

**‘the withered arm’
and ‘the distracted
preacher’ essay
sample**



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'The Withered Arm' is a story about a woman whose arm becomes withered. She believes that a woman in the village has inflicted this injury upon her, and she spends all her time trying to find a cure using whatever methods she can. 'The Distracted Preacher' is about a preacher who lodges in a woman's house. They fall in love, but things become complicated when he discovers she is involved with smuggling. The three women all have very distinctive lives and take up different roles in each of the stories. Rhoda is a milkmaid who has a son, by her employer, Farmer Lodge, but they are no longer together.

She lives a very secluded life, and rarely talks to anyone but her son.

Gertrude is quite young, very pretty, and married to Farmer Lodge, although she knows nothing of his previous relationship with Rhoda or of their son.

She is very kind hearted, 'She gives away things to other folks in the meads'

(p. 9) Lizzy has no real trade, although she takes in lodgers, her main source of income is smuggling, she uses this money, to support her and her mother.

She has been married, more than once, but is no longer. She is also, like Gertrude very pretty.

I felt sympathy for all the women, at some point in the stories, Lizzy because Stockdale was trying to stop her from doing what she wanted. Rhoda, because she must feel lonely and unwanted by her fellow villagers. Most of my sympathy however, went to Gertrude; this is because she actually seemed to be a genuinely nice person. As I mentioned she was always giving things away, she seemed embarrassed when disturbing others in the church, with the noise of her dress, 'the lady coloured up more than ever for very shame at the noise,' (p. 7).

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She also is very trusting of Rhoda, and although this in itself is somewhat naive, you can't help but feel that if only she knew what Rhoda believed she had done to her, that Gertrude would not feel quite the same way towards her. I felt least sympathy for Lizzy, because although Rhoda supposedly wounded Gertrude's arm, she regretted it once she got to know Gertrude. Lizzy however, is quite selfish; she is not at all concerned for anyone's feelings but her own. Mr Stockdale, may interfere in her business, a little more than is necessary, but he doesn't deserve to be treated in such an appalling manner, as he is only trying to help.

She also teases Mr Stockdale, as he is obviously attracted to her. She does this by, for instance, when he says, ' that he did not want the chicken, unless she brought it up herself;' (p. 90) and then she sent it up to him with Martha Sarah. Then she tells him about hidden barrels of smugglers liquor, so he had to choose between being faithful to her, or betraying her secret, which for such an honest man, in an honest job, must have been hard. She teases him further, by on some days when he expects to see her, not appearing at all.

Hardy uses very descriptive and emotive language to influence your feelings towards a character. For example when he is trying to make you feel sympathy for Gertrude, because Farmer Lodge shouts at her for all the herbs and charms in her cupboard, he says she, ' turned her sad, soft glance upon him in such heart-swollen reproach that he looked sorry for his words. ' (p. 19). This makes her seem very sweet and innocent, and a little abandoned, which makes it hard not to feel sorry for her.

Whereas when he is trying to turn you against someone, the language is just as powerful, but sharper and more edgy, as if trying to cut into your emotions, rather than just touch them. For example, when Mr Stockdale tells Lizzy he is leaving, although he is being very civil about it, she can't keep this tone, ' " You never loved me! " she said bitterly' (p. 145) showing that she just wants to take one more jab at him. This makes you feel that she is very severe even in their parting moments. Although these three women appear to be quite different, there are certain similarities.

For instance Gertrude and Lizzy are both very beautiful, Gertrude has a, ' face as comely as a live doll's' , ' her mouth is very nice and red; and when she smiles her teeth show white. ' , ' She's lovely' (p. 5, 6). Lizzy is an, ' extremely well made young woman' , she has ' a beautiful forehead' , and, ' eyes that warmed him before he knew it' (p. 88-9). Whereas Rhoda is just described as, ' a thin fading woman of thirty' (p. 1). They are all however in different positions, as far as marital status is concerned. Rhoda isn't married, but had at one time had some sort of relationship with Farmer Lodge, we know this because she has a son by him.

