

# The Disruptive Semiotic:

## A Kristevan Reading of Thomas Hardy's Fiction

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## **Abstract**

The thesis sets out to understand the ambiguous reader response induced by Hardy's novels. Basing itself on Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, according to which intertextuality is identified as a primal process of transposition of discourses, this study analyzes the narrative ambiguity in Hardy's novels as an intertextuality, revelatory of the ideas of Hardy's reading, reflected in his annotations, jottings and quotations. Using Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, the thesis further widens the discussion of Hardy's narrative style to include the dynamics of desire of the semiotic theory of Jacques Lacan. Highlighting a correspondence of ideas in Hardy's fiction with the basic tenets of Kristeva and Lacan's theories, Kristeva's dynamic view of intertextuality as a process of abjection, is used to explicate this correspondence of ideas.

With Kristeva's conception of intertextuality being linked to her theory of the "subject in process" (Revolution 1984, 17, 60, 126, 162; Desire 1982, 15), her dynamic view of the subject is endorsed by the thesis. Hardy's narrative is thus interpreted as a dynamic production of meanings resulting from 'semiotic discharges of the drives' disrupting the uniform meaning of the text. Intertextual nodes are hence identified to evidence the process of abjection producing the textual ambiguity.

Further, making use of Roland Barthe's ideas about the technique of free association, this thesis explores Hardy's writing as a 'layered tapestry' of meanings. The reading, however, is delimited to interpreting Hardy's writing through the subtext of his reading, while taking the inner being of Hardy, the author, into account as a 'subject in process'. Though it is an essentially psychoanalytical analysis, nevertheless it is not psychoanalytical in a strictly Freudian sense. With reference to Hardy's anti-realist defense of "inspired Art", the thesis rather endorses the view of Hardy as creatively inclined, by highlighting passages evidencing a subtext, suggestive of the energizing process of abjection of the 'I' of the author. The thesis thus analyzes the dynamic process of the productions of meanings of the fictional narrative of Thomas Hardy.

*Keywords* *abjection Chora ex-sistence intertextuality maternal jouissance (m)Other palimpsest phallic function signifiante*