



RESEARCH PAPER

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Eustacia Vye: Exploring the Philosophy of Hardy's Tragic Heroine

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ABSTRACT

This research examines Eustacia Vye, the tragic protagonist from Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), through a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on Sigmund Freud's principles of the id, ego, and superego. Eustacia's character embodies the profound internal conflicts that emerge when an individual's desires, reality, and moral consciousness collide. The analysis examines Eustacia's powerful id-led impulses – her longing for escape, passion, and satisfaction – which dictate her choices and steer her into challenging circumstances. This research is qualitative in nature and descriptive in design. Freud's psychoanalytic theory, proposed in his works *The Introduction of Psychoanalysis* (1917) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923) is taken as a theoretical framework. The study highlights the complexities of human psyche in Hardy's work, illustrating how the failure to reconcile desire, reality, and morality can result in devastating consequences.

KEYWORDS *Eustacia Vye*, Freudian Theory, Psychoanalytic Reading, *The Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy, Tragic Heroine

Introduction

The early 20th century marking the beginning of modern psychology and with the pace of this psychology the psychological analysis of literary texts evolved. This method of critiquing used the concepts advocated by noted psychologist, including Carl Jung, Alfred Adler and Otto Rank and above all Sigmund Freud. It was first used or developed as a method of therapy for neuroses by Freud, but very soon expanded it to account for many expanded developments and practices in the history of civilizations including warfare, mythology, religion, literature. Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Austrian Neurologist Sigmund Freud and others. Freud's psychoanalytic theory, coming as it at the turn of the century, provided a radically new approach to the analysis and treatment of 'abnormal' adult behaviour. Earlier views tended to ignore behaviour and look for a physiological explanation of 'abnormality'.

Human beings are recognized in terms of their specific characteristic traits. Personality of any person differentiates him from others. Human personality is the mixture of different emotions, feelings, ideas and thoughts. Nelson and Miller state personality is an "individual's unique and relatively stable pattern of behaviour, thoughts and emotions". (Baron, 1989). Different factors and people play a key role in shaping our personality. Sigmund Freud's view of human personality is entirely based on the human psyche. He believes in the interplay of the three psychic entities id, ego and superego have an immense role in forming an adult personality. He calls it the process from 'womb to

tomb'. Id is the most primitive part of the personality that is the source of all our most basic urges. The id is entirely unconscious and serves as the source of all libidinal energy'. The ego is the component of personality that deals with reality and helps ensure that the demands of the id are satisfied in ways that are realistic, safe, and socially acceptable. The super ego is the part of the personality that holds all of the internalized morals and standards that we acquire from our parents, family, and society at large.

The Return of the Native, published in 1878, is one of Hardy's most eminent novels. The novel is set in the rural and atmospheric landscape of Egdon Heath. The story revolves around the complex relationships of several characters. The central plot follows the return of Clym Yeobright to his native land from Paris, his ill-fated marriage to the restless and passionate Eustacia Vye and the tragedies that appear.

Eustacia Vye is the leading figure and appears as complex and ambiguous character. She is a restless and desirous woman, longs to escape the somber and oppressive environment of Egdon Heath and wants to live a more efficacious life. Hardy uses several phrases to describe her reaction to life, among the most striking of which is "smouldering rebellious". Her actions and desires lead to her downfall make her a tragic heroine in Hardy's narrative. She takes immense pleasure in being unconventional in some ways. Her character embodies a rich blend of conflicts, desires and existential dilemmas that make her an ideal subject for Psychoanalytic exploration. This study aims to explore the Psychoanalytic reading of Eustacia's character by applying the theory of Sigmund Freud to unveil the intricate layers of her character.

Vye is one of most complex characters of in Hardy's fiction, who can't be understood without diving into her unconscious mind. This research highlights how Eustacia's intense yearning for idealized life, her relentless pursuit of unachievable dreams and unconscious mind contributes to her psychological turmoil and tragic end. This research aims to explore a psychoanalytical reading of Eustacia Vye, with a focus on uncovering and analysing her unconscious desires.

