



CRITICAL ANIMAL STUDIES AND NON-SPECIESIST PERCEPTION OF ANIMALS IN THOMAS HARDY'S POETRY

KRİTİK HAYVAN ÇALIŞMALARI VE THOMAS HARDY'NİN ŞİİRLERİNDE TÜR-AYRIMCILIĞI KARŞITI HAYVAN ALGISI

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Abstract

This study intends to foreground Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) social and ecological responsibility to the ongoing animal exploitation by analyzing his poems from the perspective of a recently emerging theory of critical animal studies. Hardy's poetic responsiveness to the unjust human treatment of animals as disposable materials to be used and consumed is worthy of critical attention pertaining to his depiction of animals as self-conscious, intelligent, and emotional individuals. Going against the conventional anthropocentric assumptions of the Victorian period that perceives animals as insentient, passive, and automated objects who cannot feel pain and suffering, Hardy adopts an animal-oriented viewpoint and confronts his readers with the dreadful consequences of implacable human attitude to animals. In addition to giving voice to animals who are tortured and murdered for trivial human reasons, Hardy disentangles the indubitable principles of humanity and its moral standards which give consent to the infliction of pain and anguish on another living being. While questioning the morality of human values, Hardy depicts animals as moral communities who are perfectly accomplished and sufficiently advanced to initiate meaningful interaction with their environment. An elucidation of Hardy's poetry from the viewpoint of critical animal studies, hence, will provide a broad insight into Hardy's scientific understanding of the universe, replete with intelligent, socially and emotionally developed individuals who deserve the respect and approbation of humans.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Thomas Hardy'nin (1840-1928) şiirlerini, kritik hayvan çalışmalarını teorik bakış açısıyla inceleyerek, hayvanların süregelen sömürsü ve istismarına karşı şairin göstermiş olduğu sosyal ve ekolojik duyarlılığı açığa çıkarmaktır. Kullanılıp atılan bir malzeme olarak görülen hayvanlara karşı haksız insan davranışlarına Hardy'nin verdiği şiirsel tepki ve onları öz-bilinçli, düşünebilen ve hissedebilen bireyler olarak tasvir etmesi takdire değer bir durumdur. Hayvanları şuarsuz, pasif, acı duymayan otomat objeler olarak gören Viktorya dönemi antroposentrik düşüncenin tam karşısında duran Hardy, hayvan merkezli bir bakış açısı benimseyerek, okuyucularını insanların hayvanlara karşı vicdan yoksunu tutumlarıyla yüzleştirmiştir. İnsanların gereksiz sebepleri yüzünden işkence uygulanan hayvanlara söz hakkı veren Hardy, canlı bir bireye acı ve işkence çektirmeye müsaade eden, tartışılmaz derecede mükemmel görünen insanlık prensiplerinin ve ahlaki standartlarının çözülmesini sağlamıştır. İnsanın ahlaki değerler sistemini sorgularken, Hardy, hayvanları da ahlaki değerlere sahip ve çevreleriyle anlamlı ilişki kurabilecek derecede gelişmiş topluluklar olarak resmeder. Bu nedenle, Hardy'nin şiirlerinin kritik hayvan çalışmaları yönünden incelenmesi, şair tarafından benimsenen ve içinde bilinçli, sosyal ve duygusal olarak gelişmiş canlılarla dolu olan bilimsel bir evren görüşünü ortaya çıkaracaktır.

Introduction

While Thomas Hardy's novels continue to receive abounding ecocritical attention since being declared to be a "good place to start" to look for "narrative procedures that correspond to ecological principles", his poetry has not enticed such a great ecocritical scholarly attraction (Kerrige, 2001, p. 126). Nevertheless, Hardy's poems, besides his novels, are simmering with the circumstances of human and nonhuman encounters which elicit deference and ethical consideration towards nonhuman beings. In her comprehensive study of Hardy's novels with regards to the author's fictional representation of human-animal encounters, Anna West foregrounds the concept of "creature" which is particularly chosen by Hardy "as a species-neutral appellation, raising and destabilizing boundaries traditionally asserted between humans and animals: boundaries based on moral sense and moral agency, language and reason" (West, 2017, p. 2). Indeed, Hardy's entanglement with animals, most of the time, uncloaks his scientific skepticism of the classical Western doctrine of human elitism that foregrounds the fundamental distinctiveness and superiority of humans over nonhuman species. An unsubstantiated anthropocentric concept of human agency and intelligibility posited against the nonhuman submissiveness and insentience carves the path for Hardy to discover the permeability of these precincts which are constructed firmly between human and nonhuman beings. Situating humans within an extremely complex, heterogeneous, intelligible and intentional more-than-human world assists Hardy in providing a deep insight to the problematic relationship between humans and animals and holding a mirror to the biological complexity of nonhuman life which "diminishes the human individual to insignificance" (Miller, 2020, p. 161). Therefore, analyzing Hardy's poetry from the perspective of critical animal studies will be the prevailing subject of this study which will expose Hardy's biological understanding of the universe in which humans, both physically and emotionally, are thoroughly enmeshed with nonhuman species and his affirmation of the biological inseparability of humans and nonhumans as well as grappling with the problems of humans' mistreatment, torturing, and killing of animals.

