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“Plunging into the Abyss”: ai confini del romanzo vittoriano

Abstract — From a cultural point of view, one of the most important aspects of the Victorian novel is its representation of change intended also as an epistemological crisis and revolution in terms of the perception of the real. By the second half of the century, in fact, the idea of an organic society is drastically unsettled while the changing landscape is perceived as a body whose limbs convey no longer a sense of unity and continuity. But, although George Eliot is well aware of such a radical socioeconomic transformation, she is ready to subscribe to a world-view in which a hypothesis of national wholeness and organic growth is postulated. This is explicitly voiced by Felix Holt in the Address to the Working Men. The same attitude does not apply to Thomas Hardy whose novels are deeply ingrained in a Weltanschauung in which there is no room for an organic view of society. His narrative, partly mirroring a modernist sensibility, is more clearly connected to a perception of reality as a fragmented body for which no possibility of recovering the lost totality and order is envisaged. In this sense Hardy’s poetics is closer to Conrad’s conception of the novelistic form, even though for the latter “the rescued fragment” has still many stories to reveal.

**Keywords:** The Victorian novel, change, fragmentation, wholeness, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy