

## Revisiting *A Pair of Blue Eyes* as a Saga of Love and Conflict

**Suresh Kumar**

Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Govt. College Indora  
Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India

### Abstract

Love as an emotion has always remained at the core of the existence of the human and animal world since time immemorial. As humans are social animals, they seek gratification from their emotions as per the socio-cultural norms of society or by keeping their love matters secrets as per circumstances from their parents. Authors and artists have predominantly portrayed love in their creative compositions like literature, painting sculptors, etc. Besides this, in cinema, almost every film projects love or multiple forms of love as an integral part of the plot. This research paper explores the theme of love through the experiences of the title character of the novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* i.e. Elfride Swancourt. The paper also showcases how socio-cultural norms, class consciousness, virtues assigned to female characters or gender roles, and hegemonic family structures combine to ruin the life of loving adult females in Victorian society during the latter half of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Britain. In addition to this, the paper analyses the conflict aggravated by the consistent interactions between ego, superego, and Id.

**Keywords:** Love, conflict, emotions, socio-cultural norms, hegemonic structures, ego, superego, Id.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is regarded as one of the most significant writers in English during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century England who began his writing career as a novelist and dedicated his life towards poetry after his last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895). He was trained as an architect and practiced it until the success of his first great novel, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874). *A Pair of Blue Eyes* published in 1873 revolves around a nineteen-year-old girl Elfride Swancourt who surrenders her loves while obeying her father. (Trivedi 594)

Richardson analyses *A Pair of Blue Eyes* from the perspective of sexual choices of lovers and partners (pp.303-308) whereas Arthur K Amos points out the cliff scene as the most accidental part of the novel that changes the destiny of a true lover i.e. Stephen Smith (p.162)

Sigmund Freud divides the human mind of the psyche into three parts i.e. the ego, the superego, and the id. The ego is the conscious mind. We use and work with this mind. We are aware of this mind in the present most of the time. It is the conscious mind that mediates between the unconscious id and superego to make decisions and rational thoughts. The Superego can be called our conscience. It represents socio-cultural values, ethics, and morality. It influences the way the conscious works. The id is Sigmund Freud's favourite territory. The id is the area of instincts, dreams, and desires, and all that does not come to the fore in our consciousness, is unconscious. (Nayar 65) A significant term emphasized by Freud is 'sublimation', where the repressed material is promoted into something grander or disguised as

something noble (Bary 93). The artist person, for example, possesses an especially high degree of power to sublimate for example to shift the instinctual drives from their original sexual goals to nonsexual 'higher' goals, including the goal of becoming proficient as an artist. In simple words, an individual possesses the ability to shift socially unaccepted content into socio-cultural willful acceptance. It is an ability to elaborate fantasied wish fulfilments into the manifest features of a work of art in a way that conceals or deletes their personal elements. This makes them capable of satisfying the unconscious desires that other people share with the individual artist. Sublimation not only allows the artist to overcome personal conflicts and repressions but makes it possible for the artist's audience to obtain solace and consolation from their unconscious sources of gratification which had become inaccessible to them. (Abrams 321)

Thomas Hardy presents the theme of love in the novel through the character of the protagonist, Elfride Swancourt, and her lovers i.e. Felix Jethway, Elfride Swancourt's first lover, Stephen Smith, an architect, Henry Knight, a reviewer.

The novelist introduces Felix Jethway as Elfride Swancourt's first lover who was passionate about her. It is altogether a different matter that the protagonist never had any feelings for him. The love of this lover is revealed as one-sided love or infatuation. Elfride Swancourt reveals about her first lover while returning down from the hill. The novelist writes:

“‘What was the young man's name?’ he enquired.

‘Felix Jethway; a widow's only son.’

‘I remember the family.’

‘She hates me now. She says I killed him’ (Hardy 83)”.

It was his mother, Gertrude Jethway who had written a letter to Henry Knight while warning him about his relationship with Elfride Swancourt (Hardy 342). After reading her letter Henry Knight quarrels with his beloved and leaves her for foreign (Hardy 348).

Stephen Smith is her second lover and the first person who she falls in love with. He is an architect and an assistant to Mr. Hewby and is sent to Endelstow Vicarage from London to design the tower and aisle of the Church. As stay arrangements for him are made at Mr. Swancourt's, he comes close to Elfride Swancourt who also finds her being attracted towards him. Both start spending time with each other. Mr. Swancourt also observes them enjoying their company and has no objections to this relationship, But as soon as he comes to know about his background that he is a son of a mason or that he does not belong to a noble background, he instructs his daughter to keep away from him. But till this time both fall in deep love with each other (Hardy 83) and start addressing each other as their husband and wife. Even they exchange their first kiss (Hardy 63) and in Mr. Swancourt's absence at home, they elope to London to register their marriage, but it is only at the last moment that they plan to postpone their wedding in a socially accepted way (Hardy 125).

