

Daniel Knott

Compare the lives of the two central characters in 'The Son's Veto' and 'The melancholy Hussar'. What is the authors treatment of women and class prejudice.

Introduction

Having read and analysed these two short stories, written by Thomas Hardy in the 19th century, and considered the essay question I feel we must firstly consider the two main characters, Sophy and Phyllis. Both characters are not able to marry someone they love because they have to keep others happy. Firstly, Sophy has married someone in an upper class out of respect. Then after her husband died, she is left in an uncomfortable, patriarchal society. Her son then refuses her the right to re-marry because he wants to keep his social status. Phyllis, on the other hand, has a chance to be with the man she loves, but wanting to keep her father happy, stays.

The Son's Veto

Before she dies, Sophy is left feeling deserted due to her son's denial to her being allowed to re-marry to Sam Hobson, "taking her before a little cross that he had erected in his bedroom for his private devotions, there bade her kneel, and swear that she would not wed Samuel Hobson without his content." This quote is just one of many that shows Randolph has an extraordinary power over Sophy. This eventually drives Sophy to her death, lonely and depressed. This has been created by Hardy's patriarchal society and Randolph's superior education. During this novel Sophy has a few, if none at all, choices to make. She marries Mr. Twycott because she feels she can not say no, rather than because she loves him: "Sophy did not exactly love him, but she had a respect for him which almost amounted to veneration." Sophy had even less choices when Mr. Twycott, her upper class husband, dies and "through out these changes Sophy had been treated as a child she was in nature, though not in years." Her son, Randolph, sometimes makes these choices. Their relationship in chapter 1 gives the impression of Randolph being the parent, and Sophy the child, "Has, dear mother - - not HAVE! Exclaimed the public school boy, with an impatient, fastidiousness that was almost harsh." There is also a strong class difference where Randolph is a respectable upper class gentleman; Sophy is a lower class woman in an upper class world.

Randolph treats Sophy as just a minor, although he respects her a lot as she is his mother. The 2 previously used quotes about swearing on a cross and correction of grammar shows just how dominant Randolph is in their relationship. Although he respects her by calling her “mother”, she believes she doesn’t deserve this role.

Mr. Twycott treats Sophy with a cruel intended nature. He proposes, leaving her feeling obliged to agree, admits in doing this he has committed “social suicide.” Then, although some will say it is not his fault, he dies, leaving Sophy to fend for herself in an “uncomfortable” society.

Sam Hobson is the only one who has Sophy’s feelings at heart. He wants her to re-marry to him but has to compete with Sophy’s jealous son. He is patient and waits for Sophy to agree, “It was enough for him, and he was blithe at their parting. “ At the end of the story he is left alone also because of Randolph's ignorance.

We must ask why is Sophy treated so badly? She is treated badly because of her class boundaries and the “question of grammar that bore upon her past.” Her male dominated, class restricted society is leading her life to become “insupportably dreary” and lonely in love. The fact she is left in a class she isn’t used to and isn’t accepted in doesn’t help her in a patriarchal society. Even Mr. Twycott and Randolph have more care for their reputations than for Sophy. Not so much Mr. Twycott, but Randolph who won’t let Sophy marry Sam because he would lose his social status. “I am ashamed of you! It will ruin me!” Sophy is treated like this because she is still regarded as a lower class citizen by Mr. Twycott and Randolph, and herself. Although she is upper class to anyone else, “no I am not a lady’ she said sadly ‘I never shall be’. But he is a gentleman and that- - makes it- - O how difficult for me!” Sam treats her differently because he believes she has gone up in class, “I forget ma’am, that you’ve been a lady for so many years”, he even refers to her as “ma’am”!

This short story is just a way which Hardy expresses his views, using the characters. In Sophy he shows a weak, badly- treated, dependent woman, quite normal in the 19th century’s patriarchal society, “and she had done it her self, poor thing.” In Randolph he shows a dominant, well- educated man/boy whom, although Sophy’s son, has control over her. “His mother hastily

adopted the correction, and did not resent his making it, or retaliate, as she might have done.”

In Mr. Twycott he represents a man who can abuse his position to get what he needs, “She hardly dared refuse a parsonage.”

In Sam he shows the person Sophy can’t have because of her social boundaries, “Such a lady as you’ve been so long, you couldn’t be a wife to a man like me.”

