

BARBARA HARDY

Barbara Gladys Hardy

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This memoir reads both Barbara Hardy's autobiography, *Swansea Girl*, and her novel, *London Lovers*, to illuminate her bold and vivid life, work and career. These texts frame a sustained examination of her publications and her work as critic and scholar, from her earliest, innovative work on George Eliot and the novel, which opened up the nineteenth-century novel for twentieth-century critics, to her work on narrative, on the emotions in poetry and on individual writers, such as the outstanding study of Dylan Thomas. Her later work as a poet is also addressed.



BARBARA HARDY

When Barbara Hardy died, I lost one of the most profound friendships of my life. This memoir, therefore, will not have the distance of an official memorial. It celebrates a uniquely unusual woman. To meet Barbara was to encounter a woman of buoyant strength, with a capacity for warmth and joy and enthusiasm. It was to encounter a woman with a bold, crystal mind, whose power, precision and largeness of vision possessed extraordinary expansive energy. Her intellectual brilliance was everywhere apparent. She had a special charisma.

The life

I met Barbara in 1964. She had been an Assistant Lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London, since 1951 for thirteen years (despite producing her subject-transforming book on George Eliot, *The Novels of George Eliot: a Study in Form*, in 1959) and would move straight to a Professorship of English at Royal Holloway College in 1965. It was extraordinarily liberating to meet this buoyant and powerful woman, full of intellectual delight and radiating pleasure in her work, teaching and thinking. It was unusual to encounter this mood at this time. I had just been appointed to the English Department at University College London (UCL; just down the road from Birkbeck). It was a desolate time and very lonely. The department was at its nadir, fragmented and uncollegial.¹ The College was not friendly to women—there were three common rooms in descending order of size and sumptuousness, a men's common room, a 'mixed' common room and a women's common room. Barbara's intellectual vivacity and power were already legendary. I had been eager to meet her, and when I did an important friendship began.

Barbara broke the mould of academic life in many ways. She had two young children, Julia and Kate. Women in academic life were rare; it was extremely unusual for such women to have children, and unusual to talk about them if they did. She was very hospitable, another unusual trait. In those days, university teachers used to measure their 'days in' and then flee to their research and to their homes in the suburbs (even in those days it was expensive to live near your work, and this bred isolationism). Her flat in Earl's Court, looking over the green of Philbeach Gardens, with its beautiful trees, ornamental shrubs, nooks and benches, was strikingly beautiful, a space of plenitude. I always felt that going into the flat was like walking into a Matisse:

¹Professor Sir Frank Kermode, as he was later to be, did not arrive in the Department until 1967, encouraged to take up the Lord Northcliffe Professorship by Noel Annan, then Provost. Among a talented but dispersed department at UCL there were three brilliant women who suffered from its fragmentation—Winifred Nowotny, Hilda Hulme and Lillian Haddakin. Frank transformed the department.

it was full of oriental rugs, pictures, pots, found objects, not to speak of books. Barbara, an excellent cook, would cook for parties and dinners with the generosity that characterised so much of her life. She loved talking, she loved a good argument. She cared about intellectual debate and would not let go if she thought you were wrong. From girlhood her politics were left wing and egalitarian (we stayed up most of the night to watch the 1997 election results). She became an ardent feminist when the women's movement got under way. Her feminism shone in her life and work. Birkbeck, with its tradition of giving mature students a second chance at degree work, was the ideal place for her. (Except for a brief period at Royal Holloway all her professional career was at Birkbeck, where she returned as professor in 1970.)

All these things were exceptional at the University of London at that time. Above all, the work she chose to pursue, to write on the nineteenth-century novel exploring the possibilities of Leavisian close reading on large-scale works of prose, was highly original. Research at the University of London had for the most part taken the form of prescriptive, empirical scholarship. Its great tradition of historical research, and editorial, linguistic and philological scholarship, had narrowed.² I will speak of this prodigious output in more detail later, but it is important to understand how adventurous Barbara was in all aspects of her life.

I felt I could never equal this intrepid spirit. It was then a major choice to continue to work and have children. When I voiced my doubts to her, she said, 'Don't be afraid: coming home to one's children after work is like coming home to a husband or a brother or a lover.'

She loved teaching. Then as now, not everybody did—another way Barbara was exceptional. Even her mode of teaching was unusual. What often looked like an informal and impromptu teaching mode was actually deeply thought out and researched. Martin Dodsworth, a colleague at Birkbeck before he went on the occupy a Chair at Royal Holloway College, gives, in his appreciation of her, a lovely account of her lecturing style and its scrupulous perfectionism:

Not many professors look their audience in the face and talk directly to them in beautifully formed sentences freighted with meaning. Barbara Hardy did, and people tended to remember. It was a superlative way of teaching, born of a characteristic act of will. The very first lecture she ever gave – an evening extra-mural class – she had the ill luck to be 'inspected'. The verdict was that all had gone well but she shouldn't look down at her notes so much. So she determined never to use notes again, and she didn't. She prepared every lecture with meticulous professionalism, however, shaping her distinctive written style – short sentences, clearly focused, based on a multitude of

²As always, generalisations are hazardous: the work of the women named above, plus Randolph Quirk's research into Linguistics at UCL, and Geoffrey Tillotson's fine critical and historical work at Birkbeck, were exceptions.

analytic distinctions embodied in vigorous verbal patterns. In lectures her sweet, beautifully modulated voice gave you the illusion of keeping up with her thinking; when you met her in print, though, you knew that something more was required of you than just reading the text. She loved argument, and her books – so many, on George Eliot most famously, but also on Dickens, Austen, Thackeray, Hardy, Shakespeare, Dylan Thomas, the art of narrative, the art of poetry – needed to be pondered, argued through and with. She was a very perfect academic.³

Barbara's confidence and willingness to experiment always astonished me. I think that its origins were her Welsh background, which was a powerful part of her life as a writer and academic. It gave her, I think, a liberating sense of belonging to a rich culture that was to the side of English academic mores and conventions. It meant that she could maintain a powerful, vigorous independence that challenged the unexamined assumptions of academic life.

Fortunately, she has written about this Welsh beginning in her gripping memoir, *Swansea Girl*,⁴ a retrospect written in her retirement. This is just part of a creative oeuvre that included, quite apart from criticism and scholarship, three collections of poetry, *The Severn Bridge* (2001), *The Yellow Carpet* (2006) and *Dante's Ghosts* (2013), a novel, *London Lovers* (1997), and a collection of short stories, *Dorothea's Daughters* (2011). In an earlier essay, I spoke of Barbara as a 'scholar-creator' whose 'buoyant, bold, and ever-present creativity' was the impetus for criticism and creative work alike.⁵

Swansea Girl charts growing up in the depression in the midst of a packed family life in lower middle-class Swansea. Despite an absent father, there were 'the uncles to spoil, play, boss, tip, tease and love' (p. 55), grandparents, aunts, cousins in abundance. 'The uncles and aunts were always dropping in on their way somewhere . . . and the inner glass door was always opening and shutting' (p. 67). '[E]veryone dropped in every day and every night, without advance warning or a ring on the bell' (p. 79). 'We were much loved in childhood but it was rough loving. Yet we were protected . . .' (p. 70). Teasings, sayings, songs, Church and Sunday School three times every Sunday: it was a 'warm nest' (p. 73). Yet there was also penury: 'It was lovely bathing in the zinc washing tub, in front of the roaring fire on Friday nights' (p. 12). Girls with inside

³This is an extract from Martin Dodsworth's obituary for the Royal Society of Literature, of which Barbara was a Fellow from 1997: <https://rsliterature.org/fellow/barbara-hardy-3/> (accessed 20 January 2020). See also W. Baker, 'In memoriam Barbara Hardy (1924–2016)', *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies*, 68(2) (2016), 79–82, and W. Baker, 'Hardy [née Nathan], Barbara Gladys, (1924–2016)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.111970> (accessed 20 April 2020).

⁴B. Hardy, *Swansea Girl: a Memoir* (London and Chester Springs, PA, 1994).

⁵I. Armstrong, 'Introduction', in W. Baker with I. Armstrong (eds.), *Form and Feeling in Modern Literature: Essays in Honour of Barbara Hardy* (London, 2013), p. 2.

bathrooms and lavatories inspired awe. She was the first member of her family to go to university (University College London, then in temporary wartime quarters in Aberystwyth) and when she passed the ‘Scholarship’, the eleven-plus exam, her mother, though she could not have been more supportive, wept because of the costs of uniform—eventually bought in instalments through the clothing club, as all clothes were. There were family outings, but no family holidays. Barbara sometimes made them up at grammar school when confronted by girls who took them for granted.

Two aspects of this early life are striking. First, its freedom of movement, unsupervised, walks out of town as an 8-year-old with a friend, down to the ever-present sea, wandering on fishing trips with her brother: ‘Looking back, I’m amazed at the freedom we had to wander about on our own, often in dangerous places. Half the time the grown-ups didn’t realize what we got up to . . . we had the joy of playing outside in the long summer evenings, and in winter under the street lights. When I was a little older . . . I went about on my own, in the blackout, sometimes on very lonely roads’ (p. 117). I am sure that this intrepidity and self-reliance helped to create the independence and bravery that characterised all Barbara’s thinking and action. She was a free spirit.

Secondly, her intellectual curiosity was boundless, fired by the enormous range of her voracious reading well before arriving at university. When I chart the things she read, often at an early age, the range is huge, from popular culture to classics. I cite the following books and authors roughly in the order in which I noted them down as I read, I’ve probably missed many out: *Little Women*, *Anne of Green Gables*, A. J. Cronin, *Hatter’s Castle*, Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Lorna Doone*, *The Three Musketeers*, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Tennyson, Ibsen, Chekhov, *Peg’s Paper*, Ruby M. Ayres, Anne Ridler, Evan Walters, Walter de La Mare, Shakespeare, ‘The Highwayman’, G. K. Chesterton, ‘Lepanto’, *The Mill on the Floss*, ‘The Boy stood on the burning deck’, Alfred Noyes, Rider Haggard, *She*, Aldous Huxley, *Gone with the Wind*, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Rupert Brooke, Robert Bridges, Alice Meynell, W. B. Yeats, *The Golden Treasury*, *A Shropshire Lad*. And, of course, Dylan Thomas. He was older than Barbara, and not known to her except in print, but he was a Swansea presence—‘I must have often passed him in the street’ (p. 71). Singing and recitation were family pastimes—‘The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo’ was a favourite. ‘If you were the only girl in the world’, ‘Bye Bye blackbird’, ‘The Isle of Capri’, ‘O play to me gypsy’, ‘Red sails in the sunset’, ‘September in the rain’, everybody sang them. Knowing things by heart was taken for granted. Barbara *knew* a lot. She had read hugely. Because she carried her scholarship lightly, this was not always recognised, but her range was massive.

Connected with this repertoire of reading and song was her mother’s decision that Barbara was to have elocution lessons. This meant that she learned by heart some

‘pretty awful poems’ (p. 144) such as ‘Where did you come from, baby dear?’ and ‘Little Boy Blue’. But she also learned Blake’s ‘Tiger, Tiger’ and Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’. The art of performance and public speaking was something she learned at an early age. Moreover, she also learned the physiology of breathing and speaking, articulation and voice. I am sure that the beautifully modulated lectures Dodsworth describes had their origin in this early training.

Barbara made sure that her own children belonged to this culture and its warmth. She and her husband, Ernest, bought a cottage on the Gower peninsula. Ernest died in 1977 after a separation. A deep, fifteen-year friendship with the biographer and critic Richard Ellmann continued until his death in 1987. People in a happy union would much rather not be silent about it if that is possible. And for this reason, I mention it now.

To know Barbara was always to know how deep her relations with her children were: Kate’s paintings hung in her flat; she and Julia learned Italian together and continued to work on the language to the end. I was lucky enough to visit Barbara for an afternoon about two weeks before she died. Our conversation ranged over many topics. She was as crisp and alert as ever. I told her that I’d been working on George Moore’s *Esther Waters*. ‘That’s a lovely novel’, she said. This enthusiasm and delight pervades her criticism. Barbara was *for life*.

The critical and scholarly work

William Baker’s Festschrift to Barbara lists twenty-five books, fourteen of which were widely reviewed major critical works. (There were actually twenty-six, a study of Ivy Compton-Burnett was published after the Festschrift, in 2016.) It was an illustrious and majestic publishing career. She began it with a seminal work, *The Novels of George Eliot: a Study in Form* (London, 1959), a work that transformed novel criticism and established Eliot permanently among major nineteenth-century writers.⁶ It is easy to forget now that once a case had to be made for this novelist! This first book, fresh and confident, lit up the critical world of the University of London, where, as I have indicated, a narrow historical scholarship or belles lettres approach was the norm. Barbara transferred to narrative the principles of close reading that most followers of F. R. Leavis used only as a method for the analysis of poetry. It was a first. This had not been attempted before. In her hands, this transition looked effortless, but in fact required a process of re-thinking and a concern with narrative form and texture that

⁶For this book, Barbara Hardy was awarded the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize by the British Academy in 1962.

preoccupied her for most of her scholarly life. One thing is certain: this great critical effort actually made the nineteenth-century novel readable for a whole post-war generation of readers and beyond. Until then the novel seemed an alien ‘Victorian’ form: offered in close-printed editions, tedious, long and with no critical key to these texts. Barbara’s methodology opened up nineteenth-century novels and made them meaningful. Though Structuralism and Post-Structuralism introduced different kinds of thinking in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is arguable that, without this prior opening up of the novel to criticism, these texts would not have been readable by subsequent theorists. There are no fewer than five of her studies in which Eliot is central. But before I turn to these, I will discuss two works where she established principles for thinking about form and textual surface, a lifelong project. These are *The Appropriate Form* (1964) and *Particularities* (1982).

The Appropriate Form has an important Introduction where she sets out the meaning of both appropriate *and* inappropriate form.⁷ Two principles emerge very clearly. First, form is tied to story. Narrative is its permanent characteristic: ‘The novelist, whoever he is and whenever he is writing, is giving form to a story, giving form to his moral and metaphysical views, and giving form to his particular experience of sensations, people, places and society. He tells a story’ (p. 1). Ethical feeling and individual and social experience cannot come into being without the driver of narrative. Form for her is never ‘skeletal’ (p. 3). She eschews a ‘a scaffolding of categories’ (p. 10) as a way to understand the Victorian novel. The purism of Henry James, his view that the novel should possess ‘a highly concentrated unity’ (p. 5), is, she thinks, alien to the way a Victorian narrative works. ‘Looked at another way, it is an assertive display of form which is common in music and the plastic arts, and rare in fiction’ (p. 5). Aesthetic form, the ‘formal stringency’ (p. 6) required by James, does not accord with the ‘loose baggy monster’ he saw as the Victorian novel, but the task is not for the critic to fit the novel to the procrustean bed of formal unity but to understand the form it *takes*, the many and varied kinds of pattern and ordering made by many and various stories. Thus her discussion of the novelists that follows—James himself, Defoe, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, Forster, Eliot (again!), Lawrence and Tolstoy—is dominated by her recognition of the formal relevance and richness of redundancy and expansiveness. She also recognises that the novelist can wrench the narrative pattern of a novel for ideological purposes, as seen in the novels of Defoe and Brontë.

The second important principle of *The Appropriate Form* is its rejection of the category of realism. Then as now this is a category taken for granted, but for Barbara the novel’s power was not simply the mimetic reproduction of a world but its capacity

⁷B. Hardy, *The Appropriate Form: an Essay on the Novel* (London, 1964), p. 1.

for an inwardness that offers us moments of insight, moments of truth. Just as she seeks a reading of form that does not become distorted by dogma and rigid classification, so she seeks a reading of the novel's world that does not depend on external accuracy. She works inwards from the novel rather than prescriptively outwards to it. In the course of this she rejects the term 'realism' and looks to 'truthfulness' instead. This truthfulness means that we 'look also for the form of particularity' (p. 3). This does not mean emptying form of its meaning, but finding a new way to give what she calls 'individual presences and moments' (p. 3) in the novel a structural significance. I will set out two quotations from this fruitful book to indicate how Barbara can move from particularity in an individual moment to particularity organised in larger patterns. The first is when she writes of Will Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*, the second is when she speaks of the inconspicuous patterns of *Anna Karenina*.

