

THOMAS HARDY
A PAIR OF BLUE EYES



A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

THOMAS HARDY was born in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, on 2 June 1840; his father was a builder in a small way of business, and he was educated locally and in Dorchester before being articled to an architect. After sixteen years in that profession and the publication of his earliest novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871), he determined to make his career in literature; not, however, before his work as an architect had led to his meeting at St Juliot in Cornwall, Emma Gifford, who became his first wife in 1874.

In the 1860s Hardy had written a substantial amount of unpublished verse, but during the next twenty years almost all his creative effort went into novels and short stories. *Jude the Obscure*, the last written of his novels, came out in 1895, closing a sequence of fiction that includes *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891).

Hardy maintained in later life that only in poetry could he truly express his ideas; and the more than nine hundred poems in his collected verse (almost all published after 1898) possess great individuality and power.

In 1910 Hardy was awarded the Order of Merit; in 1912 Emma died and two years later he married Florence Dugdale. Thomas Hardy died in January 1928; the work he left behind—the novels, the poetry, and the epic drama *The Dynasts*—forms one of the supreme achievements in English imaginative literature.

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THOMAS HARDY

A Pair of Blue Eyes



Edited with Notes by
ALAN MANFORD

With a new Introduction by
TIM DOLIN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan South Korea Poland Portugal
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Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

Text, Note on the Text, Explanatory Notes © Alan Manford 1985
Chronology © Patricia Ingham 2002

Introduction, Select Bibliography © Tim Dolin 2005

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First published as a World's Classics paperback 1985
Reissued as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 1998
New edition 2005

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Data available

Typeset in Ehrhardt
by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd., St. Ives plc., Suffolk

ISBN 0-19-284073-8 978-0-19-284073-8

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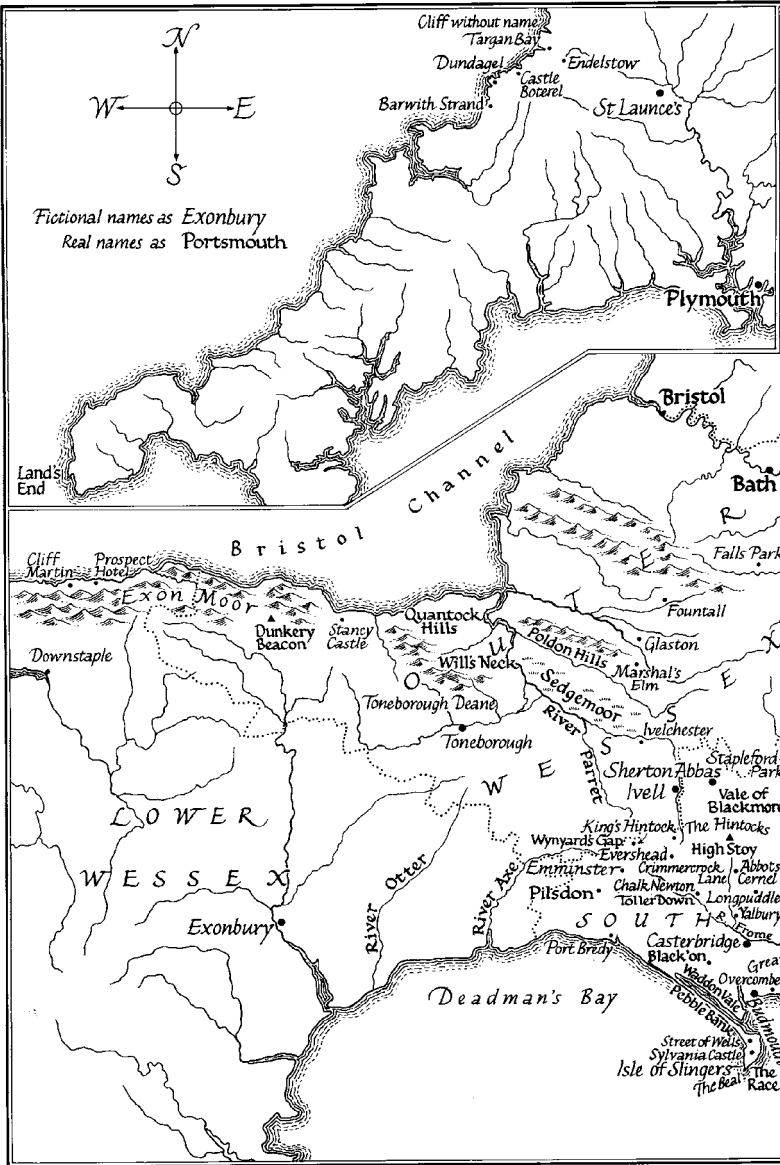
GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE first concern in the Oxford World's Classics editions of Hardy's works has been with the texts. Individual editors have compared every version of the novel or stories that Hardy might have revised, and have noted variant readings in words, punctuation and styling in each of these substantive texts; they have thus been able to exclude much that their experience suggests that Hardy did not intend. In some cases this is the first time that the novel has appeared in a critical edition purged of errors and oversights; where possible Hardy's manuscript punctuation is used, rather than what his compositors thought he should have written.