CRITICAL ANIMAL STUDIES

In 1974, Joseph Meeker introduced the concept of "literary ecology" and suggested that it is critically imperative to assess literature "carefully and-honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment-to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us"

(1974, p. 25). Meeker incorporates his ethological understanding of animals as competent, self-conscious individuals of universe into literature and asserts that “*recent growth of ethology, the study of animal behavior, is a sign that humans are now beginning to see animals as significant source of information*” (1974, p. 44). Meeker’s preliminary attempt to compose a literary ecology which necessitates approaching animals from an ethological point of view bears a significant influence in the burgeoning of critical animal studies that consigns itself to scrutinizing cultural, social, and textual representation of animals which are far from the biological reality of actual animals. Later in 1976, the bioethical philosopher Peter Singer, in correspondence to racism, defines speciesism as “*a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species*” (2002, p. 6). Singer, further, argues that if human life is assumed to be “*sacrosanct*” as the only worthwhile form of existence, then, it is a “*form of speciesism*” (2002, p. 18). Critical animal studies emerges naturally and eventually out of animal liberation movements during the last quarter of the 20th century, challenging the staunchly established dogmatic ideology of human exceptionalism with its groundbreaking pronouncement of the astonishing interrelatedness of human and nonhuman beings both biologically and emotionally.

Human civilization has built its ethical humanitarian principles upon a long unethical tradition of using, abusing, imprisoning and murdering of animals either for industrial economies, laboratory experiments, medicine, and pharmacy or for personal use of their skins, furs, meats, and milks. What gives a sharp upswing to the emergence of critical animal studies is this decadence of humans’ moral standards, excluding everything that is nonhuman. “*Being human*”, Pick argues, “*is grappling with what is inhuman in us*” (2011, p. 6). Engaging specifically with how animals are represented in cultural, social, and literary constructions of human beings, critical animal studies fervently calls for “*the radical breakdown of human/animal distinction*” in almost every area of human life (Calarco, 2015, p. 6). Animalization of humanities, therefore, emerges as an aspiring project of critical animal studies evoking more respectable and responsible activism to terminate human oppression of animals. The development of an intersectional perspective sanctioned by the internalization of interdisciplinary approaches to animal question is considered to be crucial for the construction of “*interspecies morality*” by critical animal studies (Macfarland and Hediger, 2009, p. 6).

What lies tightly behind these problematic animal representations are the unreliable projections of bigoted human ideologies and fixed conceptualizations through which animals are allotted a disgracing role of servitude to the superior human beings. The separatist human practice of prioritizing human needs and desires as the only meaningful goal of life in the universe appears as the ultimate governing motive of humans' anthropocentric propensity to suppress the textual as well as the actual agency of animals by reducing them into abstract, metaphoric, linguistic constructions. In spite of the density of animal populations in literature, animals hardly occupy literary platform as dominant literary actors and primary focus of attention, but they mostly serve as instrumental tools of humans' poetic or narrative imagination. In outlining the overriding tenets of critical animal studies, Susan McHugh opines strenuously that "*animal studies pushes the limits of exclusively human ways of being, and reveals among other things the ways in which species-being works in literary texts precisely as a function of what we think of as their literariness, even within and beyond humanist traditions*" (2011, p. 7).

In attesting to the moral standing of animals, critical animal studies unsettles humans' anthropocentric primacy of being the only intelligent and self-conscious species who have the absolute power to destroy, exploit, and torture every nonhuman being in the universe. Probing into the depths of hierarchical structure of human-animal relationship which depends on biased humanistic set of values, critical animal studies makes a compelling case for restoring the rights of animals to exist and live with their own selves without being exposed to the prejudicial and discriminatory treatment of human despotism. It's high time for humans to recognize that the universe is replete with species other than humans who are much more complicated, intelligent, and self-conscious. In Kari Weil's words, "*there are beings or objects with ways of knowing and being that resist our flawed systems of language and who may know us and themselves in ways we can never discern*" (2002, p. 12). Likewise, Dominic Ohrem warns against the crucial human fault of constructing a dualistic opposition between the notion of humanity configured over and against the notion of animality. Founding this kind of classificatory system of dividing species according to their cognitive and agential capacities, Ohrem argues, is delusional and does not reflect the reality since "*historical constructions of humanity is epistemologically and politically problematic in its failure to take into account their constitutive intersectionality*" (2017, p. 9). Reacting against the pseudo boundaries constructed between the concept of humanity as a paragon of perfection and animality as the most degraded form of existence, critical animal studies demands appreciation for

animality as a powerful animating force of the material world as well as human consciousness and imagination. In this respect, Bleakley suggests reversing the question of “*how do humans constitute a world*” into “*in what sense might the world of animals construct us in its image, or educate our attention(s) to its presence(s)?*” (2000, p. xiii). Critical animal studies undertakes the duty of disclosing the deeply rooted intersectionality of humans and animals on account of the fact that no matter how hard humans try to distinguish themselves from the nonhuman beings, they are deeply entrenched in the material universe so much so that their physical bodies, emotions, ideas, thoughts and imaginations are all shaped by nonhuman beings who are equally intelligent and intentional beings, having their own unique interests and goals in life, independent of humans. The literary configuration of animals, therefore, is brought under a close interrogation by critical animal studies with a studious attempt to change the anthropocentric human perception of animals as inert and passive objects of literature serving at the backdrop of dominant human actors. Critical animal studies, as Sarikaya convincingly argues, “*stands against the kind of literature that regards humans as the only active agents of literary creativity and reduces animals to abstract constructions*” (2023, p. 7).

Animals in Hardy’s Poems

Animals, as members of the-more-than-human world, inhabit Hardy’s poems as dominant social actors and biological entities who are acutely aware of their environment as well as possessing a self-consciousness and self-determination. Hardy’s concern with animals is generated by his knowledge of the Darwinian theory of evolution which, he believes, “*revealed that all organic creatures are of one family*” and for this reason, “*the practice of vivisection, which might have been defended while the belief ruled that men and animals are essentially different, has been left by that discovery without any logical argument in its favour*” (Hardy, 1962, pp. 346-347). Attributing intelligence to the whole universe and stretching the borders of agency and intentionality to embrace all nonhuman species, as Hardy believes, “*shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively*” (1962, p. 346). Hardy’s broadened concept of empathy is palpably observed in his poem, “Bags of Meat” which presents the cruelty and immorality of humans’ anthropocentric view of animals as pieces of meat rather than as living beings who have their own interests of life. The poem, in this sense, entails a severe criticism of the instrumental relationship forged between humans and animals based upon a total elimination of

the agency, intentionality, and individuality of animals while showing a persistent effort to accomplish the maximized human happiness, comfort, and satisfaction:

‘Here’s a fine bag of meat,’
Says the master-auctioneer,
As the timid, quivering steer,
Starting a couple of feet
At the prod of a drover’s stick,
And trotting lightly and quick,
A ticket stuck on his rump,
Enters with a bewildered jump (Hardy, 2017, p. 474).

The poem describes callousness of the local cattle auction markets where animals are turned into commodity materials to be bought and sold. Hardy, in this poem, examines the disturbing undertows of the master-slave relationship between humans and animals through which animals are brutally slaughtered by the cruel human masters. The demeaning attitude of “the master auctioneer” who is incapable of seeing the cattle as a living being is adroitly contrasted with the vulnerable status of the “*bewildered*”, “*timid*,” and “*quivering steer*” who is simply called as “*a fine bag of meat*” (Hardy, 2017, p. 474). Underscoring “*ticket stuck on his rump*”, the poem insinuates how the concept of animal is striped out of its authentic implication of a living being and has come out to be associated with the notion of a passive, inanimate object (Hardy, 2017, p. 474). The untenable anthropocentric ideology of classifying animals as passive objects, appropriate and even necessary to be tortured and killed as they are incapable of feeling any pain is put under a serious critical investigation in Hardy’s poem. The poem draws attention to how everyday practices of humans and their cultural discourses enable them to adopt the anthropocentric ideology which regularize and legalize the brutal torture of animals as imperative and ordinary way of human life. The power of language in shaping a society’s communal consciousness and the belief systems is aptly elaborated by Nibert who asserts that “the political and ideological use of language” requires the functional choice of words and expressions “*to normalize systems of oppressions*” (2017, p. xviii). To strengthen his argument, Nibert points out that the use of words like “*cattle*’, ‘*meat*’, ‘*dairy*’, ‘*pork*’, ‘*poultry*’, and ‘*livestock*’ all serve to objectify other animals—to cast their very existence in terms of the industries that use and kill them for profit” (2017, p. xviii). Similarly, Hardy’s poem, beginning from its very first line, focuses on the problematic nature of human discourse, working as a mind-shaping mechanism which directs humans to see animals as pieces of meat by dismissing their individuality, vitality, and sentience.

With its emphasis on the intricate connectivity between the objectification and oppression of animals, the poem lays bare the powerful undercurrents of anthropocentric ideology which standardizes its oppression of animals by a system of objectification. “*Objectification*”, as Carol Adams suggests, “*permits an oppressor to view another being as an object*” and normalizes the maltreatment of a living being by an “*object-like treatment*” (2010, p. 74). Through the process of objectification, animals are deprived of their agency and turned into consumable objects just like “*the butchering of animals that converts animals from living breathing beings into dead objects*” (Adams, 2010, p. 74). Relatedly, Hardy’s paying special attention to the master-auctioneer’s calling a living animal as a “fine bag of meat” is quite significant in demonstrating the puissant role of language in the objectification of animals through symbolic and metaphoric constructions so that their animality, subjectivity, feelings, emotions, and pains are all unheralded. With an authentic depiction of the public market, Hardy showcases the plain truth of how poor animals are exposed to the inhumane treatment of humans: “*The beast was rapped on the horns and snout / To make him turn about*” (Hardy, 2017, p. 474). Through the end of the poem, Hardy’s moves his attention away from the master-auctioneer to the animal and deals more intensely with the emotional trauma of the objectified animal:

Each beast, when driven in,
Looks round at the ring of bidders there
With a much-amazed reproachful stare,
As at unnatural kin,
For bringing him to a sinister scene
So strange, unhomelike, hungry, mean;
His fate the while suspended between
A butcher, to kill out of hand,
And a farmer, to keep on the land;
One can fancy a tear runs down his face
When the butcher wins, and he’s driven from the place (Hardy, 2017, p. 475).

