

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

The George Eliot Review

English, Department of

2016

Barbara Hardy in France

Alain Jumeau

University of Paris-Sorbonne

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Jumeau, Alain, "Barbara Hardy in France" (2016). *The George Eliot Review*. 355.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/355>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The George Eliot Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Barbara Hardy in France

Barbara Hardy was a well-known figure among French Victorianists, probably because she had written on three at least of the major novelists of the period, Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, not to forget Thomas Hardy and a few others.

One of my colleagues, Maurice Chrétien, a former Professor at Lyons University, told me that when he was an undergraduate at Dijon in the early sixties, she lectured there for a semester on *David Copperfield*. Her lecturing was a model of scholarship and clarity and it was a rare privilege to hear what she had to say on Dickens's masterpiece. Later on, when this

colleague specialized in Thackeray for his Ph.D., he was, quite naturally, influenced by Barbara's book *The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray* (1972).

As far as I am concerned, when I started researching on George Eliot in the early seventies, I found her book *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* particularly inspiring. At that time, most critical studies dealing with George Eliot were either concerned with the problem of realism or with a purely moral approach. The notion of form, which was so central in her book, seemed very promising, particularly when the Victorian novel was easily rejected because of its supposed formlessness.

A few years later, many of us were beginning to develop an interest in "Women's Studies", and in this particular field, Barbara's own version of feminism seemed particularly appealing. That is probably why in 1988, we invited her to be our guest speaker, at our annual conference, in Strasbourg, which was devoted to 'Victorian Women'. There she made a great impression and we were glad to hear a real authority on the subject.

I had the privilege of meeting her again in London, where, in association with the George Eliot Fellowship, Birkbeck College organized several conferences on the novels of George Eliot. I remember once we were travelling on the tube together and she remarked she was grateful to be still mobile. Although her physical mobility might be a problem to her, it was clear that her intellectual agility remained exceptional.

To sum up what she represented for many of us, I might translate a brief notice which I sent to our academic website, a short time after her death on 12 February:

I have the sadness to announce the death of Barbara Hardy (1924-2016). This great lady was not only Professor Emerita at Birkbeck College, University of London, but also Honorary Professor at the University of Swansea, a city where she went to grammar-school — and also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a Fellow of the British Academy.

The French Victorianists who invited her to one of their conferences knew the span of her works, from Jane Austen to Henry James, including Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, George Eliot, the Victorian Poets, but she had also published on Shakespeare and Dylan Thomas. Her most original work was probably *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (The Athlone Press, 1959), which completely renewed our reading of the Victorian novelist and contributed to the recognition of her place in the canon, when she was still lingering in the Purgatory of Victorian writers, in the fifties.

I hope Barbara Hardy's enthusiasm, her intellectual vitality and her non-conformity will live on and continue to inspire new scholars.

Among those who reacted to these lines, quite a few had the feeling that I had lost someone who was dear to me... Now I realize that all French Victorianists have lost a friend.

Alain Jumeau
University of Paris-Sorbonne