

How thomas hardy portrays women in his storie



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The three stories all have very social, historical and cultural impacts on the women of the time. "The Withered Arm", is about a woman's, struggle to cure her withered arm and the jealousy felt by Rhoda who had been used by the farmer in the past and had born his child. Gertrude's fear of losing her husband and her superstition make her carry out actions that result in her death. The next story, "The Distracted Preacher", is about an independent woman called Lizzy and the choice she has to make.

She is involved in smuggling and the head of the gang but is offered a different life by Minister Stockdale, who asks her to marry him and leave. She decides to stay but gets caught and suffers for some years till he returns and offers again to marry him, this time she accepts but only because of circumstances. The third story, "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion", is about a shy, naive middle class woman called Phyllis and her fight between her conscience, her fathers desire and her true love. She chooses her conscience and in the end loses everything. The Withered Arm has two main female roles: Rhoda Brooks and Gertrude Lodge.

They both have very different backgrounds; Rhoda is the poor working class woman while Gertrude is the pretty upper middle class women. Rhoda has to work for her son and herself just to eat; she has no husband and so is an outcast from society and has to keep herself to herself. Because of this she has no male role model for her son. Rhoda is a "thin, fading women of thirty", which emphasises how hard she works and how tiring her life is. In comparison Gertrude is the typical married middle class woman, with lots of time on her hands. She is youthful and pretty, "soft and evanescent", which is why Farmer Lodge married her.

Rhoda has a very wicked side, which shows itself when Gertrude arrives in town. She becomes jealous and wants to know all about the well-awaited new wife. She becomes obsessed with her and makes her son find out about Gertrude and follow her, " Then do you go to Holmstoke church to-morrow: she's sure to be there". This jealousy links in with the superstition of that time when Rhoda's dream about Gertrude having a withered arm comes true.

At that time everyone believed each village had it's own witch. The witch could curse victims and make limbs wither or in extreme cases fall off. From this we can see how worried Rhoda would have been, believing she was a witch, " that I exercise malignant power against my own will? " This illustrates that Rhoda feel sympathetic for Gertrude and responsible for her arm. She fears what she might do to her and what may happen if she is a witch. Even though she has this evil side, you see that she does contain some sympathetic qualities.

For example Rhoda recognises the " gruesome fascination" which leads her to find Gertrude but she is unwilling to tell her where to find Conjuror Trendle for fear that she will lose Gertrude's friendship. Hardy shows Rhoda's point of view throughout the story so you feel sympathetic especially when we find the dead boy is her son. She is very independent and strong so in the end wants nothing to do with Farmer Lodge and the fling therefore refuses his sympathy vote and doesn't accept his money. Gertrude starts by being very kind and loving, she gives Rhoda's son some shoes and befriends Rhoda and creates a close relationship with her.

Rhoda appears concerned; particularly about Gertrude's imagined rejection by her husband. Her personality changes for the worst when her arm becomes withered. Gertrude relies on Rhoda for a concerned understanding of the growing separation between herself and her husband, who " knows the disfigurement is there. " The choice of the word " disfigurement" reveals his attitude to appearances. Social attitudes demanded that middle class women were beautiful and attractive.

She turns vain and selfish, obsessed by her arm and the need to find a cure, " Her determination received a fillip. She finds a treatable cure for the arm after trying so many. She's now determined to try this one even though it involves such indignity. This is all too much for Gertrude when she finds out who the boy is in reality Rhoda's son. She isn't so vain and determined, she is actually very shocked and started to feel sympathy for the victim and in end the superstition and shock kills her.

In the Distracted Preacher the main female role is Lizzy Newbury a middle class, strong-minded, character who, " was none the less independent". This emphasises how Lizzy is able to lead her village in successful smuggling. She's an attractive, local girl who can take on an immense job for a women in those times but Lizzy does it as well as any man could. Lizzy is a widower and looks after her mother, as well as the customers of her Lodge, where Mr Stockdale goes to stay. She values her job and sees nothing wrong with smuggling, " If a king who is nothing to us sends his people to steal out property, we have the right to steal it back".

This illustrates how Lizzy doesn't care whether people think her smuggling is wrong she has reason to do it and she lives off the money and the adventure. The smuggling is tradition: " My father did it, and so did my grandfather, and almost everybody in Nether-Moynton lives by it, and life would be so dull if it wasn't for that, that I should not care to live at all". This shows that Lizzy is no ordinary woman she sticks with what she wants and doesn't look up to men as a higher being besides she's a decisive woman and gets her way. She needs to carry on even though her romance with Stockdale gets in the way because he doesn't agree with it, so Lizzy uses vigorous but absurd arguments to justify her actions. To begin with Lizzy doesn't want to go away with Stockdale and marrying him, " It is too much to ask.

My whole life ha' been passed in this way. " She needs to stay in Nether-Moynton where the adventure is and not do what normal females do. Later we see Lizzy's resolve deteriorates; she needs Stockdale because the money earned from smuggling runs out. After all her talk about needing smuggling and it being fine to do it, she says it wrong, " I own that we were wrong, said she.

