

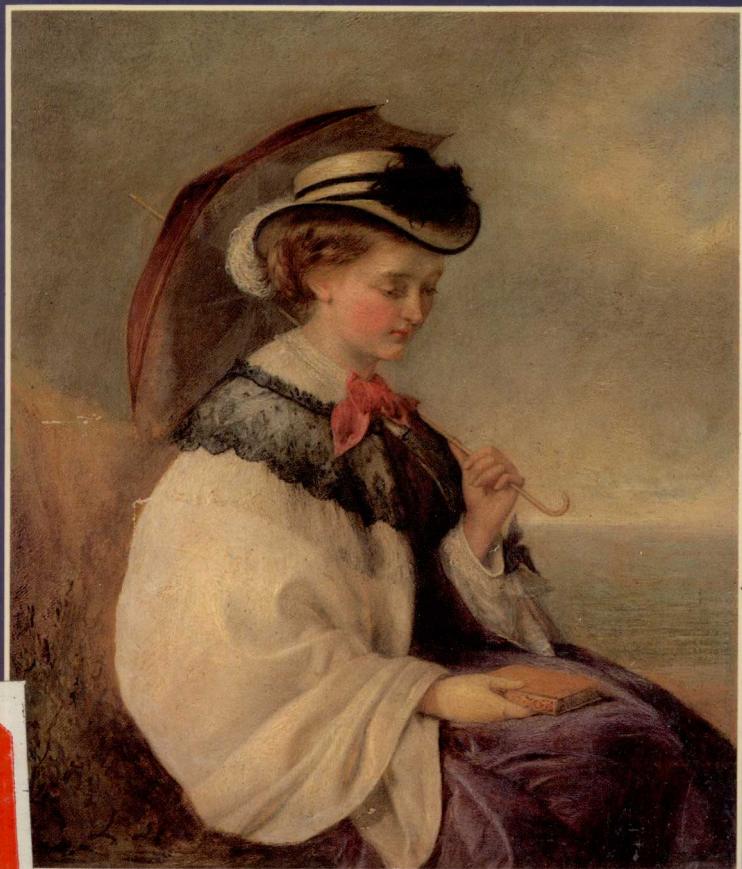
THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



OXFORD

THOMAS HARDY

A PAIR OF
BLUE EYES



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A Pair of Blue Eyes



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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE first concern in The 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



