



**FATHOM**

a French e-journal of Thomas Hardy studies

**4 | 2016**

**Human, All Too Human**

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## Posthumanist Hardy?: Rethinking “the Whole Conscious World Collectively”

*Hardy posthumaniste ? Repenser “l’ensemble du monde conscient de manière collective”*

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**Publisher**

Association française sur les études sur  
Thomas Hardy

**Electronic version**

URL: <http://fathom.revues.org/651>

ISSN: 2270-6798

**Electronic reference**

Anna West, « Posthumanist Hardy?: Rethinking “the Whole Conscious World Collectively” », *FATHOM* [Online], 4 | 2016, Online since 15 October 2016, connection on 20 October 2016. URL : <http://fathom.revues.org/651>

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This text was automatically generated on 20 octobre 2016.

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# Posthumanist Hardy?: Rethinking “the Whole Conscious World Collectively”

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Anna West

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- 1 What does it mean to be human in Thomas Hardy’s novels? What does it mean to be an animal? Hardy’s sense of kinship between the human and nonhuman animal worlds is well-known, both in his 1909 letter to the New York Vivisection Investigation League, in which he stated that “the discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively” and in his 1910 letter to the Humanitarian League, where he wrote of “a re-adjustment of altruistic morals [. . .] beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom” (Hardy 1984, 373, 376-377). Hardy concluded the letter by saying, “And though I myself do not at present see how the principle of equal justice all round is to be carried out in its entirety, I recognize that the League is grappling with the question” (377). Clearly, Hardy too “grappl[ed] with the question”, as his depictions of human and animal worlds in his novels demonstrate. This article will explore two questions in order to better understand Hardy’s “grappling”. First, how does Hardy’s figuring of animals subtly undercut the prevalent attitudes not only toward animals in the humanist era in which he lived, but also toward women and the idea of what is human? Second, could Hardy’s approach be described as – in some sense of the word – posthumanist?
- 2 The discussion will focus around portrayals of woman-as-animal – and in extension, woman-as-property – in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) in order to examine whether or not Hardy subverts accepted humanist attitudes of the Victorian times in relation to animals, women, and the concept of the human. Set up against this idea of woman-as-animal, figured in the person of Tess Durbeyfield, is the question of man-as-human, for which Michael Henchard will serve as an example. Close

readings of animals in relation to each of these characters will attempt to untangle the effect that the binaries of human/animal and man/woman have upon each text.

- 3 In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the title character is repeatedly submitted to comparisons with the animal world: especially birds and horses<sup>1</sup>. On an initial glance the parallels between Tess and animals seem to be rendered in misogynistic terms. At Trantridge, Tess's status as animal – and specifically, as bird – is reinforced by the mirrored role between herself as caretaker of the birds and Alec as her supervisor. In a sense, Tess becomes Alec's pet: Alec re-teaches her to whistle so that she can instruct the “dumb creatures” to sing human melodies (Hardy 2008b, 65). While the instance serves as an ironic jab at the traditional human-animal boundary (which would hold that birds have neither language nor the capacity to learn), it also subjugates Tess through Alec's “superior” position as male, and in the Victorian conception of the Great Chain of Being, more human. His later sexual perpetration of her on the Chase – where he prepares a “nest” for her out of dead leaves and feels his fingers sink “into her as into down” – only reinforces the idea that Tess is a creature that exists for a specific use, like the fowls at Trantridge whose purpose is to amuse their owner (80-81). Alec also views Tess as akin to his mare, Tib. Both exist in his eyes for his enjoyment, and he manipulates the latter in order to control the former, as can be seen in the scene of Tess's move to Trantridge: Alec convinces the horse to pull the cart at such a speed that Tess is obliged to hold onto him. It is of consequence that Alec tells Tess “[i]t was fate” that brought him and Tib together, given that “Tib has killed one chap; and just after [he] bought her she nearly killed [him]” (59). Alec's misogynistic view of Tess is reiterated by male perspectives throughout the novel, perhaps most tragically through Angel's perception of Tess as a creature and as the embodiment of his ideal female rather than as a human and an individual.
- 4 Yet the categorical boundaries between man and woman that are so distinct for Alec and Angel seem not to exist for Tess in regard to the human and the animal. She sees herself as a part of the natural world, undivided by any sense of Cartesian dualism. When Prince dies, she views herself “in the light of a murderess”, a word legally and philosophically reserved for the putting-to-death of a human, not an animal (Hardy 2008b, 40).<sup>2</sup> Later in the novel, when she encounters the dying pheasants after fleeing from her own male human predator, she kills them “tenderly,” crying, “Poor darlings—to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!” She continues, “And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding” (298). Ironically, Hardy's narrator describes the hunters who shot these pheasants as “so unmannerly and so unchivalrous towards their weaker fellows in nature's teeming family”, a statement that, while reading humorously, gestures toward concepts typically related to the female domain in trivialization of the sex: manners, chivalry, and feminine weakness (298). Here, it is the narrator who moves between the human and animal worlds, using irony to address boundaries set in place by patriarchal humanism. The birds' traumatic death calls for a more serious response than that of the maintenance of manners and chivalry by the hunters; in the same way, Tess's plight is not to be trivialized, and neither is the situation on the road that caused her to feel unsafe and to flee into the plantation<sup>3</sup>.
- 5 In his depiction – through the narrator's and through other characters' viewpoints – of Tess as animal, Hardy undermines misogyny by calling upon a trope often used both to belittle women and to rally in their defence. Historian Joanna Bourke focuses her book, *What It Means to Be Human* (2011), around an 1872 letter by “An Earnest Englishwoman” to

the press, in which the Victorian writer asked “Are Women Animals?” in order to argue for the protection of women against bodily injury at least to the extent of contemporary legislation in place for animal welfare (Bourke 1). Bourke discusses the trope of woman-as-animal both in “misogynist humour” and in “feminist critiques”, giving an example of the latter from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) in which the author “railed against the lives of ladies ‘confined like the feathered race’ with ‘nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch” (Bourke 13). In the end, Tess fulfils her “animal” nature and kills Alec, just as Tib almost did before her, revealing that Alec is susceptible to the same vulnerability as Prince, the dying pheasants, and later, Tess: mortality.

- 6 The trope of subverting misogyny through comparisons of women with birds appears in works by Hardy’s contemporaries, such as Henrik Isben’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899). But what is unique in Hardy is the way this subversion is linked to undermining humanist attitudes toward animals. By raising questions of the female subjection, he slips in questions of anthropomorphization and the subjugation of animals - take, for example, the role of Prince as “breadwinner”, whom Tess feels obligated to replace after “kill[ing] him” - almost as if through the back gate (Hardy 2008b, 40, 48). While Hardy does not settle on answers - there is a heavy sense of the iterability of Tess’s tragedy when Liza-Lu takes the place of Tess in the ending scene with Angel - it is the way he brings up such questions that allows his work to be read through a posthumanist lens, as will be considered later in this article.
- 7 Perhaps the subversion of misogyny in Hardy is most evident in the narrative of Michael Henchard, the protagonist of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* who moves from embodying the fully male (and thus fully “human”) status early on in the novel to losing all sense of his personhood and identity by the end. Nowhere in Hardy is the subjugation of woman-as-animal - and woman-as-property - more opaque than in the opening scene of *Mayor*, when Henchard decides to auction off his wife. The “joke” begins with the sound of an “auctioneer selling [...] old horses in the field outside” the tent; Henchard, upon hearing it, wonders “‘why men who got wives, and don’t want ‘em, shouldn’t get rid of ‘em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses [...] put ‘em up and sell ‘em by auction men to who are in need of such articles?’” (Hardy 2008a, 10). He continues by calling his wife names indicating her status in his eyes as less than human: terms such as “‘this gem o’ creation’” and his “‘goods’” (11). Hardy makes the irony apparent by Susan’s dry reference to her drunken husband as her “‘owner’” (11). After the sale is complete and Susan leaves, the narrator moves outside the tent of the auction, noting the “difference between the peacefulness of inferior nature and the wilful hostilities of mankind” that were “very apparent at this place. In contrast with the harshness of the act just ended within the tent was the sight of several horses crossing their necks and rubbing each other lovingly as they waited in patience to be harnessed for the homeward journey” (14). Here, Susan’s earlier equation of status with the horse comes full circle: but it is the horse-world that proves to be more compassionate rather than the human, subverting assumptions of human superiority and animal incapacity once more.
- 8 Henchard’s lack of compassion for his wife - the cruelty of the act, even if it had started in jest - haunts him for the rest of the narrative. No matter how he tries to atone for it - rising in success to be mayor and magistrate of his town - Henchard, by refusing to acknowledge the person of his wife, loses his own personhood. The shifting point towards his downfall comes when his past is revealed, and Lucetta realizes, “At bottom, then,

