

A Route to Modernism

Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf

Rosemary Sumner



Also by Rosemary Sumner

THOMAS HARDY: Psychological Novelist

WILLIAM GOLDING'S *THE SPIRE*

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H.R.



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Preface

The title of this book is *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf*. The bringing together of these three novelists highlights some of the less noticed aspects of modernism, and distinguishes their work from other kinds of modernism. This is not to disparage other modernist prose writers such as Stein and Joyce; their works have their own interest, their own innovations, their own distinctive merits and greatness. But my aim is to explore the modernism of my three writers rather than to emphasize the ways in which they differ from other modernist novelists. In this process, their distinctive qualities and the relationships between them will emerge. Most critics comparing Hardy and Lawrence have focused mainly on Lawrence's *a Study of Thomas Hardy*; for this reason I have examined what they have in common mainly from other angles. Woolf wrote interestingly and briefly on both of them but this is not the connection I dwell on. The way all three push out the boundaries of the novel, extending it into unknown regions of the universe and of the psyche (moving fiction away from the relatively realistic and social concerns of nineteenth-century fiction into more mythic and cosmic regions) is central to my thesis. The long introduction weaves together some of the main lines of thought the book will follow in relation to the three novelists. The subsequent chapters dwell mainly on each novelist separately, but without losing sight of their relationships to one another. My aim throughout and in conclusion is 'not rounding off. Opening out'. In this I follow Stanley Fish who said (in *Is There a Text in this Class?* (p. 16)) 'the business of criticism was not . . . to determine a correct way of reading but to determine from which of a number of possible perspectives reading will proceed. This determination . . . will not be made once and for all . . . but will be made and remade again. . . .' This book is a study of 'the adventure to the unknown', the unconscious, the enigmatic in the fiction of Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf.

R.S.

List of Abbreviations

Hardy

RN	<i>The Return of the Native</i>
TonT	<i>Two on a Tower</i>
MofC	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>
W	<i>The Woodlanders</i>
TD	<i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i>
JO	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>
WB	<i>The Well-Beloved</i>
Life	<i>The Life of Thomas Hardy</i> by F.E. Hardy
CP	<i>Thomas Hardy: the Complete Poems</i> (ed. James Gibson)

Lawrence

SandL	<i>Sons and Lovers</i>
R	<i>The Rainbow</i>
WinL	<i>Women in Love</i>
CP	<i>The Complete Poems</i> (ed. de Sola Pinto and Warren)

Woolf

MrsD	<i>Mrs Dalloway</i>
TTL	<i>To the Lighthouse</i>
TW	<i>The Waves</i>
BTA	<i>Between the Acts</i>
CE	<i>Collected Essays</i> (ed. Leonard Woolf)
Diary	<i>The Diaries of Virginia Woolf</i> (Penguin)

1 Introduction

'The fact about contemporaries', wrote Virginia Woolf, 'is that they're doing the same thing on another railway line; one resents them distracting one, flashing past the wrong way.'¹ The right way for Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf took them 'flashing past' other modernist writers – Joyce and Stein for instance – on another line. The works of these three novelists show that there is a route to modernism which is on a different track from Joyce's, though it is important to note that, in spite of this, 'they're doing the same thing'. It was the 'tricky, startling, doing stunts'² aspects of Joyce which Woolf rejected, saying that he 'respects writing too much for that'.

My aim is to interest readers in concepts of modernism rather than to formulate a definition of it. The focus of this book is on the particular kinds of innovation brought to the novel by Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf and on the particular 'lines' they follow, rather than to argue minutely their precise differences from Joyce, Stein and others. I am not maintaining that the kind of modernism of these three novelists is totally different from all others. Obviously, Woolf's recognition that 'they're doing the same thing' implies that her 'railway line' runs parallel to or crosses others from time to time. It might be claimed, for instance, that the use of the single day in *Mrs Dalloway* is directly derived from *Ulysses*: but the differences between these two novels are more striking than their similarities. Joyce creates a rigid structure (not only the Homeric framework but all the other 'schematic systems');³ the hour of the day of each section is just one controlling feature among many. Time in *Mrs Dalloway* is also important – the booming of Big Ben reverberates throughout the novel, but the time struck is often

unspecified. (John Sutherland's 'Mrs Dalloway's Taxi'⁴ amusingly highlights the difference from Joyce, who worked on *Ulysses* with a stopwatch.) Clarissa gets home from Bond Street earlier than anyone with a stopwatch would expect. Whether or not she went by taxi (as Sutherland maintains) is utterly irrelevant to *Mrs Dalloway*. The carefully calculated structures of *Ulysses* are alien to Woolf's methods; to what Hardy called 'my own unmethodical books'; and to the spontaneity which was central to Lawrence's conception of art. He saw Joyce's work as 'too terribly would-be and done-on-purpose, utterly without spontaneity or real life'. Herbert Read asked of *Ulysses* 'Is it not an erudite crossword puzzle?'⁵ and therefore capable of solution. Joyce defines, analyzes, solves. Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf are concerned with the undefinable, the unanalyzable, the unresolved. Genette suggests that it is 'foolish to search for "unity" at any price, and in this way to force the coherence of any work'.⁶ The route I'm mapping goes in the direction of new forms, not as exciting for their own sake, but as enabling exploration of the inconsistent, the irrational, the unresolved, the unknown.

