

How does thomas
hardy present men
and women and their
relationships in the
three ...



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The relationships between men and women are explored seriously and humorously in 'The Withered Arm', 'Tony Kytes - the Arch-Deceiver', and 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion'. It is through the plot that concerns about marriage and social status are revealed, and through this Hardy presents a fictionalised picture of society and relationships at that time. Hardy's stories are based on many tales, which had been told to him as a young boy. They are mainly based on events, which happened before his birth in 1840.

This therefore separates the time period of his contemporary readers from his characters lives, and therefore enables Hardy to create a fictionalised world that is based on social fact. Wessex is a fictional county that was closely based on the county of Dorset, which is why much of the dialect used in the three stories, is that of Dorset. The events relayed in the stories tell us that the social attitudes and values have not changed, and this also gives us a picture of how relationships between men and women must conform to society's standards. In each of the three stories, Hardy has chosen to use the pastoral voice, which is the common dialect throughout many of Hardy's stories.

The use of dialect during his stories, occur at moments when Hardy does not want an element of pretension. It is the uneducated, lower class characters that speak with regional dialect, an example being from 'The Withered Arm' - "He do bring home his bride to-morrow, I hear." This comment could also signify the fact that women, within a community, like to gossip. Whereas the upper class characters tend to use more formal Standard English, and this signifies their conformity, social standards and behaviour. 'The Withered

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'The Withered Arm' examines rejection and the destructive forces of vanity and repressed jealousy. The effects of these are exacerbated by the setting: a small rural community in which witchcraft is believed to exist.

This story is told through an omniscient narrator, where Hardy is the storyteller with total knowledge of characters' thoughts, feelings and actions. This establishes a formal tone and creates a less friendly atmosphere. Hardy uses this narrative perspective for more serious stories, where he explores issues of social division and morality. The use of an omniscient narrator in 'The Withered Arm', allows parallels to be drawn between Gertrude and Rhoda through their subconscious states of mind: 'Gertrude's unconscious prayer' and 'Rhoda's secret heart'.

.. did not altogether object to the slight diminution of her successor's beauty. 'The contrast between Gertrude and Rhoda is evident. Gertrude is shown to be shallow and petty in allowing a superficial thing like her appearance have such a devastating effect on her life. Rhoda, however, has suffered much and has endured much greater hardship in life.

Hardy's narrative voice blends in with characters causing him to become more omniscient, bringing the pastoral way of life alive. Hardy uses the study of people to create his narrative voice. The stories are grounded in Dorset life and folklore during the mid-nineteenth century and are drawn together by a unique narrative perspective - the pastoral voice that reveals the affectionate observations of rustic life. Hardy's narrative voice is used to explore and convey a philosophical view of the world, and through this Hardy creates and insight into the human condition.

In 'The Withered Arm' for example, there is a strong portrayal of how vanity and greed is a major downfall of the human race. The story also gives us an insight into the expectations of the relationship between husband and wife at that time, and this is shown through what seems to be Gertrude's 'duty'. It seems as though her husband expects her, to visit various people in the community, to show off her beauty. The previous relationship between Farmer Lodge and Rhoda Brook is alluded to early in the story. We conclude that the relationship was 'inappropriate'.

Farmer Lodge is obviously a wealthy landowner belonging to a higher class than Rhoda Brook - although there seems to be some sympathy for Rhoda's situation amongst the community, from which she has isolated herself. She has been rejected by Farmer Lodge, having had his son, and he has now married a more suitable woman in terms of class - "A lady complete". This shows how important it is for people to conform to society's rules and regulations of the time. The contrast between the prosperous lifestyle of Farmer Lodge and the destitute lifestyle of Rhoda and her son serves to emphasise the fact that they are from different social backgrounds. It is through the context of social class that the theme of prejudice is explored. As with the other two stories, social concerns have complicated the choice of a spouse, with disastrous consequences.

Farmer Lodge's character is presented as an attractive though ageing man. He seems as though he is quite vain, even from the beginnings of the story, his new wife was a "rosy-cheeked, tisty-tosty, little body". However, his character becomes less attractive as we learn of his past happenings with Rhoda Brook. Like Gertrude, he places undue value upon appearances and <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-thomas-hardy-present-men-and-women-and-their-relationships-in-the-three-wessex-tales-essay/>

we are told that she was “ the woman whom he had wooed for her grace and beauty”. His reaction to her disfigurement, leaves the impression that he is purely only after the physical attributes of a woman. This feeds Gertrude’s obsession with her appearance, and he drives her to find alternative cures, in order to regain the happiness in their marriage.

