

# The Eternal Woman—Elfride with a pair of blue eyes

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## 1

THE HEROINE of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Elfride Swancourt, is compared to Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*. But she has none of the joyful and satisfied feelings that are revealed on the face of Raphael's Madonna. Elfride has yet to attain maturity as a woman and appears as a woman quite indifferent to the delightful aspects of life. She also lacks that earnest pursuit of happiness which we find in many of Hardy's heroines, for example, Tess and Eustacia. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is not a portrayal of the dramatic life of a woman such as that of Tess Durbeyfield aspiring after her own happiness.

Elfride's blue eyes embody her purified soul. In them exist her true life and herself.

These eyes were blue; blue as autumn distance—blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody slopes on a sunny September morning. A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked *into* rather than *at*. (35)<sup>1)</sup>

We should not associate the blue of her eyes with the bright blue of the summer sea. Her blue eyes are no doubt clear and fresh, but remind us more of the blue of a misty horizon in autumn. One peers into them as if searching through the mist.

Sadly, however, what is at the back of Elfride's blue eyes is not apparent. But we have two men in this novel who were fascinated by her eyes. This is the love story which is to be developed through the triangular relationship of Elfride, Stephen Smith and Henry Knight. The reader, however, will find many faults in this novel if he reads it only as a simple love story. In spite of a charming heroine, it has a very awkward plot and construction. Stephen (Smith) and (Henry) Knight appear in their turns in such a way that the former is dominant in the first half and the latter in the second half. Stephen is sent

away to India just before Knight is about to appear. They struggle with one another to capture Elfride in the last few chapters. Another fault is that the relations of the characters tend to correspond almost perfectly with the blood relationships. Elfride is descended from the Luxellians; Mrs Troyton, second wife of Elfride's father was related to Henry Knight. These things are abruptly revealed one after another.

These awkward situations may seem to be faults if judged by the standard model of a realistic novel, but they can be regarded as typical Hardy facts. Hardy is by no means a so-called realistic novelist who is devoted to creating a likely picture of human life. In the world of Hardy's novels, if we use the metaphor of architecture, which was his own first occupation, one beam crosses or comes across another beam not accidentally but necessarily. This is his view of life and art.

Like many of Hardy's other works to a greater or lesser degree, this novel has a strange abstract quality. Each description is highly precise and realistic, but we feel, on the whole, a kind of purified atmosphere, a gravity-free state or a world deprived of the scent of either man or nature. Elfride and her two lovers exist powerfully as souls, but have no solid daily lives. We should read this novel as a psychological drama; an absurd drama where the human inner soul makes an effort to establish a relationship with the outer world and experiences disappointment, neglect and contempt in the end.

The problems with which they struggle are not abstract, but actual. They are the very themes of this novel. The two men who surround the heroine represent two types of love. Their love affairs have two aspects: a social aspect involving class distinction and a genuinely individual one. These two aspects are not necessarily successfully united into the world of the artistic work. The pursuit of a unity of social and individual conflicts was one of the most important artistic objectives of Hardy throughout his novel-writing career. For example, which should we see as the cause of Jude's and Sue's tragedy, their social obstacles or their individual personalities?

There is another factor on a different plane from the problem above-mentioned. This is the novel's atmosphere of mystery. When we first read this novel, we shall be puzzled by many kinds of *mystification*. The author does not merely intend to have the reader solve these mysteries; the solutions are unexpectedly simple or the author easily reveals his novelistic tricks as if he has forgotten his device of mystification, as we can see from the following example. In Chapter Five, Elfride peeped through the blind and saw the profile of a mysterious, strange woman who was meeting secretly with Stephen. This mysterious atmosphere is emphasized by the descriptions of the Endelstow House,

especially that of its fittings in the Tudor style. Elfride afterwards asks Stephen to say who that woman was, but he says, 'No; not now,' and suggests to her an eternal farewell. The reader gets more and more intrigued by this mystery. In Chapter Seven, some underhanded deeds of Stephen are described, but the author leaves much unsaid. Stephen is entering a cottage near the Endelstow Park:

Stephen crossed the little wood bridge in front, went up to the cottage door, and opened it without knock or signal of any kind.