But I have suffered for it: I am very poor now," Lizzy wants Stockdale now she is poor and worthless and Stockdale offers to take her away from her poverty. Lizzy gives in and takes this offer, then settles down to the married life she once hated the thought of living because of its lack of adventure and predictability. This ending is problematic as Lizzy changed her attitudes totally. This ending was also added for the readers. The story was published

each week in a magazine. Hardy wrote the ending to please the audience and give them an ending most women would of taken.

There is an alternative ending to this story that isn't so problematic. This is that Lizzy would have married Owlett a member of the smuggling gang and immigrated to America. The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion has one main female role, that of Phyllis Grove an attractive middle class young lady. She is very quiet, keeps herself to herself and just likes to blend into society. She was a woman who lived her whole life without going further than the nearest market. The only family she has is her father so she has no female role model to guide her through life, this has made her very inexperienced in relationships, " though it is probable that she lost her heart to Matthaus before she is herself aware.

She never realised she was in love with Matthaus; she had never felt love before so never knew what this feeling was. She values her father's opinion greatly and her father doesn't like what's going on between Matthaus and herself. He considers the soldiers merely " foreign fellows" who flatter young girls with " unmeaning attentions". Phyllis finds Matthaus " refined and well-educated. " He is loving towards her, concerned about her loneliness, he does not put too much pressure on her to escape and marry him. She becomes very conscience stricken between the two men; will she go with her father's choice (Humphrey) or her romance Matthaus? She decided the best thing to do was to conform to society and her father and marry Humphrey, " She would stay at home, and marry him, and suffer.

" This shows that she is doing this for her father it wouldn't be love but she could live with it for her families and the moneys sake. Later we see that Phyllis has a problem as Humphrey wants to marry another woman, Belle, and Matthaus and a friend gets shot for desertion. Poor Phyllis has now been torn from fighting between two men to being alone again. We see Phyllis's life if effected by this, " while she lived she used to keep their mounds neat," meaning Matthaus grave.

This shows Phyllis's love for Matthaus still carried on when he died and this tragedy deeply affected her. In the three stories I have read the four female characters all have similarities and differences. Gertrude is similar to all three characters. She is similar to Rhoda because they both believe in superstition and worry about what is happening to them due to it.

Through the story we feel sympathy for them: for Gertrude with her withered arm and death and Rhoda for being a single parent and so an outcast and for when she sees Gertrude with her arm on her dead sons neck. The sympathy vote changes throughout the story between Rhoda and Gertrude. Gertrude is like Lizzy because they are both attractive, strong-minded women. Gertrude is different to Lizzy aswell as like her because Gertrude conforms to men's expectations but Lizzy is independent and only relies on Stockdale at the end. Phyllis is probably most like Gertrude as they are both very traditional women characters for their times. Phyllis's character is very dependent as she does as she is told, conforming to society's expectations.

If things had gone to plan then her life would be totally taken care of without her lifting a finger, when we know Lizzy chose to be independent and Rhoda

had to be independent to look after her family. In my view, I admire Lizzy because she is very outgoing and a leader, which shows women to be able to lead men in this world and she can still be attractive and feminine. She seems to put men in their places by refusing Stockdale's offer of marriage instead of being a stereotypical woman of that time married, at home cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. She speaks her mind when she wants to stay because smuggling gives her adventure and when she tells Stockdale there nothing wrong with smuggling. This is why I like the alternative ending that Hardy mentions in his footnote when she goes to America because she doesn't need the sympathy for being poor she stays strong and independent.

Even though at the end I felt sorry for Rhoda because of her son, I was never fond of her character. She seemed evil throughout the story as if she had other secrets not yet revealed. Her character was very sneaky, holding things back from Gertrude when she was untruthful. I think Rhoda is to blame for all Gertrude's problems: she placed the curse and took Gertrude to Conjuror Trendle and she paid the price of that horrendous sight. This all made me very sympathetic towards Gertrude and I know how it feels to be superficially stereotyped. She never did anything to Rhoda and died as a consequence to Rhoda's jealousy.

I also sympathise with Phyllis because men ruined her life, her life was ruined by the society's strict rules at that time to do the right thing and marry for position and money, and the shooting for desertion of her true love. Men have a great impact on women and can make our lives fun, yet some men make our lives more misery than fun. In my opinion Hardy

portrays women with respect, he makes them strong and independent, manly in a sense. In the early 1800s women all had their places in the world, which was in the home.

Hardy brought these women out of their world and into the beginning of our not so sexist England today. Men and Society had the main impact on women of this era; I believe this is why Hardy's stories were loved in this age. Women could read them and think that they had a greater role in this era and they were more intelligent than men thought. I also believe men should have read these books to see how independent and important women are to this world. It was very important for women of this era to get their thoughts and strengths across to the world, so they could begin to live as equals to men.