Lodge’s selfish behaviour and superficial values lead to disastrous consequences. Thomas Hardy establishes in the first part of the story a sense of foreboding, about what will happen when Farmer Lodge brings his new wife home. As the story progresses, Thomas Hardy conveys Rhoda’s gradually increasing obsession with Mrs. Lodge through the plans for her son to observe the new wife. It appears as though Rhoda is suppressing her feelings towards the new Mrs.

Lodge - for example, she seem satisfied when she discovers that Mrs. Lodge, or Gertrude, is shorter than she. Her obsession with Gertrude and her repressed jealousy culminates in a nightmare, in which Rhoda is haunted by an image of the new wife suffocating her. In a desperate effort, Rhoda grabs the apparition’s left arm and throws it away from her. This deeply disturbs Rhoda, although events become stranger when she is visited by the real Mrs.

Lodge, only to see that Gertrude’s left arm has become withered, perhaps due to the supernatural. Although, there is undeniably a hypocrisy here, Rhoda has been mentally scarred by her past mistakes with Farmer Lodge, although Gertrude is now physically scarred and unattractive. This therefore shows the destructive forces of vanity and repressed jealousy. The plot of ‘ Tony Kytes - the Arch-Deceiver’ is almost evident through its title; it creates

expectations of a character who is harsh and malicious in his deceptions.

This could possibly be Hardy's fictionalised way of presenting men; although, from reading the opening paragraphs of the story we realise that this image is not true depiction of Tony Kytes.

The first person narrative style of this short story establishes an informal, friendly tone. The narrator speaks with a dialect, which creates the sense of an amusing anecdote shared between friends, and this anecdotal style allows for some exaggeration of events by the narrator. The narrator is clearly perplexed by the behaviour of the characters, and he recounts the story in a way, which invites the reader to view their behaviour as ridiculous too. This adds to the humour of the story, as can be seen when Tony is trying to respond to the advances of Hannah, whilst Milly and Unity are within earshot.

He " whispered very soft, ' I haven't quite promised her, and I think I can get out of it', he then quietly adds that he will ask Hannah to marry him. This creates humour, as he denies that he is engaged to Milly, although speaks quietly as Milly is close under the tarpaulin, listening. The opening description also helps to establish the theme of relationships between men and women, and to highlight the fact that there is not realistic means to account for being found attractive: " Twas a little, round, firm, tight face, with a seam here and there left by the smallpox, but not enough to hurt his looks in a woman's eye. " This again reflects the extreme needs to be socially acceptable to the opposite sex. The story consists of only one short, although confusing journey, where Tony finds himself in a predicament. He has promised himself to be married to Milly Richards, although she is <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-thomas-hardy-present-men-and-women-and-their-relationships-in-the-three-wessex-tales-essay/>

described in admirable, though relatively unexciting terms: " a nice, light, small, tender little thing".

However, it is clear that Tony is unsure of exactly what he wants, and ends up promising three different women marriage. The theme of marriage is examined from a humorous point of view, although it reflects society's views that men have the freedom to choose, whereas women do not. The predicament of Tony Kytes is that he cannot choose between three women: Milly Richards, Unity Sallet, and Hannah Jolliver, each of whom suggests that she wishes to be his wife. It is expected that people would marry, as that was the socially acceptable thing to do, and although Tony has avoided the inevitable until now, the journey home from market seals his fate.

The narrator cannot see understand why Tony is so attractive to women, and is amused by this unaccountability. The effect of this on Tony is that he treats women as simple-minded creatures, to be looked after, and this could possibly show how Hardy presents the views on women in his stories. The climax is almost farcical, with the ending emphasising the fact that, in the end, no real harm has been done, although the events culminate in humiliation for most of the characters. There is an element of competition between the three women, and as they discover each other hiding in Tony's cart. Tony finally asks Hannah to marry him, a decision arrived at because his father suggested that he should choose Milly as his bride - " of all things that could have happened to wean him from Milly there was nothing so powerful as his father's recommending her'. Although Hannah denies him, then he decides to ask Unity, who again denies him, eventually he settles

with his very first choice, Milly, declaring that, " it do seem as if fate had ordained that it should be you and I, or nobody.

" She chooses to accept him as her husband; which is perhaps a pragmatic and sensible action in the long run. However, Tony's complete lack of respect for women is evident, although their behaviour does not seem to demand respect. It is apparent that they do not really care about his deceitfulness, as both Hannah and Unity both hope that Tony will ask for their hand in marriage again. His wish to pacify them at the end suggests his complete lack of understanding of the humiliation he has caused them to suffer. This could show that men do not really understand women, and vice versa, although this is still evident in the present day.