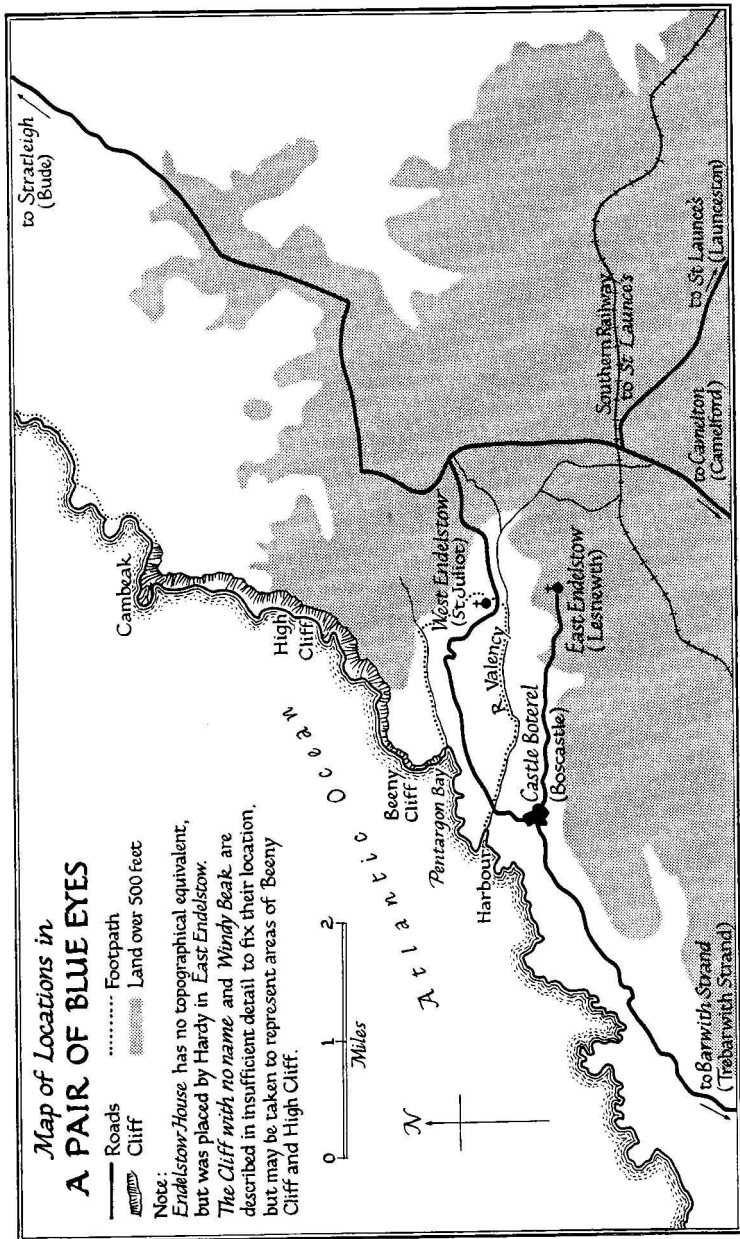
Map of Locations in

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*.

0 1 2
 Miles



INTRODUCTION

THOMAS HARDY'S *A Pair of Blue Eyes* appeared first in *Tinsleys' Magazine* from September 1872 to July 1873 and was published in three volumes by Tinsley Brothers in May 1873. In several respects it was a landmark for Hardy. Although it was his third novel to be published, it was the first to be serialized and the first to bear his name. Perhaps most importantly, during its publication he turned from his career as an architect to become a full-time writer. It was also a novel that meant a great deal to Hardy, which is one reason why it deserves wider attention than it has often received.

Hardy's special regard for *A Pair of Blue Eyes* stemmed from his involvement with its subject matter. The autobiographical element in fiction is a dangerous area for speculation. However, consider the following scenario: a young architect arrives at a remote Cornish rectory near the sea to survey the church with a view to restoration; when he arrives, the rector is laid up in bed with gout; the young man is the son of a master-mason and is largely self-educated; he was born in the country but has recently been in London; he is greeted by a young lady with abundant curly hair who is of about his own age; the young lady, whose name begins with 'E', looks '*living*', is an accomplished horsewoman, plays the pianoforte, and is interested in literature; the two fall in love, have various outings in the neighbourhood, but her father does not approve. This could be a brief summary of the beginning of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. It is, however, also a reasonably accurate account of Hardy's own meeting at St Juliot, Cornwall, in 1870 with Emma Lavinia Gifford, who became his first wife.

One should nevertheless beware the simplistic equating of Stephen Smith and Elfride Swancourt with Thomas Hardy and Emma. For one thing, it should be noted that Hardy and Emma at their first meeting were considerably older than their supposed counterparts. Hardy himself refuted the suggestion that in the character of Stephen he was presenting 'a picture of his own personality' (F. E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p. 73), and maintained that he was nearer in character to Henry

Knight (although there seems also to be in Knight much of Hardy's own friend and mentor, Horace Moule). He nevertheless admitted that 'the character and appearance of Elfride have points in common with those of Mrs Hardy in quite young womanhood', but emphasized that 'the plot of the story [was] one that he had thought of and written down long before he knew her' (*Life*, p. 74).

How far this last statement is an attempt at creating a smoke-screen it is difficult to say, but it is apparent that, however much of the novel's plot was actually in existence before he met Emma, St Juliot and its environs provide the setting for the story. There are also incidents in the story (such as Stephen's journey to Endelstow and the voyage from London to Plymouth) that are obviously based on experiences of Hardy that would have post-dated any such original version of the novel. Moreover, the character of Elfride Swancourt is so closely connected with that of Emma that Hardy even placed in Elfride's mouth words written by Emma in a letter to him; and the associations that the novel had with their courtship caused him, when an old man in his seventies, to revise *A Pair of Blue Eyes* as a direct result of the great emotional reawakening Emma's death in 1912 had brought about in him (until then, for example, he had considered it necessary to disguise the Rectory as a vicarage). It is interesting to note in this connection that Hardy borrowed material from *A Pair of Blue Eyes* for his play *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*, which was written after Emma's death and is closely related to the memory of Emma and Cornwall.