Some account of the editors' discoveries will be found in the Note on the Text in each volume, while the most interesting revisions their work has revealed are included as an element of the Explanatory Notes. In some cases a Clarendon Press edition of the novel provides a wealth of further material for the reader interested in the way Hardy's writing developed from manuscript to final collected edition.

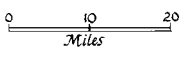
I should like to thank Shirley Tinkler for her help in drawing the maps that accompany each volume.

SIMON GATRELL



HARDY'S WESSEX

OF THE NOVELS AND POEMS



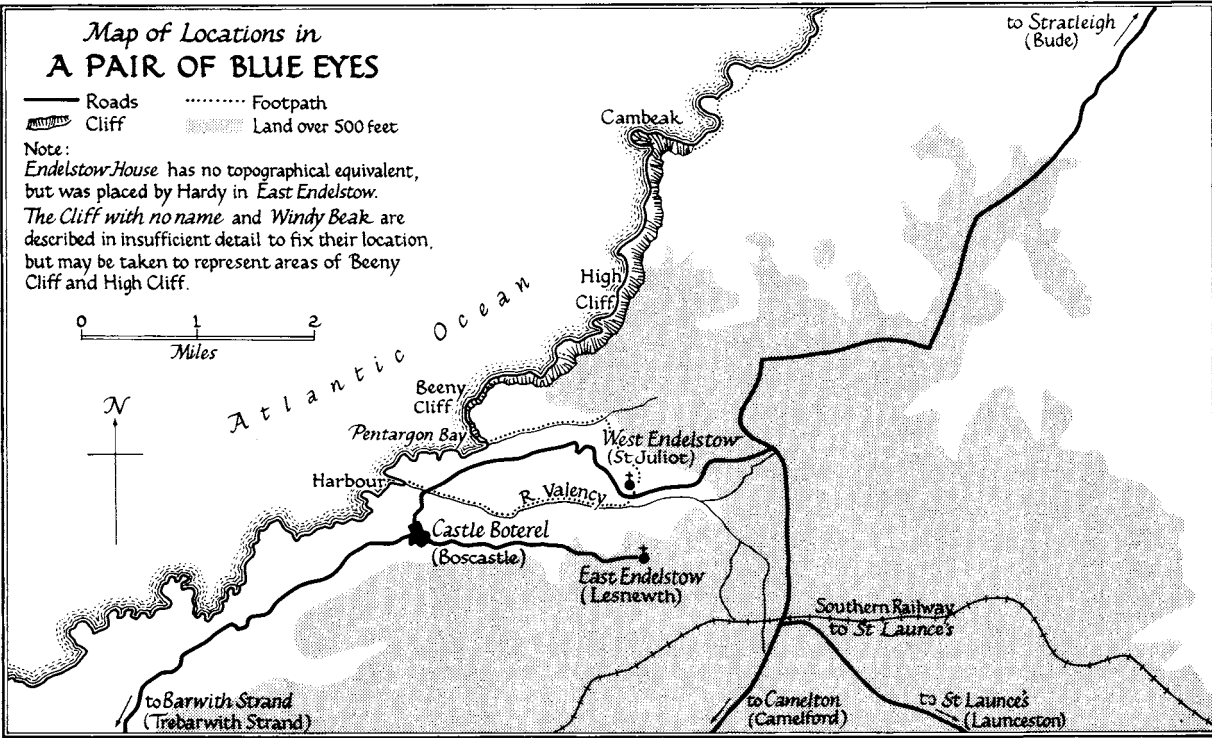
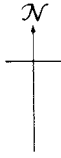
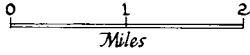
• Lightship

The Channel

Map of Locations in A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

- Roads
- Footpath
- ▬▬▬ Cliff
- ▨▨▨ Land over 500 feet

Note:
Endelstow House has no topographical equivalent,
 but was placed by Hardy in *East Endelstow*.
 The *Cliff with no name* and *Windy Beak* are
 described in insufficient detail to fix their location,
 but may be taken to represent areas of *Beeny
 Cliff* and *High Cliff*.