It is also clear that much of the relationships needed parental approval, or that they needed to meet society's expectations. In this story, Thomas Hardy takes a wry look at the relationships between men and women. He uses first person narrative which allows the story to remain amusing, despite the humiliation at the end. The narrator refrains from criticising any of the characters' behaviour, instead recounting the tale as an example of the apparently incomprehensible way in which men and women behave towards each other. ' The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' is a short story of a girl named Phyllis Grove.

She is fairly isolated from the world, and seems quiet and shy. Despite this, she becomes engaged to a respectable, higher-class, although still rather average, gentleman named Humphrey Gould. Shortly after becoming engaged, he leaves the area and goes to Bath, promising to return soon.

However, whilst he is away, the 'celebrated' York Hussars and other regiments of the King's soldiers set up camp, close to Phyllis' home. As the story progresses she becomes friends with one Hussar in particular - Matthaus Tina.

She refrains from allowing their friendship to become anything more, since she is still engaged. However, it becomes apparent that Humphrey does not consider himself engaged to Phyllis, and her relationship with Matthaus develops into romance. When he suggests they marry, Phyllis is brought back to reality and her concerns reflect the conventional views of the time. Phyllis knows that her father would not allow her to marry a disgraced soldier beneath her own social standing, therefore she chooses to run away with him, as she has fallen in love.

However on the night of departure, Humphrey Gould returns, and Phyllis believes that he has returned to fulfill their engagement plans. She chooses to return to Gould, believing that he has returned for them to marry, and although she loves Matthaus, she knows that it is more socially acceptable to marry Gould. Matthaus behaviour towards Phyllis is honorable - he is 'virtuous and kind'. He does not urge Phyllis to leave with him when she tells him she has changed her mind. However, there is an unlikely turn of events in the fact that Humphrey has already married another woman. He gives Phyllis a gift in the form of a mirror in a silver frame, as a bribe in order to persuade her to declare publicly that she could not marry him, thereby preventing a scandal and embarrassing him.

The representation of this present could show that society believed women to be very vain. Which in some cases is true, for example, Gertrude in 'The Withered Arm'. This news causes Phyllis great upset, although she is horrified when she later learns that Mattheus was caught during his escape, and has been executed. Mattheus is represented as a romantic figure, with passionate feelings. However, his ignominious death is shocking: Thomas Hardy is showing how society does not tolerate dissent or non-conformity.

Phyllis is clearly a victim, as her behaviour does not compromise herself or her father in the eyes of society, although other characters are less scrupulous in their behaviour. Social pressures treat Phyllis cruelly. She behaves honourably, but her marriage to Mattheus would be untenable in the eyes of society. Instead, she decides to martyr herself to social conformity: "she would stay at home, and marry him, and suffer", although when she discovers that she has been misled by Humphrey; it is too late to leave with Mattheus. In this short story, the narrator claims to be relating the story as it was told to him by Phyllis herself. This creates sympathy for Phyllis, and it allows Thomas Hardy to create a more poignant tone through the detached perspective of the narrator.

The title itself establishes the expectation of a sad story. The isolated location of the village in which Phyllis lives, makes her "so shy that if she met a stranger anywhere in her short rambles she felt ashamed at his gaze, walked awkwardly, and blushed to her shoulders". This shows her inexperience in relationships and naivety is reflected in her actions throughout the story. It appears as though she bases her behaviour on the accepted code of conduct of the time.

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Humphrey Gould appears very little in the story but he has a substantial impact on the plot. He is described in bland terms as “neither good-looking nor positively plain”, but he is one of the ‘idlers’ who move about the country with the fashionable Royal Court. This is also showing how Hardy presents men in upper classes – as vain and arrogant. This is also reflected in ‘The Withered Arm’.

The fact that Gould has no money and yet maintains his upper class lifestyle creates suspicion on his motives for wanting to marry Phyllis. It is through the character of Humphrey Gould, in which Hardy is criticising the lack of morals of the upper classes. Many of Hardy’s stories represent a large part of the social, historical, and cultural ideologies of his time. Each of the three stories contains some form of prejudice, either social or personal, in particular the way characters make false assumptions with regard to women.

Therefore, this shows in some ways how Hardy presents the attitudes of society towards women. In ‘The Withered Arm’, the story highlights the prejudiced social system and how its values are destructive, in that happiness, forgiveness and many relationships are seen as secondary to maintaining your social status within the community. An example of this is when Farmer Lodge, a wealthy landowner, sacrifices his son and a relationship with Rhoda Brook, lower class woman than himself, to his estate because it was not seen as socially acceptable due to the social divisions of the time. In ‘The Withered Arm’, the prejudice of Rhoda Brook is against Gertrude Lodge. At the beginning she is dignified in her response to the news that the father of her child has married a ‘lady’, rather than a lower class

woman like herself. Gertrude finds that her prejudices are unfounded and her " heart reproached her bitterly".