Diverging from the master-auctioneer’s speciesist outlook to animals as bags of meat, the poem is directed towards the thoughts of animals in the above lines where the animal perspective of events and animals’ subjective experiences of human terror are tackled with strikingly. The dull, insensitive human approach to animals is deliberately juxtaposed with the magnified animal emotions like “*a much-amazed reproachful stare*” of a perplexed animal who cannot understand what is happening around him except discerning a “*sinister scene*” (Hardy, 2017, p. 475). The poignant

cry of the imprisoned animal does not escape the attention of the poet who sympathizes with the pain-stricken animal and is emotionally stirred by “*a tear runs down his face*” (Hardy, 2017, p. 475). The predacious human relationship with animals which relies on the endless torment of animals fosters Hardy to ponder upon the lifelong incarceration of enslaved animals whose life traverses between the farmer and the butcher. Offering a short synopsis of animal life, comprised of a lifetime slavery which begins at a farm and ends in a slaughterhouse, Hardy provides an ample access into the inextricable connectivity between animal oppression and capitalism leading a policy of objectification through which every living being is transfigured into a commodity material to be utilized and consumed. Nibert designates the factory farming of animals as “*a profitable practice that would come to create unimaginable levels of deprivation, pain, and suffering for hundreds of billions of other animals*” (2017, pp. xiv-xvi). Significantly enough, apart from its genuine vociferation for a more merciful treatment of animals, Hardy’s poem quiet efficiently unravels the pivotal role of capitalist economic policies in perpetuating the systematic oppression of animals. “*Assuming sentient animals enjoy basic moral status*”, Fisher suggests, “*we should not sacrifice their vital interests to promote the non-vital interests of ourselves*” (2019, p. 39). Factory farms and slaughterhouses, in that respect, function as places where the mass murder of animals is rationalized as a necessary and excusable execution to satisfy the insatiable human appetite by ensuring their customers that they, in fact, are enjoying a “*fine bag of meat*” instead of eating a cruelly murdered living animal whose right to live freely is expropriated by humans (Hardy, 2017, p. 474). Discrediting the morality of the brutal human treatment of animals, Paula Cavalieri writes that:

We currently use nonhuman animals as means to our ends. We kill them for food, we use them in our work and entertainment, we employ them as tools in research of all kinds, and it is rare that we pause to ask ourselves whether our behavior is morally justified. Certainly, in theory, we acknowledge the obligation not to cause unnecessary suffering, but our needs are interpreted in such a broad way as to make this constraint negligible. In short, nonhuman animals are at the bottom of a pyramid, at the apex of which we have placed ourselves (2001, p. 3).

Analogous to Cavalieri’s arduous attempts to enfold animals within humans’ moral considerations, Hardy’s poem solicits compassionate identification for tortured animals, questions the morality of killing and inflicting pain on animals, and subsequently obfuscates the veracity of humanity’s ethical standards. Within the

context of the poem, Hardy exceptionally reveals this moral discrepancy between humans and animal with a razor-sharp opposition between the concerns of the master-auctioneer and the confused and frightened animal. On the one hand, the poem displays the master-auctioneer's thoughts which revolve around the money that he is going to earn by selling the animal whom he perceives as a bag of meat to consume, and on the other hand, the innocent steer's emotional horror and his tremendous fear of humans are highlighted densely. The anthropocentric human perception of the nonhuman world as fathomless resource of raw material seems to be the most insidious driving force for the exploitation of animals for human ends. Hardy's altercation with the aggressive system of capitalism and its implementation of an absolute domination of animals is more persistently observed in "The Lady in the Furs", a remarkable poem which outspokenly expresses how animals are victimized by human spitefulness for exceedingly trivial anthropocentric uses in favor of pursuing luxurious lifestyles:

True, my money did not buy it,
But my husband's, from the trade;
And they, they only got it
From things feeble and afraid
By murdering them in ambush
With a cunning engine's aid (Hardy, 2017, p. 505).

The speaker of the poem is an upper-class woman who is boastful of her social superiority and describes herself as a "lofty lovely woman" wearing expensive clothes made of animal furs (Hardy, 2017, p. 505). In reference to animals, Hardy specifically chooses the word "things" to uncover the double standards in humans' moral systems allowing humans to erase the vital existentiality of all beings who remain outside of the definition of humanity (Hardy, 2017, p. 505). Equivalently, Peter Singer defines the human penchant for categorizing animals as "items of equipment", or "supplies" as the most evident indicator of speciesism which license us to "*tolerate cruelties inflicted on members of other species that would outrage us if performed on members of our own species*" (2002, p. 69). Hardy's use of "things" for animals reveals his drastic denunciation of the speciesist ideology which refuses to acknowledge animals as living entities, having the capacity to feel pain and suffering (Hardy, 2017, p. 505). Outstripping the strictly drawn boundaries between humans and animals, Hardy endorses a non-speciesist and non-anthropocentric ideology according to which animals, as animate beings, are quite accomplished in feeling, sensing, and understanding, and foregrounds how these animals, tortured for their furs are "*feeble*

and afraid” and murdered *“in ambush”* (Hardy, 2017, p. 505). Money stands as the only criterion shaping human perception of animals which, in fact, bears a strong testimony to humans’ instrumental relationship to nonhumans whose importance is conditioned on their usefulness for human beings. In attunement with the instrumental value bestowed upon animals, humans are positioned at the nucleus of the whole universe, having an inherent value on themselves and standing there as an epitome of moral excellence.

