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“A Merciful Man”: Thomas Hardy and the Thinking of (in)Humanity

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- 1 Late in 1895, the *Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette* noted that the "pig-killing chapter" in Thomas Hardy's latest novel, *Jude the Obscure*, was about to be reprinted by the Victorian Society for the Protection of Animals (quoted in Davis and Gerber, 57-58). Whilst "bitterly attacked" by some, as the *Chronicle and Gazette* reported, the chapter was clearly "viewed differently in other quarters" (57-58), and it duly appeared in the December edition of the Society's periodical, *The Animal's Friend*.
- 2 The controversy surrounding the chapter was, perhaps, inevitable; it still retains its power to shock. It opens amidst snow, as Jude and his wife Arabella prepare to butcher the pig which they have been fattening through the autumn months (Hardy 2002, 57). When the butcher is delayed, Jude and Arabella elect to kill the pig themselves. As the animal is tied down, its rage gives way to a "cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless" (58). Arabella exhorts Jude to keep the animal "bleeding long", that the meat might be "well bled" (58). Jude refuses, and "plunged in the knife with all his might" (58):

However unworkmanlike the deed, it had been mercifully done. The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends. (Hardy 2002, 59)
- 3 Almost inevitably, these were details critics found difficult to stomach. Mrs. Oliphant thought the scene "horrible" (Cox 258). Jeanette L. Gilder, writing in the *New York World*, called it "nauseating", and an "act of literary suicide" (Lerner and Holmstrom 113). "[D]oes Mr. Hardy really take pleasure in contemplating the process of pig-sticking?" asked A. J. Butler in the *National Review* (Cox 290).

- 4 In light of the controversy that the scene had already attracted – and given Hardy’s own sensitivity to criticism – it may therefore seem surprising that he allowed the scene to be reproduced. In fact, he not only gave his permission, but offered it up for publication. On 15 November, he wrote to the Editor of the *Animal’s Friend*:

During the writing of a recent novel of mine it occurred to me that one of the scenes might be useful in teaching mercy in the Slaughtering of Animals for the meat-market – the cruelties involved in the business having been a great grief to me for years. The story is now published, and I send herewith a proof of the scene alluded to – of which I offer you gratuitously the right of publishing in the *Animal’s Friend* or elsewhere. (Purdy 97)

- 5 Clearly, this was a subject that mattered to him very much. As he remarked to Florence Henniker:

I suppose I have missed the mark in the pig-killing scene the papers are making such a fuss about: I fully expected that, though described in that particular place for the purely artistic reason of bringing out A.’s [Arabella’s] character, it might serve a humane end in showing people the cruelty that goes on unheeded under the barbarous *régime* we call civilization. (Purdy 94)

- 6 Separately, he wrote on the same subject to Lady Jeune:

You will have seen how “Jude” has been attacked in two or three quarters. I am much surprised at the *nature* of the attack – the book having been announced as for men & women: & my only fear having been that it was too much a book of moral teaching – the inculcation of *Mercy*, to youths & girls who have made a bad marriage, & to animals who have to be butchered. (Purdy 97)

- 7 *Mercy*, then, is what matters to Hardy, so it must have been a source of some satisfaction to him that the editor of the *Animal’s Friend* chose to reprint the piece under the title “A Merciful Man (Scene from *Jude the Obscure*), by Thomas Hardy”. Hardy – and his readers – would have caught the allusion. The expression “a merciful man is merciful to his beast” was by then proverbial; it appears, for example, in Christy’s compendium of *Proverbs, Maxims and Phrases of All Ages* (1890) (Christy 34). As we shall see, Hardy had used it himself, in an earlier work; and as even this brief introduction suggests, the question of humankind’s relationship to the non-human was to him both profoundly important and profoundly troubling.

- 8 Put rather differently, Hardy’s abiding concern for the non-human shaped his view of humanity. Indeed, it shaped in him a strong sense of humankind’s *inhumanity*, an *inhumanity* expressed not only in acts of occasional or random cruelty towards animals, but, increasingly, through their systematic exploitation. The aim of this essay is, therefore, to explore the way in which Hardy’s response to the non-human informs his view of what it is to be human, and how in turn that view challenges our own perceptions of humanity.