Those critics who find Ladislaw a weak romantic conception, the under-distanced product of the author's fantasy, might reflect on the fact that few Victorian heroes are shown as contemplating adultery [with Rosamond], and so coolly and miserably, in the moment of passionate commitment to the pure heroine. (p. 129)

Not only is the novel inconspicuously divided, not only does it constantly compare as well as contrast, it cannot be said to insist even on the pattern which does emerge. It is a pattern which we may very well not be strongly aware of until the end, when we may go back and see it embedded in action which strikes us in its particularity rather than its resonance. Levin's reaction to his child does not remind us of Karenin's, both are striking in themselves. It is rather that all the characters are subjected to similar tests, the common tests of fatherhood, profession, and faith, and that the parallelism is often scarcely noticeable. (p. 198)

This brings me to the second study that is important for understanding the principles with which Barbara worked, *Particularities* of 1982, a collection of her essays dedicated to the memory of her husband, Ernest.⁸ This was very much a collection written in response to what she thought of as the abstractions of contemporary theory. Here the interest was in 'the affective pressure' of Eliot's 'form, language and imagination' (p. 10). The essays collected in this book are preoccupied with a challenging paradox that Barbara throws out in an argument about local detail in Chapter 30 of *Middlemarch* (the chapter in which Casaubon and Dorothea are told of Casaubon's fatal heart problem)—the 'superficial image is the important one' (p. 52). This chapter is headed 'The Surface of the Novel' (from an original article, in 1967) and argues that we too readily systematise texts. Picking up James's description of the nineteenth-century novel as a 'treasure house of detail', she argues against the use of detail to abstract an image pattern, to illustrate symbolic structures and to systematise

⁸B. Hardy, *Particularities: Readings in George Eliot* (London, 1982).

particularity. She argues for the uneven significance of local detail (p. 37). If we ignore deep structures, we are then left with the question, what *do* we do with local detail (p. 52), and this, she argues, is the exacting task faced by the critic.

This task of the novelist and the critic to particularise is reminiscent of a statement by Goethe: ‘There is a delicate empiricism that so intimately involves itself with the object that it becomes true theory.’⁹ Certainly, in all her work Barbara ‘intimately involves’ herself ‘with the object’. It is significant that she was one of the earliest critics, well before the advent of ‘thing theory’, to understand the importance of objects in novels. In 1975 and 1977 respectively she wrote on objects in *Mansfield Park* and ‘Objects in novels’.¹⁰

I turn now to the cluster of works on Eliot, always a central concern. These, in addition to *Particularities*, are: *The Novels of George Eliot: a Study in Form* (1959), *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel* (1967, an edited collection), *Critical Essays on George Eliot* (1970, an edited collection) and *George Eliot* (2006).¹¹

As I have said, no one before this had attempted to take the close reading strategies of Leavisian criticism into a detailed and comprehensive reading of the fictional oeuvre of a nineteenth-century novelist. *The Novels of George Eliot* initiated the now enormous field of George Eliot studies. This book has been such a profound influence on the reading of Eliot, and its canonical views have been so assimilated into critical discussion, that people quote them without realising their source in Barbara’s critical imagination. The famous paired scenes in *Adam Bede*, for instance, when Dinah looks outward through her window and Hetty gazes into the mirror, were first discussed in detail by Barbara. Likewise, her formal analysis of *Middlemarch* in terms of rotating plots and parallelism was the first to understand this pattern.

In this first book Barbara aims to elicit the ‘highly complicated and intricate organizations’ and patterns of Eliot’s novels from the ‘human material it is shaping’. To recognise Eliot’s formal power ‘we must put aside the simple notions of the lucid or single well-made story, and recognise that the form of the novel can mean the cooperation of a large number of forms within the novel. The form of the novel must certainly be thought of in terms of its flow and continuity, though this is by no means the only way of approaching narrative form’ (p. 5). The arousal of ‘narrative curiosity’ (p. 5) is bound up with narrative form. Barbara’s interest has always been in a double relationship, the writer and the reader. This commitment to the reader accounts for

⁹J. W. Goethe, *Theory of Colours* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

¹⁰B. Hardy, ‘The objects in *Mansfield Park*’, in J. Halperin (ed.), *Jane Austen Bicentenary Essays* (New York, 1975), pp. 180–96; B. Hardy, ‘Objects in novels’, *Genre*, 10 (Winter 1977), 485–500.

¹¹B. Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: a Study in Form* (London, 1959); B. Hardy (ed.), *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel* (London, 1967); B. Hardy (ed.), *Critical Essays on George Eliot* (London, 1970); B. Hardy, *George Eliot: Critic’s Biography* (London, 2006).

the exemplary clarity and boldness of her writing style, which always honours the reader's need to be invited into discussion.

This book went way beyond the accepted categories of character and plot current at the time. Eliot's novels are seen unequivocally through the genre of tragedy, a wholly original claim. The *patterning* of character and its moral implications (not merely character as psychological *bildung*), the status of the authorial voice, and the scene as image—the pathetic and the ironical image—introduced new forms of critical analysis. In this way her ground-breaking writing opened out for critics a multitude of ways of reading and thinking that have found their place in critical analysis of the nineteenth-century novel ever since.

