Theme of Love - Triangle in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native.*

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Abstract:

The landscape of this novel is encapsulated in the descriptions of Egdon Heath and this sense of place is as ever central in a work by Hardy. Here, the heath symbolizes the rural past before human intervention and also adds to the sense of isolation suffered by those already isolated in human relationships, such as Eustacia and Wildeve.

This thematic concern of rural life is also referred to as a fading past when Venn’s occupation as a reddleman is described as being all but redundant with the later advent of the railway. The heath, though, is seen to be immutable and resistant to change and for some it may be regarded as an optimistic feature as it demonstrates the power of nature of humanity. The vastness of the heath also allows one to see that men and women are, by comparison, just absurdist insignificants.

The theme of failed marriage is a dominant one as each of the main characters (Wildeve, Eustacia, Thomasin and Clym) suffers from the relationship they embark upon. For Thomasin, her marriage to Wildeve occurs because of the fear of what others will say about her after Wildeve all but jilted her at the start of the novel. She marries, then, for the sake of received moral values and so as not to bring shame on her family. It is evident that marrying for such a reason is criticized as their relationship crumbles.
Conversely, Eustacia is seen to marry Clym primarily because she is in love with the idea of love in an abstract sense and because she first regards him as having a ‘golden halo’ around him. He represents her future dreams of culture and modernity, and because she is blinded by the notion of romance she fails to see the reality of marriage.

This mainly pessimistic perception of marriage is weighed against a little, however, as closure is brought about when Thomasin weds altruistic Venn.

**Key Words:** Thomas Hardy, Theme, Love, Marriage, Clym, Eustacia, Wildeve, Thomasin, Diggory.

*The Return of the Native*, Hardy has taken up a theme which involves a clear-cut issue in the minds of the leading characters, and especially in the mind of Eustacia, which is the main stage of the drama. It is her stifled longing for spiritual expansion which leads her to play with the love of Wildeve, which causes her later to throw him over for the greater promise of Clym, which leads her back again to Wildeve, and at last - with the loss of all hope - to suicide. In every case it requires but the smallest outlay of incident to provoke the most lively play of feeling; and the play of feeling - the opposition of desires - is embodied here, in true dramatic fashion, in talk rather than in acts. It takes nothing more than the return of Thomasin from town unwed to set going the whole series of dialogues which make up the substance of the first book, dialogues in which Wildeve and Mrs. Yeobright, Venn and Eustacia, Eustacia and Wildeve do nothing more than fence with one another, each maneuvering for position in a breathless game of well-matched antagonists. These are scenes in the true dramatic sense, not in the popular sense that calls for violence and surprising action.

Carpenter describes this setting as more than an image: it is a convenient narrative tool, allowing Hardy's characters to summon one another across miles with signal fires and also to bump
into each other unexpectedly as they wander the twisted paths through the furze. “By confining nearly all of his action to its terrain,” he writes, Hardy “achieves a unity of place which markedly aids in the creation of dramatic effects.” It is a handy set-ting for events that have to be brought together in order to make the story work, but it is in no way a superbly successful one. If Egdon Heath were flawless in drawing readers into the novel's magical spell, the reader would be left feeling completely satisfied about the reality and inevitability of what he or she is told goes on there. Instead, the reader is left conscious of the hand of the author as coincidences abound, apparently there only for his storytelling convenience.

Stories always depend on coincidental events. Hardy appears to not have recognized the boundary that separates “did not anticipate” from “could not anticipate” and that line, wide as the Mississippi River, separates tragedy from potboiler. A turn of events like Clym Yeobright's semi-blindness, for example, seems to materialize pretty quickly in the story, but it follows naturally from Clym's sudden dedication to be a great educator, which follows from his impulsive high-minded character, and is therefore grounded in the story.

Diggory Venn *always* shows up unexpectedly and fortuitously, so the reader can accept him as either a supernatural presence or an extremely prepared guardian. Eustacia and Wildeve are drawn together by a similar restlessness, so it is no wonder that their internal clocks would direct them both to the East Egdon “gipsying” at the same time. The adder that bites Mrs. Yeobright is the natural result of life on the heath. Eustacia is devious enough to loiter outside of the chapel when Wildeve is marrying, so there is no stretch of reality in her being the wedding's witness.

Even the event that starts the whole novel into motion the canceled marriage between Thomasin and Wildeve seems only to be a matter of coincidence to the people in the book. Readers recognize this as one of those psychological non-accidents, reflecting the fact that one of these two
subconsciously wanted the ceremony abandoned although it is unclear whether the hesitant party is Thomasin, who changed towns suddenly at the last moment, or Wildeve, who forgot to change the license.

Hardly was a modern so far as his thought or philosophy is concerned, but the form of his novel is traditional. His plots are all old fashioned. All of them turn on love. In all of them, we find the conventional love-triangle. Hardy's novels are all basically love-stories.

This is also true of the Return of the Native. It is also a love-story. And in it, there is not merely a love-triangle, but a rhomboid (a four cornered figure) with a tail. The love triangle in the novel may be represented as follows:

**Eustacia - Clym Yeobright**

**Wildeve - Thomasin - Venn**

Both Clym Yeobright and Wildeve love Eustacia, and both Wildeve and Venn love Thomasin. Thus there is a double love-story, the path of the lovers cross, and the result is much sorrow and suffering, and ultimately tragedy. Love, in the present novel, as in other novels, is a lord of terrible aspect, a source of tragedy rather than of happiness. A detailed consideration of the love-triangle would make the point clear.