- 9 In his critical biography of Hardy, Paul Turner notes the special significance of women to both his life and work (Turner 3). But, as Turner adds, “there was another notable feature of his emotional make-up which was far more individual: a special feeling for animals” (3):

This has often been dismissed as an amiable weakness, a neurotic symptom, or, in the case of his dogs and cats, a displacement-reaction to childlessness. It was actually a key-element in his personality, instinctive in childhood, but soon justified intellectually by Darwinism. (Turner 3)

This “special feeling” suggests itself as a form of what we might now call “biophilia”. Today, this is a phrase most closely associated with E. O. Wilson, and the idea that human

behaviour is shaped by a hard-wired instinct "which I will be so bold as to define as the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (Wilson 1). In the words of David Orr, this "innate urge" to affiliate with other forms of life is "inscribed in the brain itself [...] expressing tens of thousands of years of evolutionary experience" (Orr 422). Wilson's socio-biological arguments have always proven controversial. For my own purpose, and without ruling out the way in which instinct may have shaped Hardy's sensitivity to the non-human "other", it may be more productive to read his biophilia in the looser and more general terms that were first used to define and describe it, not by E. O. Wilson, but by Erich Fromm, in *The Heart of Man* (1964). For Fromm, biophilia is a "love of life" (Fromm 9), "a total orientation, an entire way of being" (41): "[t]he person who fully loves life is attracted by the process of life and growth in all spheres" (43).

- 10 Perhaps paradoxically, because Hardy's view of life is often thought of as mordant, pessimistic, and even fatalistic, Fromm's definition perfectly captures Hardy's long interest in life "in all spheres". What Hardy wrote of the young Jude, abandoning his job of bird-scaring, is also true of Hardy himself: "[a] magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs" (Hardy 2002, 9).
- 11 In Fromm's formulation, however, this kind of fellow feeling is both shaped and constrained by social as well as natural factors. In *The Heart of Man*, Fromm reflects on the social conditions necessary for biophilia to exist. It assumes, he wrote, abundance rather than scarcity, "both economically and psychologically", the "abolition of social injustice" (Fromm 48), and freedom, although of a particular kind: as Fromm notes, "[i]t is not enough that men are not slaves; if social conditions further the existence of automatons, the result will not be love of life, but love of death" (49).
- 12 In Hardy's own case, his biophilia was certainly shaped by childhood experience – as a child, it was "animal life that he watched with the greatest interest, and felt closest to" (Turner 7) – but, as a young adult, it was also shaped by his immersion in the intellectual milieu of Victorian Britain. Hardy read widely, citing Comte, Mill, Spencer, and Hume, but he was particularly influenced by Darwin.
- 13 As Levine notes (36), it is conventional, when discussing Hardy, to underline the fact that Darwin drew attention to the conflict and struggle that animated the non-human world. Somewhat ironically, therefore, Hardy's hopes for mercy must be set against his recognition that mercy was itself lacking in the animal world. As he asked of Frederic Harrison, "when will the still more numerous terrestrial animals – our kin, having the same ancestry – learn to be merciful?"

The fact is that when you get to the bottom of things you find no bed-rock of righteousness to rest on – nature is *unmoral* – & our puny efforts are those of people who try to keep their leaky house dry by wiping off the waterdrops from the ceiling. (Millgate 1990, 191)

In turn, Hardy recognised the wasted potential of what he famously called "the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is":

The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. (Hardy 1998, 52)

At the same time, however, Darwin provided Hardy with an intellectual framework within which to situate a powerful and positive response to the entirety of life. Alongside the determinism and fatalism that have so often been read into Hardy's work, there is, as Beer points out, "a sense of plenitude" strongly linked to his understanding of Darwin, and it finds expression "in the moment-by-moment fullness of the text" (241). (Inevitably,

one thinks of "The Rally", and Tess's exquisitely rendered journey into the "verdant plain" of the Froom [Hardy 2003, 102], whose waters are as "rapid as the shadow of a cloud" [Hardy 2003, 103].) As Levine notes in his discussion of "Hardyesque enchantment" (Levine 38), Hardy "was more in love with life – and in Darwinian ways – than most Darwinian readings suggest" (37).