Henry Knight is the third lover of Elfride Swancourt and the second person whom she loves in her life. He is a distant cousin of Mrs. Troyton (Hardy 150), the second wife of Mr. Swancourt the stepmother of Elfride Swancourt, and a friend of Stephen Smith. He is an essayist

and a reviewer who also reviews Elfride Swancourt's romantic novel. He also falls in love with her (Hardy 197), as she was committed to Stephen Smith, she pays no heed to him and refuses a pair of rings that Henry Knight offers to her. Now, her father wishes to see them together. Once, when she had gone towards the cliff to see the arrival of Stephen Smith in a boat from Bombay, Henry Knight appeared before her. While they talk, Henry Knight slips and hangs from the cliff (Hardy 220). As there is no one around to help, Elfride Swancourt strips off her underclothes to make a rope to save him leaving her clothed only in her diaphanous exterior robe (Hardy 229). After this scene, they come closer. Now, she does not go to receive Stephen Smith whom she had promised to rather she accepts the pair of earrings from Henry Knight (Hardy 288). Her heart undergoes a drastic change from Stephen Smith to Henry Knight. As Elfride Swancourt shares her past with him (Hardy 309), he leaves her as he demands purity from his life partner.

Lord Luxellian, a widower becomes the destiny of Elfride Swancourt. After the death of his wife, the landlord is left with his two daughters to care for. As Henry Knight had broken up with Elfride Swancourt after knowing her past and as she did not respond to Henry Smith for her third lover, she is left alone with no choices of lovers as per the present circumstances. As no lovers appear to claim her hand, her father, Mr. Swancourt decides and wed her to a widower, though she is unwilling and unhappy.

The novelist showcases the idea of how hegemony, hierarchical structure, and class consciousness are used to determine the fate of individuals in Victorian society through the depiction of relationships in the novel. For example, when Mr. Swancourt comes to know that Stephen Smith is not a Londoner and does not belong to a noble class, he tells him to leave his home and orders his daughter to leave his company. On the other hand, as he knows about the noble background of Stephen Smith, Mr. Swancourt imagines him as a match for his daughter. As a result, when Elfride Swancourt's lovers leave her due to chance, fate, or for reasons, her father gives her hand to a widower for the sake of nobility and class. In addition to this, his second marriage with a landlady, Troyton (Hardy 129) symbolizes status and class consciousness rather than mere love. In this way, one can see that the emotions of love are crushed badly by class consciousness and nobility.

Viewing the novel from the Freudian sense, the Ego is the conscious mind. The characters use this mind mostly at crucial points in their lives. For example, Mr. Swancourt's observing closeness with Stephen Smith and desiring that closeness, but prohibiting his daughter from meeting him after the knowledge of his family background is another example of the decision of a rational or conscious mind guided by the socio-cultural norms. Elfride Swancourt's and Stephen Smith's decision of postponing their wedding in London, Henry Knight's decision of leaving his beloved, Mr. Swancourt's decision of his daughter's wedding to a landlord widower (Hardy 392), and the mutual decision of Mr. Swancourt and a rich widow, Troyton (Hardy 129) are some of the primary examples of ego that resulted from the thoughtful consideration between Id and Superego. In this way, the conscious mind mediates between the unconscious id and superego to make decisions and rational thoughts.

The Superego can be called our conscience. It represents socio-cultural values, ethics, and morality. It influences the way the conscious works. In the novel, the Superego is

represented by class consciousness, nobility, virtues of character or chastity, and the Church and these factors tremendously influence the course of life of the characters and of the novel as well.

The Id is the area of instincts, dreams, and desires, and all that does not come to the fore in our consciousness, is unconscious. The desires of the three lovers of Elfride Swancourt, the one-sided love of Felix Jethway, the second pair of lovers addressing husband-wife to one another, Henry Knight's desire to know more about her past, the cliff episode, and everything that is the part of the unconscious mind and seeks instant gratification is the id in the novel.

Sublimation is another Freudian term associated with psychoanalytical theory. Through sublimation, an individual transforms socially unaccepted content into socio-cultural wilful acceptance. For example, Elfride Swancourt and Stephen Smith elope to get married in London. But as Elfride Swancourt thinks about hurting her father with this action of hers, she pauses and shares with her lover. It is at this stage that they both decide that Stephen will get a good job in Bombay and after earning money for three years he will keep the wedding proposal before her father and till that time she will remain loyal to him. As a result, Stephen Smith proves his words but Elfride Swancourt does not remain loyal to him. The novelist immortalizes Stephen Smith as a true lover through sublimation, faithfulness, and his commitment to literature.

The above analysis shows that the novelist presents a tale of love in the novel through complex relationships. Various factors like class consciousness, status, nobility, values, norms, and customs club together to determine the future of love relations. Besides, the conflict between the Id and the Superego or between the suppressed desires, unfulfilled dreams and values, ethics and morality showcases how it influences the present balanced or situational decisions. Moreover, one finds the dominance of hegemonic relationships like the father controlling the direction of the life of the protagonist in the novel during the latter half of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England.

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