Literature Review

Scholars have looked closely at Eustacia Vye, a key character in *Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native (1878)*. They have studied her in different ways, like through feminist, historical, and psychoanalytic lenses. This review combines these ideas and highlights areas where more research is needed. Experts who study feminism often point out that Eustacia represents women standing up against the rules made by men in Victorian times. Elaine Showalter (1979) suggests in her book *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, that Eustacia's unhappiness with her small-town life and her desire for adventure show a bigger fight for women to have independence. Similarly, Penny Boumelha in *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form (1982)*, explains how Eustacia's refusal to follow society's expectations reveals the few options women had in the 1800. Historical and cultural analysis situates Eustacia in relation to the rules and beliefs of Victorian society. In his book *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (1971)*, Michael Millgate talks about how the society's expectations influenced Hardy's characters. He explains that Eustacia's sad ending is connected to the strict social rules of her era. In his book *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study*, Richard L. Purdy (1954) talks about how historical events influenced Hardy's writing. He focuses on how Eustacia represents the struggle between personal wants and what society expects. Psychoanalytic readings of Eustacia Vye delve into her unconscious motivations, internal conflicts, and the psychological dimensions of her tragic fate. These interpretations often draw upon Freudian and Jungian theories, examining how Eustacia's psyche is shaped by her desires

and fears. For example, the repression of Eustacia's desires and the subsequent projection of these onto her surroundings can be compared to the psychological dynamics in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843), where the narrator's guilt manifests in an imagined beating heart, symbolizing the return of the repressed (Poe, 1843). Freudian analysis helps us comprehend Eustacia's hidden desires and defence mechanisms. In her book *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (1988), Rosemarie Morgan uses Freudian ideas to explain Eustacia's character. She believes that Eustacia's yearning for excitement and dislike for ordinary life stem from her id-driven wishes. Similar to Dr. Jekyll's transformation into Mr. Hyde, which represents the conflict between the id, ego, and superego in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Eustacia's behavior reflects the inner turmoil between her suppressed desires and the societal expectations imposed upon her (Stevenson). Morgan proposes that Eustacia's behaviour is shaped by her suppressed desires and the ensuing inner struggles. Jungian critics see Eustacia as embodying the archetype of the tragic heroine. In *Thomas Hardy's Fictional Philosophy: A Study of His Characters and Beliefs* (2003), Carl Krockel delves into how Eustacia symbolizes common human experiences, such as the conflict between individuality and fitting in with society. Krockel suggests that Eustacia's personality reflects the Jungian shadow, which represents the hidden, negative aspects of the human mind that are usually repressed by societal expectations. This shadow archetype is also evident in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, where Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect symbolizes his internalized feelings of alienation and worthlessness, mirroring Eustacia's own sense of entrapment within her societal and personal confines (Kafka). J. Hillis Miller (1970) explores how Lacanian psychoanalysis can help understand Eustacia's motivations in Hardy's characters, in his book *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*. Miller applies Lacan's ideas of desire and the other to analyse Eustacia's actions. Miller suggests that Eustacia's constant feelings of dissatisfaction and desire for an unachievable ideal can be seen through the lens of Lacanian theories of desire and the symbolic order. Despite the valuable insights provided by previous studies, there remains a significant gap in the comprehensive psychoanalytic exploration of Eustacia Vye's character. While individual aspects of her psyche have been analysed, a holistic approach that integrates Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian theories is lacking. Moreover, there is a need to connect these psychoanalytic insights with Hardy's broader philosophical views on tragedy and human nature. This research aims to fill these gaps by providing a detailed psychoanalytic reading of Eustacia Vye and exploring how Hardy's portrayal of her character reflects his philosophical perspectives on human suffering and tragedy. This review discusses different ways of analysing Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native*. Feminist, historical, and cultural perspectives have helped us understand her character better. However, there is still more to explore about her using psychoanalytic theories like Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian. Through this research, we hope to gain a deeper insight into Eustacia's psychological depth and Hardy's philosophical depiction of his tragic heroine.

