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## Remembering Barbara Hardy

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## Remembering Barbara Hardy

Everyone who reads this *Review* is certain to have read *Middlemarch*, and everyone who has read *Middlemarch* can recall the scene in chapter 15 when the narrator describes how Tertius Lydgate had discovered his vocation. Nothing he had studied in his youth had fired his interest until, home from school and hunting one wet day for something to read ‘which might have some freshness for him’, he famously stood on a chair, took from a high shelf the first volume of a neglected, dusty encyclopaedia, opened it there and then, and became immediately absorbed in a passage on the valves of the heart.

I don’t compare my intellectual capacity with Lydgate’s, but I do remember the precise moment when I knew that the study and potentially the teaching of ‘English’ were absolutely what I wanted to commit myself to for the rest of my working life, an already distinctly ‘mature’ student though I was. That moment occurred during my first year at Birkbeck, when Barbara was lecturing on Samuel Richardson’s vast epistolary work of fiction, *Clarissa*, and showing how *Clarissa*’s syntax is one of the ways in which the nature of her intelligence is distinguished from that of every other character in the novel. Somehow what Barbara was saying wasn’t just elucidating; it was compelling, and it was inspiring.

As I was to discover, those qualities were in evidence whenever she gave a lecture, just as they are in her many scholarly publications, including the two – the invaluable *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (1959) and *George Eliot: A Critic’s Biography* (2006) – which focus on the author to whose life and work this journal is dedicated. The delivery, pacing, and shape of those lectures – meticulously planned, though astonishingly given without book – were masterly. Barbara always spoke with a clarity that engaged, and held, the attention, so that it required no effort of will to follow the line of her argument; the listener was persuasively drawn along. Her pedagogic approach was consummately rigorous, but it was also intensely vital and purposeful, and it was those elements that made her such an exciting and influential teacher, both formally and informally.

**Beryl Gray**