INTRODUCTION

Readers who do not wish to learn details of the plot will prefer to treat the Introduction as an Epilogue.

Between professions

A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) was written at an important time in Thomas Hardy's life, and marks an important stage in his artistic development. He was in his early thirties, in love, and thinking of marriage, a course of action that would compel him to settle on a dependable career. But would that career be in literature? When he began writing this novel in earnest, Hardy was a practising architect, living in London and working on a series of competition designs for school buildings for the newly appointed London School Board, set up in the wake of the Forster Act, which had legislated for national elementary education a couple of years earlier. But although he 'applied himself to architectural work during the winter 1871–72 more steadily than he had ever done in his life before', he was neither very successful nor very happy.¹ He had spent sixteen years training for and working in the profession—exactly half his life to then. Yet he was still little more than a well-qualified assistant, who measured sites and worked up drawings based on the designs of the various senior architects who employed him.²

Hardy's own ambitions as a writer were largely to blame for this failure to advance in the profession, for architecture was not the vocation he had chosen. His mother, a dominant figure in his life who was ambitious for her intelligent son, had sent him to be articled to the Dorchester architect John Hicks, while he, for his own part,

¹ Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), 89.

² T. Roger Smith in this case. The most responsibility Hardy was ever given was on the rebuilding of Turnworth Church near Blandford Forum for G. R. Crickmay, the Weymouth architect, in 1869. See C. J. P. Beatty, 'The Part Played by Architecture in the Life and Work of Thomas Hardy (with Particular Reference to the Novels)', Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1963), 112–27, and *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy* (Dorchester: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1966).

dreamed Jude-like dreams of entering the Church as a university-educated man.³ But he was also cautious and pragmatic, and determined to make the most of his chances to get ahead. His early career shows all the signs that he actively sought advancement in his profession. Working in the office of Arthur Blomfield in the Strand, he entered (and won) architectural competitions, spent his spare time researching the history of Western art in the National Gallery, made sketches and notes from buildings, and prepared for the voluntary examinations of the Royal Institute of British Architects.⁴ But his literary aspirations remained foremost, and the mid-Victorian building boom allowed him to pursue them. As early as 1865, a note pencilled inside the back cover of a notebook shows that he was thinking of 'cutting Arch^e if successf:' in literature; but then, as if alarmed at his own recklessness, he scribbled another more reassuring note underneath: '—If lit. fails, try Arch'.⁵

Hardy spent a long time waiting for a 'clear call . . . which course in life to take—the course he loved, and which was his natural instinct, that of letters, or the course all practical wisdom dictated—that of architecture'⁶ while he struggled to establish himself as a writer. Although *A Pair of Blue Eyes* was the first of his books to be published under his own name, it was his fourth novel, and brought to an end an apprenticeship that had begun six years earlier in 1867 with *The Poor Man and the Lady*. That first effort was, by Hardy's own account, an inflammatory social satire which might well have been published but for a timely piece of advice from George Meredith, who read the manuscript for the publishers Chapman and Hall and cautioned its young author (who was 28 years old by then) that it might irreparably damage his literary career at the outset. Hardy eventually abandoned the idea of trying to place *The Poor Man*.⁷ But like many other writers starting out, he could not bring himself to let it go altogether, and he kept the manuscript close to hand, plundering it when he needed material for his first three published novels: a sensation melodrama, *Desperate Remedies* (1871);

³ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 31.

⁴ See the 'Schools of Painting' notebook, dated 12 May 1863, in *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard H. Taylor (London: Macmillan, 1978), 105–14.

⁵ Thomas Hardy, *Thomas Hardy's Studies, Specimens &c. Notebook*, ed. Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 59, 89.

⁶ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 61.

⁷ After trying the novel unsuccessfully with Smith, Elder and Tinsley in 1869.

a pastoral idyll, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872); and this one—which is, significantly, much more difficult to pin down to any single genre.⁸ In this respect *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is quite different from its predecessors, and much more like the fiction that would follow it: it ‘not only cannot be compared with [the work of] other writers, but cannot be classified under any known formula of literary art’, as a critic observed in a mid-career survey of Hardy’s fiction in the *Quarterly Review* in 1879.⁹