This journey starts in 1868 with Hardy's first, unpublished, novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, with its subtitle, 'A Story with no Plot Containing some original verses'. A novel without a plot in the middle of the Victorian period is clearly signalling its author's experimental intentions. Plotless and with verses, it must have been a novel in a completely new form. But, 'form is content, content is form... writing is not about something; it is that something itself'.⁷ A new kind of novel necessarily 'meant mischief' or so the potential publishers thought. It appears from their comments (our main source of information about the book)⁸ that Hardy attacked the whole social structure, questioning the relationship between the classes and the sexes and undermining the hierarchy. He referred to it in later years as 'a striking socialist' novel. Apparently it was both content and form which so alarmed the publishers. Their fear of new form was expressed in their advice to Hardy to 'write a story with a more complicated plot'.⁹ It is tantalizing to think of the challenging experimental novels Hardy might have written if his first attempt had not been rejected.¹⁰ Instead, he found ways of giving publishers the plots they wanted, while simultaneously challenging, their preconceptions both about the nature of society and about the nature of the novel; but the energy wasted on such things as the desperate overplotting of *Desperate Remedies* and on the tangled rivalries between lovers (both living and dead) in *A*

Pair of Blue Eyes might have been given to the creation of a wholly new kind of novel. Happily, however, after his initial acquiescence in the advice about plot, Hardy refused to be thwarted. In the last 30 years of the nineteenth century he wrote novels which his contemporary readers found challenging and disturbing and which were springboards for his twentieth-century successors.

Young Lawrence, like the young Hardy, planned to write novels without plots. According to Jessie Chambers, he told her, 'I don't want a plot, I should be bored with it'.¹¹ Years later he was still embattled about it. Garnett, questioning whether *The Sisters* was a viable form, drove Lawrence to despair. He even thought he might abandon his experiments: 'Then I should propose to write a story with a plot and to abandon the exhaustive method entirely'.¹² But, fortunately, he did not allow his creative originality to be crushed. He persisted in – even intensified – 'the exhaustive method'. With three published novels behind him, he was in a stronger position than Hardy had been with *The Poor Man and the Lady*. *The Rainbow* was published, and banned. But, unlike *The Poor Man and the Lady*, it survived. It was almost 50 years later than Hardy's first novel. Changes in attitudes, in society, in science, in beliefs in those 50 years were knit up with startling innovations in all the arts. *The Rainbow's* survival became a possibility. In the 1860s oblivion was inevitable for Hardy's experimental novel, 'too soon' as he said, for its date.¹³ Fifty years later, Lawrence was not alone in challenging the rigidities of publishers and public.

Woolf was even more emphatic than Hardy and Lawrence in rejecting plot. In 'Modern Fiction' she wrote, 'If a writer could write what he chose, not what he must... there would be no plot'.¹⁴ In 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' she jokingly suggested that she had felt herself 'tempted to manufacture a three volume novel about the old lady's son', though hastily adding that 'such stories seem to me the most dreary, irrelevant and humbugging affairs in the world'.¹⁵ She attacked 'the appalling narrative business of the realist; getting on from lunch to dinner; it is false, unreal, merely conventional'.¹⁶ Her characters, too, begin to voice objections. Even Bernard, the story-teller in *The Waves*, says, 'How tired I am of stories'¹⁷ and Miss La Trobe, the playwright in *Between the Acts*, seems to imply, 'The plot's nothing'.¹⁸ It seems fairly safe to risk assuming that Woolf endorses these views of her characters, especially as she said she was writing *The Waves* 'to a rhythm, not a plot... it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction'.¹⁹

These three novelists' unanimous rejection of plot is indicative of their shared desire for change – in fiction and in society. The hypnotic effect of plot on readers, its linearity, its movement towards resolution and conclusion tend to reassure rather than disturb. Hardy saw that such tendencies thwart the expression of those 'ideas and emotions which run counter to inert crystallized opinion – hard as a rock – which the vast body of men have vested interest in supporting'.²⁰ Although he had decided, when he wrote this passage, that he might express such ideas 'more fully in verse', he had, in fact, found a way of overcoming the 'unfortunate consequences of the advice to "write a story with a plot"'.²¹ He created stories with plots which undermined nineteenth-century conceptions of realism, 'ran counter to crystallized opinion' and left endings open and questioning. Such questions about plot are still a preoccupation of literary theory, in spite of the innovations of modernism. At the 1979 Symposium 'On Narrative' at the University of Chicago, Robert Scholes commented on much the same lines as Hardy; 'traditional narrative structures... inhibit both individual human growth and significant social change... narrativity itself, as we have known it, must be seen as an opiate'. He fears it 'may be too deeply rooted... to be dispensed with'.²² Hardy thought it was worth trying. He subverted the novel with the strong plot by using it to reinforce his battle against the conventional morality which the fiction of his day was expected to uphold. His essay, 'Candour in English Fiction'²³ states the case for those changes in attitudes which his novels so vividly embody. His early desire to discard plot was just one sign of a radical divergence from the established traditions of fiction and from the assumptions on which those traditions were based. He wrote the kind of novels which Barthes describes as 'the text of bliss: the text that discomforts... unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions... brings to a crisis his relationship with language'.²⁴ He occupies a pivotal position between nineteenth-century and modernist fiction. His novels now may not seem as revolutionary as those of Lawrence and Woolf, but he disrupted the temporal linearity which was based on nineteenth-century assumptions about continuity, causality, progress long before they were abruptly shattered by Einstein. The characteristic modernist gaps in narration, strange juxtapositions, unexpected language, daring subject matter are all present in Hardy's middle and late work. It was, in its time, as disturbing, as challenging and as new as the fiction of the period we now call Modernist – roughly

1900 to 1940 – because we can no longer call it modern. Instead of the kind of modernist fiction which plays conceptual games and offers puzzles which we can solve if we are perceptive, intelligent and knowledgeable enough, Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf create mysteries; they offer no solutions, no certainties, no conclusions. Their novels, on rereading, expand, deepen, become more, not less, complex.

Instead of plot, Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf focused on the unknown, the unconscious; there had been enough of what Lawrence calls 'daytime consciousness' in nineteenth-century fiction – 'unreal', Woolf suggests, in its realism. Hardy led the way. He aimed to keep his novels 'as near to poetry in their subject as conditions would allow, and had often regretted that those conditions would not let him keep them nearer still'.²⁵ Lawrence, writing *The Rainbow*, was prepared to flout these conditions, but he found it 'hard to express a new thing'; he was struggling towards 'a deeper sense than we've been used to exercise'. In *DH Lawrence: Thinker as Poet* Fiona Beckett argues that even in his discursive, non-fictional writing, Lawrence 'poetically thinks his way through and around questions of conscious process, using figures like... the flame... the poppy... the phoenix'. She emphasizes the 'neighbourly nearness' (Heidegger's phrase) between poetry and thought and claims this distinguishes him from his modernist contemporaries such as Joyce and Pound; they, she thinks, have 'the kind of modernist consciousness which might actually impede the real "neighbouring"'.²⁶ This seems to me a valid distinction. Lawrence warned Garnett not to 'look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form'.²⁷ *The Rainbow* is, like *The Waves*, 'written to a rhythm, not a plot'. Roger Fowler makes a similar point about Woolf's 'spectacular subordination of meaning to music' in the opening voices of the children in *The Waves*: it is 'incantatory, a dawn-song in a rhythm which imitates the rise and fall of the waves'.²⁸ This distinction between Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf and some of their contemporary modernists is central to the argument of this book. By bringing fiction into 'neighbourly nearness' with poetry and music, they escaped from the linearity, the logical cause and effect, the determinism implied by plot. They knew 'when to put aside the writer's conscious intention in favour of some deeper intention of which he may perhaps be unconscious'.²⁹ Derrida points out that the 'intermixing of genres' existed 'even before the advent of what we call "modernism"',³⁰

the implication of this is that the 'intermixing' is specifically, but not exclusively, modernist.

New depths, new rhythmic forms gave readers a shock. Forms that are new are difficult to recognize; they tend to seem formless. 'I tell you it's got form', Lawrence had to insist to Garnett, pleading for acceptance of the new thing he was creating. Woolf begged her readers to 'tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary'.³¹ His claim that the work in progress towards *The Rainbow* had form corresponds to her vision of a new, unwritten novel: 'It will be necessary for the writer of this exacting book to bring to bear upon his tumultuous and contradictory emotions the generalizing and simplifying power of a strict and logical imagination'.³² But this hypothetical and paradoxical novel, both tumultuous and simplified, both contradictory and logical was not as wholly innovative as Woolf suggests. In the 1895 Preface to *Jude the Obscure* Hardy said it was 'an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings . . . the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being not regarded as of the first moment'. The juxtaposition of coherence and discord is as paradoxical as Woolf's 'exacting' unwritten book. In discarding concern for consistency, Hardy recognized the possibility of balancing intellectual control with the possibility of allowing the processes of the unconscious to contribute to the shaping of the novel. The Preface to *Jude* challenged presuppositions about the nature of art and questioned whether order and harmony are necessarily of its essence. Awareness of the complexities and incoherences of the human mind made an impact on form in art. The notion of artistic perfection is threatened by a sense of a dangerous instability. The more the novel is concerned with the life of the mind, the greater the risk of fragmentation. Modernist forms of fiction reflect and emphasize this concern. Foucault in 'What is an author?' questions the assumption that 'there must be . . . a point where contradictions are resolved'. But reluctance to accept contradictions persists even now, in art as well as in literature. During a talk on Mondrian, Bridget Riley, contemplating the Mondrian she had had hung among her own paintings in the exhibition, said dubiously, 'I think it isn't quite resolved'. Asked if she was implying that she wanted resolution, she replied eagerly. 'No, it is the shifting surfaces that interest me'.³³

The mind's complex relationship with the body became of particular significance to Hardy as he explored it in his late novels. His risky

statement that Angel 'with more animalism might have been a nobler man'³⁴ is amplified in his treatment of Sue's similar but more extreme disjunction. Her desire for and fear of physical sexual relationships epitomize the discord between mind and body which Lawrence, too, saw as dangerous. In 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', he says, 'Life is only bearable when mind and body are in harmony'³⁵ and widens this out to encompass relationships with people, nature, 'the circumambient universe'. These relationships evoke questions about chaos and harmony in art. How much chaos, how much fragmentation, dare artist or writer allow into his/her work? Beckett presents this question as a continuing problem: 'What I am saying does not mean there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now'.³⁶ Before Beckett, Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf (and other modernist writers, painters and composers) were facing this problem.

Hardy's essay 'Candour in English Fiction' corresponds to 'A Propos'. Lawrence in 'A Propos' (and in much of his non-fiction) is concerned with what is desirable in life – harmony of mind and body, of the individual with others, of humanity with the cosmos – and how all this can be treated in the novel. 'Candour in English Fiction' focuses more on what is desirable in the novel. In his attack on the prudishness of the publishers and public of his time, Hardy writes, 'Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with . . . the relations between the sexes . . . To this, English society opposes a well-nigh insuperable bar'.³⁷ He adds that novelists are forced to create 'the spurious effect' of the characters being in harmony with their society. This was written in 1890 when his fiction also was making some of its most extreme challenges to contemporary attitudes (such as his comment on animalism in *Tess*). Hardy and Lawrence are both challenging a society which fears the body. Both investigate the 'halfness' which results from such fears, Hardy by splitting mind and body between two characters (Angel and Sue are all mind, Alec and Arabella all body), Lawrence by exploring in *Women in Love* Gerald's 'fatal halfness'. They are, inevitably, concerned with the lack of harmony between mind and

body. Harmony, if it does occur in their novels, is rare, ephemeral, ecstatic, threatened. In *Tess*, a transitory moment of harmony between mind and body and between two characters is shown in the episode in the empty house in the New Forest. There is even a faint hint of physical sexual fulfilment, but it is distanced by being what the caretaker saw: 'the faces of the pair, wrapped in profound slumber, Tess's lips being parted like a half-open flower near his cheek'.³⁸

