

The withered arm, short story



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

'The Withered Arm' is a short story about the supernatural, based in the rural landscape of eighteenth century England. Thomas Hardy, the author, creates various atmospheres and settings by using a number of very effective techniques and also, by his general use of language.

Hardy focuses chiefly on imagery, in particular the use of light and dark to create an atmosphere for different settings. For example, when Roda and her son are in their cottage. Hardy uses the light from the fire to show the true beauty of Roda's face: "The radiance lit her pale cheek, and made her dark eyes, that had once been handsome, seem handsome anew" This style of using light and dark to emphasise or pick out a part of something is known as 'Chiaroscuro'. It is also a technique used in the same way in art and Hardy uses it very effectively to create various atmospheres. I think that he uses this technique because it gives a supernatural feeling to the setting.

Another technique that Hardy uses to create an atmosphere is his use of colours and noises. An example of this is the way he describes Gertrude. At the church, Gertrude is described as wearing a "white bonnet" and a "silver-coloured gown", notice here the colours white and silver, colours of purity and beauty. It goes on to say: "It whewed and whistled so loud.

.. that the lady coloured up..

." This shows how Hardy is using noises to create an atmosphere. But I think that Hardy has chose these particular noises and other words, not only to describe what Gertrude is wearing, but also to let the reader know more about her personality. He uses certain vocabulary such as: "rubbed against", "touching", "pushed", "stuck out" and "hung" to describe how Gertrude

moves into her seat. These are all very erotic words that are delicately disguised within the description of Gertrude, and only by reading the passage would you notice what Hardy is trying to say.

Hardy's use of vocabulary, or 'Lexis' as it is known, is also used in the same way to describe the setting of Roda's cottage. He creates a very supernatural, dark, eerie atmosphere by using words such as: "crept", "twilight" and "depression". To emphasise this supernatural feeling, Hardy uses personification and similes, some other techniques of his, to associate the cottage to poverty, starvation, and even more so, being like a skeleton: "like a bone protruding through the skin." Hardy does use other similes that are all very simple but achieve a great effect in creating the right atmosphere. For example, when he describes the boy's neck, after he's been hanged as: "the colour of an unripe black-berry" this gives the reader an instant horrific image of the neck being badly bruised, swollen and still warm where the rope had been so tight around the boy's neck. My favourite technique of Hardy's is his use of one very strong metaphor. This appears when he describes the setting of the road from Anglebury to Holmestoke.

In literature and poetry, a road usually symbolises 'the road of life'. The idea that we are all on a journey in life and that everybody can take a different route, until this 'road' eventually comes to an end. In this case, I think that Hardy has used this 'road' to symbolise and show the major comparisons in the luxurious life of farmer Lodge and the poor, criminal life of his son. The mother of his son is Roda, but farmer Lodge disowned his son and Roda, and sent them to live in a lonely spot in the countryside in poverty.

Hardy uses all positive words to describe how farmer Lodge is travelling down the road. He focuses again on colours, and also the senses, to create the setting when describing farmer Lodge: "in the prime of life, cleanly shaven like an actor, his face tinted to that bluish-vermilion hue..." the farmer is in the prime of his life and has no worries at all. Hardy's use of the word "Vermilion", again showing how he uses certain vocabulary to achieve an atmosphere, brings out the wealth and prosperity in his life much more so than if he used 'bluish-red' for example.

Hardy also describes the gig that the farmer is on in this way too: "with a lemon-coloured body" he uses the word "lemon" instead of yellow. This is because by using lemon he adds the taste and the smell, as well as the colour, to the atmosphere. In sharp comparison to the farmer's life, his son is shown as very poor, living in poverty and having lots of problems in his life. Hardy shows this by saying: "the heavy bundle he carried" the bundle is a metaphor of all the problems and hardships in his life and Hardy creates a really depressing atmosphere around the boy. Hardy also links him to being a criminal.

He describes him as: "creeping along at a snail's pace, and continually looking behind him" Later in the story we discover that the boy has stolen a hare from the land. This was an offence and in Victorian times, when the story is set, this theft would get the death penalty. "the hare you wired is very tender; but mind that nobody catches you" this quote shows that the boy is a criminal, which is one of the problems that the bundle on his back symbolises. I think that Hardy is trying to show the class difference, still present in Victorian England, between the farmer an upper-class man with

no worries, and the working-class boy with the bundle upon his back. The light and dark also comes up again is the description of their lives, as a metaphor for the rich and the poor, the good and the evil. This is why farmer Lodge has lots of bright colours surrounding him and the boy has dark colours associated with him.

Hardy also uses dialogue to create a natural, normal setting in some areas and he also creates a curious, angry setting in others. The attitudes of the characters and what they say add to the atmosphere that Hardy wishes to create. For example, at the very beginning the story, in the Barton, it is the dialogue that creates the real setting: " he do bring home his bride tomorrow, I hear" you can see that ' he do bring' is not correct English, Hardy has done this purposefully because it creates a normal, everyday, rural diary setting. He also doesn't give any name to the characters at this point either, which I think adds to the hardworking, ordinary atmosphere that Hardy is trying to create. Hardy's use of a certain vocabulary also adds to the rural setting created at the Barton.

He uses dialect words, which are words adapted from a language, such as: " Barton" and " wropper" As you can see these words add to the setting that Hardy creates and is another style that he uses. Egdonheath is the place with the most effective supernatural atmosphere. This is because this is where Conjuror Trendle lives and he is the person with supernatural healing powers. Hardy uses a technique called ' Classical Illusion' to create a really strong atmosphere around the setting of Egdonheath. Classical illusion is when you take a mythical story or character and relate it to your piece of writing, giving a very distinct and precise atmosphere. Hardy uses this

technique to describe Egdonheath as the place where King Lear suffered so much torture and torment:" not improbably the same heath which had witnessed the agony of the Wessex King Ina, presented to after-ages as Lear" Hardy's use of language and vocabulary, or 'Lexis' as it is known, to describe Egdonheath also creates the setting and adds to the already supernatural feeling.

He uses very dark, depressing words such as:" Somber", " Dark" and " Solemn" which again create a supernatural atmosphere. Hardy also uses personification again as a technique to create a more supernatural atmosphere, this is when he describes the wind as:" the wind howled dismally" All of these techniques make the most realistic, supernatural setting. Almost as if Egdonheath is a place that time hasn't touched, and the superstitious feelings are still present there. The Hangman's cottage in Casterbridge is another place with a supernatural atmosphere.

The cottage is on top of the jail that, on its own, creates an ugly, death-like atmosphere. Hardy describes it as:" a lonely cottage by a deep slow river" the words Hardy has chosen to describe the river, deep and slow, add to the strange, creepy atmosphere. He also personifies the river that makes it sound almost as if it is following her because it's always there:" the waters of which emitted a steady roar" everything in Casterbridge seem to be slow and depressing and I think Hardy has done this intentionally because this is the place where people get hung and go to jail. The actual cottage itself is very dark too, and the only form of light the hangman has is a candle, which symbolises life and the fact that there is enough light for him. The cottage is described like a shed, with steps on the outside and no light.

It all seems very lonely and eerie which is the setting that Hardy wishes to create. Overall, the surprising thing about how Hardy creates atmosphere and conveys setting, is how simply he does it. Dialect, dialogue, of particular lexis, light and dark, metaphors and a few similes create the desired effect for all of his settings. Quite an achievement.