A Pair of Blue Eyes was also Hardy’s first attempt at a novel written specifically to be published first as a serial in a popular magazine. We know from a surviving letter to William Tinsley, principal of the firm of Tinsley Brothers, who had published *Desperate Remedies*, that he had begun work on it as early as October 1871. Having ‘nearly finished’ a ‘little rural story’ (*Under the Greenwood Tree*: already completed by then, in fact¹⁰), he told Tinsley that he had set it aside at the request of ‘critic-friends who were taken with D.R.’ to make a start on another novel, ‘the essence of which is plot, *without crime*—but on the plan of D.R.’¹¹ The following April he alluded again to the ‘3 vol novel’, with which, he wrote, he had decided to proceed ‘as rapidly as possible’.¹² At that stage, Hardy seems not to have made much progress at all, however. His dealings with Tinsley over *Desperate Remedies* had been far from satisfactory,¹³ and nothing had come from hopeful overtures towards other more prestigious publishing houses (Macmillan had rejected him three times). By the middle of 1872, not hearing back from Tinsley about the proposed new novel, he had descended again into a period of ‘mental depression over his work and prospects’.¹⁴ If we take his own word for it, he was on the

⁸ Hardy himself described them consecutively as ‘a plot, an idyll, and a romance’ (the title of ch. 5 of the *Life and Work*). On *A Pair of Blue Eyes* as a romance, see below.

⁹ Unsigned survey review, *New Quarterly Magazine* (Oct. 1879), in R. G. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 60.

¹⁰ It had been rejected by Macmillan barely a week earlier than this letter, which seems to have been written with a view to interesting Tinsley in the more sensational—that is, Tinsleian—*A Pair of Blue Eyes* (Tinsley’s had published Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the most famous of the sensation novels, in 1862).

¹¹ *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88), i. 13–14.

¹² *Ibid.* 16.

¹³ Hardy had paid £75 of his own money up front to cover the initial publishing costs, and the novel had not done well. Nevertheless, some copies had sold, and he was anxious that Tinsley keep his side of the bargain and settle the account.

¹⁴ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 59.

verge of abandoning novel-writing altogether and devoting his energies to his architectural career when, in July, Tinsley unexpectedly requested a novel for a serial in *Tinsleys' Magazine*. Put on the spot, Hardy confessed he had 'nothing ready': 'On looking over the MS,' he wrote back hurriedly, 'I find it must have a great deal of re-consideration.'¹⁵ Yet by 15 August, barely a month later, the first instalment of the novel had already appeared; by the following March the serial version was finished; and by May it had been published, with substantial revisions, in three volumes.¹⁶ This gruelling regime set the pattern for the next two decades or more of Hardy's writing life. Having 'cut' architecture as he had so often dared himself to do, and with no other earnings or inherited wealth to fall back on, he came to depend upon the additional income earned from serial publication, despite the constant pressure of deadlines, the interference of editors, the sacrifice of artistic unity to the exigencies of the part-issue, and the considerable constraints of popular taste.

With no previous experience of serial publication, and just a few weeks to produce the first instalment, Hardy needed to be resourceful. He finished the School Board drawings at the end of July and left immediately for Cornwall to make a start. His intention was to draw substantially upon the abandoned *Poor Man* manuscript for some London scenes which he would weave into a story he had 'thought of and written down long before', and which he now adapted, with considerable inventiveness, to locales, people, and events ready to hand in his own life.¹⁷ He settled to work in St Juliot, the Endelstow of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where he had been courting Emma Lavinia Gifford, the sister-in-law of the local rector, for eighteen months or more.¹⁸ He made the hero, Stephen Smith, an assistant architect like himself whose father was a rural master mason and whose mother came from a (supposedly once wealthy and noble) labouring-class

¹⁵ Hardy, *Collected Letters*, i. 17.

¹⁶ Tinsley offered Hardy £200 for *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (then entitled *A Winning Tongue Had He*) (*ibid.* i. 17).

¹⁷ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 77. Robert Gittings argues that Hardy's cannibalization of the *Poor Man* manuscript may be seen in the adaptation of the squire's name, Allancourt, to Swancourt (*Young Thomas Hardy*, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1978), 164).

¹⁸ Hardy did not marry Emma until 17 Sept. 1874, when *Far from the Madding Crowd* was appearing to acclaim in the prestigious *Cornhill Magazine*.

