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**The Theme of Alienation  
in the Major Novels  
of *Thomas Hardy***

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The predicament of human isolation and alienation is a pervasive theme that has not been sufficiently studied in Thomas Hardy's fiction. This paper investigates the theme of alienation focussing on Hardy's major novels. Although the term 'alienation' is one of the most outstanding features of this age, it is not very clear what it precisely means. The writer of this paper has to draw extensively on Hegel, Marx, Fromm and other thinkers to understand the complex ramifications of the term. The numerous connections in which the term has been used are restricted to include only a few meanings and applications among which the most important refers to a disparity between one's society and one's spiritual interests or welfare.

The theme of alienation, then, is investigated in representative texts from the wide trajectory of Victorian literature. It is clear that the central intellectual characteristic of the Victorian age is, as Arnold diagnosed it, "the sense of want of correspondence between the forms of modern Europe and its spirit".

The increasing difficulty of reconciling historical and spiritual perspectives has become a major theme for Hardy and other late Victorians. Next, in each of Hardy's major novels

the theme of alienation is traced. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Boldwood's neurotic and self-destructive nature makes him obsessed with Bathsheba, and as a result, murders Troy and suffers the isolation of life imprisonment; Fanny Robin's tragic and lonely death, only assisted by a dog, is a flagrant indictment of society.

In *The Return of the Native*, Clym is the earliest prototype in Hardy's fiction of alienated modern man. He returns to Egdon Heath only to live in isolation unable to communicate with the very people whom he thought of as a cure for his alienation. Eustacia has consistently been leading a life of alienation in Egdon Heath which leads to her suicide. All Hardy's novels deal with the problems both of adjusting to changes in society and of coping with its failure to change in response to the individual's needs. His treatment of character emphasizes that individuals as well as society are in a process of change and that novelists' methods of exploring character must change in order to reflect this and to take into account new insights. Clym, Knight, Fitzpiers, Angel, Sue and Jude are all examples of the problems of "advanced" thinkers in a world which adamantly resists any challenge to its attitudes and preconceptions.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard's alienation may be more ascribed to his own character, recalling Boldwood, than to incongruity with society. Yet Hardy emphasises the tendency of society towards modernity which Henchard cannot cope with. In *The Woodlanders*, not only does wild nature fail to be a regenerative and productive force but also human nature fails to be communicative and assuring. The people of Little Hintock fail to communicate with any other.

Giles is an "obstructed relationship"; Giles dies a sacrificial death, and Marty ends as a wreck in a rare scene hardly credible in a newly emerging world. Fitzpiers and Mrs Charmond, on the other hand, are isolated in the sterile enclosure of their own fantasies. Grace, anticipating Tess and Sue, is torn in a conflict between two worlds, neither of which can happily accommodate her. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess, after her childhood experiences at Marlott and later at Trantridge, soon discovers how oppressive society is, particularly when she is rejected by Angel, whom she loves and through whom she aspires to fulfil herself. Angel suffers from self-division in his character, and the conflict between received attitudes and advanced ideas leaves him an embodiment of an alienated man hardly able to reconcile the values of two worlds.

*Jude the Obscure* is Hardy's most complete expression of alienation. Jude's alienation is explicitly social and implicitly cosmic, and his failure to identify himself in society constitutes a major theme of the novel. The novel foreshadows the modern themes of failure, frustration, futility, disharmony, isolation, rootlessness, and absurdity as inescapable conditions of life.

In conclusion, the theme of alienation in the major novels of Thomas Hardy is a pervasive one. Nevertheless, not all his characters are alienated; however their happy condition, like that of the rustics in Gray's *Elegy*, is seen to stem from their intellectual limitations. Our life nowadays is commonly characterized in terms of "alienation". Reference is constantly made to it in connection with the growth of superficiality in interpersonal relations, the stunting of personal development, the widespread existence of neurotic personality traits, the absence of a sense of meaning in

life and the "disappearance" or "death" of God. There is almost no aspect of contemporary life which has not been discussed in terms of "alienation". Whether or not it is one of the most outstanding features of this age, it would certainly seem to be its watchword.

The predominant motif of the "Everlasting No" is the meaninglessness, emptiness, isolation and despondency of a man torn between his love of mankind and withdrawal from it. When he goes out into the world to earn his living, he confronts the selfishness of the people whose souls have become petrified under modern conditions. We cannot fulfil our best selves under the materialism of this age. Diogenes Teufelsdröckh loses hope and begins to despair of his age and consequently of himself. He even whispers that revolt is useless, that things cannot be changed. So, his humanity and religious sense are thwarted, his spirit grows restless and turns inward upon itself. He suffers from an acute sense of alienation.

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