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Hist 390 101
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Wings of Love: an overview of love triangles in the movie Wings

The movie *Wings* directed by William A. Wellman is a silent movie set during World War I and released in the year 1927. Unlike other World War I movies like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Wings* is a movie that focuses on the love lives of its cast of characters. While the war is going on, the love story of Jack Powell, Mary Preston, David Armstrong, and Sylvia Lewis continues to be a driving force of the film. The love story in *Wings* isn't a simple "boy meets girl, they fall in love and live happily ever after", it introduces complexity by having multiple interwoven love triangles that captivate the audience. There are two key love triangles that drive the plot of the film, with a few supplementary ones to round out the story. This paper aims to explore five love triangles within the film, starting off with the less prominent ones.

A love triangle is a scenario where three parties are involved romantically in some manner, either being mutual or exclusive. A love triangle that is very briefly explored and barely fits the definition of a love triangle is that between Marry Preston and the two military policemen. While Mary is changing back into her uniform after Jack has fallen asleep, two military policemen enter the room to bring Jack back to the frontline. These two men see Mary in an exposed state, one decides to start flirting while the other begins to gawk (*Wings* 01:26:00). This entire interaction is very brief, lasting about two minutes, yet there are three parties

involved in a “romantic”, more sexual than romantic, interaction therefore loosely fitting the idea of a love triangle. There is also a conflict, albeit small and negligible, between the two policemen. As mentioned earlier, the shorter one starts to flirt while the taller one is staring in disbelief, once the shorter one notices this he scolds the taller one and then continues to flirt before turning around again (*Wings* 01:26:40). It can be argued that the shorter policeman was simply scolding the taller one out of professionalism and chivalry, but the fact that he proceeded to flirt and sneak looks indicates it may have been from a place of jealousy or lust. Within this love triangle, both the policemen are coveting Mary, while Mary is wholly uninterested.

Another smaller love triangle is that between an unnamed soldier, Mary Preston, and Jack Powell. This triangle has Mary as the central point where the unnamed soldier has fallen for her (quite literally) and Mary has fallen for Jack. Mary and Jack’s love story is the primary love story in the film, but this love triangle adds to its complexity. The love triangle is introduced when the unnamed soldier falls in front of Mary’s car, he notices that the driver was a girl and pretends to be injured so that Mary would approach and help him. He then pretends to be delirious and says “Don’t leave me Mother”, this led to Mary embracing him, which was his end goal indicated by his smile (*Wings* 00:51:14). The unnamed soldier is not a serious love interest, the same way the military policemen were not serious love interests. The point of this scene seems to have been for comedic relief,

but the fact remains that this one soldier does seem to fall for Mary. The audience is also aware that Mary loves Jack, but Jack does not reciprocate these feelings, which elevates the significance of the unnamed soldier. It is still a possibility at this point in the story that Jack may never fall for Mary, so there is a chance that Mary may end up with someone else. The unnamed soldier is the only individual shown to display a romantic interest in Mary at this point as well. This love triangle adds to the complexity as it questions the romance between Jack and Mary by introducing a potential love interest for Mary.

A more significant love triangle is introduced later in the film when Jack Powell and David Armstrong are on leave from the war. We first see Mary, who learns that Jack is in the same town and starts to look for him (*Wings* 01:09:50). We then see Jack drunk at a restaurant or bar of some sort with a girl by his side, Celeste (*Wings* 01:12:20). Mary sees Celeste flirting with Jack and gets jealous, she tries to get his attention but Jack being drunk, sees her uniform and disregards her (*Wings* 01:13:12). Mary is upset and is crying in the bathroom, where she finds a lady who helps her change into a dress that will get Jack's attention. Once she changes, she makes her way back to Jack and sees him leaving with Celeste, she quickly grabs Jack's arm and both the girls start to fight for his attention (*Wings* 01:16:40). It is important to keep in mind that during this entire interaction, Jack does not recognize Mary but sees her as some random French girl. This is the closest Mary has been having Jack see her as a romantic partner, yet he doesn't even

recognize her. This love triangle is what allows Mary's character to grow, she learns to fight for Jack and also to let him go, which sets up their love story for its finale at the end of the movie.

The two most significant love triangles in the film are both introduced early on. The second of the two is between Mary Preston, Jack Powell, and Sylvia Lewis. At the very start of the film, the audience can see that Mary is in love with Jack. As Jack is working on his car, Mary approaches him and flirts, she even suggests to him that he should kiss the girl he loves under a shooting star, hoping it to be her (*Wings* 00:04:28). Jack on the other hand has feelings for a girl named Sylvia Lewis. He takes the car out to go take her for a drive, leaving Mary behind (*Wings* 00:07:40). This is where we are introduced to the other main love triangle of the film, that between Jack, Sylvia, and David. Jack approaches Sylvia and sees her with David, who Sylvia is in a secret relationship with (*Wings* 00:07:40). Jack has a relatively one-sided rivalry with David over Sylvia, which comes to a front during training where Jack beats up David (*Wings* 00:26:50). The result of this fight actually gives birth to their friendship, which we see evolve and grow throughout the film. Towards the end of the film, Jack learns that Mary resigned from the motor corps and a soldier named Cameron suggests it may be due to Mary being overly flirtatious and sexually active. Jack takes offense and defends Mary, this interaction prompts David to ask him if he loves Mary, to which Jack confesses that he loves Sylvia and that he believes Sylvia loves him because she gave him a locket with her picture (*Wings* 01:31:20).

David was already partially aware of this as the locket was initially meant for him and Sylvia only let Jack have it out of pity (*Wings* 00:14:30). Jack drops Sylvia picture and David notices it is addressed to him on the back. To protect his friends feelings, David rips up the image to which Jack gets furious and practically ends their friendship (*Wings* 01:33:30). This entire scene was tragic as that was the last interaction the two have before Davids death, and it was a meaningless fight. Davids death led to Jack learning that Sylvia cared for David not him, which allowed him to move on, and Jack learns that he does love Mary and the film ends with them kissing under a shooting star in the shooting star (*Wings* 02:20:30). Both of these love triangles are resolved by Davids death. The triangle of Jack, Sylvia, and David ends with only Jack and Sylvia remaining, and Jack understanding the Sylvia loved David not him. The other triangle, Jack, Mary, and Sylvia is also resolved as Jack moves on from Sylvia and accepts his feelings for Mary.

The love triangles in *Wings* were not just some side show to enjoy between the action but the driving force of the plot. Love was one of the central motivations for each of the characters, be in inside a romantic setting or a more platonic one. Love triangles created a layer of complexity to the love stories, which helped with keeping the audience engaged and invested in the story. There were likely more love triangles than the ones mentioned, but these were some that stood out to me during the viewing of the film.

Works Cited

d'Arrast, Harry D'abbadie, and William A. Wellman. *Wings*. Paramount Pictures, 1927.