

## Chapter – III

### A Pair of Blue Eyes

A Pair of Blue Eyes continues interrogation of the society's gendered ideology and the forces that victimise woman. In Desperate Remedies, the heroine Cytherea Graye struggles against the prevalent social forces to get womanly fulfillment in the male dominated society. She is defeated by the social forces and at last submits to the ideological role. But in A Pair of Blue Eyes, Hardy seems to have been able to break away from the patriarchal ideology. It is evinced in Elfride Swancourt who can be shown to have come out of the traditional role of the Victorian woman. She with her vibrant sexuality, fiction writing, adventurous undertakings and secret elopement breaks the idealized code of womanhood. The author shows her victimised by the patriarchal ideology of purity and sexual prudery. Like Tess she is the victim of society's notion of sexual morality and double standard. Hardy shows that the conventional values of the society cannot tolerate Elfride's sexual vitality, her frank and outspoken lovemaking, romance writing, and expedition on the cliff. Rather society condemns her extreme vitality as 'unfeminine'. The two male lovers who came in Elfride's life could not see her true self due to their ideological vision of womanhood. They judge her for her negligible womanly indiscretions. But they cannot love her for her infinite capacity for loving. For her unconventional role in the conventional society it is mandatory on her part to accept death. She transgresses the conventional ideology and meets with punishment. Like Tess, the author, however, shows her essential purity and innocence.

The plot of the novel A Pair of Blue Eyes is chiefly Victorian. The characters of the novel are the bearers of traditional victorian values .As Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall observe: "Victorianism' is generally understood to mean sexual double standard, hypocrisy and prudery among the middle classes" (Mendus and Rendall: 1989, 5). The gendered relationship in the novel is influenced by the sexual code which is constrained by Victorian convention. The conventional sexual codes demanded from

women were sexual ignorance and purity. The contemporary discourses in different contexts, for example, religious, philosophical, medical and literary, reinforced the sexual subordination of women. Family as a social institution advanced the theory of separate sphere of man and woman. Women were allotted the work in domestic sphere and men in the external world. In family the relation between the sexes were governed by a fundamental principle, the subordination of woman to man. This was the deep rooted heritage of the age-old division of production and reproduction. The model to which social pressure made people conform reflected the values and mandates of classic patriarchal society to a fundamental principle, the subordination of woman to man, that is, the authority of husband over wife, father over children. The Victorian bourgeoisie skillfully took up this rural model and adopted it to an urban and industrial society. At the base of this was of course the division of roles and masculine superiority. The break-up of old communal ties, the triumph of individualism, and the commercial economy and the substitution of an exchange value for a utility value reinforced man's superiority in the family and the society. The woman, on the other hand, found herself exalted and put down at the same time. Whole moral and religious considerations were subtly blended with economic needs. However the most remarkable aspect of the society were sexual repression and masculine hypocrisy. As Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall note, "What were emerging were new and powerful ways of ordering disruptive forces of sexuality, not by legislation or ecclesiastical penalties but through qualities appropriated to masculinity and femininity. New kinds of sexual order were embedded within the family within the separate worlds of men and women" (Mendus and Rendall: 1989, 5). It was mandatory on the part of women to be innocent sexually, and society constrained women's sexual behaviour by imposing on them ideological roles. The image of woman as sexually innocent and passionlessness was projected by the masculine ideology. Therefore the male ideology gave the concept of two types of womanhood: Madonna and Whore. A woman who did not conform to Victorian ideology of womanhood was termed 'whore' or 'fallen'. This contradiction in the representation of womanhood remained in the society. Hardy challenged this Victorian construction of femininity showing how his heroine breaks the barrier of masculine ideal and thus strikes at the

very base of patriarchal structure. Hardy as a lover of womankind was sensitive to the issues of the contemporary 'Woman Question'. Being a writer, he believed that in the traditional plot of the novel marriage began to assume central ideological function concealing the real power-relations between man and woman. Even risking censure of the orthodox critics Hardy broke away from the Victorian conventional plot, ending the novel without the ringing of the marriage bell. Like the radical feminists, Hardy did not believe in the traditional marriage ideology and in his later novel he came to attack the codes of marriage more bitterly. Hardy found that the conventional marriage denied a woman her power of self-determination and recognised no individuality in her. As Joseph Allen Boone observes:

*In the traditional love - plot, the sexual ideology has been most forcefully registered in the fictional idealization of the married state as the individual's one true source of earthly happiness. Likewise, the power of the fictional marriage tradition owes much of its idealizing appeal to its manipulation of form to evoke an illusion of order and resolution that, as we have seen, glosses over the contradictions, the inequities, concealed in the institution of marriage itself (Boone:1987, 9).*

Rosemarie Morgan in Woman And Sexuality in the novels of Thomas Hardy (1989) observes:

*Marriage saves all, ensures happiness ever after, but before receiving her prize of husband and marriage, convention dictated that the heroine should be brought to acknowledge her deficiencies, should then become penitent, should then reform. Love and courtship were thus co-terminus with moral reformation, and getting- married- and living- happily-ever-after provided the most desirable consummation for both characters and plot. (Morgan: 1988, 3).*

Hardy along with George Meredith and Gissing joined the battle for artistic freedom of presenting Victorian women as breaking the shackles of marriage and matrimonial bond. They tried to infuse into the women characters the impulses of re-structuring the man woman relationships. Hardy and his fellow novelists felt the necessity of moulding the women characters in flesh and blood reality. As Patricia Stubbs observes, "They almost had to re-invent women in the novel introducing the inner conflicts and sexual feelings which had been denied to women in English fiction for nearly a century" (Stubbs:1979, 58). As a writer, Hardy insisted on the need for candour in

dealing with the matters of sex. As Lolyd Fernando in his book 'New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel' (1977) observes,

As a writer Hardy insisted on the need for candor in dealing with matters of sex. In another symposium, he wrote "Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the substitution for. . . [happy endings] catastrophes based upon the sexual relationships as it is". The tragedy of sexuality lay in its waywardness, its unpredictability: desire cooled easily, and men and women sought new objects of pleasure because sexual passion ruled them far more strongly than was acknowledged'. In Hardy's view, the unreason of sexuality, the inability of men and women either to keep instinct at bay or to order it along preconceived paths, under mined the Victorian ideal of marriage as an indissoluble tie, and produced the chief conflicts and disasters besetting mortal clay ( Fernando:1977,134).

Wanting to give his heroine a new image of sexual reality Hardy had in his mind, as Rosemarie Morgan observes: "the very real fact of female desire, sexual understanding ,erotic love, none of which had any connection as far as he was concerned, with physical or moral infirmity with mental or moral derangement"(Morgan:1988,2). Hardy was constrained by the all-pervasive Victorian convention of representations of subversive woman in his novels. Elfride's assertive sexuality, her challenge to the conventional pattern of femininity, her confrontation with the patriarchal values posed a serious problem to Hardy in terms of Victorian proprieties. Hardy as a rising novelist did not dare to clash with the orthodox critics. 'Rather he resorted to concealment of his intention by deliberately imposing on the narrative structure the voice of a 'proprietary narrator' (Morgan, 1988) who denounces Elfride's 'unfeminine role' and at the same time endorses her unconventional role. Thus a contradiction is generated in the narrative structure camouflaging author's vindication of his 'unconventional' heroine. Rosemarie Morgan observes that' the contradictoriness occasioned by the asides persists uniformly and with such frequency that I am persuaded of a purposeful conflict, an intentional conflict, thrust by Hardy into the text as he grapples, on the one hand, with an unconventional heroine, and on the other, with the Grundiysts looking, as it were over his shoulder'(Morgan:1988,13). Hardy in

his later novels reflected this strategy, where he personally came to defend his heroine's sexuality and denounced prevailing sexual ethics, and sexual double standards. The Victorian social ideology demanded that a woman who transgresses the codes of femininity must be punished by withholding the patronages of her husband or lovers and dubbing her a 'fallen woman'. Hardy, in order to vindicate Elfride's sexual vitality and self-assertion tactfully, subverts the ideology showing Elfride outshining her two lovers who accidentally came into her orbit. She with her frank sexuality, loving personality and risk taking mentality rises above her lovers, Stephen Smith and Henry Knight, represented by the author as lacking in moral honesty and clarity of vision. Hardy did this willingly to demolish the conventional image of the male. They lack in moral stature and fail to infuse into the novel the conventional chivalric pattern i.e. men as the heroic rescuer and initiator of sexual relationships while women as the passive receptor of the male heroic exploits. Hardy reverses the pattern of the conventional Victorian novel. As for young Elfride's freedom from the conventional femininity, she is frank and outspoken in her sexual relationship with her lovers, her bareheaded unfettered movement on horse back, her attempts of romance writing and finally a heroic rescuer of Henry Knight breaks the received image of femininity. Rosemarie Morgan says, "this reversal of roles blatantly transgressed convention and openly subverted the ethical codes of the culture. Male control of the female depends in large measure upon his activating , and thereby regulating, her sexual responses and thus maintaining his supremacy" (Morgan:1988,8). Stephen Smith's lack of virility and initiative to claim Elfride from her father and Henry Knight's traditional morality and sexual frigidity brings down the heroine to the level of a 'fallen woman.'