Exclamations of welcome burst from *some person or persons* when the door was [thrust ajar, followed by the scrape of chairs on a stone floor, as if pushed back by their occupiers in rising from a table. The door was closed again, and nothing could now be heard from within, save a lively chatter and the rattle of plates. (89, italics mine)

Although the author knows the identity of the persons who welcomed Stephen, he keeps his readers in the dark, even refraining from telling whether it is one man or more than one. This is one of the methods of disguised objectification which Hardy likes to use for the purpose of mystification and other aims.

How simple and easy the exposure of the mystery is! The author beguiles the reader to this mysterious degree and stops here as if he has lost his interest in his own mystery. 'What did you see?,' asks Stephen, to which Elfride answers:

'I saw the shadow of yourself putting a cloak round a lady. I was at the side door; you two were in a room with the window towards me. You came to me a moment later.'

'She was my mother.'

'Your mother *there*!' She withdrew herself to look at him silently in her interest. (96)

Stephen, who first kept the secret stubbornly when asked by Elfride, tells her easily on this occasion about the woman who had the secret meeting with him. Why does he so easily reveal his mystery? The answer is this: the mystery is not employed for its intrinsic interest but rather as a technique to achieve some other effect and to draw the reader's attention to it. When this aim is achieved, the mystery has accomplished its function and is readily abandoned. What is emphasized in this case is one fact concealed in the core of the mystery: the humble birth of Stephen's mother. The more the mystery is

impressed on the reader, the more distinctively he becomes conscious of Stephen's intention of concealing his mother's birth and his agony underlying this intention. We need not relate the mystery to the fact that this work was first published in serial form. Mystery is certainly one of the most effective ways of holding the reader's interest, but we should not miss the author's aim above-mentioned: the aim of making the reader more clearly conscious of Stephen's agony.

## 2

If Stephen had been the only man who loved Elfride, the main theme of this novel would be the tragedy of love beset by social or class difficulties. But there is another problem in her love, a very personal and inner one. This aspect is developed in the relationship between her and Henry Knight.

The Elfride-Stephen relationship is an example of a familiar theme which will appear in Hardy's subsequent works, as we shall examine later. The theme of love affairs between lovers who belong to different classes was a virtual obsession for Hardy. For example, in 'The Waiting Supper,' a typical Hardy short story, a youth, who is a farmer, loves a squire's daughter. But they cannot marry on account of their class difference. As Patrick Braybrooke points out in his study on Hardy, that is 'the impossibility of marriage between one class and another.'<sup>2)</sup> Their difficulties are not overcome even by his going away to the Continent and returning as a rich gentleman. This short story's conclusion is that they unite with each other not through marriage, but through a more substantial relationship, a friendship, after having suffered much pain. The man wasted his whole life to achieve his marriage with her but in vain. Only his love is important to him. He easily succeeds in making a fortune and in acquiring the good manners of a gentleman, but he fails only in marriage with her. 'The Waiting Supper' is the same type of 'drama of the soul' as *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. In this story realistic details emphasize the abstract character of the lovers' daily lives. The finer the descriptions of the outer world become, the less significant they seem, and the more 'solid' become the souls of the two lovers who waste their daily lives in vain. This situation is the same as that of Stephen and Elfride.

We notice the fact that the social problem between the two lovers is solved in the transformation of it into one involving the unity of their souls. The two aspects of love presented in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the social and the spiritual, are crystalized into the very fabric of the lives of the two lovers in 'The Waiting Supper.' The love between Knight and Elfride seems to be different from that

between Stephen and her, yet they appear alike in the sense that they are each the drama of a genuinely ideal love. Besides, we cannot miss the other important fact that the predicaments arising from these two loves are intended to be resolved in the author's ironical perspective.