One of the dazzling features of this first book is its synoptic account of Eliot's oeuvre. The chapters are organised round critical themes, and in each she brings together multiple examples drawn from different novels that range over the whole of Eliot's writing, early and late. (The habit common today of devoting chapters to individual novels was alien to her.) The chapter on 'Plot and form', for instance, draws upon *Middlemarch*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*. In it she argues for the occurrence of differentiated repetitions throughout the narratives, which articulate crucial transformations and changes. She charts, for instance, how the form of *The Mill on the Floss* is organised round the way Maggie is subjected to a series of temptations, initially through her repeated exposure to the erotics of music: first through Phillip's rendering of Handel and then through Stephen's more demanding singing of Purcell, she is subjected to the pressure of intensifying sexual persuasion (pp. 116–17). Ever-present is the creative use of detail. In the chapter on 'Plot and form' the recurrence of the question, 'What can I do?' in different contexts and in different voices—Dorothea, Rosamond, Fred—endorses and complicates the pre-occupation with vocation. It is typical of Barbara to notice a detail that most people would miss, in 'The scene as image', that Felix Holt knocks down the works of Byron in Mr Lyons's drawing room (p. 185).

The next two books, *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel* and *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, are edited collections of essays by a range of scholars. In the first, *Middlemarch* is recognised as a canonical text (though, interestingly, it does not have this status in the first book) and the novel received, for the first time, an in-depth study from a number of perspectives. Indeed, perhaps this work established the centrality of *Middlemarch* to Eliot's work. It was a thorough reading of the novel. W. J. Harvey, in an admirably concise discussion that retains its relevance to this day, wrote on 'The intellectual background of the novel' (pp. 25–37), clarifying Casaubon's mythography and Lydgate's science, and Jerome Beaty contributed 'The text of the novel: a study of the proof' (pp. 38–62). He is particularly informative on the final sentence of the novel, where the 'growing life' of the world was changed to the 'growing

good' (p. 62). Other important essays are on Dorothea's diction (Derek Oldfield, pp. 63–86) and on imagery (Hilda Hulme, pp. 87–124). In her 'Introduction' Barbara mentioned the 'secondhand, inflated and deadening effect' that criticism could have on the responses of students (p. 5). But this book is far from second-hand. What impresses now, from today's perspective, is how much of this work has been recycled by later critics.

Critical Essays on George Eliot is notable for the impressive array of critics assembled to discuss the novels—for instance John Goode, George Levine, Arnold Kettle, John Bayley. It is also notable, compared with the earlier collection, for the element of critique that enters into its discussions. As Barbara puts it in her 'Introduction', the contributors ask 'mid-twentieth-century questions of the nineteenth-century novelist' (p. x). Of these the most demanding are the essays by Goode and Levine. Goode's brilliant Marxist reading of *Adam Bede* is devastating and still, it seems to me, remains unanswered. Mining Eliot's own essay on Riehl's *The Natural History of German Life*, Herbert Spencer and Carlyle, he argued that the novel exemplified the 'process of transforming historical realities into ideological fable' (p. 36). That fable was based on an evolutionary model of the social that reified evolutionary adaptability and offered accounts of Hetty as less than human and Adam as the product of a superior heredity: 'George Eliot doesn't see the historical and human basis of institutions' (p. 34). Levine's account of *Romola* is rather different: his critique is based on what he sees as a generic contradiction between novel and romance that constantly occludes ethical and social issues.

Barbara's final reading of Eliot, *George Eliot: a Critic's Biography*, dedicated to the memory of Ellmann and Beaty, is what she called in conversation with me, an 'anti-biography'. This 'biography' is entirely original. It is not structured round the temporal progression of Eliot's life, the familiar procedure of the biographer, but according to an entirely different taxonomy—family, travel, love, friends, objects. Each chapter brings out something important about Eliot—for example, the travel chapter, documenting the many different places she spent time in, brings out her remarkable independence and her European consciousness and gives a new cosmopolitan dimension to the novels. Moving from biography to the novels and back, this reading of Eliot has a delicacy and intimacy that we do not often find in biographical writing. There is a sense in this book of an author freely sharing personal insights, thoughts and feelings. Barbara emphasises the intensity of Eliot's feelings and passions that more conventional biography often overlooks. There are liberal quotations from the letters and journals. In the travel chapter, for instance, 'Home, travel and a need for foreignness', Eliot's passion for the Swiss landscape and her delight in being on water, whether on Lake Lucerne, the Serpentine or in Venice is made apparent. We are reminded that Eliot must have thought of Rousseau on the Lac Bienne as she rowed

on Lake Lucerne, and Barbara thinks that it was Rousseau who gave her the courage to think of herself as a writer after her spell in Geneva alone after the death of her father. Certainly, her time in Europe before she became active as journalist and writer, Barbara says, made her 'positively xenophiliac' (p. 47). It gave her a European dimension that made her hostile to English racism and alike to theories of 'pure' race such as Disraeli put forward to justify his belief in the superiority of Jewish culture. The Eliot that emerges from this biography is more cosmopolitan and more volatile and emotionally intense than the Eliot of more orthodox biography. The many readings of Eliot Barbara made over almost fifty years culminate in a generous understanding of a writer's psyche and its passionate ambition.

I turn now to two groups of critical work, the many books on story, feeling and form that cross poetry, the novel and drama, and the studies of individual writers.

The first cluster of writings forms a group of works whose pre-eminent concern is with narrative and feeling in different genres. They are: *Tellers and Listeners* (1975), *The Advantage of Lyric* (1977), *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (1985) and *Shakespeare's Storytellers* (1997). Two aspects of the earlier *The Appropriate Form* relate to this group: there Barbara maintained not only the primacy of story and form but also that the novelist gave form to his 'moral and metaphysical views' and to his response to 'sensations, people, places, and society' (p. 1). It is these latter categories, imbued with feeling, that predominate in the subsequent books.

