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Human, All Too Human

Hardy's Humanity: "A Strange Respect for the Individual, an Extraordinary Respect"

L'humanité de Hardy : "un curieux respect de l'individu, un respect extraordinaire"

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Hardy's Humanity: "A Strange Respect for the Individual, an Extraordinary Respect"

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Laurence Estanove

Introduction: "Humanity Appears upon the Scene"

- 1 With a self-acknowledged nod to classical drama, Hardy famously opened *The Return of the Native* with a chapter carefully setting the scene of his action: he describes at length the details of the animal and vegetal life as well as the historical layers that make up the land of Egdon Heath, before allowing the human actors to step inside the duly exposed *décor*. The second chapter's title then comes to signal the disruptive presence of man, acting as an unequivocally prophetic maxim: "Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble" (Hardy 1999, 13).
- 2 It is not so much the ensuing "trouble" of the dramatic plot that interests me here (a lot has already been said about it) as the idea that in *The Return of the Native* as in Hardy's works more generally, that setting, that "scene" is already in itself a character in the plot. Saying so is almost a *topos* of Hardy criticism, as there has long been a fascination among readers for that background, that geography, that Wessex which seems to constitute the backbone of Hardy's work. D. H. Lawrence even went so far as writing: "This is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it" (Lawrence 70). Yet in no way does this mean that "the people" are forgotten – not as individuals; it is a background that does not crush its actors but rather reveals the vibrating intensity of their lives as individuals, something Gilles Deleuze expressed beautifully:

Take as an example the case of Thomas Hardy: his characters are not people or subjects, they are collections of intensive sensations, each is such collection, a packet, a bloc of variable sensations. There is a strange respect for the individual, an extraordinary respect: not because he would seize upon himself as a person and be recognized as a person, in the French way, but on the contrary because he saw himself and saw others as so many 'unique chances' – the unique chance from which one combination or another had been drawn. Individuation without a subject. And these packets of sensations in the raw, these collections or combinations, run along the lines of chance, or mischance, where their encounters take place – if need be, their bad encounters which lead to death, to murder. Hardy invokes a sort of Greek destiny for this empiricist experimental world. Individuals, packets of sensations, run over the heath like a line of flight or a line of deterritorialization of the earth. (Deleuze & Parnet 39-40)

- 3 Wessex – that vibrating microcosm endowed with a universal scope – is indeed in itself a “bloc of variable sensations”, and Hardy’s perception of humanity is one that posits the individual as that land, as a geography – a collection of lines, of encounters and of intensities. Isabelle Gadoin pointed in particular at the way Wessex does not so much function for the characters as an object of knowledge that remains external to them, but as “a sediment deposited at the heart of people’s minds and consciousness, according to some ingrained principle of solidarity that brings space and time together. The world we perceive,” she explains, “is much more than the world that reaches our senses: it is the interweaving of all the experiences we live.” (Gadoin 77)¹
- 4 My objective here will be to illustrate that vision, first focusing on the “strange, extraordinary respect for the individual”, then on the idea of intensive and variable sensations, of vibrating collections of lines, with references to several aspects of Hardy’s writing.

Altruism and the human scale: the extremities of war

- 5 Centrally in Hardy’s work, the sense of an *extra-ordinary* respect for the individual stems from the fact that the author’s sincere attachment to the living and the human often expresses itself in unexpected ways. Charles Du Bos (1882-1939), a French writer and literary critic from the first half of the 20th century who wrote some of the most beautiful pages to have been devoted in French to Hardy², seems to have detected that. He uses the title of a seemingly pessimistic poem by Hardy, “For Life I Had Never Cared Greatly” (Hardy 2001, 537), yet reads it in a very convincing way that indeed reveals the “strangeness” of Hardy’s respect for the individual:

Yet that sense of life in general with which Hardy both refreshes and stifles us, is always, ultimately, a vivifying, healthy, salty breath of air; and what’s miraculous in the case of Hardy is that he should manage to act upon us in such a way without having ever really cared for life.