Many other characters, incidents and places in the novel can be plausibly reckoned to have their counterparts in Hardy's own experience (or to be based on something of which he would have heard). Nevertheless, the novel is not an autobiography: it is a work of fiction in which Hardy draws upon his own knowledge and experience and transmutes them for his own purpose. It is perhaps safest to say that although *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is not pure autobiography, it does have clearly recognizable links with the author's life, which in itself is not unusual for a novel.

Although the structure underlying the plot of *A Pair of Blue*

Eyes is that of a succession of suitors for one girl (Felix Jethway, Stephen Smith, Henry Knight, Lord Luxellian, and ultimately Death), the action of the book is essentially concerned with the love triangle of Elfride Swancourt, Stephen Smith and Henry Knight. It is the innocence of these three characters that provides the novel's foundation. Throughout the novel there is constant repetition of key-words such as 'naïve', 'ingenuous', 'boyish', 'girl', 'inexperienced', 'ignorance', 'childlike', and related forms. Each of the three main characters is an innocent in his or her own way, and in their respective innocences lies the seed of their small tragedy; innocence (or lack of worldliness) is the tragic flaw of each.

Elfride Swancourt, whose character is the keystone of the novel, has lived in an isolation that has afforded her no eligible suitors or experience of courtship. She is compared to Miranda, Shakespeare's heroine who had seen no man other than her father. At the beginning of the story we are told that she 'had lived all her life in retirement . . . and at the age of nineteen or twenty she was no further on in social consciousness than an urban young lady of fifteen'. She is a girl 'so intensely *living* and full of movement', but given to impetuous acts such as jumping from moving carriages or walking round parapets upon church towers. Children look upon her 'more as an unusually nice large specimen of their own tribe than as a grown-up elder'. Elfride's girlish vitality and lack of worldly taint are part of her attraction in the eyes of her admirers; in fact Henry Knight is almost obsessive about his taste for 'untried lips'. The same qualities also serve to enmesh her in her relationships with the two men: her love for Stephen, for example, is described (at the point just before they decide to elope) as 'a fancy rooted in inexperience and nourished by seclusion'. Moreover, the same ingenuousness (together with an inability to make decisions, a propensity for vacillation) also contributes to her downfall. It leads first of all to her ill-considered elopement with Stephen; but perhaps more importantly, it causes the ruination of her relationship with Knight because she naïvely believes that her elopement was so wicked.

Elfride's ingenuousness is connected to her involvement with Romances. Her father remarks: 'You get all kinds of stuff into your head from reading so many of those novels', and indeed

A Pair of Blue Eyes had originally opened with Elfride reading a novel (with a sad ending—see Appendix). She also writes a Romance, about which her world-wise step-mother comments, ‘the regular resource of people who don’t go enough into the world to live a novel is to write one’, and which Knight in his role as reviewer criticizes for its lack of realism. Hardy classified *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in his ‘Romances and Fantasies’: as Don Quixote immersed in books of knight errantry set out to emulate the heroes of those tales, so Elfride, likewise steeped in Romances, unconsciously becomes herself the heroine of a Romance. Unfortunately, the damsel of our story is failed in different ways by her knights (one ‘no baron or lord’, one named ‘Knight’, and one a Lord), and, like the Lady of Shalott, dies.

Stephen Smith, the first suitor to enter Elfride’s heart, is patient, loyal and self-effacing, yet also ambitious. At the time when he first meets her he is described as ‘but a youth in appearance, and not yet a man in years’. He fails her because of his immaturity: at the ‘critical juncture in London’ he had been ‘too youthful’ to force her to go through with the intended marriage. They might also have married in Plymouth but for his ignorance of the laws governing licences. His youthful good looks had attracted her, but he had not the strength of character to win her permanently, although ironically she claims to love him because he is so docile and gentle. Some of his initial attraction in Elfride’s eyes may also have been that she believed him to be an experienced town man; but even before the crucial point in London she had already had occasion to be condescending about his ignorance of horses and his strange untutored method of playing chess.