The packed and fecund discussions of *Tellers and Listeners* start from categories of tales embraced by the narrative imagination rather than from particularities, but the double perspective of narrator and listener is never lost. In fact, the interaction between them *constitutes* the story. These fresh narrative categories always lead to specificity and not to abstraction. They are: Fantasy and Dream, Memory and Memories, Abuses of Narrative, Good Stories, Good Listeners. Yet these new formal categories do not of themselves convey the immense fertility of the forms of narrative imagination documented in this book. They include rhetoric, confession, gossip, the yarn, the lyrical story, the collective myth, community tales, the fairy tale, autobiography. These intricate readings of the teller's tale and the listener's response, not forgetting that our stories gratify 'the listener within ourselves', have a specificity and detail that is gripping.¹² The juxtaposition of reference and comparison is often thrilling. On a single page one can encounter Fanny of *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Dalloway, Krapp of *Krapp's Last Tape*, William Carlos Williams, Proust and *The Mill on the Floss* (p. 61). There is a virtuosity about this aggregation of examples. Rival stories, the painfulness of listening, memory and fantasy, the book documents and explores an almost infinite

¹²B. Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners: the Narrative Imagination* (London, 1975), p. 172.

number of forms of telling and listening. The condensed and eloquent chapter on Dickens illustrates something of the richness of this book.

‘Just as a dramatist tries to squeeze in as many histrionic opportunities as possible, so a great story-teller naturally seizes every chance to tell a story. Dickens’s novels are full of travellers’ tales, confessions, lies, reports, warnings, autobiographies, tall stories, anecdotes, narrative jokes, books, readings and fairy tales’ (p. 165). From Jingle to Mrs Gamp this chapter demonstrates the coerciveness of the determined story-teller’s narrative. Tellingly, it observes that ‘Dickens’s story-tellers allow him to produce effects and to move into reaches where his own narrative, unaided, dare not go’ (p. 169). It concludes with a lyrical reading of Little Dorrit’s story to Maggie, where Maggie’s own ego-directed interruptions divert but do not disguise from us that the story Little Dorrit has told is a surrogate for her own longings: ‘The story she has told half-abstractedly has revealed and not revealed the story of her hidden love for Clennam and her desire to keep it secret out of love and modesty’ (p. 173).

Barbara’s criticism is the work of a critic who is a great story-teller herself. In *The Advantage of Lyric* (1977) she continues to meditate on what defines feeling, form and narrative, but here the lyric is her theme.¹³ Form in the lyric is constituted by ‘its concentrated and patterned expression of feeling’. She writes unequivocally of lyric that ‘what it does provide is feeling alone, without histories or characters’ (p. 1). Nevertheless, in clarifying that feeling, which is the project of lyric, a form of ‘buried narrative’ (p. 3) can be present. ‘Although lyric poetry is not discursive, it is capable of speaking its feelings intelligently, so as to speak about them. The double voice of feeling can speak in a single form, fusing reflection or even analysis with the stirring passion’ (p. 3). The phases of feeling in a lyric poem, its oblique allusion and unfolding of metaphor, create an indirect narrative structure even when we are presented with ‘feelings without histories’ (p. 4). In her introduction to this book she discusses what no one has done before or since, the poems made and thought about by characters in novels—Ladislaw in *Middlemarch* and Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—where we see feeling coming into being and structured as ‘Feelings are evoked and shaped, then worked up and worked out into larger feelings. The result is a generalization of character but a vivid particularity of feeling, present, active, neither imitated nor revived’ (p. 9). Conscious brooding and the instant of emotion come together in lyric poetry. She evolves a theory of poetry here that is significant for her own poems. A Wordsworthian ‘overflow’ is mediated by brooding and reflection: ‘Reflection of this kind, itself part of the affective experience inside and outside poetry, is not discussion’ (p. 11).

¹³ B. Hardy, *The Advantage of Lyric: Essays on Feeling in Poetry* (Bloomington, IN, and London, 1977), p. 1.

This book again illustrates Barbara's prolific range. She moves from the poems of John Donne, to Arthur Hugh Clough (one of the best essays ever on this poet), to Gerard Manley Hopkins, Yeats, W. H. Auden (two chapters), Thomas and Sylvia Plath. Throughout her concern is to meditate on the way intense personal feeling is formed and structured, whether it is through the small conversation of the lyric floated on narrative, as in Clough's work (p. 41), 'minimal anecdote', as in Auden's love poetry (p. 90), or 'brilliant linguistic impersonation', as in Plath's 'The Applicant' (p. 137). One of the most intense and passionate discussions is of the poetry of Hopkins. There is a rich understanding of the rhythms of this poet's agonistic writing as well as the ways his language attends to the possibilities of image and comparison. Here is an extract from the discussion of 'Glory be to God for dappled things':

[T]he general evaluative terms are part of a highly sensitive account of the particulars: 'skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow' and 'rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim' and 'Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls'. The acute sensitivity shows in two ways: the sensuous range of texture, colour, feel, taste, pattern, and in the startling conjunction of two kinds of dappled thing in the first three instances. The pied beauty of skies is described through the simile of the pied beauty of the cow; the pied beauty of the trout through the pied beauty of the compound 'rose-moles', the pied beauty of the chestnut-fall in terms of the pied beauty of fire and coal and the compound 'Fresh fire-coal'. There is opposition and wide contrast: the sky and the cow; the rose and the trout; the fire *and* the chestnut. We are made to feel the variety of the phenomenal world within *and* the variety of each phenomenon . . . in each of these three instances there is a different kind of coupling. (p. 57)

Barbara leaves 'feeling' to be defined through her discussion. Always hostile to abstractions she prefers to demonstrate feeling rather than to generalise about it. In the study of the novel through the feelings, *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (1985), she offers a kind of taxonomy of feeling in the novel—pathos in Dickens's *Bleak House*, anger and jealousy in Brontë's *Villette*, self-conscious understanding of emotion in *Theophrastus Such*.¹⁴

Perhaps the greatest book in this group, and indeed perhaps her greatest, ranking certainly with the first book on Eliot, is the stunningly virtuosic *Shakespeare's Storytellers* of 1997.¹⁵ Over ten years in the making, it is a marvel of scholarship and subtle thought. She ranges through the Shakespearian oeuvre with complete familiarity. And she is at ease with the scholarship of sources and contexts, and uses these creatively, whether it is Shakespeare's knowledge of Virgil or North's Plutarch, Holinshed or Sidney. Freud, Proust and Beckett appear as interlocutors. The place of

¹⁴B. Hardy, *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (London, 1985).