Rhoda's prejudices return at the end when she discovers Gertrude laying her disfigured arm on the neck of her hanged son, a cure suggested by a wise man, and Rhoda calls Gertrude, " hussy - to come between us and our child now". There is not as much prejudice in the other two stories, although, in ' The Melancholy Hussar', Hardy explores the social injustice in this short story through the engagement of Phyllis Grove to Humphrey Gould. Marriages between social classes were frowned upon by the upper classes, and the engagement is seen to be a triumph for Phyllis. In my opinion, the word " triumph" represents a picture of winning something, and this shows that Phyllis clearly does not love Humphrey Gould.

Humphrey, however, is presented as a mercenary and heartless character for whom marriage is a means of social improvement - although he is of a higher class than Phyllis, he is " poor as a crow". In this short story he embodies the prejudices of the upper classes, and their disregard for anyone of a lower class. A great deal of the stories contains issues over social hierarchy and sacrifice. The tales portray how the different characters are faced with dilemmas causing them to relinquish something that they hold dear. In ' The Withered Arm', Lodge sacrifices a son and heir to his estate, due to the social divisions of the time.

Farmer Lodge could be seen as a cruel and heartless character, because it is clear that his concerns lie with social acceptance rather than the concern for Rhoda and their son's happiness. Rhoda is forced to sacrifice her son to the

legal system of the time, whereas Gertrude is driven by vanity to cure her arm, due to the social pressures of beauty that defined a women's status. This also shows that relationships between men and woman were based largely on physical appearances. In ' Tony Kytes...

' Milly Richards sacrifices her self-esteem and dignity for the love of Tony. This is viewed in a pragmatic way, as marriage was expected in society. Similarly, in ' The Melancholy Hussar', due to the pressures of society, Phyllis Grove is forced to deny herself happiness and not run away with her true love - Matthaus. She is aware of the effects such an act would have and the shame it would bring to her family, due to the fact that it would be seen as a scandal in society. She convinces herself that, " esteem must take the place of love", and therefore Phyllis conforms to the social expectations, emphasising the power of them.

Humphrey Gould does not behave in an honourable way; this also shows irony in the fact that upper classes tend to be concerned with behaving appropriately in the eyes of society. This also shows Hardy's criticism for the upper classes; they are no better than the lower. Humphrey's actions are driven by greed and social improvement, and he does not therefore sacrifice his chances of success. Hardy is also saying here that honourable behaviour is not to always be associated with the upper classes. Relationships between men and women are also largely defined and developed in relation to people and their environment. Their environment influences the characters in the three stories either positively or negatively, as the moral standards of civilised society are perceived differently in the remote settings of these stories, and class divisions are more pronounced.

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In 'The Withered Arm' the small size of the community makes it inevitable that Rhoda and Gertrude will meet. Hardy draws on the belief of witchcraft to create a sense of mystery surrounding the characters, due to the supernatural. This also heightens the tension, and leaves Rhoda no choice but to live outside the local community. However, many lower class people believed that those who chose to live in isolation were witches, and we later learn that Rhoda has been "slyly called a witch", by the locals.

The reader emphasises with Rhoda; this creates suspense and a curiosity as to how events will turn out. However, the upper class did not share the faith in witchcraft of the lower classes, and Hardy draws upon this to emphasise the vanity and desperation on Mrs. Lodge. As Gertrude says, "O, how could my people be so superstitious as to recommend a man of that sort?" when talking about Conjuror Trendle. She dismisses the idea until her desperation drives her to seek any cure possible and eventually comes to place her faith in witchcraft. She, too, now believes that her disfigurement is the cause of the unhappiness in her marriage.

The magnitude of her vanity and her despair are emphasised by the gruesome suggested cure of Conjuror Trendle. Likewise, in 'Tony Kytes...

' it is understood that social status and appropriate behaviour acquire more relevance in a small community in which it is difficult to be discreet. The disapproving voice of Tony's father reflects the importance of being seen to behave appropriately instead of "driving about the country with Jolliver's daughter making a scandal". This shows the hypocrisy also; as it presents to us the reader that it is more important in the working class system to

conform to society's rules and regulations. The isolation of the community again plays its part in ' The Melancholy Hussar.

.. ' as marriage prospects are few for Phyllis. It is seen as a triumph for her when she becomes engaged to Humphrey Gould. However, when he leaves to visit the much larger community of Bath; very little is heard about him, and Phyllis eventually becomes attracted to the romantic figure of Matthauss.

Her vulnerability is emphasised through her isolation, and once again social status and appropriate behaviour acquire more relevance in a small community, in which it is difficult to be discreet.