Material and Methods

This study uses a qualitative technique to access the character of Eustacia Vye in Thomas Hardy's work *The Return of the Native* (1878) using Freudian psychoanalytic theory. A thorough close reading of the novel is carried out to obtain insight into Eustacia's thoughts, feelings, and actions, with a focus on identifying important scenes and narrative moments that reflect her psychological dynamic. Eustacia's motivations and behaviours has been interpreted using Freud's structural model of the psyche, which includes the id, ego, and superego, with a focus on how her unconscious mind influences her decisions and actions. The study also looks into how Eustacia's connections and cultural forces affect her psyche, defining her sad path. By combining these data, a thorough psychoanalytic

profile of Eustacia Vye is created, providing a detailed picture of her character through the lens of Freudian theory.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which offers a thorough framework for comprehending the human psyche and behaviour, is the foundation of this subject. In particular, this study uses of Freud's structural model of the psyche, which holds that the id, ego, and superego make up the human mind. These three elements are always interacting, affecting a person's feelings, ideas, and behaviour. The most primitive aspect of the mind, the id, stands for the innate and subconscious motivations that shape human conduct. It disregards societal rules and customs in favour of seeking out instant gratification for needs and desires. However, the ego, the logical and reasonable portion of the mind, acts as a mediator between the id and reality, making sure that each person's desires are satisfied in a way that is acceptable to others.

The ego oversees making decisions, solving problems, and managing stress and anxiety. The superego, the mind's moral component, combines societal standards and ideals, directing individual conduct toward what is judged "right" or "wrong". It aspires for perfection, which frequently results in emotions of guilt or shame when these standards are not attained.

Freud's theory also highlights the importance of the unconscious mind, which comprises repressed thoughts, desires, and memories that are hidden from conscious awareness. Repression, the process of driving unpleasant thoughts or urges into the unconscious mind, is an important defense mechanism for avoiding distress and maintaining a sense of self. Furthermore, Freud's theory emphasizes the importance of defense mechanisms, which are techniques used by the ego to deal with stress, anxiety, and other forms of psychological distress. These strategies, which include denial, projection, and rationalization, allow people to temporarily escape or alter reality, lowering sensations of discomfort or danger.

This study tries to provide a comprehensive view of Eustacia Vye's complicated and sad trajectory by applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory to her character in Thomas Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native* (1878). The analysis looks at how Eustacia's id, ego, and superego interact, as well as how her relationships and societal forces affect her psyche, exposing the unconscious reasons and wants that drive her actions.

Results and Discussion

Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878) presents Eustacia Vye as one of the most complex and mysterious character in Victorian age. Through the lens of Freudian Psychoanalytic theory particularly the concept of id, ego and superego, we can explore Eustacia's character and understand how these elements shape her actions and lead to her tragic fate. This detailed analysis explores the intricate workings of Eustacia's psyche, using textual evidence from the novel to illustrate how Freud's model applies to her character.

Eustacia Vye is motivated by a strong, almost unexplainable urge to leave Egdon Heath, which represents being trapped both physically and mentally. According to Freud's idea, these strong desires which an individual may not always be able to completely understand come from the unconscious. Eustacia's feelings toward the heath: "She only loved night and the darkness. To be loved to madness—such was her great desire"(Thomas Hardy,1878). One could argue that Eustacia's obsession with leaving the heath and moving to a beautiful city like Paris to live a fuller life is a symptom of suppressed

needs for recognition, love, and independence that are unfulfilled in her current surroundings. She despises Egdon Heath as a place of despair: "It is my curse, my misery and will be my death. Eustacia's decision to marry Clym Yeobright despite knowing that he does not want to leave heath shows an unconscious drive for escape. According to Freud theory this decision is influenced by unresolved unconscious conflicts rather than rational thought. This is evident when Hardy writes, "To Eustacia the situation was maddening. She was always considering the possibility of getting away" (Thomas Hardy, 1878).