For Life I had never cared greatly

[...] True; but sometimes with the great – when they are the greatest – not caring for life has no other consequence but to make one care even more for human beings, caring for them precisely because they are, like oneself, subjected to the fate of being alive. (Du Bos 854-855)³

- 6 As stated here, Du Bos sees genius in Hardy because he is overwhelmingly penetrated by a “sense of life in general”. It seems to me that such perceptiveness is acquired in Hardy’s works – novels, poems and all other writings as for example *The Dynasts*, of prime importance here – by an extensive exploration of all forms of existence, whether human,

animal or vegetal, but also of existence on all levels, all scales: from the minute existence of insects⁴ to the immensity of the cosmos, up to the sublime supra-aerial dimensions of the "Overworld" (*The Dynasts*).

- 7 Despite this, Hardy never fails to dwell on the human scale and repeatedly returns to it, expressing that respect for the individual in different ways, whether in the multiplicity of voices and personal stories one can hear in his poems – and I will return to the multiplicity of voices – or in the narrative format and techniques of his novels, as explained by Gillian Beer: "Though the individual may be of small consequence in the long sequence of succession and generation, yet Hardy in his emplotment opposes this perception and does so by adopting again the single life span as his scale. Whereas George Eliot's novels, and Dickens's novels, tend to include death, rather than end with death, Hardy's texts pay homage to human scale by ceasing as the hero or heroine dies." (Beer 223) The ultimate silence of Hardy's novel-writing thus constitutes a form of respect for the individual and of humanism – indeed a strange and extraordinary respect, since what thus signals the author's reverence for his characters is his insistence on having them die at the end of his books!
- 8 In Hardy's work, the humanistic or altruistic instinct is naturally also expressed in the recurring motif of "lovingkindness", a "tender respect for the individuality of others" (Robinson 143), the origin of which is naturally to be found in Christian charitable love. In that respect, as noted by several critics, Hardy shares with George Eliot a belief in that "religion of humanity" defended by Comte (though of course in different ways). Once again, Charles Du Bos offers some very perceptive phrasing for such a position, calling both writers "geniuses of sympathy": "In many respects, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy are very distant one from the other; yet they meet on that particular point, as can only be for all the geniuses I would readily call "geniuses of sympathy", those whose religion – sometimes their one and only – is that which used to be called "the religion of human suffering", unjustly censured as such." (Du Bos 845)⁵ There is thus – unsurprisingly – a strong moral implication to Hardy's boundless altruism. When he declares in 1904, "What are my books but a long plea against 'man's inhumanity to man' – to woman – and to the lower animals?" (Pinion 178), he is indeed calling for universal compassion and denouncing, in a very simple way, the absurd cruelty of man. The sincerity of Hardy's instinctive sympathy towards animals in particular is further revealed when it surfaces in his personal writings, as for instance in the following notebook entry from 1888: "13 July. After being in the street: – What was it on the faces of those horses? – Resignation. Their eyes looked at me, haunted me. I heard their tramp as I lay in bed, the ghosts of their eyes came in to me, saying, 'Where is your justice, O man and ruler?'" (Hardy 1989, 220). Such reflections are echoed particularly in Hardy's war poems such as "Horses Abroad" (*Human Shows*, 1925; Hardy 2001, 785-786) or "And There Was a Great Calm" (*Late Lyrics and Earlier*, 1922) which imagines, "On the Signing of the Armistice, 11 Nov. 1918", "Worn horses mus [ing]: 'We are not whipped to-day'" (Hardy 2001, 588-590).
- 9 The denunciations of man's cruelty and the underlying assertion of the value of lovingkindness can thus be found quite explicitly in Hardy's attitude to war, particularly in his redefinition of patriotism, simply put for example in a short note from 1922: "Patriotism, if aggressive and at the expense of other countries, is a vice; if in sympathy with them, a virtue" (Hardy 1989, 450). Hardy had explicitly stated that redefinition in earlier letters, written during World War 1, and had also exemplified it in his war poems

from both the Boer War and WW1. On 8 February 1917, in response to the *Royal Society of Literature* inviting him to a meeting of a pacifist committee, he thus wrote:

I regret that as I live in a remote part of the country I cannot attend the meeting of the Entente Committee.

In respect of the Memorandum proposing certain basic principles of International education for promoting ethical ideals that shall conduce to a League of Peace, I am in heart agreement with the proposition.

I would say in considering a *modus operandi*:

That nothing effectual will be accomplished in the cause of *Peace* till the sentiment of *Patriotism* be freed from the narrow meaning attaching to it in the past (still upheld by Junkers and Jingoists) and be extended to the whole globe.