## 3

As for how the love between Elfride and Stephen begins, their love arises from a mutual misunderstanding. This is based on the assumptions of Elfride's father concerning the birth of Stephen. Mr Swancourt, the rector of Endelstow, had convinced himself that Stephen could not be of any ordinary family but must belong to a well-known ancient, country family—the Stephen Fitzmaurice Smiths of Caxbury Manor. He proceeds to say to Stephen, 'I congratulate you upon your blood; blue blood, sir....' (46) Stephen sadly responds to him, 'I wish you congratulate me upon some more tangible quality.' It is natural that he should hesitate to confess his humble birth, more natural that he should wish to be highly esteemed for his ability as an architect. His disappointment is caused by the fact that Mr Swancourt and even Elfride would not accept him as he is.

This misunderstanding is important, because it encourages Elfride to dream that her lover ought to be a hero in some romance. In fact she is writing her own love romance, *The Court of King Arthur's Castle*. (Into the bargain, this romance is a love story about a knight, and Henry Knight, a literary man, reviews it severely.) She then begins to idealize Stephen, a young architect, who comes to Endelstow from London.<sup>8)</sup>

Elfride's love towards Stephen is inflamed by her own romantic dream. This illusion of romance is fostered by her strange jealousy at the mysterious Tudor house of the Luxellians. Once again we return to that scene where she secretly watches through the blind.

On the blind was a shadow from somebody close inside it—a person in profile. The profile was unmistakably that of Stephen. It was just possible to see that his arms were uplifted, and that his hands held an article of some kind. Then another shadow appeared—also in profile—and came close to him. This was the shadow of a woman. She turned her back towards Stephen: he lifted and held out what now proved to be a shawl or mantle—placed it carefully—so carefully—round the lady; disappeared; reappeared in her front—fastened the mantle. Did he then kiss her? Surely not. Yet the motion *might* have been a kiss. Then both shadows swelled to colossal dimensions—grew distorted—vanished. (66)

Elfride's eyes are persistently fixed on this picture, with its exaggerated description of the mute shadow picture which 'swelled to colossal dimensions,' 'grew distorted' and finally 'vanished'; the image appears, for example, in the scene where she observes Stephen placing a shawl 'carefully—*so* carefully—round the lady,' or in her uneasy but tenacious mind wondering whether he kissed her or not. 'Surely not. Yet the motion *might* have been a kiss.' Afterwards she obstinately asks him who the lady was, and it is not difficult to suppose that the blue eyes burned with jealousy. This scene is the very world of the romance which her romantic imagination dreamed up and set in the time-worn mansion.

Before this scene, Elfride and Stephen have entered there and become fixtures in this antique-looking Endelstow House just like its antiquated fittings.

Elfride entered the gallery, and Stephen followed her without seeming to do so. It was a long sombre apartment, enriched with fittings a century or so later in style than the walls of the mansion....

Stephen was at one end of the gallery looking towards Elfride, who stood in the midst beginning to feel somewhat depressed by the society of Luxellian shades of cadaverous complexion fixed by Holbein, Kneller and Lely, and seeming to gaze at and through her in a moralizing mood. (64)

'[The] society of Luxellian shades' encloses Elfride, and in the following scene Stephen is transformed into a hero of some medieval romance.<sup>4)</sup>

Stephen walked along by himself for two or three minutes, wrapped in the rigid reserve dictated by her tone. Then apparently thinking that it was only for girls to pout he came serenely round to her side, and offered his arm with Castilian gallantry, to assist her in ascending the remaining three-quarters of the steep.

Here was a temptation: it was the first time in her life that Elfride had been treated as a grown-up woman in this way—offered an arm in a manner implying that she had a right to refuse it. (69)

She imagines herself the heroine of the dream-world of her romance, the beautiful lady of the court of King Arthur. The man 'offering his arm,' 'to assist her' is a knight waiting for her love in vain, suffering her refusal. She refuses Stephen's arm. 'It was Elfride's first fragile attempt at browbeating a lover.' (70)

Stephen becomes absolutely obedient to Elfride afterwards. This attitude of his is most dismally shown to us in the scene of the chess game played between them. He is toyed with until she displays her overwhelming dominance. She deliberately loses twice and finally gives him a finishing blow. He expresses how wretched this makes him, when he detects her ill-conceived act.