Some 25 years later, Lawrence is able in *Women in Love* to be much more open about sexual harmony. In 'Excuse' he creates a moment in Sherwood Forest similar to the one in *Tess*, but much more explicit, of course, about the physical nature of the relationship. His rhythms and repetitions, the balanced and matching sentences ('She had her desire fulfilled. He had his desire fulfilled...') create a sense of musical chords and harmonies. Lawrence uses the rhythmical and sonic resources of language to evoke harmonies that are physical, sensual, emotional. Heidegger maintains that 'It is... the property of language to sound and to ring and to vibrate, to hover and to tremble... But our experience of this property is exceedingly clumsy, because the metaphysical-technical explanation gets in the way, and keeps us from considering the matter properly.'³⁹ Lawrence's physical, sensual, emotional rhythms escape the clumsiness feared by Heidegger and create a new kind of fictional prose to express a previously forbidden experience of harmony.

However, 'there must be mutation... inconclusiveness, immediacy, the quality of life itself'⁴⁰ in poetry, said Lawrence, but it applies to fiction, too. And so the novels deal with conflict and the struggle towards harmony more than with its achievement. The problem of realizing this in words is shown in a particularly sharp way in Lawrence's 1912 short story 'New Eve and Old Adam'. Here, he is already experimenting, trying out different methods of conveying intellect and 'blood', consciousness and unconsciousness. Though this story gives a simple, even crude outline of dislocation between mind and body, it is an important stage in the process towards finding a form and a language which will express, both imaginatively and intellectually, the complexities of this relationship between harmony and chaos.

Women in Love is that new form. It oscillates between harmony and chaos. That moment of harmony in the New Forest is placed in the context of violent clashes. Birkin's meditation on the African statuette is designed to clarify the dangers of separation of mind and body. Just as Hardy separated them by allotting mind to one character,

body to another, so Birkin makes the African statuette represent purely sensuous knowledge, in stark opposition to the abstract, 'ice-destructive knowledge', which he tentatively identifies with Gerald's 'halfness'. Birkin is simplifying for the sake of clarifying; these opposites, he implies, rather in the manner of Lawrence's essays, need to combine in harmony; Gerald cannot achieve such a combination: 'His consciousness had gone into his wrists, into his hands... his wrists were bursting, there would be no satisfaction till his hands had closed on her.' This is not a harmonious synthesizing of mind and body but a damaging eruption of the repressed instinctive element into consciousness. Even when the Gerald-Gudrun relationship seems to be running smoothly, they are 'separate like opposite poles of one fierce energy', in contrast to Birkin's idea of polarity, with stars harmoniously balancing one another.

The novel's structure may seem to be the simple one suggested by Leavis: one couple heading towards chaos, the other towards harmony. But this is complicated by many cross-currents; Birkin's analysis of Gerald's 'halfness' is juxtaposed to his anxiety about his own 'duality', 'so spiritual on the one hand, so degraded on the other'. 'That chaos called consciousness' (the phrase is Hardy's)⁴¹ is a vital element in the shaping of *Women in Love* and of the novels of Hardy and Woolf.

Their exploitation of the relation of consciousness to the external world adds another dimension of complexity to the form of the novel. In the first chapter of *The Return of the Native* Hardy suggests that humanity no longer feels in harmony with mild and gentle landscapes but is more attuned to the sombre and the desolate. Wild places like Egdon Heath correspond to the unconscious; they are 'the original of those wild regions of obscurity which we encounter in dreams of flight and disaster'. This razor edge where chaos harmonizes with chaos is epitomized in Eustacia's paradoxical relation with the heath; as she goes through the storm to her death, 'Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without.'⁴²

The episode of Tess in the uncultivated garden, listening to Angel's harp, is similarly equivocal: 'the harmonies passed like breezes through her'⁴³ and even slug-slime and sticky blights are harmless, merely 'cooling and softening' on her skin (this is the colour, rose madder, not the incipient dementia of some urban critics' imaginations); but Hardy does not let us forget that she cannot help crushing snails underfoot. Breezes pass through Tess; 'this coolness and subtlety

of vegetation passing into one's blood' is Birkin's experience when he rolls naked among the plants. There is no equivalent of the crushed snails here; the harmony between man and nature seems complete. But perhaps the harmony is even more tentative than in *Tess*; it is brought into question much later when, facing Gerald's corpse, Birkin feels his blood turn to ice-water. Both novelists emphasize the physicality of the relationship with the external world. In Woolf it is sometimes even more intensely physical, sometimes violently, so that harmony is on the brink of slipping over into dissonance: 'a jar was so green that the eye seemed sucked up through a funnel by its intensity and stuck to it like a limpet'.⁴⁴

Woolf frightens us with a green jar, Hardy frightens us with the universe. For the characters in *Two on a Tower* outer space, observed through a telescope, has 'a vastness they could not cope with, even as an idea'.⁴⁵ This experimental novel suggests that the immensities of space make any notion of harmony between 'man and his circumambient universe' inconceivable. In *Women in Love* Lawrence seems to acknowledge this, postponing its achievement until Birkin's vision of 'a finer created being' of 'miraculous unborn species' replaces humanity. In his essays, on the other hand, he sees 'connecting ourselves up with the cosmos' as a necessity for humanity.