Allied to this last point is the matter of social class, which also plays an important part in the relationship of Stephen and Elfride. Stephen is socially inferior to Elfride (and Knight), but not financially (that is, until her father remarries). Stephen’s father is an artisan and his mother of yeoman stock. His mother in particular is keenly sensitive to the family’s place in the social stratification; and as they move slightly upwards socially because of their own labours and Stephen’s successful career in the professional class, she shows herself to be as snobbish as Parson Swancourt (who will have nothing to do with Stephen once he knows the truth about his social origins).

At the one end of the novel's social scale is Lord Luxellian, to whom the Swancourts are related; and at the other are the ordinary villagers with derisory names such as Worm, who serve as little more than a passing commentary (notably in the scene in the vault, with its echoes of Hamlet's gravediggers). Between these lie the Smiths, and it is interesting to note that in his revisions Hardy made careful adjustments to their social standing. For example, in the Wessex edition he made modifications in several references to their present and past status. Mr Smith is described at one point as a 'working master-mason' rather than a 'journeyman mason', and at another as a 'builder' rather than a 'mechanic'. In the Wessex edition Mrs Smith had been a 'dairy-woman' who after her marriage continued to 'manage' a dairy, rather than, as in previous texts, a 'dairymaid' who continued to 'attend' a dairy; we later learn that when preparing for a visit from Stephen she 'has had the house scrubbed' instead of doing the scrubbing herself. Furthermore, the epithet 'sorry' is deleted when applied to Stephen's antecedents, and the language of the Smiths is rendered appropriately more standard by the elimination of many dialect forms.

Nevertheless, although the difference in social class between Elfride and Stephen plays an important part in the novel and the embarrassing proximity of Stephen's parents is a factor that causes Elfride's passion for Stephen to cool, it is the young couple's immaturity—their inability to cope with the situation—that is at the root of their separation.

Henry Knight, who displaces Stephen Smith in Elfride's affections, is an older and stronger character than Stephen. Nevertheless, he too fails Elfride because of the one side of his character that has not developed. Despite writing ingenious essays upon the nature of women, he knows little of them at first hand: 'He could pack them into sentences like a workman, but practically was nowhere'. He is sexually repressed, and although Elfride rescues him physically from the cliff, she fails to rescue him sexually, despite the symbolic use of her underclothes as a makeshift rope. Even during the 'impulsive embrace in the pelting rain' they do 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'. Knight has rationalized his lack of sexual experience into 'an invincible objection to be any but the first comer in a woman's heart', and it is this somewhat unrealistic and unreasonable ideal upon which his love for Elfride founders. When he eventually drags from Elfride the fact that she has had previous admirers, instead of accepting her for what she is (together with her love, which he does not doubt), he abandons her: 'Having now seen himself mistaken in supposing Elfride to be peerless, nothing on earth could make him believe she was not so very bad after all.'

Although I have mainly confined my comments to the three main characters, this is not to suggest that the less important characters are without interest; even a minor character such as Unity, Elfride's maid, for example, is more rounded than her importance in the novel perhaps warrants.

On a mechanical level Unity is used by Hardy mainly as a convenient device for sketching in the details of Elfride's last days, from the time of her abandonment by Knight to her death. But Unity also serves both as a foil to Elfride and as a means of focusing the reader's sympathy towards her. As a servant, her life necessarily revolves around her mistress; the small details of Elfride's life (such as her ear-rings) are important to her also. In contrast to Elfride she is practical and dependable, qualities which when added to devoted loyalty serve Elfride well. When Elfride returns exhausted from her ill-fated elopement, Unity is there to cover up for her; when Elfride gets herself into a state of nervous collapse playing chess with Knight, Unity is there to nurse her and wait patiently at her door; when Elfride has lost both Stephen Smith and Henry Knight and her father is cold towards her, Unity is the one person who notices that she is looking unwell, the one person in whom she confides. A minor character is thus given a role of some subtlety.