‘You have been trifling with me till now !’ he exclaimed, his face flushing. ‘You did not play your best in the first two games ? (77)

This scene offers us a typical pattern of the basic relationship between them. Elfride always gains a final domination over Stephen, after making some concession to him. Strange to say, immediately after he is beaten, she feels guilty and repentant.

He drew a long breath, and murmured bitterly, ‘Ah, you are cleverer than I. You can do everything—I can do nothing ! O Miss Swancourt !’ he burst out wildly, his heart swelling in his throat, ‘I must tell you how I love you ! All these months of my absence I have worshipped you.’ (77)

Elfride is a woman of absolute perfection to Stephen, who as an inferior always worships her. Once this relationship is established, there will be no possibility of an inversion or even a balance of power, without tremendous effort on the man’s part.

#### 4

There is an inferiority complex concerning class latent in his humble attitude towards her. Stephen, who was mistakenly believed by his lover’s father to be of aristocratic birth, is frustrated at the very outset and eagerly tries to conceal the true birth of his parents. And at last he confesses all from his up-bringing and education to his low birth ; he forsakes marriage with her and tells her he has decided to return to London. But Elfride insists on her true love for him, saying ‘No, no ; I cannot give you up ! This hopelessness in our affairs makes me care more for you.’(97)

Elfride’s psychology at this time is very interesting. She dominates Stephen and at the same time her egoism is always concealed under a hypocritical self-sacrifice. It was because of her egoistic hypocrisy that she was to injure Stephen’s pride: in the chess games she deliberately lost twice and debased him

by these losses. She tried to trap him into loving her. It is not of course a conscious trick: her egoism is almost instinctive. She fears extremely the loss of her follower. Her desire to make a departing man stay is a manifestation of her own egoism which is not perceptible to her, but is gradually revealed to the reader.

Her father knows about Stephen's true birth and he objects to their marriage, as she expects, when she puts her plan to him in these words:

We care so much for one another, papa—O, so much! And what he was going to ask you is, if you will allow of an engagement between us till he is a gentleman as good as you. We are not in a hurry, dear papa; we don't want in the least to marry now; not until he is richer. Only will you let us be engaged, because I love him so, and he loves me? (103-4)

It is very easy to discern a parallel with the theme of the knight-errant of medieval romances. Such anachronisms are characteristic of Hardy's world. Some characters start on journeys to become gentlemen or to acquire good manners, culture, fame and money. Heroines wait for their lovers in their own homes. What a hackneyed form of romance this is! And yet Hardy is not an author of romances. Elfride's plan results in Stephen's migration to Bombay and after that ironically Hardy has her fall in love with Henry Knight.

Stephen will not resist the social conventions, among which is class distinction, because of his own strong class consciousness. It is her social status and her bent for romantic fancy which cause Elfride to propose that Stephen should travel as a heroic knight. But when he agrees to her plan and tries to remove an obstacle to their marriage in such a way, we cannot but wonder at his uncritical failure to observe the social conventions. We might rather expect him to actively resist such conventions as do some of the heroines of Hardy's fictional world, e. g. Eustacia, Tess and Sue.

## 5

There appear various problems in the relations between Elfride and Stephen which are distinctive features of Hardy's world: the class consciousness; a young man's attempts to establish himself in society without any means or influential connections, with nothing but his own ability; the romantic imagination of love and its failure. We can also see here a self-sufficiency of a new-type, that of a professional intellect, such as had already been treated in the lives of Jane Eyre



or of Lydgate in *Middlemarch*. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* such Hardy themes are a little wildly expressed in the context of the novel's melodramatic, mysterious atmosphere.