- 14 In part, at least, this is a sense of wonder at the richness and diversity of life. When, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Fancy and Dick celebrate their marriage beneath the spreading arms of the eponymous greenwood, their lives are overlaid with the countless lives that have sprung from it:

Many hundreds of birds had been born amidst the boughs of this single tree, tribes of rabbits and hares had nibbled at its bark from year to year, quaint tufts of fungi had sprung from the cavities of its forks, and countless families of moles and earthworms had crept about its roots. (Hardy 1992, 193)

As Turner points out (32), the implied allusion is not only to Darwin's "great Tree of Life", which covers the earth's surface "with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications" (Darwin 172), but to the image of an "entangled bank", with which Darwin concludes *The Origin of Species*. Clothed with "many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth," there is, he argues, "grandeur in this view of life" (Darwin 459).

- 15 There are also consequences to it. From Darwin, Hardy took not only the concept of a common origin of all species but, by extension, an innate kinship that shifted the ethical basis of behaviour from "the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom" (Millgate 1985, 377). Writ large, this is the challenge of what Raymond Williams called the crisis (and counter-tradition) of "the knowable community" (and the shared "social and moral code" that it embodied) (Williams 15), an instability created by the need to include voices that had hitherto been excluded from dominant forms of communication (O'Connor 69). Evolution, as Hardy wrote, "shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively" (Millgate 1985, 373). And it is clear that, for Hardy, "the whole conscious world" could be a very wide one. This is the opening stanza of "The Wind Blew Words", from *Moments of Vision* (1917):

The wind blew words along the skies,
And these it blew to me
Through the wide dusk: "Lift up your eyes,
Behold this troubled tree,
Complaining as it sways and plies;
It is a limb of thee.

(ll.1-6, Hardy 2001, 446-447)

In an ethical context, this is the point at which we move beyond the biocentric to the ecocentric. "[E]cosystems are complexly unified wholes," Warren argues in "The Rights of the Nonhuman World" (1983), "in which one element generally cannot be damaged without causing repercussions elsewhere in the system":

If sentience is a necessary, as well as a sufficient, condition for having moral rights, then we cannot ascribe such rights to oceans, mountains and the like; yet we have a moral obligation to protect such natural resources from excessive damage at human hands, both because of their value to us and to future generations, and because they are intrinsically valuable, as elements of the planetary biosystem. (Warren 131)

As Hardy continues in "The Wind Blew Words", "[t]hey are stuff of thy own frame" (l.12, Hardy 2001, 447).

16 Thus, Hardy's belief that "all organic creatures are of one family" (Millgate 1985, 373) shapes and determines his in-principle inclusivity, his philosophical willingness to step beyond the narrow bounds of "human", the better, one might argue, to realise his humanity. For Hardy, to be human was also to be humane; indeed, it was in a letter to the Humanitarian League that he wrote of the "far-reaching" ethical consequences of the common origin of species (376). But his expanded and expansive sense of humanity also explains his ambivalence towards humanism, and the humanistic tradition that its critics now berate for the sense it creates of "a gulf between ourselves and other animals" (Gray 17). As Hardy continued in the same letter:

While man was deemed to be a creation apart from all other creations, a secondary or tertiary morality was considered good enough towards the "inferior" races; but no person who reasons nowadays can escape the trying conclusion that this is not maintainable. (Millgate 1985, 377)

Trying it no doubt was. Hardy was not, after all, a philosopher. We have his word for it; as he remarked late in life (1917), his critics repeatedly erred in treating "my works of art as if they were a scientific system of philosophy, although I have repeatedly stated in prefaces and elsewhere that the views in them are *seemings*, provisional impressions only" (Millgate 1985, 406). Although Hardy may be protesting too much, it is fair to say that his close connection with the non-human world has less to do with abstruse matters of philosophy than a reflexive "hatred of cruelty" and the unnecessary suffering it created (Millgate 1990, 170).¹

17 As Hardy knew from his own upbringing, and his immersion in the working world of a region that still made its living from agriculture, there is also a tension between the natural and the social, between the non-human world, and the human world with which it is interleaved. At its most immediate and obvious, this is reflected in the long-standing and traditional practices that Hardy evokes in the pig-killing scene in *Jude*. Arabella is, of course, the daughter of a pig-breeder, and whilst readers may recall very little else of her first conversation with Jude than the pig's pizzle that prompts it, she and her friends are at the time washing "pig's chitterlings" in the river by a "small homestead, having a garden and pig-sties attached" (Hardy 2002, 33). "Pigs must be killed", as Arabella bluntly remarks (59); for her, Jude's reaction to the necessary process of slaughter simply makes him a "tender-hearted fool" (58).