family.¹⁹ Like Stephen, Hardy had been sent to St Juliot in March 1870 to take measurements and make preliminary drawings for the restoration of the medieval church there, and had been met by Emma on his arrival.²⁰ In a memoir written forty years later she recalled how her brother-in-law had been laid up with gout and could not be present to meet the London architect, and how she ‘had to receive him alone, and felt a curious uneasy embarrassment at receiving anyone, especially so necessary a person’. He stayed a week, but returned, as Stephen does, later in the summer for a three-week holiday, during which time the courtship flourished. Encouraged, he ‘came two or three times a year from that time’, and Emma rode her ‘pretty mare Fanny’ with Hardy walking by her side as she ‘showed him some of the neighbourhood—the cliffs, along the roads, and through the scattered hamlets . . . to Tintagel and Trebarwith Strand . . . [and] other places on the coast’.²¹ Like Elfride, Emma found herself falling in love with a mysterious London professional. A few sentences from their only surviving love letter, written by Emma, is wonderfully redolent of the visionary atmosphere and erotic feeling Hardy was trying to capture in the novel: ‘This dream of my life—no, not dream, for what is actually going on around me seems a dream rather. . . . I take him (the reserved man) as I do the Bible; find out what I can, compare one text with another, & believe the rest in a lump of simple faith.’²² But the reserved man turned out to be, as Stephen is, her social inferior, and Emma agreed to marry him against the express wishes of her family (the scene in which Stephen’s suit is contemptuously dismissed by the Reverend Swancourt echoes a scene between Hardy and his future father-in-law).²³

Over the years *A Pair of Blue Eyes* became more and more closely associated with the St Juliot idyll in Hardy’s mind, particularly after Emma’s death in 1912 released a flood of Cornwall poems—‘When I

¹⁹ Hardy was undecided about the Smiths’ exact social position in the manuscript and early editions, where John Smith is variously a journeyman mason and a master-mason.

²⁰ Her recollection of the meeting is recorded in part in ch. 5 of the *Life and Work*, and in Emma Hardy, *Some Recollections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²¹ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 73, 74.

²² She later burned the rest: this one escaped only because Hardy transcribed it and absorbed part of it into Chapter XIX of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. See *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3.

²³ Although her father was a retired solicitor, and therefore a professional man like Hardy, her uncle was a canon in the Church of England, and later became Archdeacon of London.

Set Out for Lyonesse', 'Near Lanivet, 1872', and many of the 'Poems of 1912–13'. To some extent the intimacy of these autobiographical elements, and their later role in the provenance of some of Hardy's greatest verse, have obscured other no less significant connections between *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and Hardy's life in the early 1870s. In particular, as we have seen, this novel was a product of 'the uncertainty of his position between architecture and literature'.²⁴ It is also true, however, that Hardy himself associated 'literature', then as later, not with fiction but with poetry. So it would be truer to say that *A Pair of Blue Eyes* was a product of the uncertainty of his position between one profession and another—what fellow novelist George Gissing disparagingly called 'the profession of letters'.²⁵ Before he felt confident of choosing the literary profession he had to be sure it 'paid him well': as well as, or better than, architecture.²⁶ Perhaps, though, 'choose' suggests a resolve which Hardy did not really possess. As Henry Knight tells Elfride in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, '... I don't choose [to write] in the sense you mean; choosing from a whole world of professions, all possible. It was by the constraint of accident merely. Not that I object to the accident' (p. 148). The accidental constraints of economic necessity also forced Hardy to put aside any aspirations to 'literature' in order to make a living. He wrote to Leslie Stephen in 1874: 'Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the proper artistic balance of the completed work, but for the present circumstances lead me to wish merely to be considered a good hand at a serial.'²⁷ There was nothing very unusual about this situation. Hardy wanted to be a poet but needed a steady income: like so many others in England and elsewhere he was 'forced to abandon poetry sooner or later for the sake

²⁴ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 189. Gissing considered his own (and Hardy's) fiction to be literature, however. It has been argued that Hardy's claim to have been primarily a poet, and only accidentally a novelist, was a later invention of the *Life and Work*—a case of Hardy re-creating himself as the 'pure literary man': a 'piece of *petit-bourgeois* wish-fulfillment' (see Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History: A Study in Literary Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1989), 154). It should be remembered, of course, that he *did* write poems in the 1860s; and that he was already publicly talking down his fiction as early as 1900, when he only had one (not very successful) volume of poetry to his name: see William Lyon Phelps's recollection in James Gibson (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: Interviews and Recollections* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 64.

²⁶ Hardy reportedly told Tinsley (no very reliable source) that 'unless writing fiction paid him well, he should not go on with it' (Gibson (ed.), *Interviews and Recollections*, 8).

²⁷ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 102.

of literary activities which are much better remunerated, such as writing novels of manners'.²⁸ Still, the image of the 'literary man'—a man of cultural authority, university-educated and of independent means—had a powerful hold over him. And as we shall see, he found a way of reconciling the man of letters and the popular novelist, cultivating in its place an appealing up-to-date substitute: the image of the literary professional.

