

# The withered arm short essay



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On the one hand, Hardy portrays how negative life was for women in Victorian society. However, on the other hand, he clearly shows sympathy for the plight of women which suggests he had a desire for change.

Hardy shows how the role of women in Victorian society was to get married. If a woman did not get married, she was treated as though there was something wrong with her and indeed was often ignored by both men and women. Hardy shows us this when he tells of how Rhoda sat apart from the rest in the milking barn and lived on a lonely spot away from the other milkmaids. We learn that Rhoda has had a child out of wedlock with Farmer Lodge.

For this 'terrible sin,' Rhoda is effectively excluded from society; however, no blame is attached to Farmer Lodge. This is an example of the double standards that women in Victorian England had to live with. Hardy uses this concept throughout the story to emphasise the plight of women in Victorian society. Women were also expected to marry young and produce an 'heir and a spare'. When Gertrude failed to do this, she invited the scorn of her husband who was bitter over her failure to continue his family line.

At no time was it suggested that it was the man's fault that they were unable to have a child. It was always considered the woman's fault. In Victorian times, beauty was a desirable quality for any young brides and an absence of this led to rifts between partners. Hardy shows this by comparing Farmer Lodge's attitude to Gertrude before and after her arm became disfigured; Before Gertrude's arm becomes disfigured, Farmer Lodge views Gertrude as a pretty young girl who will serve well as his wife and he is pleased with her.

However, after her arm becomes disfigured Gertrude tells of how she thinks that Farmer Lodge cares for her less.

From then on, we get the impression that Farmer Lodge feels very 'displeased' by his wife. All this shows that women were expected to conform to society's expectations of them and if they did not they were ostracized from society. An extreme example of this is illustrated by Hardy later on in the story when he tells of how Rhoda is even viewed as a witch because she is not fulfilling the usual criteria of a woman. On the other hand, Hardy shows he had sympathy for the way women were treated by the way he ends the story. Hardy punishes Farmer Lodge for not taking care of Rhoda and her son by killing his wife and making him live a remorseful life from then on. This shows that Hardy desired change in the way the women were being treated but understood that innocent lives would have to be lost first.

He drew a parallel between this and the death of Gertrude.