Henchard was this. How terrible a contingency for a woman who should commit herself to his care” (Hardy 2008a, 188). She marries Farfrae in secret, explaining to Henchard afterward that because he “sold [his] first wife at a fair, like a horse or cow [...] [she] could not risk [her]self in [his] hands” (195). What ultimately releases Lucetta from her obligation to marry Henchard and allows her the freedom to marry whom she chooses is this potential capacity Henchard has for causing suffering: it is the powerlessness that would come with being his wife under Victorian patriarchy that gives her the power as a single woman that she exerts over him, destabilizing the very hierarchy that allowed Henchard to sell his first wife.

- 9 Beyond this coupled dependency of opposites in the male/female dynamics of the novel, Hardy links sympathy for Henchard to the animal world. In the scene in which Henchard saves Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane from the bull, the narrator calls the bull a “mistaken creature”, suggesting that the animal had not meant to bully Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane (Hardy 2008a, 191). While this suggestion may seem odd when read in consideration of the bull’s actions alone, the overlap between the bull and the bull-like Henchard adds pith to the human character’s retraction of his previous domineering attitude in forcing Lucetta to agree to an immediate marriage against her wishes, a retraction which is of course too late (191). Elizabeth-Jane’s sympathy for the animal world is translated, then, into compassion for Henchard: upon running back to the barn to retrieve a dropped item, Elizabeth-Jane passes the bull on her way out, “paus[ing] to look for a moment at the bull, now rather to be pitied with his bleeding nose, having perhaps rather intended a practical joke than a murder” (192). The thought echoes back to the opening wife sale, when the narrator repeatedly insists that Henchard began talking of the transaction in jest rather than in earnest. The “caged goldfinch” at the end of the novel serves as another image to mirror Henchard’s status in the world of living creatures: he, too, is caged, trapped by the conventions of his day and by hegemonic masculinity (299). If Lucetta had seen Henchard as another living, suffering being rather than as “this” – a man who was willing to sell his wife in an unemotional, although arguably rational, transaction – perhaps the story would have ended differently.
- 10 Elizabeth-Jane’s sympathy for Henchard is mediated again through the figure of the animal at the end of the novel: the goldfinch she discovers dead. When she learns that it had been an intended wedding gift from Henchard, the narrator tells us that “[s]he went out, looked at the cage, buried the starved little singer; and from that hour her heart softened toward the self-alienated man” (Hardy 2008a, 305). Henchard’s death parallels the bird’s; as Abel Whittle reports to Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard’s demise is hastened because “he couldn’t eat – no, no appetite at all – and he got weaker; and to-day he died” (308). The shift from the animal to the human not only highlights the irony of the ease of human sympathy for the “innocent” animal in comparison to the lack of forgiveness toward the human, it also complicates the idea that being a normative male in a humanist society will guarantee any type of security in being treated as human. This doubling back upon the hierarchy, as it were, reopens the question, what does it mean to be a part of the “whole conscious world collectively”? Henchard’s note requesting that his death be unacknowledged and his grave be unmarked calls to mind Michel Foucault’s image of man’s disappearance “like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea” in his essay on the archaeology of thought, an essay from which posthumanism finds some of its roots (Foucault 29). Not only is Henchard’s identity as mayor – the top of the humanist hierarchy in his world of Casterbridge – deleted as quickly as it was gained, his complete

person is elided. Through Henchard’s character, Hardy undermines the humanist concept of being human: to be human – even possessing all the qualities supposedly required to be fully human – in such a tradition is a precarious position indeed.