On the other hand that the sentiment of *Foreignness* – if the sense of a contrast be really rhetorically necessary – attach only to other planets and their inhabitants, if any.

I may add that I have been writing in advocacy of those views for the last twenty years. (Hardy 1989, 405; Hardy's emphases)

- 10 What Hardy seems to be defending here is a form of *internationalism* ("extended to the whole globe"), yet one of a purely theoretical nature since it clearly bears no economic consideration. In order to promote his own vision of equity Hardy denounces the aggressive chauvinism of both nations alike ("Junkers and Jingoists"⁶), hence paying particular attention to the rhetorical implications of the patriotic terminology ("the sentiment of *Patriotism*", "the sentiment of *Foreignness* – if the sense of a contrast be really rhetorically necessary").
- 11 If one is to take the poem "His Country" (*Moments of Vision*, 1917; Hardy 2001, 539-540) as a faithful expression of Hardy's belief, then his patriotism is one that erases all language barriers as well as geopolitical frontiers:

I journeyed from my native spot	He travels
Across the south sea shine,	southward,
And found that people in hall and cot	and looks
Laboured and suffered each his lot	around;
Even as I did mine.	
Thus noting them in meads and marts	and cannot
It did not seem to me	discover the
That my dear country with its hearts,	boundary
Minds, yearnings, worse and better parts	
Had ended with the sea.	
I further and further went anon,	of his native
As such I still surveyed,	country;
And further yet – yea, on and on,	
And all the men I looked upon	
Had heart-strings fellow-made.	
I traced the whole terrestrial round,	or where
Homing the other side;	his duties to
Then said I, 'What is there to bound	his fellow-
My denizenship? It seems I have found	creatures end
Its scope to be world-wide.'	
I asked me: 'Whom have I to fight,	nor who are
And whom have I to dare,	his enemies.
And whom to weaken, crush, and blight?	
My country seems to have kept in sight	
On my way everywhere.'	

- 12 The poem is also interesting insofar as its speaker seems to assert a belonging to the world of living beings in its widest and most varied existence, as the term "denizenship"

might denote – a substitute for “citizenship” which seems to signal the extension of the fraternal community to animal and vegetal life.

- 13 There does seem to be a form of humanistic ideal in some of Hardy's texts, for instance as we see him hunting altruism down to the very battlefields of WW1, more strikingly so in “Often When Warring” (*Moments of Vision*, 1917; Hardy 2001, 545):

Often when warring for he wist not what,
 An enemy-soldier, passing by one weak,
 Has tendered water, wiped the burning cheek,
 And cooled the lips so black and clammed and hot;
 Then gone his way, and maybe quite forgot
 The deed of grace amid the roar and reek;
 Yet larger vision than loud arms bespeak
 He there has reached, although he has known it not.
 For natural mindsight, triumphing in the act
 Over the throes of artificial rage,
 Has thuswise muffled victory's peal of pride,
 Rended to ribands policy's specious page
 That deals but with evasion, code, and pact,
 And war's apology wholly stultified.

- 14 One could also mention other war poems that likewise testify to a redefinition of patriotism and a denunciation of the absurdity of fighting from a human perspective. “The Man He Killed” (*Time's Laughingstocks*, 1909, dated 1902; Hardy 2001, 287) thus focuses on the fundamental identity of fighters from both sides, making the very notion of martial antagonism nonsensical:

'Had he and I but met
 By some old ancient inn,
 We should have sat us down to wet
 Right many a nipperkin!
 'But ranged as infantry,
 And staring face to face,
 I shot at him as he at me,
 And killed him in his place.
 'I shot him dead because –
 Because he was my foe,
 Just so: my foe of course he was;
 That's clear enough; although
 'He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
 Off-hand like – just as I –
 Was out of work – had sold his traps –
 No other reason why.
 'Yes; quaint and curious war is!
 You shoot a fellow down
 You'd treat if met where any bar is,
 Or help to half-a-crown.'

- 15 In Hardy's vision, then, human moral responsibility is quite clearly pointed at, but as the tautological phrase “man's inhumanity to man” indicates, man is both accused and celebrated. This isn't such a surprising or extraordinary perspective, it even stands as quite typical of a Judaeo-Christian context.

Beauty and grandeur of the commonplace

- 16 What is maybe less ordinary is how Hardy dwells on the minute, even banal details of human existence more consistently than on the grand achievements of mankind. His work celebrates the intensity and value of ordinary life, which he takes pains to record and describe. "He was a man who used to notice such things", the poet hopes people will say of him when he is gone ("Afterwards", *Moments of Vision*, 1917; Hardy 2001, 553). And indeed, one notebook entry from April 1925 says it all: "People came to tea." (Hardy 1979, 87) The note (quoted here in full) is indeed extraordinary in its matter-of-factness; Hardy's need to keep a record of such a commonplace event albeit with such vagueness ("People") is, to me, a remarkable thing. I consequently feel tempted to draw a parallel with an observation of a similar sort by Schopenhauer who wrote that "a scene from everyday life can be of great inward significance, if human individuals and the innermost recesses of human action and will appear in it in a clear and distinct light." (Schopenhauer 231)
- 17 All in all, it seems to me that Hardy's work is about discovering the peaceful grandeur of everyday life in the face of a general disenchantment with existence, a form of ontological disappointment both carried by the author's personal sensitivity and by the late Victorian *zeitgeist*. This is the peculiar strength Paul Zietlow sees in Hardy's poetry: "Again and again Hardy's poetry testifies to the importance of daily life. Again and again he shows his keen, sympathetic understanding of the kindly variousness of experience, and of life's potential to achieve quiet fulfilment day by day in brief, diverse perceptions of goodness and beauty and in homely acts of ongoing sympathy. Consummations come, but they are few and far between, and are usually followed by let-down and depression, disillusionment and suffering. In the meantime, there is the daily life of ordinary experience, offering little, but nevertheless something." (Zietlow 238) Here is how that "extraordinary respect of the individual" is enacted, "strange" precisely because it attaches itself to the ordinary minutiae of human existence. Having "an eye for such mysteries" ("Afterwards", *Moments of Vision*, 1917; Hardy 2001, 553) enables the author to discover how the ordinary is in no way a merely linear continuum of existence. Very often in Hardy's texts, and mostly in his poetry, the ordinary is – to return to a Deleuzian terminology – an encounter, the intersection of various trajectories, of lines or intensities.
- 18 As Deleuze noted and as I mentioned earlier, the characters of Hardy's novels, perceived as "packets of sensations in the raw", "run along the lines of chance, or mischance, where their encounters take place – if need be, their bad encounters which lead to death, to murder." (Deleuze & Parnet 39-40) Examples of such tragic encounters are easy to find in Hardy's work, but what interests me here are encounters that are apparently of a minor mode: in these, Hardy's respect for the individual is at its strangest, its most extraordinary, because rather than appealing to compassion for cruel destinies, it calls upon the subdued intensity of the ordinary experience.
- 19 The perfect illustration to this is, rather famously, the poem "An August Midnight" (*Poems of the Past and the Present*, 1901; Hardy 2001, 146-147). The scene presents itself as a suspended moment (carefully situated in time and space as indicated by the mention "Max Gate, 1899"), its power residing in the underlying vibrating intensity of this apparent banal experience. It is indeed hard to resist the temptation to connect that intensity with

the vibrating wings of the insects present in the scene, a buzzing that gives its full texture to the episode, together with the shaded light. A dim light, a commonplace moment – yet there's an overwhelming sense of reverence to the scene that no reader would deny, the intuition that something of great import is being played out before our ears and eyes.

- 20 Something similar can be said of what Hardy named "the beauty of association", which also testifies to an extraordinary respect for the individual. This idea brings us back to the connection between subject and place, individuality and geography – as initially presented. As early as 1877, Hardy thus wrote (as recorded by *The Life*): "September 28. . . . An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists, and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand" (Hardy 1989, 120). The idea was even more explicitly expressed the following year in Hardy's consideration of the pictorial methods of Boldini and Hobbema, which he apparently aimed at applying to his writing:

April 22 [1878]. – The method of Boldini, the painter of 'The Morning Walk' in the French Gallery two or three years ago (a young lady beside an ugly blank wall on an ugly highway) – of Hobbema, in his view of a road with formal lopped trees and flat tame scenery – is that of *infusing emotion into the baldest external objects either by the presence of a human figure among them, or by mark of some human connection with them.* This accords with my feeling about, say, Heidelberg and Baden versus Scheveningen – as I wrote at the beginning of 'The Return of the Native' – that *the beauty of association is entirely superior to the beauty of aspect, and a beloved relative's old battered tankard to the finest Greek vase. Paradoxically put, it is to see the beauty in ugliness.* (Hardy 1989, 123-24; my emphases)⁷