The novel opens with the description of Elfride. She is seen by the narrator not as a fully grown woman, her presence can only be perceived. As the narrator observes, "As a matter of fact, you did not see the form and substance of her features when conversing with her" (A Pair of Blue Eyes,8, henceforth referred to as PBE). "Her personality is scarcely formed as she had lived all her life in retirement-The monstrari digital of idle men had not

flattered her, and at the age of nineteen or twenty she was no further on in social consciousness than an urban young lady of fifteen" (PBE 8) Elfride like the early Hardy heroine represents contradictory traits of personality in her. The narrator informs "Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface" (PBE 51). The conventional narrator shows Elfride as emotional, capricious and childish. The narrator emphasizes her youthful inexperience in early chapters of the novel. But at the same time she is also shown in the role of a nurse and a perfect host to Stephen Smith. The narrator confirms Elfride's inadequate exposure to the process of socialization. However, she in her isolated existence acquired some of the etiquette of a city woman by dint of her reading novels and magazines that she subscribed to regularly. As Jane Thomas in her book Thomas Hardy: Femininity and Dissent observes, "She is isolated in the remote rural enclave of St. Juliot and permissively parented by her father. At this stage of her development she has had little experience of the disciplinary technique incumbent upon her urban equivalent" (Jane Thomas:1999, 70). Elfride with her unfettered movement on the rectory, her self-expression through romance writing and vibrant sexuality takes a rather 'unfeminine' role before the eyes of the patriarchal society. Society demands in her stillness, passivity and passionlessness. But in a bid to break the conventional image of womanhood Hardy shows Elfride's self-assertion through romance writing and her assertive sexuality as something healthy and normal. She is neither morally degenerate nor an 'angel in the house'. But the conventional ideology demands that a woman whose role borders on 'unfemininity' must be punished by stigmatisation and withholding of male patronage. Elfride's relationship with each of her lovers places her in the discourse of sexuality. The discursive nature of female sexuality identifies female body with 'sex' and simultaneously the discourse denies the sexual feeling in her. The society demanded that a woman must be purged of her sexual feelings and an 'aberrant' womanhood must be brought to discipline by the patriarchal institutions.

Hardy represents Elfride in the backdrop of the relationship between Stephen Smith and Henry Knight, the two male lovers of Elfride. In Hardy's novels women lose their autonomy and identity as soon as they come in

contact with the male world. The male ideology of women circumscribes their freedom and spontaneous sexuality. Hardy reworks the theme of his first novel The Poor Man and the Lady in Elfride - Stephen Smith relationship. Here the poor man is represented by plebian Stephen Smith and Elfride becomes the Lady. Stephen Smith, a young architect, who is the son of a master mason comes to Endelstow on a architectural mission hosted by Mr. Swancourt, the rector of the church. Elfride Swancourt, the daughter of a snobbish rector, plays the role of a perfect hostess. When Stephen is sent to the Endelstow rectory to restore the church, he and Elfride fall in love, encouraged by Swancourt, who does not know Stephen's parents are among the lower ranks of his own parishioners. The narrator describes Stephen Smith as a 'youth in appearance, and yet a man in years' (PBE, 6) and stresses on the feminine aspects of his appearance:

His complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks almost as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupid's bow in form, as cherry-red in colour as hers. Bright curly hair; bright sparkling blue-green eyes; a boy's blush and manner, neither whisker nor moustache, unless a little light brown fur on his upper lip deserved the latter title: this composed the London professional man, the prospect of whose advent had so troubled Elfride (PBE.60).

Hardy subverts the notion of man -woman relationship - man as the dominant protagonist and woman as the submissive, self-effacing, self-deprecating being. Elfride takes a rather dominant position in this relationship and controls the situation. As Pamela Dalziel observes,

Her interactions with Stephen, however, create a more complicated representation: initially awed by him, she quickly takes up a more dominant position, observing, 'you are not critical', or experienced or-much to mind. Her self-assertion increases in proportion to his self-effacement. As his lack of a gentleman's experience gradually reveals itself in his odd manner of holding chess pieces, his non-standard Latin pronunciation and his inability to ride, Elfride increasingly takes control of the situation, allowing him to win at chess, appearing and disappearing at will during their excursion to Windy Beak and ruling his heart, 'with absolute despotism'. After the secret of Stephen's origins is discovered it is she who breaks her father the news of

their wish to marry, arguing 'gallantly in her attempts to control his opposition (Pamela Dalziel, Introduction to A Pair of Blue Eyes, 1988, xxii).

Hardy symbolically establishes Elfride's supremacy over Stephen Smith through the chess game. The author shows Elfride's dominance over the novice chess player Stephen Smith. Through this chess game Hardy subverts traditional concept of womanhood. As Mary Rimmer observes,

Hardy's use of chess-game motif is specially provocative in A Pair of Blue Eyes, where chess matches are the most resonant of the parallel events in Elfride Swancourt's two successive relationships. These two matches structure, develop and symbolize the currents of social and sexual dominance that defines Elfrides relations with her two suitors (Mary Rimmer in Margaret R. Higonnet (ed) 1993, 205).