- 11 Can Hardy’s approach to the human-animal boundary, then, be read through the emerging theoretical framework of posthumanism? As Cary Wolfe points out in his book, *What is Posthumanism?*, the term can be more difficult to define than its supposed opposite, humanism. Despite its prefix, posthumanism does not refer to a chronological event coming after humanism, nor does it seek to overthrow all the tenets of humanism itself. For Wolfe,

when we talk about posthumanism, we are not just talking about a thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates (though that is where the conversation usually begins and, all too often, ends); rather, [...] we are also talking about *how* thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges. (Wolfe xvii)

- 12 Similarly, Bourke offers a definition that bids the reader to “move beyond comparisons based on similarities and dissimilarities and inject instability and indeterminacy” into the discussion (Bourke 12). Her conception of the human-animal boundary is visualized neatly by the concept of a Möbius strip – a long strip of paper taped into a figure 8 with a 180 degree twist in the middle, creating a fluid, flexuous figure with only one side and no front or back, beginning or end, top or bottom. For Bourke, the Möbius strip is a way of understanding Derrida’s stipulation that “supposed dichotomies are actually dependent upon each other” (12). This image provides a concrete way of reconsidering *how* one thinks about the human and the animal. Throughout his writing, Hardy juxtaposes humans and animals to call into question preconceptions of animal capacities and to shift humanist expectations of Cartesian dualism. Often there is a sense of following the flip of the Möbius strip: an image of an animal converges with a depiction of a human, leaving the reader to question where the domain of one ends and the other begins, but providing no definitive or stable answers.
- 13 Hardy’s love of ambiguity and irony allows him to work in this manner subtly, without his presentation of animals feeling anthropomorphic (except, at times, when he uses anthropomorphism intentionally for humorous effect) or heavy-handed. Rather than centering on animals or putting humans in the background, Hardy presents a world where humans and animals seem to shift between fore-, mid-, and background seamlessly: he zooms in and out on figures upon the scene. Words like “figure” and “creature” neutralize the space between the human and the animal, presenting them on the same terms without the explicit insistence that humans are animals – a statement which, as Harriet Ritvo has pointed, can serve to fortify the very boundary that posthumanist thinkers are attempting to make porous<sup>4</sup>. One of the difficulties of working with ideas presented by posthumanism is that humanism often is embedded into the structure of current ways of thinking themselves: as Wolfe explains, “philosophical work that takes the moral status of nonhuman animals seriously is, in some obvious sense, posthumanist”; however, “such work may still be quite humanist on an internal theoretical and methodological structure that recontains and even undermines an otherwise admirable philosophical project” (Wolfe 62).
- 14 While Wolfe takes philosophy for his example, one might also apply this idea to the discipline of fiction. In Victorian literature, representations of animals tend to lean

toward human-based imaginings of the animal’s perspective (think, for example, of Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877) and the proliferation of dog “autobiographies” such as Gordon Stable’s *Sable and White: The Autobiography of a Show Collie* (1893)) or toward the naturalistic portrayals in realism that affirm the impossibility of knowing what it is like to be an animal (while categorized with the modernists, D.H. Lawrence’s representations of animals in *The White Peacock* (1911) might be taken as an example). Both have an internal humanist scope, no matter the attribution of mental or moral qualities to the animals in the text: the first places the animal in the role of the human, while the second overemphasizes the idea that one cannot know what it is like to be an animal because animals’ minds are not accessible to the human in the same manner that adult human minds are. Both of these approaches place the adult human as the standard by which all other creatures must be measured.