18 At the same time, however, Hardy was also touched by a wider and deeper historical shift in patterns of behaviour towards animals. As Keith Thomas argues, the Enlightenment laid the foundations for human "dominion over nature", but that very power nourished "an increasingly sentimental view of animals" (Thomas 29; 301). As White notes, Thomas's thesis explains "the simultaneous rise of sentimentality characteristic of middle-class pet keeping and the unprecedented exploitation of animals in sport, the marketplace, and the laboratory" (White 61). Affection, Ritvo explains in a detailed account of the role of animals in Victorian society, accompanied exploitation (Ritvo 2-3).

19 It is easy to find Hardy in these ideas. If pet ownership was (for the middle classes) a new but also a now widespread phenomenon (White 59), Hardy was certainly representative. Indeed, his many pets mattered so much to him that he created a pet cemetery at Max Gate (Millgate 2004, 240). As he wrote to Florence Henniker (31 Oct 1920), "[w]hat silly people we are to get so attached to pets whose natural lives, as we well know, must in every reasonable probability finish before our own!" (Millgate 1990, 349). At the same time, however, that fellow feeling – that biophilia – manifested itself in other ways. Like

many other members of the Victorian public, Hardy also applied his "tender feeling for household pets" (White 61) to the increasingly widespread and instrumental use of animals across society, and more specifically, their use and misuse by a newly emergent (and ascendant) science: Hardy's engagement with and opposition to vivisection is just another aspect of his life's work that critics have tended to overlook. As Millgate elegantly summarizes it, Hardy was "a passionate proponent of such causes as slaughterhouse reform and an active supporter of animal welfare organizations and movements for the abolition of fox-hunting, stag-hunting, hare-coursing, and other field sports" (Millgate 1990, 170).

- 20 Here, it may be helpful to consider Hardy's perspective in the light of Jacques Derrida's thoughts on "The Animal That Therefore I Am". The differences are as instructive as the similarities. Mindful of the "sinister connotations" of biological (or in his words, "biologistic") continuism, Derrida opens his argument by insisting on the *discontinuity* – the "rupture" – between human and non-human (Derrida 30):

I have thus never believed in some homogenous continuity between what calls *itself* man and *he* calls the animal. I am not about to do so now. That would be worse than sleepwalking [...] (Derrida 30)

At the same time – and here his language overlaps with Hardy's own evocation of an extended community or collectivity – Derrida insists that, "[b]eyond the edge of the so-called human" (the stress is important), there lies a "heterogeneous multiplicity of the living", or more precisely, of relations between the living, but also between the living and the dead, the organic and the inorganic:

These relations are at once intertwined and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. They do not leave room for any simple exteriority of one term with respect to another. (Derrida 31)

It follows that "one will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named The Animal" (Derrida 31). As he adds, "[i]t is a question of words" (33), or, more exactly, of that one word which, "in the singular and without further ado", designates "every living thing that is held not to be human" (31). And for Derrida, the consequence of this "auto-situation of man or of the human *Dasein* as regards what is living and animal life" (24) – its constitutive impact – is just that transformation in the treatment of animals to which White and Ritvo refer, and from which Hardy recoils. Over the past two centuries, Derrida argues, what he calls the "traditional exploitation of animal energy" has given way to an "*unprecedented* [...] subjection of the animal" (25), even as humans have done all they can "to dissimulate this cruelty or hide it from themselves" (26). In turn, Derrida all but argues that this process of dissimulation extends to a philosophical tradition that asks whether the animal can "think, reason, or speak", when what matters is simply (but above all else) their capacity for suffering (27). "The *first* and *decisive* question," he argues, following Jeremy Bentham, is "whether animals *can suffer*" (27).

- 21 There are, therefore, strong parallels between Derrida's argument, and Hardy's own position. Both register the shifts to which Derrida refers; both focus firmly on the suffering it creates. As Hardy remarked to William Archer in February, 1901:

What are my books but one long plea against "man's inhumanity to man" – woman – and to the lower animals? [...] Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. (quoted in Millgate 2004, 379)

Seen in these terms, *Jude* reveals the scale of its ambition. As Hardy observed in a letter to Florence Henniker, "I think it turns out to be a novel which 'makes for' humanity – more than any other I have written" (Purdy 94). This was an argument his more perceptive critics could accept. The American novelist William Dean Howells, writing in *Harper's Weekly*, whilst allowing that "there are many displeasing things in the book" – the pig-killing scene amongst them – stressed that "they are deeply founded in the condition, if not in the nature of humanity" (Cox 255). "It is *human*", wrote D. F. Hannigan in the *Westminster Review*, "in the widest sense of that comprehensive word" (273).

- 22 This is a refrain that may be found throughout Hardy's work, and as his remarks to Archer suggest, his concern with the suffering of non-humans is also – perhaps always – linked to the suffering of humans; and so, perhaps problematically, Hardy draws a connection between both "man's inhumanity to man" and his inhumanity towards (in the same breath) women and animals. Yet this too finds its basis in the attitudes that Thomas identifies and discusses at length: the "firm line" (Thomas 41) drawn between man and beast had profound and lasting consequences for those groups that were seen as socially marginal or even inferior, and which were in turn seen as less than human (and, therefore, more like animals) (41-43). Women were sometimes amongst them (43). This is a conflation that Hardy himself may be making when he declares that Arabella is "a complete and substantial female animal – no more, no less" (Hardy 2002, 33). Thus, and whilst Turner (3) separates Hardy's concern for women from his interest in animals, the predicament of both are essentially interwoven.
- 23 This is particularly apparent in the scene in *Tess* where, pursued, she seeks refuge in a plantation. Here, she encounters the aftermath of a shooting party: pheasants everywhere, some dead, many injured and "writhing in agony" (Hardy 2003, 278). As she puts the stricken birds out of their misery, she recalls childhood glimpses of the men (Hardy is explicit) who make it "their purpose to destroy life – in this case harmless feathered creatures, brought into being by artificial means solely to gratify these propensities – at once so unmannerly and so unchivalrous towards their weaker fellows in Nature's teeming family" (279).
- 24 Clearly, hunting, fishing, shooting are themselves long-standing rural pursuits, but what is in question here is not (or not only) their usurpation by the socially privileged, but their systematic expansion along highly structured and organized lines. By Hardy's time, as Millgate records, the shooting of game birds had become a "mass slaughter" that Hardy found "particularly" oppressive: "Lord Wimborne's guests, a few weeks before the ball which the Hardys attended in December 1881, had killed in one day 1,418 pheasants" (Millgate 2004, 218). In Hardy's hands, however, the aftermath of this kind of slaughter also echoes Tess's own suffering, "their fate in some sense imaging hers" (219). It is notable that, in this moment of encounter, Tess's response also manifests that tension between customary and educated languages, the one "thwarted by ignorance", the other "limited in humanity", that Williams (107) identifies and discusses, and which Hardy seeks to circumvent. In spite of her education at a National School – perhaps even to spite her education – Tess slips back into dialect. For the reader, it is difficult to escape the feeling that this educated language (a language of abstraction) is itself indicted in a process of instrumentalization that affects people and place, human and non-human. Tess is herself the subject of that process when, later in the novel, she encounters the alien presence of a steam-threshing machine, harbinger of the twentieth-century industrialization of farming, and is given the job of helping to feed it with sheaves of corn

("[f]or some probably economical reason it was usually a woman who was chosen for this particular duty" [Hardy 2003, 327]). Whilst the machine still turns, she cannot rest; and the machine does not rest. Its demand is ceaseless, and the hum of the thresher "increased to a raving whenever the supply of corn fell short" (Hardy 2003, 327).