Elfride -Stephen Smith relationship is dominated by class theme rather than the gender theme. The plebian origin of Stephen Smith disqualifies him as a suitor of Mr. Christopher Swancourt's daughter. The author depicts Mr. Swancourt as a comic character. Through the character of Mr. Swancourt Hardy satirizes the materialistic clergy. Mr. Swancourt for his material advancement marries a wealthy widow Mrs. Troyton. A snobbish and unprincipled clergy, Mr. Swancourt wants to attain a higher class mobility through marriage of his daughter with an aristocrat. Stephen Smith with his plebian origin, wrong Latin pronunciation, self-effacing mentality and ignorance of horse riding is more marginalized than Elfride. As Patricia Ingham observes 'In early Hardy works, including A Pair of Blue Eyes, the categories of woman(usually Lady) and poor man are not always discrete and that woman becomes a vehicle of metaphor for the socially disadvantaged male' (Ingham, 1989,53-54). Hardy represents Stephen Smith with the fervour and imagination of his first romantic association in Cornwall during his courtship with Emma Gifford, his first wife. Stephen Smith shares similar class position with Hardy. Stephen Smith is shown by the author as a victim of class prejudice in the Victorian society. This class vision, as George Wotton observes:

always has the status in Hardy's writing of a form of blindness. Swancourt sees Stephen as one man when he believes him to be a member of the aristocratic Fitzmaurice Smith's but as a totally different man when he find that he is the son 'of one of my village peasants'. In vain does his daughter plead that he is the same man....The same in every particular (Wotton:1982, 83).

*Elfride shows her readiness to fight with her class obsessive father.*

Elfride is shown by the author free from any class prejudice and she boldly proposes to Stephen to solemnize their marriage in London. The author castigates an effeminate Stephen who fails to claim Elfride from her snobbish father. Elfride's daring personality instigates the weak and directionless Stephen to marry secretly, and thus Stephen's weak personality is stressed by the author. As Rosemarie Morgan observes, "Stephen's discovery of Elfrides engagement to Knight in his absence spurs no hot pursuit, no valiant attempts at reconciliation, but instead a passive if not unconventional retreat from the locality" (Morgan:1988,12). Elfride becomes a victim of double standard of society's sexual morality. When she returns from London unmarried, she becomes a subject to the scrutiny of conventional morality and the society condemns her as a fallen woman, whereas the society absolves Mr. Smith of the charge of sexual immorality as he happens to be a male member of the society. As Mary Rimmer observes:

*Elfride's anomalous position after her abortive elopement resists conventional definition and leaves her without firm connections to either Stephen or her father. Although technically she has not 'fallen', she resembles 'a fallen woman' in her inability to be assimilated within orthodox.(i.e. male-headed) family structures, she is neither married nor openly engaged, nor still unequivocally an inexperienced girl (Mary Rimmer: 1993,209).*

Elfride's indiscreet decision of elopement and her past love affair with Felix Jethway, the son of widow Mrs. Jethway, exposes Elfride to the disciplinary action by the patriarchal society. As Jane Thomas observes:

*The woman who failed to discipline herself or who sought agency and freedom outside the conventional boundaries of femininity was threatend and contained by the stigmatisation of sexual looseness and punished by the withholding of male*

patronage, the consequences of which were severe in a society where women were systematically excluded from access to gainful employment in their own right. It is Stephen's failure to incite Elfride to the proper management of desire or to contain that desire by making his wife that renders her so deficient when subject to the 'normalizing gaze' of the 'manly' Henry Knight' (Jane Thomas:1999,72).

Elfride's attempt to evade the consequences of abortive elopement fails miserably due to the double standard of the prevailing sexual ideology. She is forced to take the stigma of a fallen woman and the society considers her indiscretions as something irreversible and inexcusable. This double standard of the contemporary sexual morality is presented by Mr. Henry Knight, a heavy - weight bourgeois intellectual and who looks upon woman not as an individual but 'as a mass of generalities'. As Penny Boumelha observes,

Clare is prefigured by Henry Knight in A Pair of Blue Eyes who adopts the official mid-Victorian view of women as creatures of effortless sexual immaculacy. In contrast to Clare's relatively crude application of double-standard in the later novel, Knight takes chastity as a principle to which he adheres equally in his own conduct. His prudish over-prizing of his virginity contrasts with Elfride's franker and more impulsive sexuality (Boumelha:1982, 45).

Elfrides earlier independence and defiance of conventional role over was shadowed with the advent of Henry Knight at the Endelstow vicarage. 'The reviewer and the reviewed come face to face '(PBE 211). Mr. Knight considers Elfride's effort to gain literary recognition as something unfeminine, he prefers conventional role for women:

*'But I would advise you to confine yourself to domestic scenes'*

*'Thank you. But never again!'*

*'Well, you may be right. That a young woman has taken to writing is not by any means the best thing to hear about her.'*

*'What is the best?'*

*'I prefer not to say.'*

*'Do you know? Then do tell me, please?'*

*'Well' - (Knight was evidently changing his meaning) 'I suppose to hear that she has married (PBE, 212).*

Henry Knight's patriarchal ideology cannot approve of Elfride's unconventional role as a writer. To him a woman's proper place is the hearth or home. In fact, the author explores through Mr. Knight the contemporary ideology of sex difference and its pernicious effect on man-woman relationships.