Hardy's extreme conscientiousness about the business of being a professional literary man has often been remarked,²⁹ but it is less often noticed that something of that conscientiousness came out of, or was brought out by, the architectural training which so deeply instilled professional values in him. In fact, in the final analysis Hardy's architectural training not only made him an architect, it made him a novelist: it offered him a model of professional identity and culture which bestowed credibility and legitimacy on a career choice that was no less difficult to him because it was unavoidable. Fiction allowed Hardy—as architecture had, and as it allows Stephen Smith in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*—to move up in the world, retaining the social identity he had already assumed as a 'practical professional man' in London.³⁰ That identity was effectively a substitute for class identity. It both concealed and stood in for his social origins. Thus, the Reverend Swancourt assumes that the 'London professional man' (p. 14) is of good character (he can be trusted with his daughter) and therefore unimpeachably of good family. The 'guarantee of integrity' . . . is the main distinguishing mark of the professional',³¹ who asserted his competence in performance, reliability, and conduct, and justified the charging of professional fees, by a transparent, standardized process of training

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, referring to writers in France at roughly the same time, in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 261.

²⁹ See Widdowson, *Hardy in History*, 138.

³⁰ Hardy strongly associated London with practicality. In the *Life and Work* he wrote: 'Hardy used to relate humorously that on the afternoon of his arrival he called to inquire for lodgings at a house where was employed a bachelor some ten years older than himself, whose cousin Hardy had known. This acquaintance, looking him up and down, was sceptical about his establishing himself in London. "Wait till you have walked the streets a few weeks", he said satirically, "and your elbows begin to shine, and the hems of your trousers get frayed, as if nibbled by rats! Only practical men are wanted here"' (p. 40).

³¹ Barrington Kaye, *The Development of the Architectural Profession in England: A Sociological Study* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), 17.

and examination.³² The architectural competitions which Hardy entered and won were just such forms of accreditation, and it is significant that he valued them highly as professional credentials (not just as architectural credentials), citing them in biographical entries for the rest of his life.

Professionalism came at a price, however, and Hardy's growing disenchantment with architecture in the 1860s paralleled its rapidly accelerating professionalization. Later he recalled nostalgically how he had set out for fame and fortune in London in 1862, the year of the second International Exhibition at South Kensington. Like its illustrious predecessor, the 1851 Great Exhibition, this extravaganza of industrial and domestic design associated cultural advancement with the industrial arts. It was also, more significantly for Hardy's interests, the first showcase for the reformist arts and crafts movement (William Morris's firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. exhibited there). Under the influence of John Ruskin and the Gothic Revival, the Arts and Crafts movement sought to integrate the work of creative artists into the built environment. When Hardy went to work for Blomfield, one of the leading figures in the Gothic Revival, he must have imagined that his future lay as such an artist-architect. For all his diligent self-education in the history of art and architecture, however, he soon discovered that the architect was,

more than any other artist . . . at the mercy of his personal employer, and of Committees. After making the most scientific and skilful plans, elevations, and sections, the result of much immediate study and of long experience, he finds the whole disorganized or materially injured by the presumptuous interference of some person or persons in power, whose chief or only qualification arises from official influence and length of purse.³³

In the 1860s there was already a degree of hostility between artist-architects and professional architects—those for whom the provision of professional services and the promotion of professional values overrode the claims of creative expression.³⁴ Hardy, who described himself as 'a "literary architect"—a person always suspect in the

³² Kaye, *The Development of the Architectural Profession in England*, 16.

³³ John Britton and Augustus Charles Pugin, quoted *ibid.* 117.

³⁴ Outright hostilities broke out in the 1890s: see Richard Norman Shaw and Thomas Graham Jackson, *Architecture a Profession or an Art; Thirteen Short Essays on the Qualifications and Training of Architects* (London: J. Murray, 1892).

profession in those days',³⁵ carried the terms of that conflict into his writing career. The professional writer and the artist–writer vied with each other. They were, respectively, the novelist and the poet—or so Hardy would come to insist in his later years, forgetting that fiction was something more to him than 'a trade, which he had never wanted to carry on as such'.³⁶ From the beginning he was both the exemplary professional, proud to be known and relied upon as a good hand at a serial, and the artist faced with the architect's old 'dilemma of artistic autonomy',³⁷ believing his work would always be compromised by the demands of the professional relationship.

Not only did Hardy become a professional novelist, he became, as Simon During has argued, 'the great novelist of professionalism and professional mobility',³⁸ whose fiction explores the conflict between the rewards and costs of that mobility. The attainment of a profession may have proved to Hardy 'the most effective means of moving through the traditional class/caste system'.³⁹ But it brought intense 'personal pressures', as Raymond Williams described them, pre-eminently a loss of continuity from his own customary past and an always uncertain connection with the cultured metropolitan society he had entered, pressures described and enacted in his fiction in 'the making and failing of relationships, the crises of physical and mental personality'.⁴⁰ In particular, During writes, there are three crucial points where these pressures erupt in Hardy's novels. First, sexuality is dangerous because it cannot be brought under the control of the forces of professionalism, and is 'not attuned to the career trajectories of the professional or the kind of educated woman who might become a professional's or rich man's wife'.⁴¹ Secondly, Hardy attempts to overcome the decline of old rural life-ways and work practices by fictionalizing 'continuities as well as discontinuities between the peasantry and the professional so as to conjure away the history of religious dissent, the centrality of urbanization, the key

³⁵ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 189.