In discussing *“humanism’s possible role in an anthropocentric perspective”* which, to a great extent, is premised on the infinite use and abuse of animals, LaCapra notes that the instrumental view of animals *“validates whatever serves human interests and, as a consequence, projectively situates other animals, or animality in general (including the animal in the human being), in the position of bare life, raw material, or scapegoat victim”* (2009, p. 151). As an ardent advocate of animal rights, Hardy destabilizes the anthropocentric assumption about the superiority of humans over animals by presenting humans as insensitive, unethical violators of the rights of nonhuman beings while depicting animals as self-conscious, emotional and defenseless victims of human beings. Hardy’s poem deals with the capitalism and anthropocentrism as two interlaced ideologies finding a solid ground in conferring a monetary value on everything that is nonhuman by disregarding their agency and vitality. Underpinning the capacity of animals to feel pain and fear, Hardy vouchsafes agency not only to humans but also to animals whose rights, emotions, and human-caused pains are unrecognized by humans who assume themselves as the one and only source of meaning and purpose of life in the universe. The convoluted bond between capitalism and the exploitation of the subordinate individuals is more blatantly observed in the following part of the poem:

True, my hands, too, did not shape it
To the pretty cut you see,
But the hands of midnight workers
Who are strangers quite to me:
It was fitted, too, by dressers
Ranged around me toilsomely (Hardy, 2017, p. 505).

The speaker of the poem explains the difficult and toilsome process of the production of her fur coat, availing of a multi-dimensional exploitation not only of animals but also of under-privileged classes of humans. The lady in the furs accepts that her fur clothe is made *“toilsomely”* by the *“hands of midnight workers”* who constitute the working classes, enslaved by the capitalist business owners (Hardy

2017, 505). Hardy exudes the idea that the problem of objectification is not restricted with animals, but humans also are reduced into objects and working machines who do not feel and think, similar to the objectification of animals who are assumed to be inert objects, unable to speak, think, and feel. Hardy's poem employs a severe criticism of capitalism which is a vicious economic system, the only concern of which is to maximize its pecuniary profits at the expense of humans and nonhumans, and thus, unhesitatingly preying on them for its own interests. In manifesting the analogous exploitation of humans and animals by the capitalist system, Sanbonmatsu remarkably notes that "[t]he capitalist war on nature and other animals meanwhile occurs in parallel with the violent disenfranchisement of poor and working people, with the capitalist state serving to ensure both processes" (2017, p. 14). In the same manner, Hardy skilfully demonstrates that capitalism and its consumerist cultural system operate through a procedure of commodification during which vulnerable groups of humans and animals are concomitantly tortured, abused, and oppressed.

Coercing his readers to re-evaluate their detrimental relationship to non-human beings, Hardy recurrently delineates animals as self-cognizant and sentient living individuals who are ruthlessly oppressed by humans. The persona of the poem still considers herself as "a lovely lady" regardless of the people who "say I shine/ By robbing Nature's children" (Hardy, 2017, 505). It should be taken into consideration that "Nature's children" refers not only to animals who are killed and tortured but also refers to humans who are evenly exploited by capitalism (2017, p. 505). In calling humans as the children of nature, Hardy emphasizes the spiritual kinship of humans and nonhumans regardless of the anthropocentric and capitalist ideologies' arraying humans and animals in conflict with each other. Hardy's configuration of humans and animals as kindred species, belonging to nature, is reminiscent of the notion of "companion species" offered by Donna Haraway to obliterate "human exceptionalism" by bringing humans side by side with animals as "a multispecies crowd" engaged in "making of partners through the making itself" (2008, p. 165). Haraway's proposition of companion species hankers for bringing humans closer to animals in "a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity" (2008, p. 42). Humans and animals as knots of co-species are not obsessed with forming a hegemonic authority over each other since there is an interdependent, inter-species relationship which is anchored on "response and respect" (Haraway, 2008, p. 19). In tandem with Haraway's concept of companion species, Hardy invites his readers to perceive animals as their kindred species who deserve respect and sympathetic

understanding. Subverting anthropocentrism which legitimates the manipulation, control, and the mishandling of nonhuman beings, Hardy proffers a posthumanist idea of nature's children as "*knots of companion species*" (Haraway, 2008, p. 18), and in this manner, achieves to dissolve the stringently drawn boundaries between humans and animals. In doing this, Hardy succeeds in reinvigorating an inter-species respect and appreciation for differences instead of hostility and hatred. He induces his readers to read the universe as an all-enveloping system of interplay occurring between companion species.

