



PREFERENCE AND LOVE IN THOMAS HARDY'S A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

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Abstract

This is the second Hardy book that have had the pleasure to read. The first was Far from the Maddening Crowd which is one of his later books and what most critics feel to be one of his masterpieces. As with most Hardy novels things do not always turn out how readers would wish it to and the ending is very sad but despite this the character descriptions and his descriptions of the landscape are so accurate and detailed that it is easy to imagine you hanging from the cliff with Henry as well. The book describes the love triangle of a young woman, Elfride Swancourt, and her two suitors from very different backgrounds. Stephen Smith is a socially inferior but ambitious young man who adores her and with whom she shares a country background.

Keywords: society, relationship, landscape, marriage, love-triangle, ambition.

Introduction

This novel centers on Elfride Swancourt a beautiful young woman with the "blue eyes" that the book alludes to. Elfride Swancourt—leading female character in A Pair of Blue Eyes, the holder of the blue eyes, is girlish, impetuous, flirtatious and naïve. She is granddaughter of Lady Elfride Luxellian, who eloped with the singer Arthur Kingsmore. Her mother had eloped with Mr. Swancourt when he was a curate. Elfride, the heroine of the novel is much drawn from Emma Gifford. If in writing Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy learnt to use his rural background and his rustic chorus, he showed for the first time in A Pair of Blue Eyes that he could handle characters on a large scale.

At the time of receiving the young architect Stephen Smith at Endelstow Rectory, she had written The Court of King Arthur's Castle, a romance of Lyonesse. When she meets a young aspiring architect who is socially inferior but ambitious with potential as he gets older, Stephen Smith she finds

that she enjoys the attentions that he gives her and she feels that she is falling in love with him and commits herself to marry him. But when her father finds out about Stephen's humble background, he demands that she never see him again. Stephen leaves Elfride to make his fortune in India and Elfride meets an older more established, smart decent man, Henry Knight, which forces her to look inside herself and determine what her true feelings are. She is torn between doing what is right and what her heart wants to do her, eventually the plot moves forward and in a different way from the contemporary Victorian age and the plan is motivating even today. As Jane Thomas asserts, "Hardy recognized women's physical, mental and emotional susceptibility to convention, and their consequent capitulation in the face of apparently overwhelming social pressures" (48) A Pair of Blue Eyes is one of his earlier works with enjoyable plot. This is the book where the term "cliffhanger" originated from because in one of the scenes Henry Knight is literally left hanging from a cliff.

who has hitherto been hidden from us by the darkness, was at this time of his life but a youth in appearance, and barely a man in years. Judging from his look, London was the last place in the world that one would have imagined to be the scene of his activities: such a face surely could not be nourished amid smoke and mud and fog and dust; such an open countenance could never even have seen anything of 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret' of Babylon the Second. (APBE: 15)

She fell in love with Smith, who was encouraged by her father. In the face of her father's snobby refusal to expect Stephen Smith as a suitor because of his lower-class status, she agrees to elope, but wavers and then retreats in cowardice from the endeavour, absurdly blaming her horse for her indecision about keeping her marriage appointment.

She regards her returning by night train from London to Plymouth with Stephen as a wicked escapade. She is grasped in circumstances and 'her nervous temperament anticipates those of Eustacia Vye and Sue Bridehead' (Harvey: 96) Elfride and Stephen Smith are too immature to make a successful marriage; she is vacillatory and he lacks the forcefulness to secure her pledge to him. Smith is somewhat boyish and feminine in character. Stephen's love-making is trivial and passionless, but not unreal in view of his youth and inexperience. In the same way, Elfride's prim reception of his modest advances seems annoyingly unnecessary, but after all, she is the daughter of a country clergyman, and mid-Victorian at that, so that it is second nature with her to check Stephen even while she wants him to go on. Hardy gives full-length narrative of 'Elfride's first kiss': And so awkward and unused was she none of those struggles to get out which only results in further getting in no face upon face That graceful position making sweethearts the sweeter, was not here. Why? Because experience was absent. A woman must have had many kisses before she kisses well. In the prolonged absence of Smith, she remained loyal to him. Stephen's rival in love for Elfride, Henry Knight, his somewhat older mentor, a man of intellect and a book reviewer. Hardy

succeeds in presenting a fine emotional study of an arrogant idealist, whose emotional coolness and moral rigidity looks forward to Angel Clare. His neurosis takes the form of having to be the first man to have been the focus of his woman's affections, and while he is unable to forgive Elfride her previous trivial defiance of convention, he is shaken by the eruption of his repressed sexual life. Henry Knight is the respectable, established, older man who represents London society.

A man of thirty in a speckled coat, with dark brown hair, curly beard, and crisp moustache: the latter running into the beard on each side of the mouth, and, as usual, hiding the real expression of that organ under a chronic aspect of impassivity. (APBE: 128)

Although the two are friends, Knight is not aware of Smith's previous liaison with Elfride. Elfride finds herself caught in a battle between her heart, her mind and the expectations of those around her – her parents and society. When Elfride's father finds that his invitee and candidate for his daughter's hand, architect's assistant Stephen Smith, is the son of a mason, he immediately orders him to leave. Knight, who is a relative of Elfride's stepmother, is later on the point of seeking to marry Elfride, but eventually rejects her when he learns she had been previously courted.

