

# "the withered arm" and "the seduction"

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The two texts that I am going to be comparing are *The Withered Arm* by Thomas Hardy written in the nineteenth century and *The Seduction* by Eileen McAuley written in the 1980's. The areas that I will attempt to focus on are the differences in structure, author, setting, language and the similarities in the theme and language. These two texts will be very good to compare as despite there being a gap of over a hundred years they are both the same topic but set in different cultures and of course time.

I feel that the most interesting point is that the author of *The Withered Arm* was a gentleman who also especially for the time it was set in had a very sympathetic view towards women. Summaries Before I start comparing the two texts I shall give a brief summary of the texts. " *The Withered arm*" is a short story based on the three main characters Farmer Lodge, Rhoda Brook and Gertrude Lodge. We are initially introduced to Farmer Lodge, Rhoda Brook and their son. Farmer lodge owned the eighty-cow dairy and Rhoda was one of his milkmaids.

The two of them had a son which farmer Lodge chose to disown and keep him secret from the town due to the fact that Rhoda was in a lower social class than he was. A few years on Mr Lodge returns with a young attractive, upper class woman called Gertrude. Rhoda is very jealous and dreams about Gertrude and that she has thrown her across the room by her wrist. The following day Gertrude came to the farm and showed her wrist to Rhoda revealing a hand print where Rhoda had dreamed of throwing her. Rhoda began to think that she had cursed Gertrude with her dream.

In time the arm got much worse. Rhoda went with Gertrude to visit a witch doctor called Conjuror Trendle and it was here that he revealed the truth about Rhoda and her dream, this made Gertrude very unsure of her friendship with Rhoda. Shortly after this meeting Rhoda decided to move away with her son, leaving Gertrude's arm to become ugly and withered. After half a dozen years Gertrude and Farmer Lodge's marriage had become a very unhappy one the woman he had married had become very disfigured and had brought no children.

Gertrude realised this and sought out Conjuror Trendle again. On this occasion she was told that she should go to the hanging of a young man and when he had been cut down, she should rub her arm along the back of his neck. So Gertrude headed off to a small town called Casterbridge where there was to be a hanging she visited the man who organised it and did exactly as she was told, rubbed her arm across the young mans neck after he had been hung. The young man happened to be the son of Rhoda and Mr Lodge. They are both there and horrified to see what Gertrude is doing.

The blood turned as she was warned it would and in the end kills her. Mr Lodge eventually died leaving his money to a boy's school and Rhoda, but she does not accept it and chooses to live on her own and provide for herself. The second text is a poem called " The Seduction". This is set in the middle 1980's in Birkenhead Docks, Liverpool. This is about an anonymous teenage girl and boy who meet at a party. The boy gets the girl very drunk on vodka and after the party leads her under false pretences to the docks.

There he plies her with even more drink so that he can easily seduce her, which he does very successfully. She discovers that she is three months pregnant and very frightened but also realises how much she was cheated by the boy and how little he really liked her and the empty promises he made to her just to get what he wanted. Differences Within the Structure An immediately obvious difference between these two texts would be that one is a short story and the other is a poem. I think what defines a short story is that it contains very few characters.

In "The Withered Arm" there are predominately three main characters Farmer Lodge, Gertrude Lodge and Rhoda Brook though the story is based mainly around Rhoda. Having very few characters is very effective, as it is far easier to follow than lots of different characters as you can easily remember who is who and what they have done. A short story contains very little detail this is effective and keeps the reader focused on the main line of the story, but other times you may wish to know more about the background and the situation.

In 'The Withered Arm' there is little background detail but this works well. We do not know any background information between Rhoda and Farmer Lodge, we do not know if it was casual rape, if it was a long liaison or even if any courting went on between them. You are made to feel that it was casual rape or a one night stand as Farmer Lodge had dis-owned his son and Rhoda was made to be in a lower social status than him. Another example of containing very little detail is when Rhoda and her son left the farm, the author did not mention where they went to or to do what.

You do not find out any more information on them until you are nearing the end of the story and the hanging of Rhoda's son for committing arson, but again there is very little on Rhoda's movements until the end of the story. In a short story the plot is very important it has to be well thought out and have lots of twists so that the reader cannot know what is to happen next. In larger and more complex stories there are usually three or four plots happening at the same time making it more exciting and keeping the reader's attention for longer.

In a short story there is normally only one main plot happening and there are not any sub plots this is good as it allows the reader to remain focused on the one story without getting confused with other plots. This allows the story to have a much faster ending without the reader wanting to know what happened to all the other plots. A swift 'denouement' this is French for 'unknotting' is contained in a majority of short stories this means that the story very quickly unravels itself and the reader is straight into the main plot and the main body of the story.

This is very effective for short stories where you have not the space to fill it with unnecessary details and therefore allowing the reader to get directly into the story. Poems Rhyme and Rhythm usually define poems. In the poem 'The Seduction' it has a rhyme scheme of A, B, C, B through out this poem it can clearly be seen and heard. The following verse shows the rhyming scheme: " As he brought her more drinks, so she fell in love, With his eyes as blue as iodine, With the fingers that stroke her neck and thighs And the kisses that tasted of nicotine.