Elfride's romanticism is, if seen obversely, a harsh egoism and has a latent willfulness disguising her self-justification. Stephen, who could not perceive such a shadowy aspect in her love, plays a foolish, comic part. In fact this aspect of hers can be seen in her relation with Felix Jethway. According to her explanation, Felix arbitrarily fell in love with her and died of consumption. But his mother thinks of Elfride as 'one who encouraged an honest youth to love her, then slighted him.' (328) She seeks vengeance upon Elfride, believing that she made her son die. Which do we regard as the truth? There is no evidence to justify either, but they are both partially correct. Elfride's cruelty is the result of her unconscious fickleness.

The object of her love changes from Stephen to Knight. Is this process universal in such women as Elfride? We can suppose that Hardy harboured a distrust of woman's love, to judge from his insistent pursuit of this theme. As examples of this, we easily recall Fancy's secret treachery to her lover, Dick, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Eustacia's immediate disillusion with Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*, Grace's giving up Giles Winterborne in *The Woodlanders* and Arabella's or even Sue's attitude towards Jude.

It is interesting to see that Elfride's initial preoccupation with Knight begins with a sort of jealousy. Stephen worships Knight and everytime he speaks of him, Elfride is irritated because she views it as a failure to monopolize Stephen's affection.

'But I *do love you* just the same,' she continued, getting closer under his shoulder again, 'and I don't care anything about the past; and I see that you are all the worthier for having pushed on in the world in such a way.'

'It is not my worthiness; it is Knight's, who pushed me.'

'Ah, always he—always he !' (95)

The existence of Knight begins to disperse the influence of Stephen in her mind. Before she meets him, she forms a mental picture of Knight as a different type of man, one whom she has never before encountered, one who seems to be difficult to manipulate as she pleases.<sup>5)</sup> Elfride is first torn between Knight's review of her book, *The Court of King Arthur's Castle* and a letter from Stephen.

Attack is more piquant than concord. Stephen's letter was concerning nothing but oneness with her: the review was the very reverse. And a stranger with neither name nor shape, age nor appearance, but a mighty voice, is naturally rather an interesting novelty to a lady he chooses to address. When Elfride fell asleep that night she was loving the writer of the letter, but thinking of the writer of that article. (163)

We shall examine the relationship between Elfride and Knight later but here we will trace the process whereby she gave up her love for Stephen and how she persuaded herself to do so. This problem shows us Elfride's character as well as Hardy's views on women. The author informs us of a change of her mind as follows:

Love frequently dies of time alone—much more frequently of displacement. With Elfride Swancourt a powerful reason why the displacement should be successful was that the new-comer was a greater man than the first. By the side of the instructive and piquant snubbings she received from Knight, Stephen's general agreeableness seemed watery; by the side of Knight's spare love-making, Stephen's continual outflow seemed lackadaisical. She had begun to sigh for somebody further on in manhood. Stephen was hardly enough of a man. (258)

Irony in love is one of Hardy's favourite themes. Love is not eternal in his world. Characters' feelings of love are extinguished for various reasons; the passage of time and the physical distance between lovers extinguish the flame of their love. The irony is, furthermore, deep: an overwhelming torrential outpouring of love is less effective than the spare raindrops of love. One example of this irony we see in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

Women are never tired of bewailing man's fickleness in love, but they only seem to snub his constancy.<sup>6)</sup>

Such is an unavoidable law of love which affects many of Hardy's characters. This law works in the mind of Bathsheba who first chooses Troy instead of Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

Elfride recognizes Stephen's devoted love, and yet she is dissatisfied and is obliged to feel that he is inferior to Knight. However, she seems not to regard the class distinction as important. In fact she does not think of poverty in itself as a sin.

The abiding perception of the position of Stephen's parents had, of course, a little to do with Elfride's renunciation. To such girls poverty may not be, as to the more worldly masses of humanity, a sin in itself; but it is a sin because graceful and dainty manners seldom exist in such an atmosphere. (258)

'A proneness to inconstancy' in her nature which is suggested in that quotation is the root cause of her feelings of love shifting from Stephen to Knight.