- 21 It thus seems that it is by looking at the raw "ugly" material of reality through the lens of the human that one may discover its beauty. Here, the intensity of a place depends on the human presence, whether immediate and tangible or mediated by an object of the most common sort – another form of extraordinary respect that expresses itself through the strength of the ordinary.
- 22 The individual human experience is clearly at the centre of that intensity, whether as ghosted or imprinted presence, or as the nexus of a suspended moment. It is the multiple articulations or combinations of such unique traces, unique moments – "unique chances" or combinations – that make up the "great web of human doings", to use a key quotation from *The Woodlanders* describing the solitary figures of Giles Winterborne and Marty South:

Hardly anything could be more isolated or more self-contained than the lives of these two walking here in the lonely hour before day, when grey shades, material and mental, are so very grey. And yet, looked in a certain way, *their lonely courses formed no detached design at all, but were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings* then weaving in both hemispheres, from the White Sea to Cape Horn. (Hardy 1998, 21-22; my emphases)

- 23 Here is clearly one expression of Hardy's "keen, sympathetic understanding of the kindly variousness of experience" (Zietlow 238). This variousness is also a form of variability, as one is tempted to perceive the great web as a vibrating woven cloth quivering under the intensity of each unique combination – indeed "a bloc of variable sensations", to use again Deleuze's words.

Iipseity and dispossession: the variousness of identity

- 24 One final aspect of Deleuze's perspective on Hardy I'd like to explore here is how the idea of "individuation without a subject" reveals itself in Hardy's writing as a form of dispossession of the self, a divestiture or *dessaisissement*. That divestiture is a condition to true altruism and is itself made possible precisely by the acknowledgement of the variousness of experience evoked by Zietlow.
- 25 Firstly, from a post-evolutionary perspective, Hardy's work quite obviously dramatizes man's loss of a central place in the universe. The end of anthropocentrism is indeed explicitly depicted in Hardy's attention to the animal and vegetal world, as well as in his exploration of the cosmos – delineating what I have named elsewhere, with particular reference to *Two on a Tower*, a "cosmic sense of belonging"⁸. This naturally forces man to relinquish his self-centredness and embrace other perspectives, thus performing an initial divestiture of his subject.
- 26 Interestingly enough, one finds in Schopenhauer's texts (from which Hardy certainly drew some inspiration⁹) the idea that only by seeing through the illusion which is the principle of individuation can man attain true altruism, an altruism that allows him to experience directly the suffering of all other beings:
- If that veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis*, is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egoistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as in his own, and is thus not only benevolent and charitable in the highest degree, but even ready to sacrifice his own individuality whenever several others can be saved thereby, then it follows automatically that such a man, recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world. No suffering is any longer strange or foreign to him. All the miseries of others, which he sees and is so seldom able to alleviate, all the miseries of which he has indirect knowledge, and even those he recognizes merely as possible, affect his mind just as do his own. (Schopenhauer 378-379)
- 27 Isabelle Gadoin also summarizes perfectly how, in Hardy's writing, the celebration of the ordinary combines with the dispossession of individuals as people or subjects:
- The refusal of any philosophy based on a constituting consciousness that would give existence and meaning to the objects that surround it, and conversely the openly stated preference for a subject that is barely one, entirely "caught in the fabric of the world" or "in the middle of things", is also what leads Hardy to celebrate the primitive, the child-like, the naïve, the senseless, and all those country folk of equal simple-mindedness and superstition [...] who live in a minor mode of consciousness and volition, but are precisely thereby brought closer to the world they see themselves fated to inhabit, a world whose silent language they can listen to and which remains irreducible to knowledge and understanding. They are at once bewildered and self-forgetful, a combination that is also the assurance of open-mindedness, of complicity and of sympathy with the world. (Gadoin 77)¹⁰
- 28 I would argue that with Hardy the ultimate dispossession of the self appears in the diffusion of the author's identity, the way he systematically expressed himself in various modes – novels, short stories, poems long and short, notebook entries, unclassifiable works such as *The Dynasts*, and, last but not least, especially where this paper is concerned, in his ghosted third-person autobiography, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*. In addition to the simple distancing device of the third-person narrative, from the onset

of that implausible work Hardy does present himself less as a person than as a combination, a collection of lines weaving identity and geography:

Owing to the accident of his being an architect's pupil in a county-town of assizes and aldermen, which had advanced to railways and telegraphs and daily London papers; yet not living there, but walking in every day from a world of shepherds and ploughmen in a hamlet three miles off, where modern improvements were still regarded as wonders, he saw rustic and borough doings in a juxtaposition peculiarly close. To these externals may be added the peculiarities of his inner life, which might almost have been called academic – a triple existence, unusual for a young man – what he used to call, in looking back, a life twisted of three strands – the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life, combined in the twenty-four hours of one day, as it was with him through these years. (Hardy 1989, 36)

- 29 Here is indeed Deleuze's vision of the individual as a "unique chance" ("the *accident* of his being"), an unstable threefold composite ("a triple existence", "a life twisted of three strands"). The notion of a variable identity is not an unusual consideration in the intellectual and artistic context of Hardy's life and work as novelist or poet – whether it is the "double poem" of the Victorian era¹¹, or the "multiplicity that is one" explored by Modernism and already to be found in Bergson:

Is my own person, at a given moment, one or manifold? If I declare it one, inner voices arise and protest – those of the sensations, feelings, ideas, among which my individuality is distributed. But, if I make it distinctly manifold, my consciousness rebels quite as strongly; it affirms that my sensations, my feelings, my thoughts are abstractions which I effect on myself, and that each of my states implies all the others. I am then [...] a unity that is multiple and a multiplicity that is one [...]. (Bergson 257-258)

- 30 Hardy's writing clearly testifies to that constant oscillation between the one and the manifold in the task of defining the subject, and *The Life and Work* is indeed, as I've just mentioned, a perfect illustration of that. Hardy's perception of the manifold nature of identity is expressed in very explicit terms, as for instance in a notebook entry from 1890: "Dec. 4. I am more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand in their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances" (Hardy 1989, 241). This points clearly to the distinction established by Paul Ricoeur between identity as *ipseity* or selfhood (which Hardy's words describe) and the invariable sameness of the *idem*-identity¹². Hardy's perception of individuals as being made of different "strands" woven into a variable whole is also directly echoed by Deleuze's own words: "We are made up of lines which are variable at each instant, which may be combined in different ways, packets of lines, longitudes and latitudes, tropics and meridians, etc. There are no mono-fluxes. The analysis of the unconscious should be a geography rather than a history." (Deleuze & Parnet 102)
- 31 One poem is particularly telling in that respect, as it combines Hardy's attachment to Wessex in its geography – down to its very topographic specificities – with his sense of the variousness of identity:

Wessex Heights (1896)

There are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a kindly hand
For thinking, dreaming, dying on, and at crises when I stand,
Say, on Ingpen Beacon eastward, or on Wylls-Neck westwardly,
I seem where I was before my birth, and after death may be.
[...]

Down there I seem to be false to myself, my simple self that was,
And is not now, and I see him watching, wondering what crass cause

Can have merged him into such a strange continuator as this,
 Who yet had something in common with himself, my chrysalis.
 (*Satires of Circumstances*, 1914; Hardy 2001, 319-320)

