

ABSTRACT

The Woman as Orphan

A Study of the Theme of Orphanhood in five novels

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This paper sets out to examine the concept of woman as orphan, be that orphanhood actual or functional, as it is treated in five novels - Emma, Tess of The D'Urbervilles, Portrait of a Lady, Wide Sargasso Sea and The Color Purple. It will explore events in the careers of the women in these novels that seem directly attributable to their orphanhood.

The intention of this paper is to see if the novels to be examined bear out the theory that to be an orphan is a condition that often predisposes the woman to a life fraught with danger to body, mind and spirit. In addition, it seems that most writers allow no escape from this state of endangerment, unless it is through the good offices of a patriarchy which offers adoption to the woman, but only on its terms. In essence, this paper seeks an answer to the question "Is orphanhood always a dead-end street for the woman, or can it lead to discovery of the self and re-generation?"