- 15 In his essay “The Science of Fiction” which considers the contemporary literary movement toward realism, Hardy suggests a different way of working. “To see in half and quarter views the whole picture, to catch from a few bars the whole tune, is the intuitive power that supplies the would-be story-writer with the scientific bases for his pursuit”, Hardy writes (Millgate 110). Rather than attempting to picture the perspective of animals from a human lens (which is intrinsically anthropomorphic) or insisting on the impossibility of knowing what it is like to be an animal (which ignores the shared physiological experience of creatures in a sensory-based material world), Hardy’s idea of “intuitive power” through “half and quarter views” creates a space for a different approach to thinking about animals in the text, both human and nonhuman. Often the interiority of characters’ thoughts are shown not through direct exposition but through speculations by the narrator based on appearance, through word choices like “it seemed” and “as if”. His attention is focused on the “moment-by-moment fullness” of embodiment in a material world, as critics such as Gillian Beer and George Levine have pointed out (Beer 241)<sup>5</sup>. In this way, his writing matches Wolfe’s description of posthumanism as an insistence to “attend to the specificity of the human—its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing” (Wolfe xxv): Hardy recognizes the space between physical embodiment in a shared sensory world and mental access to the mind of the other, acknowledging through “seems” and “as if” the fact that one cannot know what it is like to be in the mind of the other, human or nonhuman. Influenced by Herbert Spencer, Hardy firmly believed that “beyond the knowable, there must always be an unknown” (Hardy 1984, 400). This mix of attention and intuition seems to put into practice Wolfe’s proposition of a second type of “finitude” shared by human and nonhuman animals.
- 16 The first type of vulnerability, or finitude, that posthumanist thinkers focus on hinges upon the idea of suffering and shared mortality, perhaps most clearly articulated by Jeremy Bentham in the nineteenth century when he shifted the question of human/animal rights away from divisions based on linguistic, mental or moral capacity to the question, “Can they *suffer*?” (Bentham 283). Jacques Derrida pushed the argument further, suggesting that this “not-being-able” is the “nonpower at the heart of power”, the shared experience of vulnerability that evokes moments of compassion, given the common finitude of all living creatures is mortality (Derrida 396). Wolfe suggests a second type of finitude, inextricably linked to this first one; as he explains,

The first type (physical vulnerability, embodiment, and eventually mortality) is paradoxically made unavailable [. . .] to us by the very thing that makes it available —namely, a second kind of ‘passivity’ or ‘not being able,’ which is the finitude we

experience in our subjection to a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language, a technicity that has profound consequences, of course, for what we too hastily think of as ‘our’ concepts, which are therefore in an important sense not ‘ours’ at all. (Wolfe 88)

- 17 This second finitude presents a paradox: the very tool that humans use to understand the abstractions of vulnerability and mortality at the same time limits the human to such language-bound considerations, moving the unspeakable into an abstraction and estranging humans – and nonhumans, at the point of interaction between the two by means of any semiotic system – from flesh-and-blood experience. Bound up with this double finitude is often a sense of trauma, a trauma sensed through the body. Attention to embodiment allows an awareness of this second type of finitude. When Tess encounters the dying game birds, her first impulse is to strangle them, feeling their agony in her own person; only as she is killing the birds does she mediate the feeling through language, and notably she speaks here in dialect rather than “standard” English. In the same way, when Prince is dying, Tess is moved to cover the wound with her hand, a useless gesture, but arguably one that demonstrates a sense of Wolfe’s second kind of finitude.
- 18 The idea of language being “a radically ahuman technicity” (Wolfe 88) may seem contradictory; after all, language and its system of semiotics, especially when encoded in written form, has long been seen as, in Wolfe’s words, “a well-nigh-magical property that ontologically separates *Homo sapiens* from every living creature” (121). Yet Wolfe recognizes that it was “an essentially non- or ahuman emergence from an evolutionary process” that “makes possible language proper and the characteristic modes of consciousness and mentation associated with it, but remains tied [...] to an evolutionary substrate that continues to express itself in human interaction” (121). Human language in its current form coevolved with the human, but its emergence was not intrinsically human. As Charles Darwin pointed out, language evolved “through a gradual process” (Darwin 1981, 137) and was “completed by innumerable steps, half-consciously made” (Darwin 2009, 63). Despite the insistence upon language as a marker of the human in the Victorian era, its roots are inevitably entangled with nonhuman forms of semiotic systems, given the shared ancestry of humans and animals from one common progenitor. Such a consideration suggests that supposedly “human” concepts, to echo Wolfe, are perhaps not “ours’ at all”, and that the history of language might be considered in similar terms to other aspects of human evolution that are simultaneously technical (rather than “human”) and reciprocally formative (in shaping and being shaped by the specific experience of being human), such as trends in height across time or in diversification as seen in the wide span of ethnicities across geographic regions. A person’s height or ethnicity may have cultural resonance due to the fact of being human, and it may shape one’s way of being in the world, but the determination of one’s height or ethnicity depends upon the technical, mechanical, and arguable “ahuman” processes of meiosis and mitosis, biological processes shared by even the most basic of plants, combining for a great percentage the same array of genes used by insentient organic life.
- 19 Posthumanism, then, is very different from the concept of the “posthuman”, a term that describes a state in which the human has escaped the vulnerability of the human form by transforming into a new physical existence, a disembodiment that often focuses on the rational and the mechanical – a goal that, as Wolfe points out, is ironically humanist rather than posthumanist. Tess, who early in the novel postulates that people can escape their bodies, achieves a complete sense of disassociation from her physical embodiment