Elfride-Knight relationship is fundamentally based on the prevailing sexual ideology disseminated by the discourse of sex difference. The Victorian society adopted the politics of silence on sexuality, especially on female sexuality. The society desired that women should be not just technically pure but innocent in mind and thought as well. This denial of knowledge of sex to young English woman gave birth to a super sensitive society whose tension and acute fear of sex drew such a distinction between what was proper and what was not that it gave birth to Victorian prudery. Spheres of existence were much more rigidly separated for the middle class Victorian woman than for the working class woman or those belonging to the highest aristocracy. The latter were still independent while the middle class woman was essentially 'kept' by the society by her husband or other male members of the society. This subordination or the inferior status of woman was further reinforced by the dominant evolutionary discourse derived from Darwin and Spencer. As Jane Thomas in her book Thomas Hardy, Femininity and Dissent observes, "[They] regarded the social order as an extension of a fixed natural order whose telos was the continuing progress of the human species. Consistent attempts were made to fix gender identity in a way that fully supported patriarchal capitalism through an appeal to 'Natural Law' "(Jane Thomas:1999, 28-31).

Mr. Henry Knight's traditional ideology reflects contemporary contradictory discourse on women and sexuality. His conventional mentality cannot approve of Elfride's intellectual self-assertion, bouncing sexuality and her demand for recognition as a person in her own right. Mr. Knight with his dominant Victorian ideology misconstrues free and frank sexuality of Elfride. As a privileged member of the dominant class he thinks it his duty to purge Elfride's mind of intellectual aspirations, and normal sexuality. Knight's sense

of superiority in respect of Elfride reveals his sexist ideology. This ideology holds out the idea that women are naturally inferior to men in respect of their intellect and other emotional activities. Women take their inferiority as something natural and irreversible. It is because they know since their birth that their intellectual faculty is less developed than their male counterparts. Mr. Knight with his conventional ideology believes that women are more interested in jewellery than intellectual exercises. He tells Elfride, "Perhaps to a woman it is almost dreadful to think of losing her beauty as losing of her reputation" (PBE 386). Mr. Knight's attempt to transform Elfride into a childlike, self-effacing, submissive, approval-seeking woman finally succeeds and we are informed by the narrator that 'Elfride's mind had been impregnated with sentiments of her own smallness to an uncomfortable degree of distinctness, and her discomfort was visible in her face' (PBE 234). Elfride's sense of inferiority in respect to Knight dominates her mind when she thinks, "Ah, what a poor nobody I am!" she said sighing. "People like him, who go about the great world, don't care in the least what I am like either in mood or feature "(PBE.235).

Hardy shows the process of the internalization of woman's subjection to male domination. A woman takes her inferiority as something natural and they try to accommodate themselves to the masculine ideology of the society. With the advent of Henry Knight at the Endelstow Vicarage the novel comes to the exclusive point-the sexual domination. The author symbolically represents Elfride's gradual exclusion from the male-dominated culture through the chess game motif. Earlier in the novel the chess game motif was deployed by the author in the plot to show Elfride's dominance over Stephen Smith. As Jane Thomas observes;

The chess metaphor permeates A Pair of Blue Eyes. The turning point in the relationship between Elfride and her two lovers, Smith and Knight, is marked by a game of chess which can be read as an analogue of the disciplinary technologies which produce subjects of class and subjects of sex. The chess board represents the Victorian middle class social formation-the contract which conjoins individuals together in a society-and the king is a manifestation of Power, which operates by categorizing individuals and attaching them to their identities and which it is in the

interests of a patriarchal capitalist society to protect and defend (Jane Thomas:1999,76).

Elfride took seriously the match with Henry Knight and played the game more aggressively. She engaged her whole body and mind to win the match against her opponent. As Mary Rimmer observes:

Unsurprisingly then, Elfride goes through a much more intense struggle in the second match than in the first. Unlike Stephen she has staked almost everything on the game. She wants to use victory over Knight to repair the wounds he has administered to her self-esteem in his review, in his refusal to withdraw criticism when they met in person, and most recently, in the school masterly scolding he has given her for her daredevil walk around the parapet of the churchtower. For Elfride, the apparently neutral ground of chess is almost the only place where she can hope to make this claim (Mary Rimmer in Margaret Higonnet(ed) 1993, 210).