A Pair of Blue Eyes has rightly been regarded as an apprentice novel of a great novelist, but it has more to commend it than this might suggest. It has an acknowledged charm and has certainly had some famous admirers (notably Tennyson and

Proust). It was well received on its first publication and has also been a reasonable commercial success.

That it is an apprentice work is in itself not without interest: not only does it show Hardy learning his craft, but it also foreshadows themes and motifs that continued to engage him. Thus, for example, there is a heroine torn between lovers (not uncommon in Hardy's fiction), a wedding that fails to take place, a liberal amount of arbitrary and ironic fate, much mention of class and genealogy (two connected and important concerns of Hardy), a sprinkling of social satire, the continual presence of Death, and the central study of innocence.

These themes and motifs continue in the later fiction, and most of them play important parts in Hardy's last two major novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. In *Tess*, for example, the very title refers with irony to the importance of genealogy in the novel, while the sub-title ('a pure woman faithfully presented') testifies not only to Hardy's protectiveness towards his heroine but also to the innocence of her motives. *Jude the Obscure* (with very different circumstances) has a wedding which does not take place (in Part 5, Chapter 4), on which occasion Sue Bridehead when she talks of vacillation and says 'I don't like it here' echoes Elfride's words (at the beginning of Chapter XII). Jude Fawley could also be said to have much in common with a Henry Knight who says 'I consider my life to some extent a failure' and 'a high soul may bring a man to the workhouse'.

A common criticism of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* concerns certain defects in craftsmanship. Michael Millgate, for example, says that under pressure of serialization it became 'a kind of rag-bag of information, ideas, descriptive vignettes, personal experiences, fragments of the author's brief literary past', which 'could only resist integration within a firmly controlled overall structure, obscure the central issues of the book . . . and dangerously over-extend [the] story . . .' (*Thomas Hardy: his career as a novelist*, 1971, p. 67). He does, however, go on to say that 'if these are major reasons for the failure of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, they are equally sources of its continuing interest'. Hardy himself states in his 1912 preface that 'to the ripe-minded critic of the present [book] an immaturity in its views of life and in its workmanship will of course be apparent', and it must

be admitted that the circumstances of the book's composition have caused flaws in the workmanship. The pressure of time brought about by writing for immediate magazine publication undoubtedly caused Hardy to salvage material from his first and unpublished novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (such as the scene in Rotten Row), and also to use thinly veiled autobiographical matter (for example, the voyage from London, which I shall discuss later). Furthermore, the first printed versions of the novel were justly criticized for 'affectation' of word and phrase, and there are instances where Hardy seems to use quotation and aphorism to little artistic effect. The first of these defects he alleviated by replacing words like 'synthetised' and 'filamentous' with 'cried' and 'stringy' respectively, but the modern reader may still consider the quotations to be too obtrusive. There are also occasions where the tone of the book is perplexingly uncertain (there is, for example, an element of farce about the grimly ironic train journey at the end of the novel). Nevertheless, the novel is a well constructed whole and also shows a great awareness of craftsmanship at a local level.

The novel is given unity not only by the use of a number of parallel situations (for example, the chess games, the excursions to Windy Beak, and the conversations at Felix Jethway's tomb), but also by patterns of imagery, the interweaving of themes, and the numerous ironies involved in the situations and relationships. As an illustration of the last of these unifying factors one might take the scene in which Stephen Smith visits Henry Knight in his chambers at Bede's Inn (Chapter XIII). It is a scene that falls chronologically between Elfride's two love affairs, and marks the last occasion upon which the two men meet in their old roles of protégé and mentor. It contains certain ironies which, whilst partly deriving from the timing of the scene, serve to link the past with the future. One of the novel's main ironies is of course that Stephen Smith should be replaced in Elfride's heart by the man who had been his mentor—the man whom he had described to Elfride and her father as 'the noblest man in the world . . . the best and cleverest man in England'. So here there is irony in the fact that Stephen turns to Knight for advice and reassurance about his course of action with regard to Elfride, and there is particular irony in Knight's counselling that 'she

will not stick to you through, say, three years of absence in India'. That Elfride's novelette should also be present in Knight's chamber is a further irony in that it is the instrument that serves to unite Knight and Elfride. Irony is not only part and parcel of Hardy's view of mankind and a vital element in his way of describing mankind's affairs, it is also here a kind of cement, binding together the plot.