To Elfride, graceful and dainty manners are rather important virtues in her romantic realm. Stephen is an engineer, a so-called deracinated intellectual, who does not esteem such values highly. He acts according to his own values, which include a great respect for one's actual ability; Elfride, however, merely interprets this attitude as evidence of his insignificance. So she easily justifies her inconstancy.

The hour of appointment came, and with it a crisis; and with the crisis a collapse.

'God forgive me—I can't meet Stephen!' she exclaimed to herself. 'I don't love him less, but I love Mr Knight more!'

Yes: she would save herself from a man not fit for her—in spite of vows. She would obey her father, and have no more to do with Stephen Smith. Thus the fickle resolve showed signs of assuming the complexion of a virtue. (259)

The author appears to reproach her for inconstancy. He says that it is indeed 'fickleness,' even if it is skilfully disguised by 'the complexion of a virtue.'

Elfride's love is always hidden by the veil of her false romantic notions. She is one of the elite in her romantic realm and her awareness of this causes a cruel and innocent egoism, which allows her to abuse her compliant lover completely and to abandon him easily. Yet she always sees herself as an afflicted heroine in a romance. Elfride is typical of the heroines of Hardy's early novels; she is a woman who attracts a man and then keeps trifling with him. We shall follow this type from Elfride to Sue in *Jude* through Bathsheba or Eustacia. Elfride is, however, not so energetic as they. She remains feeble and airy like a heroine in a ballad. The heroine of a chivalric romance abandons servile lovers and progresses into more complicated love affairs. She enters a more delicate ideal world where the lover and the loved play a desperate game of love.

## 6

Knight changes from the object of Elfride's jealousy to a figure in her imagination who possesses the strength and greatness of maturity. This process resembles a drama in a dream being played in the mind of one woman. Feminine characters of this type often appear in Hardy's other novels and in some of his short stories. Among them Eustacia Vye is the most successful character. We also have the heroine in the short story, 'An Imaginative Woman.' These women cultivate in their imagination the image of a man whom they have never met. They love the image they create. This is a form of total self-worship or narcissism, which is free of the risk of betrayal by the loved. To trace briefly Elfride's psychological relations with Knight, Elfride's initial mental picture of Knight is revealed in the following:

The next development of her meditations was the subject of what this man's personal appearance might be—was he tall or short, dark or fair, gay or grim? (168)

She knows how sensually dangerous it is to imagine the personal appearance of a man in this way, because she tries to escape from this dream by recalling Stephen, her future husband, who has gone to India. As her uneasiness lessens under Knight's strong influence, her love of Stephen becomes lost. In this process we have one interesting description: again the scene is chess, this time games between Elfride and Knight. Elfride loses and he strongly influences her. The author shows us in some of their games how Elfride gets driven into a corner and how both her self-respect and her very selfhood are completely breaking down.

Elfride is troubled by another difference between Knight's love and Stephen's: the latter clearly and simply declares that he loves her but the former does not even suggest it. Her mind longs for Knight, the man who is not easy to manage. Here is another of Hardy's ironical views of love.

It is more interesting to examine Knight's rather perverse psychology. He begins to suffer from his love for her after she has disappeared.

The girlish presence of Elfride had not perceptibly affected him to any depth whilst he was in her company. He had not been conscious that her entry into his sphere had added anything to himself; but now that she was taken away he was conscious of a great deal abstracted. The superfluity had become a necessity, and Knight was in love. (199)

To this man with many characteristics of a dilettante, love is a superfluity. His love is not so direct and genuine as that of Stephen's. The fact that he can love her for the first time through her absence shows, in other words, that his love is highly abstract. His approach to love hardly permits him to love a woman as she really is. Elfride becomes sublimated more and more, the real traits of her character cut off in Knight's ideal thoughts. He loves this soul of hers which has been purified through such disembodiment. Hardy classifies Knight's love as philosophical, and Elfride's as romantic. It can be said that the birth and tragic end of their love are caused by their lack of reality.

Elfride, whose self-respect was destroyed in their chess games, risks her life to save Knight falling from Cliff without a Name. A change occurs in his mind. As soon as he is overwhelmed by the passion of love, he becomes extremely compulsive and simple, because he is naturally idealistic.