While these three novelists are vividly conscious of chaos, they also know how human beings long for harmony. Clym and Eustacia, newly married, live in 'a harmonious mist' which veils anything inharmonious. Jude, on arriving at Christminster, his 'heavenly Jerusalem', 'When he passed objects out of harmony . . . he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if they were not there'. Lawrence treats this tendency with greater complexity. He exposes how Gerald's concept of harmony as the equivalent of organization and so reducible to the laws of mechanics, in its operation in the mines, turns into chaos. Any contrasting moves in the novel towards harmony are transitory and unstable. Birkin's hankering for 'an eternal union' with a man is left hanging in a void when the novel stops. Woolf treats such longings more harshly. In *Between the Acts* the mockery of Mrs Swithin's 'unifying' is merciless:

Sheep, cows, grass, trees – all are one. If discordant, producing harmony – if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus – she was smiling – the agony of the particular sheep or cow, or human being is necessary; and so . . . we reach the conclusion that *all* is harmony, could we hear it.

Such longings are probably the reason why human beings invented art and why, in some periods, pictures stay inside their frames, poems obey established metrical rules and novels end with a satisfying sense of completeness. But in the period I am dealing with, roughly 1880–1940, the changes, contradictions and cross-currents of ideas challenge the concept of harmonious form in art. The endings of Hardy's last two novels question that idea, *Jude* mournfully, *The Well-Beloved* ironically. The first version of *The Well-Beloved* ends enigmatically in a gurgle of icy laughter, the second version apparently conventionally in marriage, but only because neighbours want 'to round off other people's histories in the best machine-made conventional manner'.⁴⁶ Hardy's view of such endings is implicit in the grotesque ceremony with the aging bride in the wheelchair and the closing of the natural springs – both of water and of creativity. Such ironic foregrounding of technique is one of the reasons why *The Well-Beloved* has been described as 'a key text in the transition from Victorian to modern fiction'.⁴⁷ *Jude* ends with clashing contrasts. His dying murmurs of lines from the Book of Job are crashed through and chopped up by shouts of holiday crowds and raucous brass bands. The white, silent corpse is juxtaposed to explosions of noise and colour. Finally, Sue's claim that she has found peace is set against Arabella's assertion that she will never find it. The gap between what is desired and what is is one of the subjects of the novel. The clashes and contrasts of its form demonstrate that gap. Both Hardy and Lawrence were aware of the problem. Eagleton writes 'it is precisely in its fissuring of organic form . . . that [*Women in Love*] enforces a "progressive" discontinuity with a realist lineage already put into profound question by *Jude the Obscure*'.⁴⁸ This suggests that Hardy and Lawrence were on their way to finding the form Beckett looked for. It is surprising, therefore, that Eagleton argues that 'after *Jude* there was nowhere for Hardy to go; having "exploded" the organic forms of fiction, he was forced to disembark'.⁴⁹ He also describes Lawrence as 'beset' by contradictions.⁵⁰ The question of resolution continues to perturb, both in literature and in the visual arts. Bridget Riley's interest in 'shifting surfaces' parallels Woolf's treatment of form: 'She invented many different forms, and each was like a container within which could be held in suspension a variety of different statements about what life is, in constant agitated motion'.⁵¹

Woolf wanted to 'achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords . . . some kind of whole made of shimmering fragments'.⁵² In

To the Lighthouse she uses an artist to examine directly questions of harmony and chaos in art. Lily, the artist, tries to achieve 'that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces'. In each of the three sections of the book a woman creates harmony, makes 'Time stand still', Mrs Ramsay in family life, Lily in art, the charwoman in stemming, with mop and bucket, the flow of the house towards disintegration. This patterning is matched by the ending, where, by a cunning shift of tenses, the arrival at the lighthouse is made to coincide with the final brushstroke on Lily's painting, which makes the whole cohere. Brilliantly Woolf has drawn the threads together and brought the novel harmoniously to a close.

But, is it too neat? Earlier, Lily had felt, 'Beauty had this penalty – it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life – froze it'. Lawrence's discussion of this idea in the Introduction to *New Poems* proposes a kind of poetry in which there is 'no static perfection, none of that finality which we find so satisfying because we are so frightened'.⁵³ Woolf expressed her awareness of the dangers of beauty in a letter to Ethel Smythe: 'I will broach the subject of beauty . . . and burst out in ecstasy at your defence of me as a very ugly writer – which is what I am – but an honest one, driven like a whale to the surface in a snort – such is the effort and anguish to me of finding a phrase (that is, saying what I mean) – and then they say I write beautifully! How could I write beautifully when I am always trying to say something that has not been said and should be said for the first time, exactly.'⁵⁴ *To the Lighthouse* seems to veer towards that finality Lawrence saw as dangerously 'satisfying' as Woolf so perfectly brings together the completion of the voyage, of the picture and of the novel. In doing this, she seems in danger of diminishing in the novel, the power of suffering, fear, war, death, entropy and of making chaos too easily controlled and shaped. But, at the last moment, she undercuts her perfection. In the last few lines of the book, Lily's picture is demoted from its status as a work of art to an amateur's attempt which will lie forgotten in an attic. She thus destabilizes that static perfection which, for a moment, she had seemed to endorse. *Between the Acts* more daringly explores her early idea of 'symmetry by means of infinite discords'. Here, she creates a form in which words are broken, sentences shattered and human beings are 'orts, scraps and fragments', reflected scrapily in the broken mirrors of the actors. Chaos is here creative. A tree full of starlings becomes 'a rhapsody, a quivering cacophony . . . birds syllabbling discordantly, life, life, life, without measure, with-

out stop.'⁵⁵ Woolf crystallizes what has been apparent in Hardy's and Lawrence's novels; both harmony (in *Between the Acts* imaged in the white empty room at its centre) and chaos are necessary to human existence. Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf have created forms of fiction based on a creative tension between harmony and chaos. Structurally these novels are both shaped and fragmented so that they are able to contain 'that chaos called consciousness' and its even more chaotic partner, unconsciousness. As Josipovici says, 'Modern art relinquishes the notion of art as a bulwark against chaos.'⁵⁶

