Images of Motherhood: A Feminist Study of Thomas Hardy's Short Fiction

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B.A (English Language and Literature), Yarmouk University, Irbid, 1993

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts (Literature) at Yarmouk University

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July, 1995
ABSTRACT

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This thesis is meant to examine from a feminist point of view the representation of women as mothers in Hardy's short stories and tales. Three images are discussed: the 'angelic' mother, the 'demonic' mother, and the mother as a New Woman. The first two images are the products of a patriarchal ideology that views women in such a stereotypical manner. While the 'angelic' mother is an incarnation of submission, passivity, self-denial, and self-sacrifice, the 'demonic' mother denies her maternal role for one reason or another. Between the two images we find a number of variations: the surrogate mother, the fallen, the over ambitious, and the over protective mother. The third image, the mother as a New Woman, foreshadows a rejection of cultural stereotypes to which women have been reduced, as well as a rejection of the conventional idea of women as naturally inferior. This image defies the hierarchical relationship presented by the father and introduces a challenge to the patriarchal system of the family.