¹⁵B. Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers: Dramatic Narration* (London and Chester Springs, PA, 1997).

narrative in Shakespearian drama and its sheer theatrical intensity—she never loses sight of the fact of *drama*—is demonstrated through a range of general categories, followed by studies of three plays, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. The book begins with a brilliant discussion of Egeon's speech at the start of *The Comedy of Errors* under the chapter heading 'Self-conscious narrative'. Part I explores narrative beginnings, the story at the end of the play and Shakespeare reading narrative. Part 2 considers 'Arts and acts of memory', 'Forecasts and fantasies', and 'Gender and narrative'. She is at her best on the complexities, slips and oclusions of memory and their dramatic immediacy. Indeed, memory is a constant sub-text in all these categories.

The book is so rich that it is hard to isolate a particular instance of story, but the account of *Hamlet* at the start of the chapter on 'Forecasts and fantasies' is typical of the complexity of this work. It begins with an intricate discussion of Hamlet's use of prolepsis and analepsis, 'Looking before and after' (pp. 134–5). There flickers in Hamlet's speech a reversal of those adverbs: 'the adverbs face in reversed directions, 'before' suggesting future and 'after' suggesting past . . . This subdued ambiguity in the adverbs strikes me as functional, apt for Shakespeare's often demonstrated sense that there is no simple backward and forward movement in our consciousness but a complex wave of memory and anticipation'. Psychological intensity is one register of this work. Barbara also understands the broad dramatic effect: Hotspur's careless forgetfulness—'his bad listening. He takes no notice of questions' (p. 56)—ultimately loses him sympathy: he can't tell a coherent story. The drama of his simultaneous glamour and carelessness is played out on the large stage of conflict ('Self-conscious narrative'). This work was a new departure for Barbara, a wonderfully creative venture into early modern theatre. It demonstrates the range of that voracious reading.

I turn to the final group of critical writings. Barbara was a prolific critic. She wrote on individual writers and poets throughout her career. Baker's bibliography shows the range of her concerns. She will always be identified with Eliot, but another of her loves is Dickens, on whom she produced two critical books (1970 and 2008).¹⁶ She has written books on Thackeray (one of the few books to catch William Makepeace Thackeray's strange mixture of satire and sensuousness, and one of the few that see him as a radical writer), Jane Austen, James, Hardy and Thomas.¹⁷ She has written 'Introductions' and edited texts, from Helen Zenna Smith's war novel, *Not so Quiet*.

¹⁶ B. Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens* (London, 1970); B. Hardy, *Dickens and Creativity* (London and New York, 2008).

¹⁷ B. Hardy, *The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray* (London, 1972); B. Hardy, *A Reading of Jane Austen* (London, 1975); B. Hardy, *Henry James: the Later Writing* (Plymouth, 1996); B. Hardy, *Dylan Thomas: an Original Language* (Athens, GA, 2000); B. Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: Imagining Imagination: Hardy's Poetry and Fiction* (London, 2000); B. Hardy, *Ivy Compton-Burnett* (Edinburgh, 2016).

Stepdaughters of the War (London, 1988), to Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (London, 1993). We should not be surprised by the amplitude and range of these interests: *The Novels of George Eliot* begins with a comparison between James Joyce and Eliot.

The constraints of space do not allow an extended discussion of this body of criticism. But there are some real critical pleasures in this group. The exuberant study of Thackeray's *Exposure of Luxury* is concerned with the understanding of idolatry for and 'infatuation with the outside' (p. 99), the art of the surface that shows him fascinated with 'tainted' objects: 'Relics, icons, presents, costly articles, they show the greed and heartlessness of a period of aggression and rapid expansion' (117). As I have said, well before the advent of 'thing theory', Barbara was exploring the politics of objects. The same fascination with objects colours her last book, on Compton-Burnett, where upper-middle-class mealtimes and their rituals provide microdrama, and china and cutlery become props and symbols in these acerbic narratives of incest and adultery. The readings of Austen, Dickens and Hardy (whose novels and poetry are discussed), return to the plenitude of story and narrative, as she examines 'the psychology of narrative discourse' (p. 99) among different social groups in Austen's work, the self-conscious, self-reflexive use of folk narrative and story-telling in Hardy's writing, where 'memory, gossip, news, myths, lies and truths' (p. 1) become the substance of tragedy, and the ways in which Dickens uses fantasy, madness, sleep and dreams throughout an art that is 'scrutinized' as he 'practiced it' (p. xiii).

Perhaps the outstanding exploration of a single author is the study of Thomas (2000). Here Barbara considers Thomas as a regional and green poet, and a poet of modernism with the unique identity of the non-Welsh-speaking Welsh (an identity she shared). A poet able to adapt Welsh poetic traditions (the *cynganedd*, the *hwyl*) and fuse them with the techniques of modernism, Thomas was also a demotic poet who understood local knowledge and the idiom of the spoken word in Wales. It is fitting to end an account of Barbara's critical and scholarly writing with her account of a poet whom she understood from the inside.