It is Elizabeth-Jane in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* who experiences 'that chaos called consciousness' as she sits at her dying mother's bedside and hears the unsynchronized ticking of clocks. Clock-time, mind-time, life-time are jangled together. It comes as a surprise that it is Elizabeth-Jane who has this sense of the chaotic nature of consciousness, since one of her functions in the novel is to form a contrast, in her stability and self-control, to Henchard's 'unruly volcanic stuff beneath the rind'. But, just as Hardy rejected consistency of form in the preface to *Jude*, so he also rejects consistency in characterization, especially in his late novels. Both Alec and Arabella have brief, apparently out of character, religious conversions. Such inconsistencies are psychologically more complex in the treatment of Sue, with her sudden and violent fluctuations of feeling and attitude.

Hardy explores but does not explain these emotional changes. Sue is 'puzzling and unstateable' not only to Jude, but to the reader, to Hardy himself. Little Father Time moves out into another world, 'our rude realms far above'.⁵⁷ In creating these characters, Hardy is exploring the unconscious, but hesitating on the brink of interpreting it, leaving the reader to experience its unexplained complexities.⁵⁸ In his more intense way, Lawrence flings the reader into the midst of the experience, with startling imagery, powerful, repetitive rhythms, alliteration and assonance. In this way, modes of being which seem utterly alien to the human are created. The moonlight dance in *The Rainbow*, by starting with the rhythm of the earth and sea, can lead to Ursula's unearthly, violent relationship with the moon. Her fearful repudiation of this experience when she returns to 'daytime consciousness' reinforces rather than denies it. Her glimpse of an affinity between her own incomprehensible experience and a bunch of oats glistening in the moonlight affirms the strangeness. Imagery, sounds, rhythm ensure a reading that is sensuous and imaginative, rather than cerebral. The most profound sexual experience of Ursula and Birkin 'can never be transmuted into mind content'. Terms

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such as 'unstateable' (Sue) and 'untranslatable' (Birkin) are used of characters not only in extraordinary psychological states but also in their ordinariness. (Birkin is 'untranslatable' just going into a shop.)

This strangeness is highlighted by the characters' responses to one another. Sue is a 'conundrum' to Jude; Ursula thinks the way Gudrun adds Birkin up and draws a line underneath is 'such a lie';⁵⁹ Birkin, the 'changer', the 'chameleon', is crossed out, 'summed up, paid for, settled, done with' in Gudrun's sum. Bernard in *The Waves* maintains that Louis is 'adding us up like insignificant items in some grand total . . . one day . . . the addition will be complete; our total will be known';⁶⁰ Rhoda agrees, feeling that 'if we submit, he will reduce us to order'.⁶¹ Gudrun and Louis are presented as trying to be omniscient authors of their friends' lives (like the neighbours at the end of *The Well Beloved*) and, in the process, reducing them to insignificance. In this way they sharpen the focus, in the novels they occur in, on the multiple nature of character. This distinguishes these novels utterly from the tradition of omniscience. The plain statements that 'Mrs Dalloway would never say of anyone that they were this or were that' and that 'more than fifty pairs of eyes' were needed to see round Mrs Ramsay do the same job, but in a more obvious and less vivid way. The recognition that 'no thing was simply one thing' (as James understands on nearing the lighthouse) was, according to David Lodge, 'perhaps the central assertion of the modernist novel'.⁶²

This is a central part of modernist novelists' effort to break out of confinement to place, time, consistency, 'daytime consciousness'. It was the sight of some yellow-hammers ('They are of another world. . . . The universe is non-human, thank God') which prompted Ursula's fierce rejection of Gudrun's attitude to people and to creatures – 'making everything come down to human standards'.⁶³ In *The Return of the Native* a mallard brings to Venn communication 'from regions unknown to man', as do the birds from 'behind the North Pole' in *Tess*. These are means of expressing that 'leap from the known to the unknown' in *The Rainbow*, that 'miracle of leaping from a pinnacle of a tower into the air – startling, unexpected, unknown'⁶⁴ in *To the Lighthouse*. Hardy experiments with bringing this 'something inhuman' into even closer relationship with the human by creating the character of Little Father Time, a character out on the rim of the world, gazing across 'some vast Atlantic of Time'. In his poem, 'Midnight on the Great Western', Hardy asks,

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,
'Our rude realms far above,
Whence with spacious vision you mark and mete
This region of sin you find you in
But are not of.'⁶⁵

Hardy's questioning, uncertain treatment of the journeying boy in this poem has not caused the consternation aroused by Little Father Time. The incongruity of such a strange character in a novel is the problem. It is an overt challenge to traditional assumptions about the nature of the novel. In his 'Study of Thomas Hardy', Lawrence asserts that Hardy's 'little drama [of human beings] falls to pieces . . . but the stupendous theatre outside goes on enacting its own incomprehensible drama'.⁶⁶ But his use of 'theatre' and 'drama' implies that a relationship between the human and the 'incomprehensible' outside does exist in Hardy's work. Woolf puts it in these terms: 'how it is not oneself, but something in the universe one's left with. . . . One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none, I think.'⁶⁷

Yet she persisted: 'It is to be an endeavour at something mystic, spiritual; the thing that exists when we aren't there'.⁶⁸ She writes of 'worshipping the impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours'.⁶⁹ Things (she had, for instance, chests of drawers in mind) are just as 'unstateable' and 'untranslatable' as the characters in these novels. And, because they are alien, the stretching of the imagination is even greater. Lawrence's 'carbon' ('that which is non-human in humanity')⁷⁰ is inanimate and so, according to Langbaum, 'a step further than Hardy who roots his characters in a vegetated landscape'.⁷¹ But Hardy's birds connect with the unknown and the inanimate; the trilobite's eyes, dead and turned to stone, but fixed on Knight, saw a world long before the existence of humanity. Woolf's 'solid objects' – a piece of glass looking like 'a creature from another world' and a piece of iron which was 'evidently alien to the earth and had its origin in one of the dead stars or was itself the cinder of a dead moon'⁷² – succeed in connecting the reader (as well as the possessors of the objects) with 'that something in the universe' for which she had felt there was 'no image'.

'The world without a self'⁷³ – something difficult to write about – challenged and fascinated these three writers. They treated it indirectly, through imagery, and also directly by incorporating the problems of this kind of writing explicitly in their work. In Hardy's

poem, 'The Fallow Deer at the Lonely House',⁷⁴ 'One without looks in tonight', while 'We sit and think/At the fender brink' but 'we do not discern those eyes'; so the poem raises the question, quite explicitly, of who is observing the eyes, the deer, the people, the house, the whole scene. Likewise, in the manuscript of *Between the Acts*, Woolf asks 'who observed the dining room . . . noted absence?' In the published version, it is the room itself which expresses itself:

Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence.⁷⁵

Lawrence, too, imagines 'a world empty of people'. In *Kangaroo* he writes of 'the soft, blue, humanless sky of Australia. "Tabula rasa". The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing. The white clarity of the Australian fragile atmosphere. Without a mark, without a record'.⁷⁶ In evoking the special 'humanless' quality of Australia, he also insists that it is 'unwritten', unmarked, unrecorded. He simultaneously denies and makes a 'record'. Woolf does the same, not in a strange land but in an English country garden, where the sky

was blue, pure blue, black blue; blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration. It never fell as sun, shadow, or rain upon the world, but disregarded the little coloured ball of earth entirely. No flower felt it; no garden.⁷⁷

To register what has 'escaped registration' it is necessary to use negatives. Lawrence and Woolf, especially in *Women in Love* and *Between the Acts*, use innumerable negatives (to Hardy's 'unstateable' they add 'untranslatable', 'unliving', 'inhuman', 'eyeless' (of winds and flowers), 'unblowing', 'ungrowing'). In *Between the Acts*, this negativity is, near the end, compressed into two negative fragments, detached from what they negate: 'un-' and 'dis-' concentrate the essence of negativity.

'The struggle with words and meaning', so central to modernist writing, is made even more explicit by the characters' debates about it. Such discussions pervade *Women in Love*. Lawrence uses Birkin to articulate a notion of a relationship 'where there is no speech',⁷⁸ where 'words themselves do not convey meaning. . . . Yet it must be spoken . . . to give utterance was to break a way through the

walls of the prison'.⁷⁹ Birkin's later realization that 'it must happen beyond the sound of words'⁸⁰ is no solution for the novelist who has to use words to suggest what is beyond them. In *Kangaroo* the struggle becomes less abstract and even more anguished: 'speech was like a volley of dead leaves and dust, stifling the air. Human beings should learn to make weird, wordless cries, like animals, and cast off the clutter of words'.⁸¹ Somers here is almost identical with Bernard in *The Waves* who needs 'a howl, a cry'. In desperation, these novelists look to times and places without language – 'beyond words', in the unconscious in *Women in Love*, before words, in the unintelligible syllables of the song of the ancient woman outside Regent's Park Station in *Mrs Dalloway*. Illness, for Woolf, provides yet another way of experiencing words:

In illness words seem to possess a mystic quality. We grasp what is beyond their surface meaning, gather instinctively this, that and the other – a sound, a colour, here a stress, there a pause . . . incomprehensibility has enormous power over us in illness . . . in health, meaning has encroached upon sound. Our intellect dominates over our senses. But in illness . . . words give out their scent . . . meaning is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and nostrils, like some queer odour.⁸²

In *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe, too, in her exultation with 'words without meaning, wonderful words', enjoys their sensuousness, but her new play – 'The curtain rose. They spoke' – leaves the reader at the end of *Between the Acts* confronted by a void – the blank page. 'The defining characteristic of Modernism was its insistence that the mind be subjected to a wholly new kind of stress. . . . Obsessive attempts to say "the unsayable" made extreme demands on the mind's elasticity. Not only literature but all the art of the period seemed intent on stretching the mind beyond the very limits of human understanding'.⁸³ By ending *Between the Acts* in the way she does, Woolf makes that stretching seem to be going on indefinitely. The reader is put in the position of Wallace Stevens' listener,

. . . who listens in the snow
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.⁸⁴

The modernist writer, 'nothing himself' explores a universe no longer centred on humanity. In Hardy's later fiction, characters recognize their own insignificance. Henchard's grand statement of negatives in his will claims to erase himself – '& that no man remember me' – even in the act of asserting himself, 'To this I put my name, MICHAEL HENCHARD'. By the time of *Tess* and *Jude* the erasure of the self is no longer treated ironically. Tess would have her life 'unbe' and Jude submerges himself in Job, identifying with his 'Let the day perish wherein I was born'. While Hardy gives these three characters individual reasons for wanting extinction, he also implies that this might be a universal desire. He sees little chance of happiness for 'higher existences' on this planet, but it might be found on other planets 'though it is hard to see how'.⁸⁵ In *Tess*, he momentarily imagines an improved society but concludes that 'it is not to be prophesied or even conceived as possible'. The beginning of 'To an unborn pauper Child' endorses the idea that 'not to have been born is best' ('Breathe not, hid heart: cease silently') yet the poem ends

... such are we –
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary –
That I can hope
Health, love, friends, scope
In full for thee; can dream thou'lt find
Joys seldom yet attained by human kind.⁸⁶

Hardy created an art which can hold in tension such contraries, such cross-currents. It is an art which contemplates being and non-being.