- 25 Language, then, is another aspect of the imposition of subject upon object – or, following Derrida, objectified "Animal" – and it is also implicated in the domination of women by men. This is the process enacted in "Heiress and Architect" (Hardy 2001, 75), a poem in which a highly stylized and symbolic conversation between eponymous heiress and architect is explicitly framed as a conflict between the life-affirming and the life-denying, a conflict in which the "cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view" (l.7) of the "arch-designer" (l.2) inevitability triumph, and the heiress is revealed as both subject to and subjugated by the architect, symbolic representative of reductive Enlightenment reason. Tess's predicament is itself similar. She is never seen whole: "[s]he was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations, to anybody but herself" (Hardy 2003, 91). As Eagleton suggests, "the novel itself oscillates between treating Tess as an object of erotic desire or 'scientific' investigation, and feeling genuine compassion for her" (Eagleton 194).
- 26 Something of Hardy's own ambivalence resurfaces in a later letter, of 30 November, 1906. Asked by the suffrage leader, Millicent Fawcett, for his views on women's suffrage, Hardy gives it his support, but adds, "I fear I shall spoil the effect of this information by giving you my reasons" (Millgate 1990, 192). It was not, he explained, for their own sake that he gave his support, but because he felt that "the woman's vote" would help "break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion", amongst them "sport (that so-called educated men should be encouraged to harass & kill for pleasure feeble creatures by mean stratagems)" and "slaughter-houses (that they should be dark dens of cruelty)" (192).
- 27 In short, Hardy's views are sometimes conflicted; they do not necessarily square neatly with our own ethical arguments or belief systems or sense of what is or should be valued. But there is a further, perhaps prosaic reason why Hardy's own, deeply-felt views do not necessarily translate into powerful and articulate indictments of human cruelty, or philosophically compelling commentaries on the nature of humankind, and that is the simple fact that, as a working writer, he was dependent on the tastes and whims of his readers.
- 28 To illustrate the point, take what may be one of Hardy's most extraordinary scenes, from what is certainly one of his least read novels: *The Hand of Ethelberta*, Hardy's premature attempt to break free from "writing for ever about sheepfarming" (Millgate 1985, 105). In the novel, Ethelberta (a now marriageable heiress) discovers that she is the subject of a suit by a man named Neigh. Concerned to know more about him, and hearing that he has an estate just outside London, she takes a train out into the countryside to investigate. Finding the ornamental gate that seems to mark the entrance to the estate, she and her sister walk up the drive to a large lake. Night is now falling; the fog draws in, and the moon casts its "diffused light" (Hardy 1997, 185):

Ethelberta could not resist being charmed with the repose of the spot, and hastened on with curiosity to reach the other side of the pool, where, by every law of manorial topography, the mansion would be situated. (Hardy 1997, 185)

But "where should have been the front door of a mansion" she instead finds a roughly fenced paddock, filled with near starved horses (Hardy 1997, 185). Nearby, she discovers

an "open-air larder" in which "[h]orses' skulls, ribs, quarters, legs, and other joints" are hanging (186). Then, she and her companion hear through the "mute and sleepy air" the "stygian" howling of the hounds to whom these horses are to be fed (186).