The creative work

Barbara's buoyant, bold and ever-present creativity took many forms, as I have noted—poetry, short stories, the novel. This was recognised in her final academic post: she was appointed to a short-term lectureship in creative writing at the University of Sussex. For years she ran a very democratic Poetry Workshop at Birkbeck and convened a Writers Workshop with a rather different remit in her retirement.

The writing is wide-ranging. Only one of these works is directly related to her specialism in the nineteenth century, a collection of short stories—*Dorothea's*

Daughter and Other Nineteenth-Century Postscripts.¹⁸ This collection weaves haunting narratives from the lacunae, loose ends and unspoken possibilities in the endings of the great novels of the nineteenth century—the forever hidden narrative secrets in *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*, for example. Her *Jane Eyre* story is about the forgotten history of Adèle, Rochester's illegitimate daughter. What happens to her? Jane and Rochester's baby son grows apace, but what of the illegitimate child in this triad? Barbara's story wonderfully intuitively Rochester's egocentric uneasiness about his daughter, a feeling that has been lying in Brontë's narrative, awaiting development. In another marvellous reading of the unsaid, she picks up on one of the final sentences in the Conclusion to *The Mill on the Floss*. One of the two men who visited the tomb of Tom and Maggie Tulliver 'visited the tomb again with a sweet face beside him'. The unwary reader, and the reader longing to assuage the pain of this novel, might assume that the 'sweet face' was that of Lucy, accompanying Stephen Guest on his pilgrimage of love and penitence and expressing her own forgiveness. But not Barbara. She understands Eliot's reticence, her refusal of easy gratification, and builds imaginatively upon it.

On 5 November 2011 at a conference on the Brontës at the University of London Institute of English Studies, Barbara contributed a stunning reading from this recently published collection. She commented upon her paratext step by step, speaking of her choices, her reading of the novel. It was a rigorous analysis of narrative art, both that of Brontë and her own, a revelation of the complexities of feeling and form. Her stories came from a lifetime of absolute immersion in the fiction of the nineteenth century, its tellers and listeners, its feeling and form, and what can only be described as the sheer joy of imaginative and analytical discovery.

The novel, *London Lovers*, of 1996 charts a secret love affair of fifteen years' duration (only ended by the lover's death), necessarily secret because the wife of the lover, a famous academic, is a sick woman.¹⁹ 'We met in middle-age and aged together, like an old married couple' (p. 37). The novel charts rapture, jealousy, and the violent and angry grief at being an unrecognised widow. But this is only one of its stories. It weaves this narrative together with the speaker's subtle and loving accounts of her Welsh husband, who is honoured with recollection and memory—their early purchase of a wondrous oriental carpet together as a young couple, for instance—and whose death during the affair is the occasion of intense mourning. And plaited into these two narratives is the speaker's attempts to create a novel out of these histories. This triune narrative, whose contrary stories co-exist together, is autobiographical.

¹⁸ B. Hardy, *Dorothea's Daughter and Other Nineteenth-Century Postscripts* (Brighton, 2011).

¹⁹ B. Hardy, *London Lovers* (London and Chester Springs, PA, 1996).

(I recognise myself, poignantly, as the Isabella who writes at the lover's death.) Yet the intensity and narrative art of this fiction goes beyond the autobiographical.

Barbara was a prolific poet. Of her three volumes, full of poems written with a concision that lives up to the aesthetic of particularity that she developed as a critic, *Dante's Ghosts* of 2013 seems to me the culmination of her art as a poet.²⁰ From the beginning she worked on a precise, concentrated lyricism. Here is part of 'In the Brompton Cemetery' from *Severn Bridge* (2001).²¹

. . . we pushed our first pram past
the mild Victorian dead
Violet, Bertha, Hubert, Everard
railed in iron rectangles
praised for quiet and public rectitude
over whose virtue the ivy tangles.

In their limpid clarity and charged simplicity the poems of *Dante's Ghosts*, lyrics that pick up the personae and events of *The Divine Comedy*, are outstanding in their exploration of Dante's poem, creating a lyricism of fact and detail and laconic thought that is an extended commentary on it. Here is an extract from 'An absence of Farewell', the moment when Virgil, who has earlier promised Dante 'trees, flowers and tender grasses' (p. 34) 'fades from the poem / without a final goodbye to his pupil'.

In Paradise
he weeps to realise
his teacher is no longer by his side,

and repeats his name
till dazzled by Beatrice
he forgets the master

whose going is shy
who fades from the poem
without a final goodbye to his pupil. (p. 35)

²⁰The three volumes of poetry are: B. Hardy, *Severn Bridge: New and Selected Poems* (Nottingham, 2001); B. Hardy, *The Yellow Carpet* (Nottingham, 2006); and B. Hardy, *Dante's Ghosts* (Walthamstow, 2013). Barbara also edited for the same press in 2011, *London Rivers*, poems by various hands. The second edition of this collection, edited with Kate Hardy, remains unpublished.

²¹Hardy, *Severn Bridge*, p.26.

Barbara is buried in the churchyard just above her cottage on the Gower Peninsula. Her lifetime's typewriter, reluctantly given over to the computer, was buried with her.

Note: Barbara Hardy's papers are held (at the time of writing) by her daughter, Kate.

Note on the author: Isobel Armstrong is Emeritus Professor of English, Birkbeck, University of London. She was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2003.

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