

The fundamentally distinct and opposing mentalities Paul and Ellen have developed to cope with their bleak future actively deteriorates their relationship. This results in constant miscommunication and ultimately decides their tragic future.

Controlling Ideas:

Paul's clenched virility prevents him from compromising with Ellen or even seeing her perspective.

Point:

- Paul's virility prevents him from choosing the more practical option of working in Ellen's father's shop to preserve his pride.

Proof:

- "I can't go, Ellen. Living off your people - charity - stop and think of it. This is where I belong. I can't do anything else" (64)

Context:

- Ellen is arguing that they should move to her father's shop so that they can have a better life, but Paul doesn't want to do that.

Comment:

- Paul is proud in his work on the land, and his strong virility prevents him from giving up the land to work in Ellen's father's shop. Working in Ellen's father's shop would humiliate him for not being able to provide for his wife and baby
  - This is also about self-respect and Paul's manhood - becoming a charity case insults him on an emotional level as it further demonstrates his inability to provide for his family on his own

Point:

- Paul anticipates and prepares for an argument with Ellen after he sees that the fields are barren instead of trying to reach some compromise with Ellen or admitting he was mistaken

Proof:

- "...his concern was how to withstand her, how to go on again and justify himself. It had not occurred to him yet that he might of should abandon the land. He had lived with it too long."

Context:

- Paul has just seen his barren fields but is adamant in remaining steadfast to his opinion

Comment:

- Seeing his fields barren strips him of the future he envisioned for his family and renders it impossible, but his extreme virility prevents him from accepting that Ellen was right and he is wrong. Rather, he now seeks to justify himself against Ellen instead of accepting his failure.

- Paul can't share his doubt in his loyalty to the land with Ellen without admitting that he now doesn't have a plan for providing for her and their baby, which only makes him more steadfast to providing for his family by himself through farming

Ellen is resolved in her powerlessness to change her surroundings, which has brought about her mood of plaintive indignation. She's become despondent and has lost hope for the future.

Point:

- Ellen feels oppressed and trapped in her current state.

Proof:

- "There was dust sifting everywhere. Her own throat was parched with it." (62)
- "[Paul] would only despise her if she ran to the stable looking for him" (62)
- "...she glanced around as if to find a corner where the air was less oppressive." (62)
- "[Paul's] presence made the menace of the wind seem less" (64)

Comment:

- Ellen feels trapped in her house because she can barely see anything outside or inside her home but dust, and feels powerless as she can't change her state of confinement without angering Paul
- She has quarrelled with Paul for several days about going away from their farm, which would give her greater autonomy over her life but Paul has remained steadfast in continuing to live on the farm

Point:

- Ellen has lost hope for any future prosperity

Proof:

- "I wouldn't mind the work or the skimping if there was something to look forward to. It's the hopelessness - going on - watching the land blow away." (66)

Comment:

- Ellen sees nothing in continuing to live at the farm since she knows that the farm won't yield many crops in their lifetime
- There isn't much change between each day, which leads Ellen to believe that the future won't change and she will be as powerless and hopeless as she is right now
  - There's a recurring nature in the dust storms that Ellen understands; even if the dust and wind dies down now, it will only come back