According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the id is the primitive and instinctual part of the mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden memories. In Eustacia Vye, the id is the dominant force, driving her actions and desires without regard for social norms or the consequences. Despite knowing the potential consequences, her attraction to Wildeve highlights the id's dominance in her psyche. Hardy describes her reckless attraction to Wildeve: "To stimulate Wildeve with her beauty, to extinguish his remorse for marrying another woman – had these been all her misfortunes, she might have conquered them" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). This attraction is less about love and more about satisfying her instinctual desire for excitement and validation. Eustacia's overwhelming desire to escape Egdon Heath is a powerful expression of her id. Hardy writes:

Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and externally unreconciled thereto. She was, in fact, the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. (Thomas Hardy, 1878).

This passage highlights Eustacia's dissatisfaction and her instinctual drive for something greater than her current reality, which is characteristic of the id's pursuit of pleasure and fulfilment. Her id blinds her to the reality of Clym's true aspirations and leads her to project her desires onto him. This projection is evident in her statement, "I could love you if you could take me away from this place" (Thomas Hardy, 1878), revealing that her affection for Clym is conditional on his ability to fulfil her fantasies. Eustacia's defiance of societal norms and expectations further exemplifies the dominance of her id. She refuses to conform to the rural society's expectations, particularly those related to gender and propriety. Her behaviour often shocks the community, as she is perceived as aloof and mysterious, someone who "seemed to care for nothing, but to long for the excitement of passion" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). This rebellious nature is a direct manifestation of her id, which rejects the constraints imposed by society in favour of personal gratification and freedom.

Freud's ego is the rational part of the psyche that mediates between the instinctual desires of the id and the moral constraints of the superego, operating primarily at the conscious. The ego tries to maintain control over Eustacia's desires. Eustacia's decision to marry Clym can be seen by her ego as an attempt at balancing the demands of id with the limitations of environment. While her id desires immediate escape, her ego recognizes that marrying Clym offers a more realistic path to achieving her goals. Eustacia's marriage to Clym is an example of the ego's attempt to find a compromise between her internal desires and the reality of her situation. "To be loved to madness – such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days" (Thomas Hardy, 1878).

This reflects the ego's attempt to negotiate a reality that can satisfy her desires, though it ultimately fails as her expectations clash with reality. However, this decision is fraught with tension, as her ego struggles to reconcile her fantasies with the practicalities

of married life. Hardy describes this tension, writing, "To be happy in marriage was not her notion of bliss. Passion unrequited, solitude for ever – these, these were the eternal realities" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). This quote reflects Eustacia's internal conflict, where her ego attempts to conform to the reality of marriage, but her id continues to yearn for something more, as the reality of their incompatible dreams sets in, her ego is overwhelmed, leading to conflict and dissatisfaction: "She saw the whole spectacle of her life pass before her, and could foresee that the matter would come to nothing after all" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). This realization signifies the ego's inability to reconcile the demands of the id with the harsh realities of life.

Eustacia's ego finds it more and more difficult to keep the equilibrium between her id's desires and the outside world as the story goes on. Her romanticized picture of Clym rapidly comes apart when he chooses to remain in Egdon Heath and pursue a career as a schoolteacher – a reality very different from what Eustacia had in mind. This disappointment is a pivotal point at which the ego's effort to control the id's desires fails. When Eustacia laments, "How I have tried and tried to be content, but it is of no use," Hardy aptly captures this epiphany (Thomas Hardy, 1878). Here, frustration and hopelessness increase as a result of the ego's incapacity to fulfil the id's desires while operating within the bounds of reality. Eustacia makes repeated attempts to take charge of her life and environment throughout the book, mirroring the ego's attempts to impose order. Her attempts to control Clym's actions, her manipulation of Wildeve, and even her interactions with the residents of Egdon Heath can all be interpreted as ego-driven attempts to satisfy her id while navigating the outside world. These initiatives, however, frequently backfire and cause more issues. For example, tension and loneliness increase when Eustacia tries to win Wildeve back from Thomasin. It was only in Wildeve that Hardy observes, "She was as superior to him as Clym was to her" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). This quotation emphasizes how the ego is unable to gain long-term control or fulfilment because Eustacia is still caught up in a never-ending cycle of unfulfilled dreams and unmet desires.