by the end of the novel; when Angel finds her living with Alec, he stands silently looking at her, lost for words. As the narrator explains, “Speech was as inexpressive as silence” in that moment of “implor[ing] for something to shelter them from reality” (Hardy 2008b, 401). Later, he realizes that what he was feeling was the sense that “his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers – allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction disassociated from its living will” (401). Henchard has a similar moment when, upon contemplating suicide off a bridge, he sees the effigy that represented him in the skimmity-ride floating along the river – a parallel image of “a corpse upon the current” – but for him, the effigy creates a sense of doubling, of an alternate timeline of what could have happened if the straw-self had not come along at that particular moment, that jars him from his mental state and prevents him from killing himself. On the other hand, Tess – who already considers herself “in the light of a murderess” after Prince’s death (40) – finds a material solution to her cognitive dissonance created by her role as Alec’s mistress: she rids herself of the body that is creating the conflict between the self that is Alec’s property as his mistress and the self that belongs to Angel as his wife. Arguably, her act is rational, her logic shaped by the humanist society in which she exists.

- 20 In contrast to the “posthuman”, posthumanist thinking insists on close attention to embodiment: to quote Wolfe, it “requires us to attend to that thing called ‘the human’ with *greater* specificity, *greater* attention to its embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality, and how these in turn shape and are shaped by consciousness, mind” while “pay[ing] proper attention [...] to the material, embodied, and evolutionary nature of intelligence and cognition” (Wolfe 121). Attention to the shared experience of sensory beings
- forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of ‘bringing forth a world’. (Wolfe xxv)
- 21 Hardy’s willingness to create ambiguity – to “not know”, in the words of Linda Shires – while simultaneously grounding the text in sensory detail creates a tension that causes the reader to reconsider his or her perspective on the world (Shires 36). This acceptance of not-knowing and acknowledgement of the “autopoietic ways” of “other living beings” can be seen, for example, in his poem “An August Midnight”, which describes an encounter between the narrator and four insects (a longlegs, a moth, a dumbledore, and a fly) who enter his writing space, especially in the last two lines: “‘God’s humblest, they!’ I muse. Yet why? / They know Earth-secrets that know not I” (Hardy 1981, 147).
- 22 In this way Hardy’s writing seems to be an early gesture toward posthumanism, although obviously he could never have construed it as such. Hardy famously resisted having critics consider his “works of art as if they were a scientific system of philosophy”: as a March 1917 letter – along with other letters and prefaces – states, his views were “*seemings*, provisional impressions only, used for artistic purposes because they represent approximately the impressions of the age, and are plausible, till somebody produces better theories of the universe” (Hardy 1984, 406). This statement seems to underline the tenability of language to produce “a scientific system of philosophy”, replacing it instead with *seemings* and impressions, with “half and quarter views”. For Hardy, rethinking “the whole conscious world collectively” moves beyond humanist comparisons of

similarities and differences and into the posthumanist realm of changing even the approach to thought, into the realm of “grappling”.

