women can make in the face of adversity. When Thelma reveals her actual motive behind trying to take Odie and Albert away, Julia fights to protect her son. Her revelation as Odie's mother adds layers to her character as she grapples with reconciling her past actions with her maternal instincts.

Krueger illustrates the complexities of femininity and the roles of women, particularly in the pursuit of agency and the creation of new identities in the face of societal expectations. The novel reflects elements of the New Woman movement by portraying female characters who challenge traditional roles and exhibit resilience and independence. However, it also acknowledges the constraints and pressures faced by women during the era. The male characters respond differently to the changing roles of female characters. Some, like Odie and Albert, support and

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<sup>21</sup> Krueger, *This Tender Land*, pg. 372



appreciate the strength and independence of female characters, contributing to a more balanced exploration of gender dynamics. The economic challenges of the Great Depression mean that Krueger uses the portrayal of women and femininity to illustrate themes of resilience and the capacity for change, highlighting the evolving identity and societal dynamics of the era. The novel hints at the intersectionality of gender, race, and class by depicting characters like Sister Eve and Emmy, whose experiences are influenced by multiple factors.

In *This Tender Land*, characters like Sister Eve and Emmy experience the complexities of their identities as they navigate multiple dimensions of their lives. Postmodernism often celebrates ambiguity and fluidity in gender and identity. The characters' journeys in the novel, including Aunt Julia's complex transformation, reflect the fluidity of roles and expectations in a postmodern world. Emmy, Sister Eve, and Aunt Julia embark on a transformative journey that challenges and redefines societal expectations of femininity. The convergence of these characters' journeys within the narrative creates a dynamic interplay of femininity, challenging and conforming to societal expectations in different ways. To fully appreciate the significance of these characters' journeys, one must view them through the lens of various theoretical perspectives. Spivak's postcolonial lens reminds us of the subaltern voices that often remain marginalized within dominant narratives. While *This Tender Land* primarily unfolds within a specific historical and cultural context, the women's journey from vulnerability to independence resonates with subaltern women striving for agency in a postcolonial world.

Readers navigate the rich tapestry of this narrative, where the roles of women and the portrayal of femininity emerge as enduring themes that resonate across time and culture. In the end, *This Tender Land* stands as a testament to the transformative power of women's journeys, reminding one that the exploration of femininity is an ever-evolving odyssey. In the end, *This Tender Land* beckons one to reflect on the enduring power of the human spirit, regardless of gender or societal expectations. As we bid farewell to these characters, we are reminded that the exploration of femininity is not confined to novels but is an ongoing, collective journey in which each living woman writes her narrative. Krueger's masterpiece serves as a poignant reminder that the stories of women, their resilience, and their ever-evolving identities continue to shape the tapestry of our world, offering hope, inspiration, and a profound sense of possibility.

## Conclusion

This exploration of the roles of women and the portrayal of femininity in *This Tender Land*, the researcher has embarked on a multifaceted journey through the complex tapestry of characters, themes, and socio-historical contexts within the novel. Drawing inspiration from the perspectives of prominent theorists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rache Stroupe, Dele Bamidele and Blessing Abuh, we have sought to unravel the intricate layers of gender dynamics, identity, and societal expectations as depicted in the narrative. The novel invites one to reflect not only on the historical context but also on the enduring relevance of these themes. In a world that continues to grapple with questions of gender equality, identity, and agency, the voices of Emmy, Sister Eve,

and Aunt Julia resonate as reminders that women can redefine their roles, challenge convention, and shape their destinies. In conclusion, William Kent Krueger's *This Tender Land* is a literary voyage that goes beyond its historical context to give important insights into the changing nature of femininity and the nuanced roles women have played in creating their destinies.