³⁷ Kaye, *Architectural Profession*, 31.

³⁸ Simon During, 'Hardy or James? Thoughts on Academic Literary Discrimination Today', in Tim Dolin and Peter Widdowson (eds.), *Thomas Hardy and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 61.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 61.

⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973),

199.

⁴¹ During, 'Hardy or James?', 61.

economic and social function of the industrial proletariat'.⁴² And thirdly, there is a profound loss of intimacy with nature.

A Pair of Blue Eyes, as it carried Hardy headlong out of one profession and into another, brought those personal pressures very close to the surface. If they are only imperfectly transmuted into larger themes in the novel, that was because he was inexperienced and harried by deadlines. But all the elements identified by During are there, and in a particularly overt form: the clash between sexual desire and professional ambition; and the attempt to fuse artisanal and professional values, and in doing so reintegrate urban professionalism into rural social forms and bring it into closer contact with the natural world. Like other Hardy novels, the plot of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is motivated by a group (here, as elsewhere in Hardy, a triangle) of socially and sexually mismatched romantic protagonists, and it turns on the tension between their uneven mobility quite as much as their unequal standing. The story opens—in comic mode, significantly—as a thwarted romance between a rising professional in transit from the rural artisan classes to the urban middle classes, and a socially ambitious, educated young woman who is his social superior but whose mobility is curtailed by her sex. She is trapped in genteel poverty, without access to money or profession (except, not very realistically, the profession of female author). Her only recourse is to marry—above her own class ideally.

Stephen Smith: the practical man

Stephen Smith is not the first of his social type to appear in Hardy's fiction. Like Will Strong, the hero of *The Poor Man and the Lady*, and like Edward Springrove in *Desperate Remedies*, he is déclassé, and cannot speak of his social origins.⁴³ But he is also more sunny-natured and practically minded than his predecessors, and eminently adaptable to the different worlds in which he finds himself. If he is discomfited by the discovery of his social deficiencies—how chess pieces should be handled, how Latin is pronounced, how to ride a horse—he nevertheless remains rather proud of his achievements, and confident of professional advancement and the social and financial advancement it will bring. Like Jude Fawley after him, Stephen

⁴² During, 'Hardy or James?', 62.

⁴³ Widdowson, *Hardy in History*, 141.

equates education, social mobility, and wealth: ‘Shan’t I be glad’, he bursts out to Elfride, ‘when I get richer and better known, and hob and nob with [Henry Knight]!’ (p. 60).⁴⁴ He is also optimistic about the long-term success of his suit, and assured that when it ultimately succeeds it will make all the difference to his place in the world: ‘Why, to marry her would be the great blessing of my life,’ he declares to his mother, ‘socially and practically, as well as in other respects’ (p. 85). True to the professional ethos, Stephen is perfectly frank about the practical advantages of marrying up—franker than the equally pragmatic gold-digger the Reverend Swancourt, who secretively woos and wins the rich widow Mrs Troyton. But Stephen’s courtship does not go smoothly because the practical man has almost no practical experience either as an architect or as a lover. He is, as we hear repeatedly, ‘a very blooming boy’ (p. 23) who, although he grows in ‘professional dignity’ (p. 33), comes quickly to be dominated by Elfride. A number of critics have observed that this relationship reverses normal gender roles. The socially inexperienced, feminized Stephen is completely subjugated to the more self-assertive though equally inexperienced Elfride. She has been brought up in remote and solitary parishes by her father (her mother is dead), and has consequently enjoyed a certain tomboyish freedom from the constraints of femininity which emboldens her in Stephen’s company. Class, in other words, temporarily overrules gender, at least until Knight supersedes Smith. Then, her boldness trails off into gaucheness, and social and sexual hierarchies return to normal. Elfride is put back in her place—both as a woman and as the daughter of a nouveau riche clergyman.⁴⁵

However, Hardy also makes the point in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that professionalism overrules class, first by masking it—nobody asks who Stephen Smith *is* until he himself lets Elfride in on the secret of his parents: until then it is just assumed that he moves ‘in the ordinary society of professional people’ (p. 68)—and then by erasing it. When it becomes known locally that Stephen has been ‘fêted by deputy-governors and Parsee princes and nobody-knows-who in India; is hand in glove with nabobs, and is to design a large palace,

⁴⁴ In the first-volume edition Stephen looks forward to being ‘richer and better educated’ (*A Pair of Blue Eyes*, ed. Pamela Dalziel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 65).