Knight was as honourable a man as was ever loved and deluded by woman. It may be said that his blindness in love proved the point, for shrewdness in love usually goes with meanness in general. Once the passion had mastered him, insight began to be blurred. Knight as a lover was far simpler than his friend Stephen, who in other capacities was shallow beside him. (279)

When their marriage seems almost about to take place, Knight learns of her secret fiancé's existence from the dying Mrs Jethway, and leaves for London.

Knight is the character through whom Hardy depicts the concern of a certain type of intellectual over the disparity between thought and emotion. He wanders the streets of London tormented by this problem. He is a soul deprived of the concrete reality of his life. He had certainly loved Elfride on the level of his instinct, emotion and affection, but when she comes to London to seek his affection he cannot forgive her past and her indiscretion.

The moral rightness of this man's life was worthy of all praise; but in spite of some intellectual acumen, Knight had in him a modicum of that wrongheadedness which is mostly found in scrupulously honest people. With him, truth seemed too clean and pure an abstraction to be so hopelessly churned in with error as practical persons find it. Having now seen himself mistaken in supposing Elfride to be peerless, nothing on earth could make him believe she was not so very bad after all. (337)

Knight is certainly intelligent but he has no understanding of the reality of the lives of others. He shares certain intellectual qualities with Stephen. The latter is a so-called new type of intellect, one of those who have nothing to be proud of but their own ability. Jude will be born among them. On the other hand, Knight belongs to the old, traditional type of intellectual who inherits upper-class culture and social connections. Clym Yeobright and Angel Clare represent further developments of such characters.<sup>7)</sup>

## 7

What does Elfride seek in Knight? The inner motive of her love is her strong desire for self-manifestation. In her romance she likes to imagine herself behaving like a queen or a lady among the worshipping eyes of men. Her narcissism is not so strong as that of Eustacia, who stands alone on the Egdon Heath, tending her bonfire, but Elfride has enough glamour to attract two men. Felix Jethway and Stephen Smith ruin their lives for love of her. She in turn becomes a slave of love for Henry Knight. Pride and devotion fuse in her love for Knight.

The ironical muddle of Elfride's love is a troublesome labyrinth which will be exploited in Hardy's later works. This is a knotty nexus of psychological chaos and illogical feelings. Hardy does not yet know how to unravel it in this work. His way is still the way of mystification as in *Desperate Remedies*, his first published novel. Elfride's secret relationship with the Luxellians, the mystery of her birth, the elopement, the death of Mrs Jethway. Hardy tries to explore the absurdity of love, especially the absurdity of a woman's mind, using these melodramatic elements.

Knight appears before her eyes as a typical traditional cultured man, puts out the fire of passionate love that flames up temporarily and withdraws into his old self. Stephen, having returned from India, is surprised at this 'changed man,' saying 'You out-Hamlet Hamlet in morbidness of mood.' But Knight does not change in his recognition of reality. It is not difficult to imagine Angel Clare and Clym Yeobright as coming from the same mould. They never accept others, even if they are their lovers, for that would jeopardize their idealistic fantasies. Knight can coolly contemplate himself and calculate how deep Elfride's love is, exposing himself to danger at Cliff without a Name. He is self-possessed and wanting in any of the eagerness to pursue that Angel and Clym have. To him life is only an object to observe. His intellect separates him from his emotion.<sup>8)</sup>

Stephen perceives such a morbidity in Knight. This is the same morbidity of intellect that will later attack Clym Yeobright. Those painful expressions on Clym's face<sup>9)</sup> first appear on Knight's face. In this way he is the earliest of Hardy's intellectual characters. As a man who out-Hamlets Hamlet, he does not know what to do with himself, much less with others and their pain. The tragedy of Elfride can be attributed to the fact that she is able to perceive a spiritual nobility in such a man.