In his unrelenting struggle to conduct his readers to confront ~~with~~ the disastrous results of their anthropocentric perspective of animals as inert machines, unable to think, feel, and sense, Hardy seeks to increase the consciousness of his readers about the inherent worth of animals who are morally significant individuals terribly injured and harmed by the brutal and immoral treatment of humans. Hardy's compassionate identification with tortured animals is palpable in most of his poems. In congruence with the systematic torture of animals for superfluous reasons for their furs and meats, Hardy underscores a massively bloody tradition of the blinding of birds in "The Blinded Bird" which arrantly manifests how far human vulgarity can go in the name of gratifying human desire:

So zestfully canst thou sing?
And all this indignity,
With God's consent, on thee!
Blinded ere yet a-wing
By the red-hot needle thou,
I stand and wonder how
So zestfully thou canst sing! (Hardy, 2017, p. 353).

Hardy, in this poem, points to "vikensport" which is a popular 19th century sportive activity which requires imprisoning birds in the cages, and moreover, is complicit in an unscrupulous custom in which "*breeders used to blind the birds with hot needles because a bird without visual distraction sang better*" (Patowary, 2020, p. 1). Hardy, in lines above, expresses his ineptitude to understand how the blinded bird still finds the power to sing and addresses solicitously ~~to~~ the mutilated bird who is bereaved of his most fundamental right of living a life of freedom and dignity. In the meantime, Hardy audaciously questions humans' narrow religious and moral values which give consent to this bird's undertaking so much pain and misery with an insinuation of the idea that the morality of humans is allegedly vested in compassion, care, and respect, but in reality, it depends on a long bloodthirsty

tradition which legitimizes the persecution of nonhuman beings for human happiness. In the ensuing parts of the poem, Hardy continues to envision, to his consternation, the heart-wrenching experiences of the bird who does not feel any kind of acrimony against unjust human treatment: “*Resenting not such wrong, / Thy grievous pain forgot*” (Hardy, 2017, p. 353). As Hardy ruminates further on the traumatic life of the bird, the quintessential difference between the brutality and wickedness of humans and the innocence and good-will of the blinded bird becomes more obvious. The poem ends with the poet’s expression of the respect and admiration for the bird’s “charity” and kindness regardless of all the pain he endures, “[w]ho thinketh no evil, but sings? / Who is divine? This bird” (Hardy, 2017, p. 353).

In condemnation of the anthropocentric ideology which conceives the animal as nothing more than a “thing”, aligned with “*passiveness and unawareness*” (Cavalieri, 2001, p. 121), Hardy attributes personhood to this blind bird by accentuating not only his innocence, kindness and charity, but also his soulfulness, sacredness, and spirituality. While the thingness of an animal defines a status of inertness and objectivity, signifying a substance to be consumed and squandered, the concept of personhood is “*identified with subjective identity, that is, with the unity and the continuity of the conscious life of self*” (Cavalieri, 2001, p. 121). Intertwining animals with personhood is a ground-breaking step, on behalf of the critical animal studies, breaching the paths of animal rationality, intelligence, sanctity and the advanced capacity of animals to form meaningful relationship with persons both from their own species and across-species.

In complement to Cavalieri who disassociates the notion of personhood to be uniquely paired with humans by restoring personhood and subjectivity to animals, Tom Regan refuses to accept the speciesist ideology that human life is inherently valuable while animals are only important as long as they are financially and instrumentally useful for human interests. Regan uses the term “subjects-of-a-life” for animals and refers to them as “individuals who have lives that fare experientially better or worse for themselves, logically independently of whether they are valued by others” (Regan, 2003, p. 94). With his concept of subjects-of-a-life, Regan, outstandingly, brings forth the moral significance of animals and claims that: “These animals are our psychological kin. Like us, they bring to their lives the mystery of a unified psychological presence. Like us, they are somebodies, not somethings” (Regan, 2003, p. 94).

In the same line with Cavalieri and Regan's principles of personhood and subjects-of-a-life applied for animals, Thomas Hardy displays the ambivalent grounds of human morality and animal dormancy by bending the rigid contours of humanity and animality. Moral values like charity, respect, dignity, and sanctity, which are traditionally considered to be the ideals of humanity, are surprisingly found in the blinded bird who does not feel resentment or hatred for humans even though they mercilessly blinded him. Appropriately, in his incredulousness to the terms of humanity and animality, Derrida asserts that instead of understanding the world as two opposing poles of humanity and animality, we should see "*the existence of 'living creatures,' whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity*" (Derrida, 2008, p. 47). Correspondingly, Hardy casts a shadow on the morality of humanism and the humanity of humans who violently and irrationally murder and mutilate animals while confirming the decency and respectability of animals who have advanced forms of intentional morality, spirituality, and rationality with esteemed elegance in their behaviour of kindness and charity. The poem, "The Blinded Bird", therefore, dismantles the rigidly drawn borders between humanity and animality, precipitating its readers to question the legitimacy of their unbending values of human ethics. Thus, Hardy shatters the solid grounds of the absolute human supremacy over nonhuman beings by showing clearly the fallaciousness of the anthropocentric ideology which awards humanity with privileged traits of speech, emotion, spirituality, self-consciousness, rationality on the one hand, and delineating animality with the absence of these traits on the other hand. In his disavowal of the dogmatic Western dualism which refuses to ascribe intelligence, personhood, and sacredness to animality, Hardy pertinently shows these features as common characteristics shared by humans and animals equally, and so, proves the slipperiness of the terms of humanism and animality in such a way that the readers are forced to face the animality of humans and the humanity of animals.