Lawrence goes to even greater extremes. His despair of the human race is so intense that its possible extinction becomes a focus for his imagination in *Women in Love*. Birkin sees life as 'a blotch of labour, like insects scurrying in filth'⁸⁷ and says, 'I abhor humanity. I wish it were swept away.' He imagines a more desirable world, 'empty of people, just grass and a hare sitting up'. In response to Ursula's accusation that he wants there to be 'nothing', he challenges her: 'Do you think creation depends on *man*? ... Man is a mistake, he must go'.⁸⁸ Birkin has leapt from the decentring of the human race to its extinction. At the end of the novel, Lawrence softens the harshness of this stark elimination of humanity. After Gerald's death, Birkin thinks of the 'non-human mystery' of the universe, and envisages the processes of evolution replacing

humanity as it replaced the ichthyosauri; he imagines 'some finer, more wonderful, some new, more lovely race, to carry on the embodiment of creation. ... Human or inhuman mattered nothing.' The statement that 'It was very consoling to Birkin to think this' is interestingly ambiguous. It hints that Birkin's despair of human existence is such that, like Eliot in *Ash Wednesday*, he is

having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice.

On the other hand, his claim that he 'would die like a shot to know that the earth would be really cleaned of all the people'⁸⁹ may be taken as selflessly affirmative; it is not nihilistic, since he hopes for forms other and better than the human to evolve. Lawrence makes Birkin's position more challenging than consolatory.

The post-Darwinian displacement of humanity, not just from its central position, but altogether is echoed in Woolf's investigations into the possibility of seeing 'the thing that exists when we aren't there'. In her work there is no overt debate on the world without a human element, but it is there by implication. In her diary notes of her first thoughts on *The Moths* (later to become *The Waves*) a character might 'think about the age of the earth: the death of humanity'. This idea is explored differently and more explicitly in *Between the Acts*. Isa's tentative and wistful longing is to escape from her role as an overburdened donkey into an imagined world which is wholly empty and negative:

some harvestless dim field where no evening lets fall her mantle;
nor sun rises. All's equal there. Unblowing, ungrowing are the
roses there. Change is not; nor the mutable and lovable; nor
greetings nor partings; nor furtive findings and feelings, where
hand seeks hand and eye seeks shelter from the eye.⁹⁰

This world involves both a release from growth, change and human contact and a sense of loss. A similarly equivocal view of humanity occurs abruptly just before the end of *Between the Acts*. Without explanation or comment, the characters in the drawing-room at Pointz Hall become insects:

The circle of readers, attached to white papers was lit up. There
in that hollow of the sun-baked field were congregated the

grasshopper, the ant and the beetle, rolling pebble: of sun-baked earth through the glistening stubble. In that rosy corner of the sun-baked field Bartholomew, Giles and Lucy polished and nibbled and broke off crumbs.⁹¹

In Birkin's vision of human beings as insects, they were 'scurrying in filth'; Woolf's, though shrunk to insignificance (like Birkin's) have a 'rosy', 'glistening', 'sun-baked' setting. They seem to be viewed benignly. In 1923 she wrote:

my own view of humanity in general falls and falls... now I can see little good in the race and I would like to convey this in writing... but then (and this is my weakness) tolerance keeps breaking in and I excuse the creatures instead of blighting them.⁹²

By 1939 there is less tolerance and more blighting, but not with the ruthless vehemence of Birkin in *Women in Love*. After the 'insect' paragraph in *Between the Acts*, the human characters become first fox and vixen, then Stone Age man and woman who, in Mrs Swithin's reading of H.G. Wells's *Outline of History* has just 'raised himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones'. No such positive development is offered by the blank page of *Between the Acts* after 'They spoke'. Instead, confronted by that nothingness, the reader may feel exposed to something indefinable and beyond consciousness. Gillian Beer discerns, in *To the Lighthouse*, this sense of exposure to 'an expanse of the world beyond the human'.⁹³ In the novels of Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf this awareness comes with a strong sense of the everyday. In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence gives Tom Brangwen the understanding that, 'There was the infinite world, eternal and unchanging, as well as the world of life'. In *To the Lighthouse*, for Mrs Ramsay, these two worlds are so intermingled that at a dinner party 'partook, she thought, helping Mr Bankes to an especially tender piece, of eternity'. Michael Bell implies that the 'concern with the intimate, pervasive connection between the everyday quality of experience and an ultimate metaphysical vision'⁹⁴ is specific to Lawrence's fiction. I suggest that this concern is shared with Hardy and Woolf and is a vital aspect of their modernism. 'In modernism words after speech reach into the unknown', says Josipovici.⁹⁵ The unknown into which the words of Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf reach is both 'the world beyond the human' and that other unknown, the inner world. Ricoeur pinpoints only

one of these when he says (in a discussion of *Mrs Dalloway*) that 'the art of fiction consists of weaving together the sense of everydayness and that of the inner self'.⁹⁶ The mingling together of the everyday with unknown regions, whether of mind or universe, is a crucial aspect of modernism and the main line down which this study of the fiction of Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf travels.

Hardy in *Two on a Tower* brings all these elements together in a sentence: 'At night, when human discords are hushed... there is nothing to moderate the blow with which the infinitely great, the stellar universe... strikes down upon the infinitely little, the mind of the beholder.'⁹⁷