Viewed from the aspect of spiritual nobility, Stephen is far inferior to Knight. He has nothing to depend on but his own ability and is terribly conscious of this fact. His class consciousness sometimes makes him do foolish things. But he has little snobbish desire to ascend the social ladder—this is not the reason he goes to India and makes money. For at this point he is no longer an architect living in the real world, but seems to be a man whose main occupation is love, not architecture, which seems merely a spare-time occupation. This impression can also be gotten from Jude, though the latter has a stronger grasp of life.

Stephen is an early example of Hardy's native returning home.<sup>10)</sup> We can think of several such characters, for example, Fancy in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Clym, Grace in *The Woodlanders*.

Stephen comes back to his home country as a successful man. But his two home comings are far from glorious. He is already alienated from the style of life of his parents and has lost sight of the pride and strength of physical work. He has acquired a very uncertain way of life, in exchange for his job as an architect in London.

He can be said to be more deracinated than Knight. The most important irony in this novel is the fact that through marriage the heroine comes back to her old place, the Luxellians, after having hovered between these deracinated men.

The world of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* unfolds along with the love affairs of the two young men and one heroine. It is presented to us as a sublime melodrama played against the romantic background of the Cornish countryside. The novel seems to contain no new advances in descriptive technique since *Desperate Remedies*. However, it can not be an exaggeration to say that one of the most important achievements of this novel is the creation of two types of intellectual and its portrait of an imaginative woman influenced by the irrational feelings of love. These are very important embryonic facts in Hardy's world.

When we read this work more deeply, we rediscover that peculiar abstractness which we have mentioned above. This world is not a reproduction of

reality, but a dramatic space wherein egos become entangled with one another as they pursue their respective idealistic visions. The two men connected with Elfride are living devotedly in a world of love and the soul. So the things outside all seem superfluous. They are men who experiment with love, their struggling souls observed by a certain distant abstract eye. Their desperate efforts look rather comic and sorrowful. Near the end of the book Stephen and Knight get on the same train to go to see Elfride, each deceiving the other to gain an advantage. How trifling, and comically sad are their lives? There we can perceive Hardy's own ironical view of man, which is the most important theme permeating this novel. This irony gives it the sadness which everyone sees in Elfride's mysterious blue eyes.<sup>12)</sup> The last state which that egoistic heroine, Elfride, reaches is the narcissist state of self-sacrifice, the height of her enormous egoism.<sup>13)</sup>

I'll do anything for the benefit of my family, so as to turn my useless life to some practical account. (371)

This is the only reason for her marriage with Lord Luxcellian who devotes his love to her. Could any conclusion be more fitting than this to end the strife of these three egocentric personalities?

### Notes

- 1) This and all subsequent references (hereafter by page number only) are to the New Wessex Edition of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (London, Macmillan, 1975).
- 2) Patrick Braybrooke, *Thomas Hardy and His Philosophy*, (New York, Russell & Russell, 1969), p. 19.
- 3) This novel was written on the basis of Hardy's own biographical experiences with his first wife, Emma at St. Juliot in Cornwall. Such biographical information is found in studies on Hardy, such as William R. Rutland's *Thomas Hardy: a study of his Writings and their Background*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1936).
- 4) Geoffrey Thurley, *The Psychology of Hardy's Novels: The Nervous and the Statuesque*, (St. Lucia, Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 1975), p. 38.
- 5) J. I. M. Stewart, *Thomas Hardy*, (London, Longman, 1971), p. 72.
- 6) Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, The New Wessex Edition, (London, Macmillan, 1974), p. 182.
- 7) Lance St. John Butler, *Thomas Hardy*, (Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 143.
- 8) Peter J. Casagrande, *Unity in Hardy's Novels 'Repetitive Symmetries'*, (London, Macmillan, 1982), p. 87.
- 9) Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, The New Wessex Edition, (London, Macmillan, 1975), p. 156.
- 10) Peter J. Casagrande, p. 87.
- 11) William R. Rutland, p. 167.
- 12) Patrick Braybrooke, p. 14.



- 13) J. I. M. Stewart, p. 69. Here the author points out that Elfride's final piece of bad luck is simply that she dies for no particular reason and regards her death as a 'final grim joke'.