Evidence of craftsmanship at a local level is contained in the careful revision of detail which Hardy carried out at successive stages of the novel's publishing history. For the Wessex edition, for example, there are many minor revisions that show Hardy's concern with the particulars of his craft as a novelist, whether in each case he was merely making a slight stylistic improvement, or whether the effect he was seeking was of a more general importance to the themes, plot, characterization or imagery of the book. For example, one of several discernible patterns of stylistic revision concerns the reduction on certain occasions of unnecessarily overt authorial comment conveyed by adverbs and adverbial phrases. Sometimes this may involve deletion of redundant words: it may be unnecessary to tell us that Elfride spoke 'with apprehension' or that Stephen lifted his eyes 'earnestly'. However, in other instances it is clear that Hardy was removing the authorial comment as part of a general intention: a number of adverbs and adverbial phrases that were attached to Knight's speeches to Elfride are deleted. This occurs particularly in passages in Chapter XXXII in which Knight quizzes Elfride about her past loves. The adverbs in all the following were deleted: 'Knight asked in a distinct voice'; 'said Knight sternly'; 'said Knight contemptuously almost'; and 'he said imperatively'. The effect of these deletions is to soften slightly Knight's manner during the interview, which effect can be seen more clearly when other revisions are also taken into account. Compare, for example, these unrevised and revised passages:

'Tell me, then,' said Knight sternly. 'And remember this, no more fibs, or, upon my soul, I shall hate you. Heavens! that I should come to this, to be made a fool of by a girl's untruths—' [Osgood, McIlvaine edition, p. 377]

'Tell me, then,' said Knight. 'And remember this, no more evasions, or upon my soul, I shall be thoroughly vexed. Heavens! that I should

come to this, to be made a fool of by untruths—' [Wessex edition, p. 362]

The word 'evasions' is not only more precisely what is involved here, but it does not treat Elfride as a child in the way that the use of 'fibs' did. The deletion of 'a girl's' is likewise designed to treat her as more adult.

One instance in the novel of 'immaturity . . . in its workmanship' is the presence of the voyage from London to Plymouth, which, in its original form at least, was quite irrelevant to the novel's plot and development. Hardy had himself undertaken such a voyage (in August 1872) and evidently made use of the experience to furnish matter for the novel he was contracted to write. However gratuitous the episode may have been in the earliest texts of the novel, it is arguable that by the time Hardy had finished with his several revisions he had integrated it more successfully into the novel by using it to depict more clearly the development of Elfride's state of mind. The seed of the ruination of her relationship with Knight is contained in her feelings of guilt about a past which to her appears to be unspeakably wicked. The spectre of this past is embodied in the person of Mrs Jethway, who seeks vengeance for her son's death. Instead of dismissing this woman from her mind as being a harmless eccentric, and instead of discussing her past affairs frankly, Elfride allows herself to be overawed by Knight's prim insistence that he could never love where he was not the first, and she develops a paranoid fear of Mrs Jethway and the revelations the widow might make. Originally Mrs Jethway had also been on board the boat from London: in the Osgood, McIlvaine edition (1895) a series of revisions had cast some doubt on whether the woman was really Mrs Jethway or was merely someone resembling her. In the 1912 Wessex edition the woman becomes even less certainly Mrs Jethway, and it is further suggested that she might only be there in Elfride's imagination: thus the apparent haunting of Elfride by this woman is completely internalized at this point. In the early texts the woman 'was Mrs. Jethway'; in Osgood, McIlvaine she 'was exactly like Mrs. Jethway'; but in the Wessex edition she is only 'much like Mrs. Jethway'. In the early texts, while Elfride is dozing she 'became cognizant of a