Freud's superego is the moral component of the psyche, representing internalized societal values and standards. It contrasts with the id's desires, guiding behaviour towards moral righteousness and inducing guilt when standards aren't met. Eustacia's feelings of shame and guilt become especially apparent following Mrs. Yeobright's passing. Although Eustacia's involvement in the event is complicated, the superego starts to take centre stage, resulting in strong emotions of shame and self-criticism. "She could not disguise from herself that she had been cruel to Mrs. Yeobright... She was, in fact, one who never knows the effect her actions produce upon others until too late" (Thomas Hardy, 1878).

Here, Hardy reveals Eustacia's growing guilt and self-reproach, a clear indication of the superego's belated but powerful influence. Eustacia was never able to find her footing anywhere, and Hardy describes her as "always in trouble – always floating over some bottomless abyss" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). This allegoric depiction of Eustacia's mental state emphasizes the superego's increasing power as she becomes preoccupied with the moral ramifications of her choices. Her psychological decline is exacerbated by her incapacity to forgive herself for Mrs. Yeobright's passing since the superego forces an overwhelming sense of guilt from which she is unable to free herself. Eustacia's disobedience to moral and social norms is also a reflection of her conflict with her superego. She rejects society norms on the outside, but she is not immune to the pressures they put on. Between her id-driven desires and the moral requirements imposed by the superego, she experiences conflict due to the community's judgment and her own realization of the consequences of her actions. She feels more guilty because, for instance, she initially refused to let Mrs. Yeobright into her home, which ultimately resulted in her

death. This refusal continues to haunt her. When Hardy writes, "She could not disguise from herself that she had been cruel to Mrs. Yeobright," he effectively conveys this internal conflict (Thomas Hardy, 1878). Eustacia experiences internal turmoil due to the superego's delayed influence, which makes her question her actions and ultimately plays a role in her downfall. Although Eustacia is aware of societal expectations and the moral implications of her actions, her superego often fails to exert control over her id-driven desires. This is evident when she conspires with Wildeve to elope, fully aware of the consequences: "There lay the whole vast tract of night; here only was she" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). Her decision to meet Wildeve reflects the superego's inability to impose moral restraint, leading her further down a path of self-destruction. The inability of the superego to successfully mediate between the id and the ego by the book's conclusion plays a part in Eustacia's psychological breakdown. She becomes hopeless as a result of her intense guilt following Mrs. Yeobright's passing, as well as her unmet desires and disappointment with reality. Eustacia says, "But no man can be always a martyr, and Eustacia had now no further reason for martyrdom," as she considers her life in her final moments (Thomas Hardy, 1878).

Eustacia is overcome with hopelessness in her last moments and believes that death is the only way to end her internal suffering. Eustacia's ultimate surrender to despair is captured in the final moments of her life, where the superego's overwhelming guilt leads to her tragic end: "Why did you not kill me at once? It was the meanest act of your life to bring me into the world!" she exclaimed to the unhearing night. "There is no chance left for me now!" (Thomas Hardy, 1878).