This helps the poem flow naturally and allows the words to roll off the reader's tongue it also enhances the poem and gives it more rhythm. Not all poems contain rhythm because the rhyme gives it all it needs. In poems the meaning is conveyed in a short amount of words and the words have more power and effectiveness than the ordinary form of the written or spoken language this is because poems are shorter than prose. A very good example of this is within the line " Far from the blind windows of the tower blocks".

By using this personification Eileen McAuley is telling the reader that the city is dark, that the couple are alone and that it is quite safe for him to seduce her without anyone seeing them. In a poem the author has to use powerful words to express the meaning of the sentence where as in a story a whole paragraph can be used. This can be seen in the line " So she followed him there all high white shoes". The author here is telling us that she was pure innocent and still a virgin but wanted to be older and not so pure hence why she is wearing the high heels. Between the Authors

Apart from the clear differences in the structure of these two texts another difference is between the authors. A male Thomas Hardy who seemed to be very sympathetic towards women wrote 'The Withered arm' in the nineteenth century. This was very unusual for his time, as women then did not have any rights or allowed to speak out and were treated unfairly particularly by men. The author of the 1980's poem 'The seduction' is a young woman from Liverpool, who also had very sympathetic view towards women. Eileen's views are not that surprising for then or now as women have many more rights and are treated as much as an equal as men.

Women have also gained the respect of men. What is very surprising is that both texts are both related to the same topic and both of a very similar view. Linking back to the previous paragraph another difference between the two texts is the setting and difference in the periods of time, early nineteenth century and late twentieth century. Both texts are also set in different areas, the milkmaids set one in a rural pre-industrial scene, which we know as in 'The Withered Arm' Thomas Hardy talks about milking by the milkmaids and how Gertrude rode into the town of Casterbridge by her horse.

The other is set in an inner city, postindustrial scene. We know this as the author quotes " Far past the silver stream of traffic through the city, Far from the blind windows of the tower blocks" I think this clearly shows this is in the twentieth century as none of these existed in the nineteenth century.

Language Due to the different periods of time these texts were written they both use different language. A very good example of this is within the line " She giggled, drunk and nervous, and he muttered little slag" Eileen McAuley uses slang here to very clearly show that the boy did not care about the girl at all.

I think she also has chosen to use slang here in such a way so that teenagers would understand. As this is a very serious topic she had to use very powerful words to make teenage girls realise the consequences of their actions. In the short story Thomas Hardy has used only old English this is because this is the only dialect that he would have known and those who read it at the time would have understood. If he had known any slang he could not have used it because the readers would not have known what he

was saying, just as the people of our time do not understand his use of language now.

However despite the completely different use of language both pieces are able to stress the points in the same way. Similarities Both texts are very similar. There are a number of themes that you can argue that the two texts have in common. One theme is betrayal. Men betray women in both texts ending up with dreadful consequences for the women. Considering the period the short story was written in, I find it very surprising that both texts share the same view and pity for the women.

I would think that Thomas Hardy writing with such views in his time would have caused himself trouble as the women's place in society was not to be respected by any man. The second theme both texts have in common is the importance of appearance and how a woman appears physically is important to both men and women. How a woman appears physically to a man is important whether we like it or not. I do feel that it is a shame that some men do judge a woman immediately on her appearance. What the person is like on the inside that really matters and counts and not the outside.

In 'The Withered Arm' Gertrude feels put down by her husband as he does not find her attractive anymore because of her arm; " If only I could be as I was when he first saw me" As her husband was gradually losing interest in her she too was losing confidence in herself and desperately wanted to find love between them again knowing it was her appearance that was the problem. In the poem appearance is also brought into it but not how she appears physically to a man but to other women. The other women are the



nosy neighbours that gossiped on her appearance; Than to have the neighbours whisper that you always looked the type".

This is implying that as the young girl being pregnant was brought upon herself, by the way she dressed herself or how much make up she wore. She was only a young girl and still has lots to learn about the importance of the impression that can be given through the physical appearance. It is unfair that these people also made that swift judgement, as they did not know anything of the situation at all. Language The final similarity that I am going to make is the effective use of language by both authors.

There is a powerful use of description used in both pieces. In the poem Eileen McAuley describes the bricks of Birkenhead as quiet. This immediately makes you realise that it is very quiet and nobody will hear them or say anything. Images are made for you very well in both texts and again I shall use an example from the poem by Eileen McAuley. The young girl had an image of meeting a boy, falling in love and marrying him. The girl believes all the stories she reads in the magazines and thinks that she has found all of these in the boy from the party.

When the reality of the situation hit her unfortunately after it was too late; " And she ripped up all her My Guy and Jackie photo-comics Until they were just bright paper, like confetti strewn on the carpet" This symbolises her shattered dreams and ironically she uses the word confetti as the girl thought she was going to marry the boy and of course does not so the use of this word is very clever. Conclusion I liked both of these texts but preferred

the poem by Eileen McAuley as I felt it was much more effective with a good use of very powerful language.

The poem focuses on a teenage girl who with her naivety, innocence and dreams became pregnant and this effects many young girls today. The short story focuses on a grown woman being a single parent in a different era. I found it much harder to read and understand than the poem. This was a difficult assignment to do, as both texts have some similarities but are both very different. What interested me about the short story is that Thomas Hardy had such a sympathetic view towards women and the situation, which as I said earlier was so unusual for his time.