In accordance with "The Blinded Bird" in which Hardy puts forward a non-anthropocentric view of animals as honourable individuals who pursue morally significant lives unlike humans who are ready to violate the rights of nonhumans for their selfish desires, temporary economic benefits, or simple entertainments, "The Puzzled Game-Birds" is another significant poem which gives voice to actual animals who protest against the inconsistent human behaviour of animals. The poem is built upon the binary opposition of us / them as an allusion to the human-animal disparity:

They are not those who used to feed us
 When we were young – they cannot be –
 These shapes that now bereave and bleed us?
 They are not those who used to feed us,
 For did we then cry, they would heed us. –
 If hearts can house such treachery
 They are not those who used to feed us
 When we were young – they cannot be! (Hardy, 2017, p. 117).

What is quite noteworthy in the poem is that it employs multiple speakers, groups of birds who live together as a social community expressing their disgruntlement of human “*treachery*” (Hardy, 2017, p. 117). “They” refers to human communities who act with moral frailty in contrast to animal communities who understand the outside world within the frame of their ethical values (Hardy, 2017, p. 117). Commenting on the meaninglessness of a human sport of killing animals, birds accuse humans of behaving irrationally and unpredictably in their attitude to animals. Animal speakers of the poem express their puzzlement in discovering humans as unreliable and dishonest species who seem to care for birds and breed them only to kill them in the end as a part of their foolish games. Animals’ perception of humans divulges the shallow moral standards of humans which authorize them to commit atrocious crimes against nonhuman beings just for the sake of their simple pleasures.

Hardy’s conception of animals entails the view that animals are social beings who are capable of forming purposeful relationships with other members of their communities. They live as morally responsible individuals, respecting the needs and interests of their community members. Hence, it is incontrovertible fact that Hardy recognizes animals as moral agents, acting intentionally and communicating their emotions. Far surpassing the anthropocentric misconceptions of his contemporaries which associate agency and morality with human species, Hardy comes forward as a spearheading poet who allots agency and morality to animals while showing the weaknesses of human ethics. From this vantage point, Hardy’s animal perspective resonates with critical animal studies which asserts that “*beings who act in ways that conform to the behavioral standards of their groups—whether that be a human community or culture or a group of animals—act in moral ways*” (McFarland and Hediger, 2009, p. 6). Likewise, the community of birds in Hardy’s poem manifests agency and morality by interacting with the members of their species along with the other species. As active speakers of Hardy’s poem, birds are adequately competent at

representing their own perspective of events and speaking on their own behalf. Animals are not used as instrumental tools of literature as background materials in the poem, contrarily, Hardy permits them to exist with their biological actuality, possessing a unique power to exert their agency and utter their subjective experiences. Latour expounds on nonhuman agency as the most imperative prerequisite of maintaining democracy among species and compellingly argues that:

In sharing the competencies of speech, association, and reality among humans and nonhumans, we have put an end to the anthropomorphism of the object-subject division that mobilized all entities in a fight for control of the common world...Now that speech, association, and recalcitrance have been redistributed among them, they are going to be able to begin to parley again (2004, p. 82).

In tune with Latour's unswerving attempts to corrode human-animal distinction on linguistic base, Hardy's animals, having acquired the power of speech, become the active actors of the literary activity rather than standing as abstract metaphors of the poetic imagination, generating anthropocentric ideologies. Animals are neither at the margins nor at the background of literary representation as passive objects of Hardy's poetics but remain at the centre of literary realm as the dynamic agents who are accomplished enough to speak for themselves and about themselves. In his affirmation of the exigency of critical animal turn in literature and art, Kari Weil claims that: "*The turn to animals in art as in theory is to attempt to envision a different understanding of what we humans are and consequently to enlarge or change the possibilities for what we can think and what we can do in the world*" (2012, p. 13). A similar literary attempt of turning towards animals is observed in Hardy's poem where animals are redeemed with their discourse which provides humans with an opportunity to understand how humanity is constructed by nonhuman actors in opposition to humans' self-centred and biased constructions of humanity as superior to animality. The animal perspective of the poem exposes the defencelessness of these peripheral constructions by portraying humans as cold-blooded murderers whose moral deficiency sanction them to murder susceptible animals cold-bloodedly.