Gertrude is married to Farmer Lodge, but has no children, and Lizzy, isn't married, but has had at least two husbands previously, she does however have Mr Stockdale as her lover, and they do eventually get married. They are all similar, in that they are all independent, however if you look more closely you will see that they have all achieved different levels of independence. Rhoda, in my opinion is the least independent because, although she lives on her own and is raising a son by herself, she hasn't

chosen to be that way, and only copes with that because she has to. I then think that Gertrude is next on the independence scale.

I feel this because although she takes it upon herself to find a cure for her arm, and she organises and plans out all the details, she is only doing it to get back her beauty so her husband will still love her. This shows she depends upon him because she doesn't want to lose him, ' If I could only again be as I was when he first saw me! ' (p. 20) Lizzy is the most independent, as she provides her own money through smuggling which she does quite of her own accord. She has had two husbands and is moving on to another, totally of her own free will, which shows she doesn't depend upon them, "' I had permission from myself"' (p. 23) Both Rhoda and Gertrude are quite superstitious, we know this about Rhoda because she believes she has inflicted the wound upon Gertrude, through her dream, ' Upon the pink round surface of the arm were faint marks of an unhealthy colour, as if produced by a rough grasp. ' (p. 11).

Gertrude however grows more superstitious as her arm gets worse and she becomes more desperate to find a cure. Her superstitious nature also becomes more profound after her visit to Conjuror Trendle; ' Hence it arose that her closet was lined with bottles, packets, and ointment-pots of every description' (p. 9).

Lizzy doesn't however have any superstitious beliefs although she does say, speaking of the smuggler's liquor, "' I've a good mind that you should have something more likely to cure it than that cold stuff. "' (p. 90), she must therefore have believed it to have some sort of medicinal value. In

comparison with men, women in those days had very little freedom of choice, so basically if there was a man in the house, he made the decisions. In that respect, these women are fairly unusual, Rhoda is a single parent, who was never married, which was practically unheard of.

Gertrude, although she is married, goes against her husband's wishes to find a cure for her arm. Lizzy has been married more than once, when remarrying was not really accepted, she also has a share in a business, very unusual. I don't think that Hardy really portrayed a normal woman's role in the early nineteenth century. I feel this because these three women aren't really typical of their time, so he wasn't as critical as I believe he should have been of the way most women were treated, and the lack of respect they were given.

I believe that Hardy should have shown more clearly, the contrast between these three women, and that of a typical woman in the early nineteenth century, as this would make the stories more interesting. If these women had lived today their lives would have differed greatly. Rhoda would have been accepted as a single parent, and would have received help from the government and those around her, she wouldn't have been excluded from society and life would have been a great deal easier.

Gertrude wouldn't have had to go around looking for miracle cures for her arm, as with today's advanced technology, and modern medicine, the doctors would have been able to find out what was wrong with her and do something about it. Lizzy judging by her character would probably have a job other than the smuggling, which she would probably have given up, because

of the stricter laws now. I feel quite differently about Lizzy compared to the other two women. I feel that she is altogether not a particularly nice person.

She leads Stockdale on, to believe that they were going to get married, even though she had no intention of giving up smuggling. If she had really loved him, she would know he was too good and honest to give up his profession for a life of smuggling. Although they did get married in the end, it was only because she was forced to give up smuggling, ' the trade is gone to nothing. We were hunted down like rats. ' (p. 148). I feel fairly indifferent towards Rhoda and Gertrude, as although I feel sympathetic towards both of their situations, Rhoda's exclusion from society, and Gertrude's arm.

Rhoda vividly pictured inflicting a wound on someone, which appeared to have some effect, even though she had never met her and her only reason being jealousy. Gertrude, in a desperate attempt to cure her arm, doesn't care who has to die to make her better, "' O Lord, hang some guilty or innocent person soon! "' (p. 23). Although these acts were extremely selfish, both these incidents involved very desperate women, and in their positions you can't tell what you would do or feel. For these reasons I am very sympathetic towards them.