- 29 At this point, it should be noted that Hardy advertised the novel as a comedy. Perhaps he meant it to be a black one. In any event, Hardy's handling of the scene is understated; although he underlines its "intense melancholy" (Hardy 1997, 186) and its effect on the "two lone young women" (187), it is difficult to read it without wondering what Dickens might have made of a revelation so graphic and appalling (du Maurier's illustration does some justice to it). What Hardy instead stresses is Neigh's family history, discovered through inquiry, which reveals that his father married a cook (188), or, in the revision of 1877, that their fortune was newly made by "the knacker business and tanning" (446). Thus, as Dolin points out, the issue for Ethelberta is, on the one hand, "the taint of the servant class", or on the other, "the taint of the *arriviste*" (446). What the issue is not – as it might be to a 21st-century reader – is (say) the appalling conditions of the skeletal horses on whom Ethelberta chances, or the fact that they are to be fed to hounds which have in turn been bred solely to hunt, not for food, but for pleasure. Perhaps Hardy was content to leave these concerns for his readers to construct. Or perhaps Hardy's handling of this particular scene reflects a more general point about this highly "superficial and synthetic" novel (xx). As Dolin makes clear in his introduction, Hardy was caught between his own concerns and interests, and the constraints placed upon him by his editors and by extension his readers (xxvii). As a result, his novels oscillate between "imitation" and "originality", "now advancing into dangerous territory, now withdrawing to more familiar ground" (xxvii).
- 30 Here as elsewhere, therefore, Hardy's work was constrained by the circumstances of its production and the nature of its reception. What might Hardy have written – and written of life entire – had he not also been wrestling with the prejudices and preferences of his readers? The answer, I think, becomes apparent as Hardy becomes more firmly established as a writer and more certain of his own voice. The 1880s, Millgate notes, saw the "surfacing of some of the social and humanitarian concerns that would be central to Hardy's subsequent life and work", amongst them the "sufferings of animals" (Millgate 2004, 218). By the 1890s, Hardy was increasingly willing to court controversy. In his last novel (*Jude*), as Eagleton notes, he takes "the three major ideological institutions of Victorian society – religion, education and sexuality – and censures them remorselessly" (Eagleton 202). But as I have also suggested, *Jude* represents one of his most direct engagements with what was for him another and integral aspect of humankind's lack of loving-kindness: its treatment of animals. As Morgan notes, "[f]rom the boy Jude's attempt to befriend the rooks, his protest over the pig killing, and his attack on the donkey beater to Sue's anguish over trapped creatures and beyond, *Jude the Obscure* approximates a veritable tract on humanitarianism" (Morgan 130). As a contemporary critic complained, the novel reads "almost like one prolonged scolding from beginning to end" (Cox 250), but the call is quite clear: it is, as Morgan puts it, "for an end to needless suffering and oppression for all living creatures" (Morgan 130).
- 31 Small wonder, then, that the *Animal's Friend* should have chosen to super-add the words "A Merciful Man" when it reproduced the pig-killing chapter; I would suggest that it was not only Jude to whom it refers. But the periodical's choice of title was also apt because, as I mentioned in my introduction, Hardy had used the phrase "a merciful man is merciful to his beast" in a short story entitled "A Few Crusted Characters". Published in

Life's Little Ironies in 1894, this is Hardy's wry account of a country parson who, having left a young couple locked up in his church whilst the husband-to-be sobers up, then forgets all about them, and spends the day hunting. "Fine exercise for the horses!" he shouts to his clerk as they pursue the hunt; "a merciful man is merciful to his beast" (Hardy 1977, 167).

32 The parson's name is Toogood, and transparently, his surname exaggerates his virtues. By the time he returns home, his beast is "wellnigh [sic] tired down to the ground" (Hardy 1977, 168). And whilst his exhausted horse still commands more of his interest than the unmarried couple, it is difficult to square Christian compassion with the fact that (as the narrator maintains) "he'd been in at the death of three thousand foxes" (166).

33 In his introduction to the collection, Pinion notes that nearly all the stories "belong to the interval between *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, and, like these two novels, the most serious of them were written 'with a purpose'" (Hardy 1977, 7). Hardy's story about the parson is hardly the weightiest of them, but it too has a depth that the more perceptive reader would have recognized. Whilst proverbial, the phrase ("a merciful man is merciful to his beast") has its echo, and perhaps its origin, in (quite naturally) Proverbs (12:10). In the words of the King James Version, a "righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel".² For Hardy, however, Christianity was, amongst other theologies, deeply implicated in contemporary attitudes towards animals. As he wrote to Frederic Harrison (17 October, 1906), whom Millgate calls "the leading British exponent of Positivism, the fundamentally optimistic system of conduct and belief advocated by the French philosopher Auguste Comte" (Millgate 1990, 190):

The question, indeed, of the treatment of animals is a tremendous one. As long as Christian & other theologies were really credited, & the non-human animal was regarded as a creature distinct from man, there was consistency in treating "brutes" brutally. "Arise, Peter, kill & eat," was a natural command to a man with a soul concerning animals without one. (Millgate 1990, 190)

Much hinges, as Hardy suggests, on that one word "brute", with all that it implies and all that it permits (once again, there is a strong parallel with Derrida's argument, with its contempt for the monolithic construct of thought and feeling embodied in "Animal"). And it is, perhaps, Hardy's belief in the power and potency of constructs such as the "Animal" that explains his continued pessimism, even as the theologies he indicted were losing their hold. "I almost think that people were less pitiless towards their fellow-creatures - human & animal - under the Roman Empire than they are now", he wrote to Florence Henniker soon after the end of the Great War (5 June, 1919) (Millgate 1990, 330). An entry made on his eightieth birthday is no less bleak:

