

# The withered arm and the sons' veto essay sample



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BUSTER**

In order to understand what these situations would have been like for the characters in these two short stories you need to put yourself back into Victorian England. When the world was split into social classes; in these particular stories, we only come across middle class people and working class people not upper class people. Citizens in those days would not marry across classes as it was seen to be forbidden. If this was to happen as in the 'Sons' Veto' then the couple would have been committing social suicide and would have been talked about and frowned upon.

Classes were only meant to marry between themselves in their own social groups. Victorian England was also a time when women were not meant to work and simply had to get married. A hundred and fifty years ago the Victorians believed in witchcraft and the supernatural which makes Hardy's story 'The Withered Arm' a believable tale for that period. I am going to explore the reasons in which Sophy could not achieve happiness from the short story the 'Sons' Veto'. One of these reasons was because of the difference between Sophy and her son Randolph.

This is shown when Randolph corrects his mother by saying 'has, dear mother - not have!' This happens due to Sophy's lack of education compared to her son, the public school boy. This, therefore, makes a division between the two as Randolph finds it hard not to correct his mother when having a normal conversation as she speaks the local dialect not the Queens English. Randolph also becomes very impatient and snobbish in his attitude towards his mother; 'Surely you know that by this time' Randolph looks down on his own mother, due to the way he has been brought up, with his school friends, and Mr Twycott's influence .

This theme is repeated throughout the story because she doesn't think she is good enough to be Randolph's mother and the ' vicar's wife' as she ' does not feel dignified enough to be his mother' and she feels inferior to them as she is from a lower class. There was also a division in society in those days as it was not practical for Sophy, a member of the working class, to marry Mr Twycott, a member from the middle class. This would have therefore caused problems especially for Mr Twycott as he would have been committing social suicide to marry across classes. ' Parlour maid in the parsons house'

This tells us that she didn't have a very high status as she was a ' maid'. So she would have been looked down on by many. Although he was committing social suicide as he was marrying his maid he didn't really care because ' he led a secluded existence'. ' They were, however away from everyone who had known her former position' as they moved to a London suburb in order to avoid being judged for their ' social suicide'. ' Sophy the lady had her deficiencies' as she has been married for fourteen years in which, her husband has tried to improve Sophy's education, to make her more cultured and refined but with little success.

Prior to being taught how to speak all over again by your son and husband can be terribly frustrating and degrading and this is how I think Sophy is feeling when she says, ' No. I am not a lady. I shall never be. ' As a consequence Sophy starts to feel inferior. She feels like she is being compared to higher class women than her and they are trying to change her in to something she is not. On top of that Randolph starts to be very rude and shuts Sophy out of his life because he is embarrassed that she is of a lower social class.

He was reducing their compass to a population of a few thousand wealthy and titled people' in other words the main important people. Soon ' he drifted further and further away from her' and the only two people she would talk to, or have any contact with at this point were the two servants of her own house. Randolph gets so embarrassed by his mother's low social status that he merely thinks of how it will affect him instead of thinking about his mother. This is why Sophy becomes very lonely and she starts to think about what life would have been like with Sam Hobson, the gardener who would have at one time married her.

When she finally talks to Sam after seeing him nearly everyday as he passed by her house she puts herself down when Sam calls her a lady and says ' No. I am not a lady. I shall never be. ' Sophy has tried to be more cultured and ladylike, however she realises she will never succeed. She did not want to change even though they were making her and she didn't feel dignified enough to be called a lady. Randolph's education had turned him into a snob and Sophy had become so used to his arrogance that she does not tell him off for being so rude.

His mother hastily adapted the correction, and did not resent his making it or retaliate. ' Sophy accepts the poor treatment as she was used to it and she feels inferior to everyone. She has shown that she has tried to be more cultured and ladylike with no success and she feels that she is not worthy of being a lady anyway! This is why Sophy and her son are so distant; because he is a ' gentleman' and she shall never be a ' lady'. The fourth reason as to why she was so unhappy was that in 1914 the position of women in society was not to work and the only option was marriage.

This justifies the pressure Sophy was in when she got married. She did it for the security as there was no promise that she would have this in the future especially as she was in a difficult position with her breaking her ankle and never being able to walk again. For Sophy love was not a priority. She was nineteen and the vicar was ' about forty years of age, of good family and childless' this, in Sophy's eyes was a perfect stable home. Whereas with Sam her response to the proposal was, ' Not much. But it would be home for me.

And we have heard that one of us will have to leave. ' This showed that although she did not love Sam she would keep his proposal close as in Victorian days women only married for practical reasons. ' Sophy did not exactly love him, but she had respect for him which almost amounted to veneration. ' This also shows that Sophy didn't love the vicar either but she married him because he seemed to be a more secure option than Sam. After the vicar dies we see that ' she was left with no control over anything that had been her husband's beyond her modest personal income.

Meaning that Mr Twycott didn't trust Sophy to handle his inheritance for two reasons: women in Victorian times were not trusted to look after money; he may be concerned that a women of low social class would not understand the importance of public school education. Overall we see that Sophy has not been able to achieve happiness for four main reasons. All of these reasons led to the point of feeling her inferior as a result of having in a lower social status compared to the people who surrounded her in everyday life. Now I am going to explore the loss of happiness which occurred in the book ' The Withered Arm'.

Rhoda Brook is portrayed as an isolated character who avoids the company of others. She is a parlour maid. This makes it difficult for her to have any kind of relationships with members of other social classes. Therefore when Farmer Lodge and Rhoda have a son they cannot marry because it would have been considered wrong in Victorian times. She is conscious of this social division between herself and Farmer Lodge, and this is shown in her speculative comments towards his new wife. When Farmer Lodge arrives with his new wife, Gertrude, Rhoda is very inquisitive and gets her son to examine Gertrude to see what she is like compared to herself.

After having a dream about herself and Gertrude in which she gives Gertrude a few marks on her hand, she is visited by the real Mrs Lodge and ironically she has the marks on her arm that Rhoda dreamt of. Rhoda feels very guilty about giving Rhoda these marks but she didn't know how she had done it which leads to her thinking about supernatural forces. Farmer Lodge's new wife, Gertrude is a very gentle angelic, delicate young woman; ' Her face too was fresh in colour, but it was of a totally different quality - soft and evanescent, like the light under a heap of rose petals. Beauty meant everything to women in Victorian times.

This is the reason why younger women used to marry older men as they usually had steady jobs and were wealthy. Nowadays, though women don't depend on anyone, they are independent. They do things for themselves like getting a job and getting their own money. Compared to Rhoda, Gertrude is much more elegant and sophisticated, and she is therefore everything Rhoda wants to be; ' Her voice was indescribably sweet, Her glance so winning, her

smile so tender. ' But Rhoda was a parlour maid and although she wanted to change she had no way of doing it.

The night Gertrude starts to decline and become very miserable was the night that she awoke and found the marks on her arm, ' upon the pink round surface of the arm were faint marks of an unhealthy colour' as if produced by a rough grasp. This was an unusual wound of which she couldn't find a cure, she tried obvious treatment like going to the doctors but he told her to ' bathe it in hot water' as that didn't work so she had to use unconventional methods. This was very important to Gertrude because being beautiful meant everything in those days.

Marriage also meant a lot to women in the Victorian times as it offered a home and security. Gertrude, though, was already happily married with Farmer Lodge but, her arm had made her seem ugly to Farmer Lodge and she seemed deformed. So Farmer Lodge loved her less so she needed to remain attractive for her husband to keep loving her. ' Rhoda shivered, ' that's fancy,' she said hurriedly' as Gertrude ironically explains that her ' husband says it's as if some witch or the devil himself had taken a hold of me there and blasted the flesh.

Rhoda ironically shivered knowing that to an extent it was true even though she didn't know how she had done it. Due to Gertrude's deformed arm the marriage between Farmer Lodge and Gertrude had started to deteriorate because Gertrude is ' less beautiful'. ' if- if I had a notion that it makes my husband like me, no, love me less' Gertrude becomes so worried about her arm that she goes to Conjuror Trendle. A person like Conjuror Trendle is

someone who people go to if they are really ill and cannot find a conventional way of handling the illness.

This shows that she was very desperate to be attractive again and make her husband love her once more. Gertrude gradually loses the use of her arm. Now it just hangs at her side. It makes Gertrude more determined to get better and it makes people around her want to stay away from her. To Gertrude's dismay therefore she is very upset when Conjuror Trendle immediately says; ' Medicine can't cure it. ' ' Tis the work of an enemy' Gertrude's marriage with Farmer Lodge becomes dull and just gets worse.