Elfride's defeat in the match creates a severe physical and mental strain and Hardy submits to the ideology of the biological construction of femininity showing Elfride's reaction "as the sort of 'feminine' inability to cope with intellectual stress often cited in the nineteenth century as a reason to bar women from professional pursuits, from higher education and from chess tournaments" (ibid).

It is apparent that Mr. Knight's chief attraction to Elfride remains in the idea of her 'sexual immaculacy' and in the fact that 'she had barely seen a man before him' (PBE246). We are informed by the narrator that 'Stephen Smith fell in love with Elfride by looking at her and Henry Knight ceasing to do so' (PBE 244). His obsession for finding in Elfride 'the woman with untried lips' reflects the contemporary male ideology on female sexuality. The ideology disseminated the idea that 'Victorian women had no sexual identity and no passions except emotions relating to her home and children. Their purity, the most revered aspect of Victorian womanhood, was essentially a product of sexual ignorance. The society was afraid of women's sexual freedom but they were commended by the same society as guardians of high moral standards at home. Hence women were considered both irresponsible for their own

actions and totally responsible for those of their family. Of contemporary male opinions regarding female sexuality, there is evidence that while Dr. William Acton denied female sexuality altogether, Havelock Ellis rejected that theory but believed that since female sexuality was passive it was to be initiated by the male partner. There was in general a practice of repression of sexual emotions. The ideal of restraint or chastity within and outside marriage was impinged on women rather than men. There existed within that framework of morality, a double standard, where men were concerned. As Constance Rover in her book Love, Morals and the Feminists (1969) observes:

There were forces at work in Victorian times, both in this country and America, tending to build up the ideal of the purity of women, Men had traditionally allowed themselves a liberty of sexual experiment which they denied to the women of their family, but the tendency in earlier times had been to harp upon the inherent wickedness of women and to consider they needed restraint for this to be kept in check .... The standard changed and it became acceptable to look upon women, though weak and in need of protection, as pure and, like the Queen, the guardians of family life - the 'Angel in the House'. To some extent this could be held to justify the double moral standard. If women were naturally pure (apart from a certain degraded group) then the imposition of a high moral standard was no hardship or injustice. Also, if men were highly sexed but decent women were fundamentally incapable of enjoying sexual experience, then it was only reasonable that a greater freedom should be permitted to men than to women. It was considered that a satisfactory relationship could be the better attend if the woman came to marriage totally inexperienced (could there be a fear of invidious comparisons?) and the man had had some practice in sex relations; as initiative lay with the man, the greater his experience, the better the marriage. Thus the double moral standard was rationalized. If a woman showed an active interest in sex, it was thought she had become depraved through addiction to drink or some other cause (Rover:1969, 44 - 45).

Hardy being susceptible to oppressive nature of Victorian ideology never underestimated female sexuality and he believed that due to constant pressure of social norms women were forced to conceal their normal sexual instincts. Hardy through Knight's sexual prudery and uncompromising morality exposes oppressive side of Victorian double-standard of sexual morality. Elfride's sexual appeal at 'Endelstow Tower' creates in Mr. Knight's mind

revulsion and anxiety about female sexuality. As Rosemarie Morgan observes:

*Knight rationalises Elfride's look-at-me sexual display as a vain artifice, not female desire expressly testing male response. Moral judgment thus clouds the world which his sense perceptions might at first register quite accurately, and female sexual receptivity, which urges testing behaviour, is marked down as mere vanity. Knight thus enacts the exemplary Victorian, and Elfride's sexuality remains unapproved, unproven and (for Knight's peace of mind) uncomforted (Morgan:1988, 22).*

After falling in love with Elfride, Mr. Knight began to encounter an alien sentiment in his mind. The narrator informs that Henry Knight's mental constitution is like that of a bachelor in responding to female sexuality. He looks upon Elfride as the idealized image of womanhood. He cannot see individual Elfride with her virtues and vices. The conventional Victorian morality conditioned his mind in such a way that he cannot imagine the existence of womanhood between Madonna and a whore. As the narrator observes: 'Inbred in him was an invincible objection to be any but the first comer in a woman's heart' (PBE, 246). He lives in his fantasy world and thought "Elfride had hardly looked upon a man till she saw me "(*ibid*). Jane Thomas writes, ' Henry's male ideology shows his desire for a girl with no experience is fundamentally a wish to mould the female in accordance with his fantasies' (Jane Thomas,1999). Mary Rimmer says, " Knight's relationship with Elfride a year later steps up the pressure on her considerably, because his class and professional position as a reviewer, essayist and arbiter of cultural worth enables him to dominate her much more thoroughly than Stephen can" (Rimmer, in Higonnet (ed) 1993,209). Elfride takes the role of *ultra-submissive, self-effacing, guilt-ridden woman approximating to the idealized notion of femininity*. Henry Knight thinks Elfride 'a mere child and continually overwhelms her with her own smallness'. The narrator informs that 'she never once held an idea in opposition to any one of his, or insisted on any point with him or showed any independence, or held her own on any subject. His lightest whim she respected and obeyed as law' (PBE 359).

Hardy obliquely identifies himself with his heroine's struggle for recognition as an individual in the male dominated society. The sex-biased society represented by Mr. Henry Knight wants to narrow and constrict the world of Elfride's widening horizon towards self-exploration and a new sexual identity. Her journey towards womanhood turns into a nightmare by the conventional forces of the society Hardy takes the side of his rebellious heroine to establish her superiority over her two lovers. He subverts the traditional male superiority incorporating 'the cliff scene'. In this scene the female becomes the heroic rescuer of the male. Elfride plays the role of a gallant rescuer throwing challenge to the male dominated society. Elfride's daring role is shown by the author when she comes to the edge of the cliff to rescue 'giant intellectual' Henry Knight. The insignificance of man against nature's treacherous attempt to put an end to him is stressed in this scene. Hardy shows powerlessness of Henry Knight in the scheme of nature. As the narrator observes: "He had hoped for deliverance, but what could a girl do? He dared not move an inch. Was death really stretching out his hand? The previous sensation, that it was improbable he would die, was fainter now" (PBE 272). Taking the linen from her body Elfride began to rend it into strips. She knotted end to end and afterwards twisted them like the strands of a cord. 'In a short space of time she has formed a perfect rope by this means six or seven yards long' (PBE 276). By means of her ready wit Elfride rescues this 'giant intellectual' from the clutch of sure death. Elfride out stepping her role as a traditional woman becomes a heroic rescuer. To the conventional eyes of the society Elfride's action verges on immodesty when she strips off her underclothing so that her dress seems 'to cling to her like glove' and with a rope formed from her undergarments she pulls Knight to safety. The conventional narrator endorses Elfride's heroic action. The narrator observes: "It was novelty in the extreme to see Henry Knight, to whom Elfride was but a child, who had swayed her as a tree sways a bird's nest, who mastered her and made her weep most bitterly at her own insignificance, thus thankful for a sight of her face"(PBE.276). In Henry Knight the narrator traces a kind of psychological complexity that fails to respond to Elfride's penetrating love. As the narrator observes: "It was impossible for two persons to go nearer to a kiss than went Knight and Elfride those minutes of impulsive embrace in the

pelting rain. Yet they did not kiss. Knight's peculiarity of nature was such that it would not allow him to take advantage of the unguarded and passionate avowal she had tacitly made" (PBE.278-79).

However, Hardy succeeds in breaking new ground in A Pair of Blue Eyes without jeopardising his reputation. As Rosemarie Morgan observes: "Careful not to offend against propriety, he quietly but emphatically reverses Western literary chivalric tradition in his depiction of a heroine of some courage and nerve who plays knight gallant to the hero in a scene which also goes some way to discredit his intelligence about the world around him" (Morgan:1988,22).

For avoiding direct confrontation with the conventional critics and readers Hardy tactfully represents Elfride's dominance over sex prude Henry Knight. Through Knight Hardy attacks the double standard of the sexual morality of the society. To Henry Knight sexual ignorance is mandatory on the part of a woman and woman having sexual desire is a 'fallen woman'. In the interest of patriarchal power structure ignorance of sexual knowledge is a must for a woman as woman sexuality poses a threat to the patriarchal society. Being a representative of the dominant class Henry Knight needs to control vibrant sexuality of Elfride. As Michael Foucault observes, "A policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses" (Foucault:1976,25). In discourse on sex women assume a subject position within discourse and become subjected to the power and regulation of the discourse. Elfride's past love-affair with Felix Jethway and next her abortive elopement with Stephen Smith expose her to the disciplinary system of the society. It is mandatory on her part to take punishment in the form of withholding love and patronage from her male lover. Henry Knight wrings out of Elfride her past love affair with Stephen Smith and Felix Jethway. Mr. Knight tells Elfride: "Though I own that the idea of your inexperienced state had great charm for me. But I think this :that if I had known there was any phase of your past love you would refuse to reveal if I asked to know it, I should never have loved you" (PBE,383). Like Angel Clare in Tess Mr. Knight fails to see Elfride's infinite capacity for love and her

sexuality. Hardy's conception of Knight anticipates the figure of Angel Clare. Both Henry Knight and Angel Clare reject their women for the same reason that they cannot see their lovers' infinite capacity for love and their purity. Through authorial disguise Hardy vindicates Elfride's self-concealment of her past love affair. In fact the novel is structured around concealments. The author sees no fault of Elfride in this regard. As the narrator observes: "The reluctance to tell, which arose from Elfride's simplicity in thinking herself so much culpable than she really was, had been doing fatal work in Knight's mind" (PBE,399-400). When Knight rejects Elfride for her past love affair with Stephen, the narrator observes that 'It is a melancholy thought that men who at first will not allow the verdict of perfection they pronounce upon their sweethearts or wives to be disturbed by God's own testimony to the contrary, will, once suspecting their purity, morally hang them upon evidence they would be ashamed to admit in judging a dog' (PBE,399).