Though my life, like the lives of my contemporaries, covers a period of more material advance in the world than any of the same length can have done in other centuries, I do not find that real civilization has advanced equally. People are not more humane, so far as I can see, then they were in the year of my birth. (Millgate 1985, 435)

34 Yet even as he became "increasingly sceptical" of "sanguine visions" such as Harrison's (Millgate 1990, 190), Hardy continued to commit himself and his resources as a writer to the question of what it is to be human, and what we might mean by its "humanity", given such continuous and continuing evidence of its *inhumanity*. Poems like "Wagtail and Baby" and "The Blinded Bird" lie beyond the scope of this short article, but, like sections of *The Dynasts* and many passages in his novels, Hardy's concern was consistent and persistent even if (as he himself pointed out) it was not necessarily philosophically

rigorous. Collectively, his engagement with what is narrowly called "the treatment of animals" – but we may instead regard as a commentary on the nature of humankind's "humanity" – remains just as compelling and provocative today as it did to the sometimes horrified, occasionally enlightened readers of *Jude*.

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NOTES

1. In fact, the concept of suffering itself commands a philosophical dimension, which has in turn been adapted as the basis for an environmental ethic, most famously articulated by Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*. Thus, and whilst other philosophers (amongst them Jacques Derrida) have distinguished an emphasis on animal suffering from an ethical extensionism derived from a shared capacity to "think, reason, or speak" (Derrida 27), Singer argues that a capacity for suffering is itself rooted in sentience, returning the argument to a form of extensionism; Derrida's own argument is, like Singer's, rooted in Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism (Singer 7).
2. In an essay entitled "On the Merciful Man", William McEwen writes that "a good man is merciful to his beast", a derivation that takes us still nearer to the proverb that Hardy invokes (McEwen 153).

ABSTRACTS

This paper approaches the subject of Hardy as a thinker of humanity through his response to what was often the inhuman treatment of animals. Registered in scenes like the pig-killing chapter in *Jude the Obscure*, later reprinted by the Victorian Society for the Protection of Animals

under the title "A Merciful Man", Hardy's work reflects a deep-rooted biophilia. This was in part shaped by his immersion in the latest thinking of his age. From Darwin, in particular, he took a sense of kinship with all living things, and a profound appreciation of the richness and diversity of life. At the same time, Hardy instinctively recoiled from any form of cruelty. This was, however, a moment in history when animals were made subject to unprecedented new levels of exploitation and manipulation. Nor was the inhumanity of this kind of treatment – this process of instrumentalization – confined to non-humans, as Hardy underlined in novels like *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Whilst Hardy's own thoughts were not always fully worked out, even when, as in novels like *The Hand of Ethelberta*, his imagination conjured extraordinary scenes of animal suffering, his later work suggests a growing willingness to censure cruelty, and an expansive sense of what might be meant by humanity and humanitarianism. Notwithstanding his own pessimism about the trajectory of human "progress", and its apparent pursuit of the material at the expense of the moral, this forms an important (if sometimes neglected) aspect of his work.

Cet article aborde la pensée hardyenne de l'humanité au prisme de la représentation par Hardy du traitement inhumain des animaux. Son œuvre révèle une profonde biophilie (amour du vivant), comme le montre la scène où le cochon est tué dans *Jude the Obscure* – scène réimprimée plus tard par la société victorienne pour la protection des animaux sous le titre "A Merciful Man". Cette biophilie a été en partie inspirée à Hardy par les pensées les plus novatrices de son temps. À Darwin, en particulier, il a emprunté l'idée d'une parenté entre tous les êtres vivants et une conception profonde de la diversité de la vie. En même temps, Hardy répugnait naturellement à toute forme de cruauté, à un moment de l'histoire où les animaux étaient soumis à un niveau sans précédent d'exploitation et de manipulation. L'inhumanité de ce type de traitement – ce processus d'instrumentalisation – n'était d'ailleurs pas réservé aux non humains, comme l'a souligné Hardy dans *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Cette œuvre tardive suggère une volonté grandissante de condamner la cruauté et une perception approfondie de ce que signifient humanité et humanitarisme. Malgré le pessimisme de Hardy à l'égard de la trajectoire du progrès humain et sa recherche apparente du matériel aux dépens du moral, cela constitue un aspect important de son œuvre, bien qu'il soit parfois négligé.

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