⁴⁵ ‘Class . . . emerges at this stage as a more significant social factor than gender’ (ed. Dalziel, p. 23).

and cathedral, and hospitals, colleges, halls, and fortifications, by the general consent of the ruling powers, Christian and Pagan alike' (p. 322), his lowly parents find themselves suddenly fêted by the local petit bourgeoisie, who had all previously snubbed them. Stephen duly arrives back in England 'a richer man' (p. 338) and a middle-class man: 'the definite position in which he had rooted himself nullified old local distinctions' (p. 338).⁴⁶ And all this, he modestly confides to Knight, is but a 'natural professional progress' (p. 325).

But there is a price to be paid for the rise of the practical man: the sacrifice of individuality and originality of thought. The mental constitution of the aspiring Stephen, the narrator comments at one point, was one 'rare in the springtime of civilizations' which

seems to grow abundant as a nation gets older, individuality fades, and education spreads; that is, his brain had extraordinary receptive powers, and no great creativeness. Quickly acquiring any kind of knowledge he saw around him, and having a plastic adaptability more common in woman than in man, he changed colour like a chameleon as the society he found himself in assumed a higher and more artificial tone. He had not many original ideas, and yet there was scarcely an idea to which, under proper training, he could not have added a respectable co-ordinate. (p. 88)

Stephen's father, on the other hand, in common with 'most rural mechanics', had 'too much individuality to be a typical "working-man"—a resultant of that beach-pebble attrition with his kind only to be experienced in large towns, which metamorphoses the unit Self into a fraction of the unit Class' (p. 83):

There was not the speciality in his labour which distinguishes the handicraftsmen of towns. Though only a mason, strictly speaking, he was not above handling a brick, if bricks were the order of the day; or a slate or tile, if a roof had to be covered before the wet weather set in, and nobody was near who could do it better. (p. 83)

This concern with the loss of the old broad-based artisanal skills under the increasing demand for specialized industrial work practices would occupy Hardy again in *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *Jude the Obscure*,⁴⁷ but here, in its first expression, it is very close to home.

⁴⁶ In the first-volume edition, 'the definite position in which he had rooted himself nullified all suckers of derivation from peasant ancestors' (ed. Dalziel, p. 363).

⁴⁷ In both cases it is closely linked with his own situation as a writer. Sol and Dan Petherwin take to specialist house-decorating in *The Hand of Ethelberta*; Jude Fawley takes on the life of an artisanal mason to pay his way to Christminster.

What he had encountered as a young professional architect was the same demand for specialization; and what he feared about becoming a professional writer was the struggle to reconcile his individuality and originality with what he called in the *Life and Work* the undoubted 'pecuniary value of a reputation for a speciality'.⁴⁸ He would ultimately solve this problem by specializing in stories about the Dorset countryside and culture of his early life which very often dramatize the interaction, although not always the continuity, between pre-professional and professional cultures (most obviously in the relationship between Henchard and Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1885) and Giles Winterborne and Edred Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders* (1887)). But until the mid-1880s Hardy was deeply resistant to being stereotyped as a rural romancer, and deeply resistant, as an autodidact in the mid-Victorian tradition, to the specializing tendencies of the encroaching professional age, believing, as he had in the mid-1860s, that there was 'no more painful lesson to be learnt by a man of capacious mind than that of excluding general knowledge for particular'.⁴⁹ If he constantly returned to Bockhampton to work on the early novels, it was not because he was conscientiously planning to write about life in rural Dorset. Rather, that life—the life of a successful rural skilled tradesman like his father—was 'always his refuge from stress'⁵⁰ and offered him, as a hopeful writer prohibited the privilege of being a poet and uneasy with the prospect of becoming a commercial popular novelist, a way of conceiving himself as an artist:

Probably our countryman [John Smith] was not such an accomplished artificer in a particular direction as his town brethren in the trades. But he was, in truth, like that clumsy pin-maker who made the whole pin, and who was despised by Adam Smith on that account and respected by Macaulay, much more the artist nevertheless. (p. 84)

Henry Knight: the literary man

To build a career as a popular writer 'with a real literary message',⁵¹ Hardy's aim was to unite the best aspects of his two ideals: the ideal

⁴⁸ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 105.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 56.

⁵⁰ Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, 122.

⁵¹ Hardy, *Life and Work*, 105.

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