**Clym - Eustacia - Wildeve**

Long before the novel opens, Wildeve and Eustacia have been in love with each other. They meet frequently on the Rainbarrow near Eustacia's home, and the sound produced by the dropping of a stone in the nearby pond is used as the signal of love. But their love is neither true nor sincere. They are strangely fascinated and drawn towards each other, and yet they are unfaithful to each other. The fact is that isolation in Egdon Heath has made Eustacia love-hungry, and she turns to Wildeve because there is no other more worthy object of love on
the desolate heath. Wildeve too loves her because she is the most beautiful woman on the heath. However, as she is proud, hot and impulsive, he turns to pretty Thomasin who is the very opposite of Eustacia. He is a sort of lady-killer and likes to make love to a number of women at one and the same time.

On her part, Eustacia is equally capricious and changeable. She, too, transfers her love to Clym as soon as he returns to Egdon. She is disgusted with Egdon, yearns for the pomp and glitter of city life, and loves Clym because she thinks he would take her to Paris. However, her dream is frustrated. Clym has his own plan of educating the rustics, studies for long hours loses his eyesight, and is compelled to take up the humble work of a furze-cutter. This is a great humiliation for Eustacia. At this juncture, Wildeve again crosses her path. The two dance on the village green, and Wildeve comes to meet her secretly at her home. The visit results in the tragedy of the closed door and the death of Mrs. Yeobright.

When Clym comes to know of the circumstances which led to the death of his mother, he is, quite naturally, angry with his wife. There follows a violent quarrel, and Eustacia leaves her husband and comes to live with her grandfather. Unable to tolerate life on Egdon, she decides to elope with Wildeve. They leave home on the night of the 6th of November. It is absolutely dark and a furious storm is raging. Eustacia falls into a pond and is drowned. Both Wildeve and Clym jump into the pond to save her. Wildeve is drowned, while Clym is saved by the reddleman.

In this way, Clym-Eustacia-Wildeve love-triangle results in tragedy for all concerned. Eustacia and Wildeve come to a tragic end. Clym's love for Eustacia is the direct cause of the tragic death of Mrs. Yeobright. No doubt, Clym lives in the end, but his is a life in death. He live haunted by a sense of guilt that he is responsible for the death both of his wife and his mother.

Wildeve - Thomasin - Diggory
Wildeve-Thomasin-Diggory Venn have-triangle, on the other hand, ends more happily, largely, as a result of the patient and forbearing nature of Thomasin. Diggory Venn had loved Thomasin from the very beginning, but Thomasin rejected him for three reasons. First, because she did not love him, secondly, because she loved another person, and thirdly because her aunt, Yeobright, did not agree to her marriage with Diggory, by far their social inferior. Diggory was much frustrated. He was a small dairy farmer but dis-appointedment in love led him to give up his farm and adopt the profession of a reddleman.

When the story opens we find the poor Thomasin has been jilted by Wildeve at the eleventh hour. They had gone to be married, but it was discovered that there was some technical flaw in the marriage licence and so they could not be married. This is a great humiliation for Thomasin. Instead of returning home with Wildeve after the unfortunate event, she returns in the van of Diggory. In Egdon all supposed that they, Wildeve and Thomasin, were duly married, and so the Wessex folk even came to the Quiet Woman Inn to congratulate them.

Wildeve, instead of acting honourably and marrying Thomasin at the earliest, turn once again to Eustacia who is gratified to have her lover back. Diggory does her best to help Thomasin. He adopts his, “silent system”, to scare away Wildeve from Eustacia, and keep him at home in the evening. At a critical moment, he offers himself to Mrs. Yeobright as a possible suitor for Thomasin. The result is that Mrs. Yeobright is able to talk to Wildeve from a position of strength, and to tell him frankly that if he does not marry her at an early date, there is another lover waiting to marry her. However, Thomasin is determined to marry Wildeve for, “her pride's sake”. It is only though marriage with that she can wash off the disgrace from her fair name.

It is the return of Clym to Egdon that makes matters easier for Thomasin. Eustacia falls in love with him, and writes to Wildeve telling him that she no longer wants him, and he may marry
Thomasin, if he so desires. The result is that Thomasin and Wildeve are married. But Wildeve does not remain faithful to her for long. He meets Eustacia by chance, dances with her and then visits her secretly, first in the evening, and then in the day. Thomasin knows all this, and suffers deeply as a consequence.

**Melioristic Note**

However, her patience, tolerance, humility and prudence are rewarded in the end. Wildeve and Eustacia are drowned in the pond on the might of the 6th of November, and in this way she becomes a widow. The faithful Diggory still loves her and continues to court her. The episode of the lost glove touches her heart deeply. She now realises the sincerity and depth of his love. The result is that she now accepts him, and the two are duly married. We may be sure that the two lived happily together ever afterwards.

Thus the love story of Thomasin end; happily. Through her the novelist has introduced an element of meliorism in the novel. Life is tragic, and love is a cause of sorrow and suffering, but we can get some happiness even out of human life, if we are sufficiently gentle, humble, patient and forbearing like Thomasin and Diggory Venn. It is in this way that the tragedy of human life can be ameliorated or softened a little.
Works Cited


