

The withered arm argumentative essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Thomas Hardy creates and maintains mystery and malignant, underlying forces by using symbolic descriptions of the setting, the atmosphere and the strange unguessable plot. Thomas Hardy sets the story in the fictional village of Holmstoke. Holm means home and stoke means fire.

This gives two impressions, one of a nice cosy warm story, but it also gives the impression that fire is also connected with bad things like Hell and witchcraft. This makes you start to wonder what the story will be like.

Thomas Hardy uses natural settings to contrast with unnatural events or behaviour. The heath is used a lot because of this.

He also uses the heath because it helps create atmosphere and because it is outside he also uses the weather to reflect the characters mood. An example of this is when Rhoda and Gertrude cross the heath to see Conjuror Trendle and Rhoda does not want to and “ would have done anything to escape this enquiry”, the weather and the atmosphere reflect her dread of what will happen. “ The thick clouds made the atmosphere dark” and it was only early after noon and “ the wind howled dismally”. Hardy also uses the weather to help him describe the changing of time like at the beginning of a paragraph.

All the gossip was going on in “ winter” and by the end of the paragraph it’s “ in the spring” I think Hardy also uses the changing of the seasons as a sort of metaphor to symbolize the changing of the characters. An example is when Gertrude changes from a very beautiful, perfect, kind and caring girl to a scarred “ irritable superstitious woman”. Hardy also has such large gap in time so the changes in Gertrude are more noticeable. Thomas Hardy also uses characters to help him create mystery and underlying forces especially

Rhoda Brook. Rhoda is an outsider and she lives out of the village by herself with her son.

She's a little weird because she never mixes with people. People don't really mix with her because of her sleeping with Lodge and having a baby. People think she is a witch. I think this is because people associate her with Trendle. When Gertrude needed to find Trendle the villagers told her to ask Rhoda and she realized that they thought " a sorceress would know the whereabouts of the exorcist". But the mystery really begins when she has her vision and next day Gertrude shows her the mark from the vision which is on her arm.

The vision is an important part of the story as it is the start of everything and caused everything. Rhoda can not control what is happening so it helps maintain the uncontrollable forces which are all through this book. Thomas Hardy uses Conjuror Trendle a lot to help create mystery and uncontrollable forces. Just the fact that conjuror Trendle lives on the heath starts to make the reader feel a sense of mystery because the heath represents the weirdness of the story.

Trendle also helps create mystery by doing magic in secret and not openly " He did not profess his remedial practises openly" and it also helps that he was in disguise. He was disguised as a dealer in furze , turf sharp sand and other local products". He had to be disguised because people in that time were very superstitious. I think Thomas Hardy uses Gertrude to help create a sense of uncontrollable forces, this is because things are happening to her mentally and physically which she has no control over. Also because the

things that are happening to her are unexplainable, it helps create and maintain malignant uncontrollable forces. Hardy illustrates this physically when her incredible beauty is which is described as “ the light under a heap of rose petals” becomes ruined and scarred by her withered arm; and mentally when she turns from a very nice person to an “ irritable, superstitious woman” Farmer Lodge is not in the story much but none the less is a very important character, because he is the main reason the whole story happens.

He is the center of the love triangle of him Rhoda and Gertrude which is why everything happens. As we don't see him much in the story this makes him more important as it helps add to the mystery. Hardy uses imagery to help the reader mentally see what's happening and also to symbolise things. An example of this at the beginning of the book “ the lorn milkmaid” Hardy paint us the picture of a lot of milkmaids all sitting together gossiping.

This gives the impression that the village is quite a close knit place and that one Rhoda Brooke is all by herself on the side not joining in this gossiping. This gives the impression that she is a sort of outsider which no one wants to be friends with which adds to the mystery. A very important image in the story is the withered arm. It creates mystery because the reader will wonder how it happened and malignant uncontrollable forces because the reader will wonder if Rhoda really is a witch. The main themes of the story are witch craft and passion. The passion is in the love triangle between Farmer Lodge, Gertrude and Rhoda.

The witch craft is in the vision Rhoda sees and the physical and mental change in Gertrude. Passion and witch craft are the uncontrollable forces in the withered arm. I think one of the things Hardy is trying to say in this book is that life can't always be explained. Thomas Hardy uses many different languages effects. He uses similes and metaphors, to describe Gertrude " her face as comely as a live doll's" and her face " like the light under a heap of rose petals". Hardy also uses extended imagery when he uses the river outside the executioner's house to link him to the village, " it stood close to the same stream".

He also uses personification in describing the river " the waters of which emitted a steady roar". Thomas Hardy shows us which characters are " common" and which aren't by having the " common" ones use dialect. The only person not to use dialect is Gertrude. Another important factor in creating and maintaining a sense of mystery and malignant uncontrollable forces was the plot. The vision coming true and Rhoda beginning to doubt herself really draws the reader in to the story. I think it was a very effective ending giving no clear answers like yes, Rhoda was a witch or not or no, it was all a coincidence and leaving it up to the reader.

That really helps maintain mystery In conclusion I think that by using the characters, settings and a strange plot, Thomas Hardy successfully creates and maintains mystery and malignant forces in the withered arm.