Elfride, out of desperation, marries a third man, Lord Luxellian. The decision finds both suitors travelling together to Elfride, both intent on claiming her hand, and neither knowing either that she is already married or that they are accompanying her corpse and coffin as they travel. The parts in the novel that shows as if things are going to turn out fine for all characters a point at which the Hardy just ruins one- or two-characters' lives in his stories. This has made the struggle to Hardy saying that he's got a cruel splash, either for his characters or for his readers. Rosemarie Morgan has attempted to explain this unevenness as a deliberate stratagem on Hardy's part, arguing that the discrepancy between his seemingly sympathetic portrait of Elfride and the narrator's location of her within an essentialist and largely negative commentary on womanhood is an attempt to placate the Guundysts' by

superimposing on the narrative a censorial voice.' (12-13) A different Victorian book is recommended as a good reading probably for a person who is feeling too good about life in the world in order to get what he has called a threatening winter-storm sensation.

The plot figures out the motive of Hardy in his text whether to create spectators of disheartened people or he has written the depressing dramas to construct a point as he wonders where fun is in being the kill-joy all of the time. He points out Hardy's liberalism where Hardy doesn't tell to us of the dangers of breaching society's ethical code but rather points out the peril in having a severe moral code. In *Blue Eyes*, Hardy has avoided a happy ending because he wanted to make his character's defeat the product of their opinions. Hardy has managed to clearly show the self-harsh quality of chauvinism, prejudice, arrogance and creativity in the characters used making the reader like them and at the point of falling apart it's hard for the reader to watch it happen.

"A Pair of Blue Eyes" is notable for its innermost scene that to extent surprised and inspired Victorian readers. In the beginning it had caused Hardy to be entangled in arguments regarding the sexual morality of his book which he strove to show by the oppressive effects of societal conventions on the human character. The novel is loaded with biographical echoes revealing the full surfacing of the graphic ironies which portray Hardy's afterward in his great works, and gave an allegation of the terrible philosophy that dominated all he wrote. The novel is a loving nature of the champion, Elfrida Swancourt, which pervades the text and concludes the book has got a remarkable where Hardy resolves to a pair of blue eyes where guilt and lament for his cold disregard of her in her lifetime took hold of him and he simply plots on a girl, Elfrida Swancourt who at the same time falls in love with an architect by the name Stephen Smith and while Stephen moves to India to make his fortune, Elfrida's distressed wavering in choosing amid of her two suitors becomes the focus of the novel.

But Elfrida must not be confounded with ordinary young feminine equestrians. The circumstances of her lonely and narrow life made it imperative that in trotting about the neighbourhood she must trot alone or else not at all. Usage soon rendered this perfectly natural to herself. Her father, who had had other experiences, did not much like the idea of a Swancourt, whose pedigree could be as distinctly traced as a thread in a skein of silk, scampering over the hills like a farmer's daughter, even though he could habitually neglect her. (APBE: 103)

Hardy's prose is beautiful and this makes it rise high with romantic Victorian fiction. The dramatic episodes especially where Knight is hanging on a face of a cliff only to be rescued using her undergarments. The characters are likeable while the dramatic incidents and landscape descriptions are as portrayed by the novel look beautiful. His story sounds intensely personal perhaps because he engaged the heart more than the head. The novel marks Hardy's use of poetical language as remarkably strong and with softening sway which in essence was powerful, turbulent and scandalous. Hardy is described as an omniscient narrator draws the characters quite accurately, passionately in addition to including some stunning comments on life and love. The way he has brought out comments like

Nobody would have expected the sun to shine on such an evening as this. Yet it appeared, low down upon the sea. Not with its natural golden fringe, sweeping the furthest ends of the landscape, not with the strange glare of whiteness which it sometimes puts on as an alternative to colour, but as a splotch of vermilion red upon a leaden ground—a red face looking on with a drunken leer. (APBE: 216-17)

Conclusion: He concludes that the book is an encourager. The story of *Blue-eyes* excited, Elfrida Swancourt as of little occurrence of the world outside her remote community, and becomes entwined with the two men: the Stephen Smith who is described as a boyish architect and Henry Knight

referred as older literary man. The previous friends turn into rivals, and Elfride faces an intolerable choice. Elfride's predicament mirrors the tricky verdict Hardy himself had to make in this novel which is either pursuing the career of architecture, in which he was conventional, or writing, where at that particular time has to establish and make a name. The story has a quality that is almost fabled, he thinks that the female character Elfride has an appeal that is common to the genres heroines. He thinks that, if the book is given a cut that is dried and cut label, this is inequality to the novel. What is interesting is that it relies on coincidence that is melodramatic which is more than in any other of Hardy's book. Some people do not like Hardy's novels but they find themselves liking this one. The story brings out the life's view which is civic in the Victorian age. This view does not come out clearly up to the last part of the novel. His artistry is also controlled in a tight way and is brought out in an immaculate way. In the novel, it is clear that will turn out well in every novel that he writes. This is especially to those who have read his earlier work, they will see this pattern of improvement in any new book.

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