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## NOTES

1. As Michael Irwin points out, she “is likened to a bird, a cat, a sapling, a flower – as well as to a fly” (Irwin 33). For further discussions of Tess and animal imagery, see Irwin's *Reading Hardy's Landscapes* (2000), Elisha Cohen's “‘No Insignificant Creature’: Thomas Hardy's Ethical Turn” in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 64.4 (2010): 494-520, and John Humma's “Language and Disguise: The Imagery of Nature and Sex in ‘Tess’” in *South Atlantic Review* 54.4 (1989): 63-83.

2. See William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1756), 198, and Jacques Derrida’s “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject” in *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, 279.
  3. Hardy was vehemently against hunting as sport, viewing it as “proof that [humans] have not yet emerged from barbarism”, as he wrote in a letter on 2 March 1904 to Reverend S. Whittell Key (Millgate, 201). See also his 14 October 1926 letter to Wilfred P.H. Warner (455).
  4. Ritvo explains that “explicit claims of unity (humans are animals) actually reinforce the human-animal boundary that they are intended to dissolve” by “incorporat[ing] a grudging acknowledgement that this boundary is widely recognized and powerfully influential. Why else would it be continually necessary to deny its validity – or to remind ourselves of its arbitrariness?” (Ritvo 271).
  5. Beer comments that Hardy attempts to deal with the problem of anthropomorphism by grounding his writing in “the senses” and “the material world” (Beer 258). See George Levine’s “Hardy and Darwin: An Enchanting Hardy?” in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 36-53, for an exploration of enchantment with the material world.
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## ABSTRACTS

In his 1910 letter to the Humanitarian League, Hardy wrote of “a re-adjustment of altruistic morals [...] beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom”. He concluded the letter by saying, “And though I myself do not at present see how the principle of equal justice all round is to be carried out in its entirety, I recognize that the League is grappling with the question” (Hardy 1984, 377). This article explores two questions in order to better understand Hardy’s own “grappling with the question”. First, how does Hardy’s figuring of animals subtly undercut the prevalent attitudes not only toward animals in the humanist era in which he lived, but also toward women and the idea of what is human? Second, could Hardy’s approach be described as – in some sense of the word – posthumanist? The first half of the discussion focuses around portrayals of woman-as-animal (in the person of Tess Durbeyfield) and man-as-human (in the character of Michael Henchard), with close readings from *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) that seek to untangle the effect binaries of human/animal and man/woman have upon each text. The article then considers whether and how Hardy’s work fits into the current theoretical framework of posthumanism, exploring ideas of vulnerability and embodiment.

Dans une lettre de 1910 à la Ligue humanitaire, Hardy évoque “un réajustement de la morale altruiste [...] au-delà de la simple sphère humaine jusqu’au royaume animal tout entier”. Il conclut sa lettre ainsi : “Et, bien que je ne voie pas à présent comment ce principe de justice et d’égalité peut être porté dans son intégralité, je reconnais que la ligue se saisit de la question” (Hardy 1984, 377). Cet article explore deux points afin de mieux saisir la façon dont Hardy lui-même se “saisit de la question”. Premièrement, comment la représentation hardyenne des animaux subvertit-elle subtilement les attitudes de l’époque non seulement à l’égard des animaux, mais aussi à l’égard des femmes et de l’idée de ce qui est humain ? Deuxièmement, cela permet-il de qualifier l’approche hardyenne de “posthumaniste”, dans un certain sens du terme ? La première partie du débat se concentre sur les portraits de femme comme animaux (Tess Durbeyfield) et d’hommes comme humains (Michael Henchard), à partir de lectures précises de

*Tess of the d'Urberville* (1891) et de *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) qui tentent de dénouer les effets que les couples notionnels homme/animal et homme/femme ont sur chaque texte. L'article évalue ensuite la façon dont l'œuvre de Hardy correspond ou non au cadre théorique actuel du posthumanisme, en examinant les notions de vulnérabilité et d'incarnation.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** humanity, animal, posthumanism, suffering, gender

**Mots-clés:** humanité, posthumanisme, souffrance, finitude, genre

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