This passage symbolizes the collapse of her psychological defenses, with the superego's imposition of guilt and hopelessness leading her to choose death as an escape from her inner turmoil. In her last act, Hardy eloquently portrays this by having her walk into the stormy night, which represents both her internal turmoil and her submission to it. Hardy writes, "To her eyes this prospect was but part of a blackness that spread like a cloud over all" (Thomas Hardy, 1878). Here, the darkness represents the total collapse of her psyche, with hope, reason, and will completely be eclipsed by the superego's overwhelming power. It is possible to see Eustacia's drowning death as her ultimate, irreversible surrender to the forces within her. In Freudian analysis, the water is frequently used as a symbol of the unconscious. Here, it symbolizes her final plunge into the unresolved conflicts that have dogged her. The tragic conclusion, which leaves her in a state of psychological ruin, is thus directly related to the superego's inability to maintain a balance between her id's desires and the harsh realities of her world.

Conclusion

Eustacia Vye, the tragic protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, serves as a representation of the intricate psychological conflicts that emerge from the intersection of intrinsic desires, societal norms, and ethical awareness. Utilizing Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, particularly the concepts of the id, ego, and superego, one can attain a more nuanced comprehension of Eustacia's multifaceted character and the underlying forces that ultimately lead to her tragic fate. Central to Eustacia's identity is the overwhelming influence of the id, which manifests in her relentless aspirations for liberation, passion, and self-actualization. Her desire to escape the limitations of Egdon Heath, coupled with her fervent romantic and sexual urges, drives her actions throughout the narrative. The id's demand for immediate satisfaction often leads Eustacia to overlook potential repercussions, resulting in her engagement in relationships and circumstances that are fundamentally precarious and untenable. This impulsive disposition, propelled by the pleasure principle of the id, is particularly evident in her choice to marry Clym

Yeobright, a decision that prioritizes the allure of an adventurous life over authentic emotional connection.

The ego, which is responsible for balancing the primal urges of the id with the constraints imposed by the external environment, faces significant challenges in Eustacia's existence. Although the ego endeavours to align her aspirations with practical considerations such as her decision to marry Clym in pursuit of her goal to escape Egdon Heath, these attempts ultimately prove futile. The stark realities of her marital situation and the limitations inherent in her surroundings swiftly lead to a sense of disillusionment. Eustacia's ego, beset by the overpowering demands of the id and incapable of harmonizing these with the realities she faces, is unable to sustain the equilibrium necessary for her psychological well-being.

Initially, the superego, which embodies the internalized ethical and societal norms, holds a relatively minor influence in Eustacia's life. However, its importance escalates as the narrative unfolds, particularly following the demise of Mrs. Yeobright. This sorrowful incident ignites profound feelings of guilt and self-blame within Eustacia, as the superego enforces its moral scrutiny upon her actions. The guilt she experiences, exacerbated by the community's rejection, results in a breakdown of her psychological defenses. The superego, previously dormant or repressed throughout much of the story, abruptly emerges as a dominant force, overwhelming Eustacia with the burden of its moral demands.

Eustacia's fragile mind breaks down when her superego fails. The overwhelming guilt and sadness she feels become unbearable. With no way to solve her inner struggles, she sees death as her only way out. Her tragic fate comes not just from outside events but from her own mental battles. Eustacia cannot balance her desires with what her ego wants and the rules of her superego, leading to her downfall.

In conclusion, Eustacia Vye's character in *Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native* (1878) serves as a profound investigation into the intricacies of the human mind and the tragic repercussions of unresolved psychological conflicts. Utilizing Freud's psychoanalytic framework, one can observe how the unrestrained influence of the id, the ego's inadequate mediation, and the superego's delayed yet overpowering moral scrutiny culminate in Eustacia's tragic demise. Hardy's depiction of Eustacia transcends the narrative of a woman's unfortunate fate, offering a commentary on the complexities of human psychology and the catastrophic outcomes that arise when these internal forces are perpetually at odds. Eustacia Vye exemplifies the tragic potential embedded within the human experience, illustrating how the tension between desire, reality, and ethical considerations can lead to an inescapable path of ruin.

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