This suggests people who are pre-occupied with social class/reputation and doing the expected thing are just upper class people. This is wrong! Although it is not referred to in the story lower class people try to do the expected thing and Hardy has not shown this. I strongly disagree with this influence in this story. Upper class people, represented by Mr. Twycott and Randolph, are shown as self absorbed and socially conscious, “It will degrade me in the eyes of all the gentleman of England.” Hardy’s judgement of Sophy’s fate is a strong and effective one as it shows just how stressful life can be as a lonely, upper class citizen. I, myself, blame Randolph for Sophy’s death. He left her to die alone for his social benefit, but I also think that the author blames everyone, but also no one in the form of society. Each of them has a negative link towards Sophy’s feelings and needs.

The Melancholy Hussar

In ‘The Melancholy Hussar’, The main character, Phyllis Grove, Has 3 dominant males in her life. The first, her father, Dr. Grove, the second, Humphrey Gould her fiancé, and lastly, Mattheus Tina. Similar to Sophy, She has a family member, an upper class citizen she is expected to marry, and her real love. Dr. Grove treats Phyllis with an influential parenthood. He pressures her into wanting to marry Humphrey, although she loves Mattheus, “Phyllis had not the smallest intention of disobeying him with her actions, but she assumed herself to be independent with respect to her feelings.”

Humphrey treats Phyllis unjustifiably and like a rag doll. He is to marry her, she gives the man she loves for him, to find he has married another woman, “I have privately married a dear young belle.” Mattheus Tina, Phyllis’s true love, is a knight in shining armour who is going to whisk her off her feet, marry her and live in Germany happily ever after, until it all goes wrong and he is left to leave alone, although he does respect her decision as a sign of true love, “ but he did nothing to tempt her unduly or unfairly.”

Links with Sophy from “The Son’s Veto” are strong as a family member pressures each, neither marries their true love and both die

alone. The character representation is also alike as both lives are run by men and the patriarchal society.

Why is Phyllis's treated with contempt and lack of respect? The term "unequal" marriage is a reference to social class and how for Phyllis it is acceptable in her society, it is not acceptable for Humphrey, quite like Mr. Twycotts "social suicide". Dr Grove wants Phyllis to marry Humphrey because for her it is a "brilliant move for someone in her constrained position" and a social boost for him. Similar to Randolph in "The Son's Veto" you could call this the father's veto.

The wall so often referred to as a "boundary" is not only a physical one, but a metaphorical one as well. The metaphorical boundary is the fact Mattheus Tina is a German soldier looking to marry Phyllis but he can't do this as a "boundary" is in the way. The physical one is the wall Phyllis has to sit to talk to Mattheus from.

The similarity between Phyllis and Sophy's love life is that one is isolated geographically, then kept in a prison in her aunt's house, the other is isolated by society and by her son proving difficult for both our main characters. This results in a similar ending for both stories, having no one to love and both are mourned by the people who restricted them.

To look at Hardy's views in more detail, the reason Phyllis cannot marry Mattheus is that her social boundaries and isolation stand in her way. Also in the way is the geographical location. He structures this using Humphrey and location, which Phyllis could not and will not break. His language shows his attitude towards these themes. He uses more complex, meaningful words to put emphasis on certain points, for example he uses "cannot break faith" instead of "remain loyal".

In each of the stories, Hardy's attitude towards women and class prejudice is that of a negative one. This is because both women have made sacrifices and have been pressured into marriage. But, as each became older, what seemed right to do at the time turned into regret. Hardy's attitude is that men have a superior dominating effect on society and that women can be used and abused. This mainly shows in "The Melancholy Hussar" where Humphrey has dumped Phyllis. "The Son's Veto" puts across the same point and another one. In "The Son's Veto" the setting is Gaymead, a nice little town that reflects a happy life that Sophy led before she married. In "The Melancholy Hussar", set in the countryside represents Phyllis's lonely, isolated life. The essay question asked us compare the lives of the two central characters in "The Son's Veto" and "The Melancholy

Hussar". What is the author's treatment of women and class prejudice? In the two stories Hardy wants us to think about this. He wants us to think why were women mistreated and why was there so much class prejudice? Hardy seems to suggest that when somebody marries's up class there is going to be problems. In the short stories they are sometimes overreacted, but otherwise he has a very cor rect portrayal of 19th century society