Conclusion

A comprehensive study of Hardy's animal poems from the critical perspective of animal studies has revealed the inestimable sensitivity and affection of the poet for animals who are forced to go through disquieting agonies and mortifications due to the ego-centric principles of humanism which condones the commitment of

unbearable violence against animals in the name of human happiness. Hardy's social activism of animal rights is dexterously observed by Kreilkamp who notes that: "Throughout his adult life he became more explicitly and passionately dedicated to the cause of improving the human treatment of animals" (2018, p. 110). Hardy's poems, in this respect, are dedicated to increase the social and moral responsibility of humans towards animals. His arduous animal advocacy instigates a shift of anthropocentric perspective of animals as inanimate objects of human life with that of self-conscious and rational animals who can feel, speak, understand, and build a momentous relationship in their social milieu. In his radically innovative depiction of animals as emotional and spiritual beings who construct their social communities and live by its moral codes of conduct, Hardy challenges the dichotomous situatedness of humans as superior to and more ethical than animals. Poems of Hardy, in this manner, serve to an ultimate goal of bringing humans and nonhumans on an equal ground as compatriots. Summoning his readers to look into the world from a distinctive animal perspective, Hardy unwinds capitalism and anthropocentrism as two closely ensnared ideologies, sustaining and systematizing animal exploitation. Instead of hammering out a master/slave relationship which legitimizes the acrimonious domination of humans over animals, Hardy's poems are predicated on non-speciesist premise, evoking to recognize humans and animals as kindred species in a mutually respectful and meaningful interaction with each other.

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Summary

Since the emergence of humans as presumably the only intelligent species on the planet, animals are wrongfully declared to be undeveloped, primitive creatures who are in need of being controlled and dominated by human beings. Human exploitation of animals, as a consequence, has come out to be an ordinarily accepted form of treatment which does not demand any kind of moral accountability from humans since it is discerned to be the most natural human right to tyrannize animals. Constructing their cultural heritage of civilization upon a long tradition of animal exploitation, humans throughout the ages have taken benefit of animals in every possible way by enslaving, captivating, torturing, and murdering them ruthlessly. Literature, undeniably, plays a key role in nurturing, normalizing, and prolonging this strongly established convention of animal oppression by representing animals as unvoiced, insignificant, and subservient elements, inhabiting the literary sphere as metaphoric constructions and as symbols of human ideas and emotions. Critical animals studies—emerges during the last decades of the 20th century with a ground-breaking argument that challenges humans' speciesist perspective of animals as inferior to humans according to some equivocal cognizant capabilities like speaking, thinking, feeling, and knowing. Drawing from the interdisciplinary studies of biology, ethology, and ecology, critical animal studies proves that animals are self-conscious, intentional, and vitally alive individuals, and in this way, dethrones the absolute power of humans both in the textual and the actual sphere. This study, therefore, dives into the poetry of Thomas Hardy from the critical perspective of animal studies to disclose Hardy's non-anthropocentric and non-speciesist outlook of animals who are not pushed into the backdrop of literature but are moved into the very centre of literary attention.

In addition to his reputation as the landmark figure among Victorian novelists, Thomas Hardy shows himself to be a quite lucrative poet, continuing to write during the first decade of the modernist period and prolonging his exploration of humans' relationship with the outside world. Deviating from the traditional Victorian belief in the moral perfection of humanity, Hardy reveals humans' moral weakness and double standards in their exploitative attitude to nonhuman beings. Apart from plants as biological entities of nature, animals are also at the centre of Hardy's poetry in which human beings, with their corrupt moral values manifest themselves as the only pernicious species who self-consciously inflict torture on nonhuman

members of the universe. Animals consistently appear as the vulnerable victims of human brutality in Hardy's poetry which displays how humans' anthropocentric mindsets intercept their perception to see the inherent value of animals. Hardy frequently challenges the anthropocentric view of animals as passive objects and directs his readers towards an accurate comprehension of the universe, which is overabundant with biologically active, dynamic nonhuman species, competent enough to communicate with the members of other species. For that reason, animals in Hardy's poetry are not passive objects of literature but emerge as thinking, evaluating and interrogating individuals with self-awareness and self-sentience. Animals in Hardy's poetry are empowered to react against human oppression and accuse humans of irrationally and irresponsibly violating the rights of animals who are killed, mutilated, and tortured by human beings. Hardy, through his poetry, dismantles the erroneous basis of the anthropocentric ideology of humans' being the only prestigious species who have spiritual, intellectual and emotional sophistication. Representing suffering and brutally murdered animals by the human hand, Hardy negates the false ideology of anthropocentrism and its claim for the ostensible superiority of human species over other species. In addition to anthropocentrism, capitalism also comes out as an extremely bigoted, hierarchical system of oppression which has a hazardous propensity to transform underprivileged groups of human and nonhuman communities into raw materials and substances designed to be used and abused boundlessly by its control mechanisms. Hardy tries to convince his readers to circumvent the imposition of capitalist economies and overcome their anthropocentric boundaries which dictate humans to assess the universe as a stratified composition of two opposite poles between the privileged human species and inferior nonhuman species. Warning his readers against the capitalist strategy of objectification of animals by means of denying their vivacity and agential capacities, Hardy considers animals as active moral agents whose ethicality far surpasses human values. In most of his poems accordingly, Hardy casts a doubt upon humans' moral values which are postulated upon bestowing a financial value on every nonhuman being in compliance to its practicality and usefulness for human needs. Hardy leads his readers into a journey through which they will discover to their amazement an intimate bond of friendship, kinship and resemblance with animals who are distant and different from humans' anthropocentric classifications.