

The withered arm by  
thomas hardy and the  
schoolteachers guest  
by isabelle allende...



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In contrast, Hardy's 19th century short story is set in rural England whereas Allende sets her story in South America both of which strengthen the credibility of the stories.

Although they start in different manner both set out to fascinate the reader, Hardy chooses to set the in great detail and brings it altogether at the end, Allende chooses to hit the reader with a shock and fills out the background using a series of flashbacks. During this piece of coursework I shall look closely at parts 1, 3; 9 of the Withered Arm and the whole of The Schoolteachers Guest and how they engage the readers interest and convince of their reality. To begin with Hardy describes the working atmosphere of an eighty-cow dairy in which we find one of the protagonists of the story. Immediately the reader is transported into the believable yet fictitious setting of Wessex, rural England. The language used backs up and adds to the verisimilitude of the story: " He do bring home his bride tomorrow.

" The syntax here shows a time gone by as does some of the archaic language used throughout: 'tisty-tosty,' ' supernumery' and ' barton. ' As the story develops we see mentioned a woman separate from the rest. Hardy is slowly introducing this woman to the reader she mentioned as: " a thin fading woman of thirty milked somewhat apart from the rest. " The reader is immediately interested in this person the mention that she is ' thin and fading' at thirty suggests that she may have had an arduous life. The woman being spoken of is named Rhoda Brook. In this chapter we are told of the farmers new wife.

During conversation between other milkers about his new wife there is a hint in their speech that there may have been a relationship between the farmer and Rhoda: Tis hard for she... Oh no he ha'ant spoke to Rhoda Brook for years. " Again an item that would interest the reader greatly as it can raise many questions, " Was there any relationship? " " How long did the relationship last? " and " Why did the relationship end? " Not long after this point arises we see the emergence of Rhoda's son of twelve this immediately makes me think, " Could this have been the result of the relationship between farmer lodge and Rhoda? " This answered by Rhoda: " Your father brings home his young wife tomorrow.

" Rhoda asks her son to go to the church the next day to get a detailed report on what this new wife looks like, the class she comes from, distinguishing features, she wants to know everything about her; perhaps still harbouring feelings for Farmer lodge and wants to know if she is better in any way to his new wife. At the end of chapter two Hardy prepares us for what is to happen when he shows us Rhoda's growing obsession with the new wife of farmer lodge, she know, after all the descriptions given her by her son, has a mental picture clear as a photograph. This is emphasised when we enter chapter three and Rhoda is contemplating Gertrude so intently she doesn't stop thinking about her even whilst working or doing general jobs around her home. Chapter three ' A Vision' begins with Rhoda thinking about Gertrude so much that she loses track of time and it becomes quite late. By the time she goes to bed still contemplating Gertrude she is visited by an incubus whose features are ' shockingly distorted,' the incubus is Gertrude as Rhoda would like her to be which, as we find out, is in great

contrast to what she really looks like. The incubus is thrusting her wedding ring in Rhoda's face taunting her with what she has and Rhoda wants and creates a powerful image in the readers mind as to what might be happening in that room.

To relieve herself she grabs the arm of the incubus and throws it to the floor. Rhoda, along with the reader, believes this to be nothing more than a dream that is until her son mentions hearing a loud thud on her bedroom floor, this shocks not only the Rhoda but also the reader that the events of the previous night are more believable than may have been first thought of; it also helps to keep the reader engaged. When asked by her son Rhoda gives a nervous response: " Did you hear anything fall? At what time? " She is worried about it and is still preying on his mind. Not long after Gertrude appears at the gate of Rhoda's home the reader could of expected a point of anger from Rhoda as she has already decided she does not like Gertrude and says: " I told you never go near that place.

" She wants nothing to do with her; as Gertrude approaches the door Rhoda is still imagining her as she was the previous night features ' shockingly distorted,' Rhoda wants to hide, leave, be anywhere other than in her home: She would've escaped... had escape been possible. " Rhoda opens the door and discovers not the haggard being she had seen the previous night but someone sweet and innocent and Rhoda's heart reproaches her for harbouring bad feelings toward Gertrude. From the first meet hey become good friends, during conversation Gertrude reveals her withered arm Rhoda is taken aback as is the reader.

This raises the question, ' Is this real? ' Rhoda asks when it happened and when Gertrude mentions the exact time and date of Rhoda's incubus. Hardy's era would have been very superstitious and people like Rhoda would have believed themselves to possibly have supernatural powers that help the verisimilitude of the story. At the end of the chapter the reader is left wondering what will happen between Rhoda and Gertrude a point that will keep the interest of the reader. The final chapter has Hardy showing us how fate has a major part to play in how the story finishes. His attention to detail brings to the reader the reality of the current situation: " One o'clock on Saturday..