Henry Knight using his privileged position as a Victorian bourgeois intellectual acts as an authority figure demanding confessions from Elfride about her past love affairs. As Michael Foucault observes:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject of the statement; it is also ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies, him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates, him and promises him salvation. For centuries, the truth of sex was, at least for the most part, caught up in this discursive form (Foucault:1981, 61-62).

Henry Knight rejects Elfride for she had been kissed by a man before him. He justifies his rejection of Elfride saying: "I looked into your eyes, and thought I saw there truth and innocence as pure and perfect as ever embodied by God in the flesh of woman" (PBE 398). To maintain hegemony

of the patriarchy it is necessary to discredit or marginalize a woman who shows healthy manifestation of her sexuality. Foucault observes: 'It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, "it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation-whether in acts or words" (Foucault:1981, 4).

Elfride challenges Henry Knight's attempt to fix her identity to the category of a 'fallen woman'. As a woman she demanded recognition from the society in her own right. Elfride emerges from a submissive, guilt ridden woman to a confrontational woman defiantly faces Knight's rejection:

Am I such a-mere characterless toy- as to have no attraction in me, apart from freshness? Haven't I brains? You said-I was clever and ingenious in my thoughts, and- isn't that anything? Have I not some beauty? I think I have a little- and I know I have- yes, I do! you have praised my voice, and my manner, and my accomplishments. Yet all these together are so much rubbish because I- accidentally saw a man before you! (PBE 383)

The narrator's sympathetic voice is heard when he accuses Mr. Knight of sexual frigidity: "Perhaps Knight was not shaped by Nature for a marrying man. Perhaps his lifelong constraint towards women, which he had attributed to accident was not chance after all, but the natural result of instinctive acts so minute as to be indiscernible even by himself" (PBE385). Elfride is stigmatised, rejected and finally silenced by the conventional morality of Mr. Knight. The author records gradual decline of a spirited, self-assertive, loving woman.

At the end of the novel Hardy vindicates Elfride's innocence and moral purity and shows her two lovers sharing the same train to ask Elfride's love and ironically that train carries Elfride's dead body. Mr. Knight and Stephen Smith vie with each other for Elfride and Hardy deliberately withdraws the heroine from getting by them. Hardy projects diminishing worth of these two male characters beside the towering personality of Elfride who loved them but instead got the stigma of a 'fallen woman'. Hardy subverts the traditional closure of the Victorian novel showing the death of the heroine at the end of

the novel. Hardy's revolt against the traditional closure of the novel is emphasised in the funeral procession of the heroine whom her two lovers have failed to win. Hardy does not believe in the ideology of the marriage that it can ensure peace and happiness. Hardy's cynicism about the institution of marriage gets bleaker in each of his successive novels and it culminates in Jude the Obscure. Hardy moves Elfride away from the world of Henry Knight's sexual double-standard and moral prudery. As Pamela Dalziel notes: Recent feminist critics have also seen a glimpse of the more assertive Elfride in the woman who becomes Lady Luxellian. It is certainly true, as Patricia Ingham has pointed out,

that Elfride marries a man who socially, financially and even physically outshines' Stephen and Knight and thus thwarts her former lovers' belated attempts to possess her.... There is an element of victory in her death: Knight and Stephen, having earlier indulged in possessive squabbling about whether Elfride died for love of one or another for them, are effectively vanquished by the painful recognition, that both have been supplanted. Even so, Elfride's triumph at the cost of her life (Quoted in Pamela Dalziel, 1998, XXVI-XXVII).

Elfride was starved of real affection from a good man. She was *hungering for a more complete relationship* and this need had grown from her efforts to explore her psycho-sexual needs, for her exploration of her womanly identity in the male dominated society. Both Stephen Smith and Henry Knight failed to provide any fulfillment to her womanly aspirations or help in her striving towards the quest of her sexual identity. Stephen was not 'man' enough to snatch away Elfride from sexually-inhibited and prude Henry Knight. Henry Knight with his mid-Victorian sexual morality and total lack of sexual drive could not accept Elfride's healthy sexuality and her extreme lovingness. Elfride teaches this inhibited intellectual giant how to love risking life. But his blunt morality remained impervious to Elfride's penetrating love.

Elfride's presentation thus questions the condition of women in the mid-Victorian male dominated society. The author shows that Elfride bears the fire of rebellion in her breast and questions the role allowed her by the society. Yet Hardy could not fully liberate her from traditionalism though he was

conscious of the changing concept of woman. However, through the presentation of this unconventional woman Hardy advances considerably in his vision of the radical womanhood. His struggle with the gendered ideology of the society continues in the next novel Far From the Madding Crowd.