Farmer Lodge isn't happy because he doesn't have a son with Gertrude, who can take over. And so he starts to think about Rhoda and the son she gave him. Farmer Lodge hasn't had anything good out of the marriage with Gertrude and thinks about adopting Rhoda's son into his family with Gertrude to carry on the family name but he is an illegitimate child so he wouldn't inherit the property and possessions of his father. This all mattered to Farmer Lodge as he had a son but with a different woman who he could have married like Mr Twycott did.

Unlike Mr Twycott he chose not to because he was more worried about what people would have thought of him. Farmer Lodge could have married Rhoda like Mr Twycott married Sophy and they could have lived happily but Farmer Lodge refuses to cross the boundaries to marry Rhoda as it in his eyes would cause more pain to him but whatever he did he knew there was going to unhappiness either way. Gertrude was so desperate at this point she would



have done anything to look like the innocent, young, beautiful girl Farmer Lodge had married.

At this point in the story we start to realise that Gertrude has changed over this period of time. She used to be an enlightened girl but she's transformed into an irritable superstitious woman. After ' six years of marriage, and only a few months of love' she becomes anxious. So she tries again for any remedies ' in a last desperate effort at deliverance' she goes again to visit Conjuror Trendle. This time he gives her a terrible remedy this was to ' touch with the limb the neck of a man who's been hanged' but carrying out this remedy showed how desperate Gertrude actually was.

Her nature was a timid one; and probably of all the remedies the white wizard could have suggested there was not one which would have filled her with so much aversion as this, not to speak of the immense obstacles in the way of its adoption' Gertrude was a very timid person but she has a chance to get her beauty back which means doing something frightening in this case touching a corpse. For that reason ' she did nothing for months and patiently bore her disfigurement as before. ' Nevertheless despite her fear she's determined to try this last attempt to save her marriage and happiness.

To even consider doing this task you must have courage and this undermines her personality in the beginning when we first met her as she was sweet, innocent and shy. She is none of these things now. At the beginning of this story she was a very happy girl who had just got married and had a bright future ahead of her but because of Rhoda's envy Gertrude has lost the happiness she started with and has now turned into a horrible

woman. Behind her husband's back she secretly finds out when the next capital charge is.

She dares not tell him' as she didn't know what his response would be like and she had changed so much that she just wanted to get her arm sorted and back to the way it was before; ' Her determination received a fillip' Shows that she had obvious changed into an egotistical, selfish person because she is looking forward to someone dying; ' O lord hang some guilty or innocent person soon' On the way to Casterbridge she was determined to make sure that her husband had no idea about where she was really going but to do this she needed to be cunning.

She went alone and went the opposite direction to where she was meant to be going so that nobody would know where she was actually going. This was very risky but it was a risk that in Gertrude's mind was worth it. Gertrude has gained courage because if she was told to go and touch a corpse just before she got married to Farmer Lodge she would never have done it as it is distasteful for posh women to be interpreted with corpses like it is nowadays but as she has changed she is willing to do this to save her marriage.

As she arrived at the hangman's house she becomes slightly scared again as she starts to hesitate and then gets more anxious as she over comes her fear and revulsion to touch the neck of the corpse; ' her knees trembling so that she could scarcely walk. ' As the coffin was placed in front of her a ' grey mist seemed to float before her eyes' and before she knew it she was dead as her blood had turned.

Overall Gertrude's life could have been a very fulfilled, happy life but because of Farmer Lodge's mistake by courting with Rhoda, Gertrude's life had been cursed and therefore ended tragically. Throughout the story we see Gertrude change due to the foreseen circumstances she becomes superstitious and egotistical leading her into unusual actions which caused everyone pain. After analysing these two short stories, I realise that happiness was never achieved in either due to the social split in Victorian Times.

This social split caused the loss of happiness for both Rhoda and Sophy as they were both members of the working class. On one hand Sophy was lucky because she got married, and was promised security and a home. But she was unlucky because she was secluded from everyone else. On the other hand however Rhoda did not marry Farmer Lodge and yet she was still unhappy because she did not have the security she would have liked. So either way if you did or you did not marry in Victorian Times you were still unhappy. This was all due to social class in those times.