. County jail 1793. " Gertrude still has the withered arm and her final option given to her by a conjuror is to touch the neck of a man just hung, hence her visit to a county jail. Hardy begins to build slowly and dramatically to the climax by giving each detail of Gertrude's actions: " she crossed the inner paved court beyond he gatehouse, her knees trembling so that she could scarcely walk.

" Gertrude is shown as being visibly nervous by the task at hand. Gertrude touches the young mans neck, neither she nor the reader at this point realise it is Rhoda Brook's son. Hardy shocks the reader once more when he reveals Rhoda's arrival: Immediately behind her stood Rhoda Brook her face drawn and eyes red with weeping. " However this is not Hardy's only surprise for the reader and Gertrude: " Behind Rhoda stood Gertrude's own husband.

" Hardy's clever use of fate has brought together the protagonists for this intoxicating finale and explains the coincidences. In the end of the story we

see Gertrude die from the stress of the recent events and that her blood has turned too far, the irony is evident as it was Rhoda who gave Gertrude her ailment and it was Rhoda's son's neck which Gertrude tried to cure herself with. Farmer Lodge ends trying to make amends with Rhoda for what happened, he also died and left most of his money to a reformatory for boys and a small annuity to be paid to Rhoda possibly out of guilt. Rhoda ends the story as she began with very little and rejecting the annuity left for her by Farmer Lodge. As the reader we feel satisfied with the outcome whilst feeling melancholy about Gertrude's death; throughout, she did no wrong and remained the sweet innocent person described by the young boy, also pleased that the Farmer realised he had a responsibility to Rhoda no matter how late on it was.

The unfortunate barriers of Victorian class are indeed the real barriers to a true relationship; neither Rhoda or Farmer Lodge can ever truly be together - a fact all too well accepted by Hardy's readers. In comparison, the contemporary writer Allende's short story 'The Schoolteachers Guest,' begins with a shock: " she announced to him that she had just cut off the head of a guest in her boarding house. " Allende begins to immediately engage the reader with this announcement whereas Hardy decides to begin by setting the scene in great detail. At this point the reader has no clue for the reasons behind this brutal murder all we know is how she has killed him.

The reader would have noticed the closeness of both Ines and Riad, proven by the fact Riad is the first she tells of this murder, Allende is showing indirectly the closeness of their friendship and Riad knows immediately Ines is being truthful as he ' clasps his handkerchief to his mouth;' she would not <https://assignbuster.com/the-withered-arm-by-thomas-hardy-and-the-schoolteachers-guest-by-isabelle-allende/>

of told him this if she did not fully trust him and this trust plays a key part throughout the story. Subsequently, Allende uses flashback to show the reader the depth of their relationship; and to show the length of it: The two had known each other so long... .

.. an Arab immigrant with a false Turkish passport... .

.. still-young woman with firm hips and proud shoulders. " Similarly to Hardy, Allende chooses to open up the doors to the protagonist's history slowly by using flashback, which engages the reader and helps them to become part of the fictitious Agua Santa. Agua Santa as a place helps the plausibility of the story, it is set as a quiet town somewhere foreign to Britain possibly South America as it mentions it being on the edge of the jungle. Ines does things made possible only by the setting she is in: " Girls brought boyfriends for approval.

.. ... she was counsellor, arbiter and judge of all the towns problems.

" Ines is shown to have an aura about her a certain authority that makes people listen and her opinions matter to them: " Her authority, in fact, was mightier than that of the priest, the doctor, or the police. " The town respects Ines, as she is the only teacher in the area so she would have taught everyone there and that is why everyone respects her. Allende's Agua Santa makes things like these possible, these sorts of things would of not been possible in a modern British setting, as they would be seen to be totally unreal, however Agua Santa is a completely different culture that's what makes it more acceptable to the reader. Allende, likewise to Hardy,

incorporates fate as a main reason for Ines killing the man: “ I had to do it, it was fate.

” In comparison to Hardy, Allende shows the idea of fate directly with Ines mentioning it, whereas Hardy does no mention it as such but the reader knows it is involved to explain some of the goings on. This is a point that fascinates the reader as it helps to explain a lot of occurrences especially the murder. The narrative ends with the death of the schoolteacher Ines that releases the people from their duty to keep the murder secret. Allende changes her style from second to first-person, as though she was around when all of this happened: “ the death of the schoolteacher freed us, and now I can tell the story. ” Allende keeps the story present tense, which helps to make the reader feel a part of Agua Santa as all is happening before their eyes.

Finally both stories are convincing in use of technique. Hardy and Allende have settings, which convince the reader of their verisimilitude; Hardy’s characters actions are accepted because are set, though in Britain, a century ago and gives them licence to do things that would otherwise be cast aside as nonsense. Despite their contemporary nature, Allende’s characters are acceptable as they are in a different land and culture; it is because of such strong credible settings the reader is able to accept the goings on. Despite an age difference of 100 years each author has the skill to captivate us.