- 32 Here is again Wessex as D. H. Lawrence described it, "vital and vivid" (Lawrence 70), the poet's persona and self both appearing as "blocs of variable sensations". Similarly to what is at work in *The Life and Work*, it is here the appearance of the third-person pronoun that comes to signal the divestiture of the self. This is also what Deleuze expresses specifically in the case of literature, stating that "[i]t is not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say 'I'" (Deleuze 3).
- 33 "Wessex Heights" offers an extremely complex experience of geographic identification (both as ipseity and as sameness), which I'd like to explore a little by focusing solely on the extract quoted above, significantly corresponding to the opening and closing stanzas of the poem. One may read there how the poet's persona is clearly woven ("merge") by the combination of many lines: by the gradients of those heights that constitute Wessex, the toponymy of which, both strange and familiar to the ear, somehow imprints the contrasting levels graphically upon the page ("*Ingsen Beacon*", "*Wylls-Neck*"); by his various moods and actions ("For thinking, dreaming, dying on"); by the intertwining of different tenses and modes ("where I was before", "after death may be", "my simple self that was,/ And is not now"); and of course by the complex use of pronouns. It is the latter point which, in the last stanza, precisely comes to mark the dissolution threatening the subject caught in a spiralling of identity whereby the *I* is detached from the *self* ("I seem to be false to myself") and where each part of the subject seems to be contemplating the other, though not as its exact reflection ("I see him watching"). The poem ends with the image of a poignant ontological dispossession, since the subject as true primeval being ("my simple self") is evoked indirectly by the distancing of the third person ("himself"), and appears as nothing more than an empty shell ("my chrysalis"). However, the poem also ends with the ironic convergence of all threads ("merge") into an eerie sense of communion ("strange continuator", "something in common"), an intense form of weaving confirmed by the motif of the chrysalis. What this analysis hopes to show is how Hardy's poetic writing itself operates as a sort of porous threshold that necessarily combines voices and identities, thus mirroring the complexity of the conscious subject.
- 34 In "Wessex Heights" as elsewhere it is again, as previously said, the appearance of the third person that signals self-dispossession. Throughout Hardy's work, one may thus encounter a fair amount of poems which likewise seem to enact that breached identity, bearing third-person titles but turning out to be, upon reading, unequivocal homodiegetic reflections or narratives: such is the case of "He Abjures Love", "He Prefers Her Earthly", "He Never Expected Much", "He Resolves to Say No More" – to name but a few.
- 35 The distancing such titles establish can signal a refusal of involvement on the poet's part, but they also offer the possibility of a paradoxically introspective act of self-criticism, as is the case in "He Follows Himself" (*Late Lyrics and Earlier*, 1922; Hardy 2001, 645-646):

In a heavy time I dogged myself
 Along a louring way,
 Till my leading self to my following self
 Said: 'Why do you hang on me
 So harassingly?'

'I have watched you, Heart of mine,' I cried,
 'So often going astray
 And leaving me, that I have pursued,
 Feeling such truancy
 Ought not to be.'
 He said no more, and I dogged him on
 From noon to the dun of day
 By prowling paths, until anew
 He begged: 'Please turn and flee! -
 What do you see?'
 'Methinks I see a man,' said I,
 'Dimming his hours to gray.
 I will not leave him while I know
 Part of myself is he
 Who dreams such dree!'
 'I go to my old friend's house,' he urged,
 'So do not watch me, pray!'
 'Well, I will leave you in peace,' said I,
 'Though of this poignancy
 You should fight free:
 'Your friend, O other me, is dead;
 You know not what you say.
 - 'That do I! And at his green-grassed door
 By night's bright galaxy
 I bend a knee.'
 - The yew-plumes moved like mockers' beards
 Though only boughs were they,
 And I seemed to go; yet still was there,
 And am, and there haunt we
 Thus bootlessly.

- 36 One can note how the poem presents a clear distinction between the self as subject ("He"/ "I") and as object (the reflexive "Himself"/ "myself"), one only too explicitly pursuing the other ("my leading self"/ "my following self"¹³) yet each pursuing a goal of his own. Beneath the apparent cleaving lies a subjective confusion once again introduced by the interplay of pronouns. As in "Wessex Heights", "myself" becomes "he", yet so does "I", as hinted at by the initial shift from "*I dogged myself*" to "*Till my leading self to my following self*". Incidentally, the two "selves" of the poem are concomitantly the two halves of a whole ("*Part of myself is he*") and discrete doubles ("*O other me*"). Besides, not only is the subject caught in the dialectical exchange with himself, but he is also involved in the complex dynamics of pursuit and avoidance, of self-withdrawal ("So do not watch me, pray!") and persistent trailing ("I dogged him on", "I will not leave him"). By incorporating the single "his" of the departed friend ("his green-grassed door"), the subject opens himself to a possible equation of I with the Other, thus presenting his inner cleaving as the prime condition to the encountering of subjects.¹⁴ The final stanza of the poem reveals that the encounter can occur thanks to the perviousness of ghosts, since it is in haunting ("haunt") and incorporeity ("bootlessly") that the two "I"s can effectively meet, thus eventually signalling the impossibility of a divided subject ("I seemed to go; yet still was there") as well as the move from an obsessive pursuit to the integrity and permanence of a constitutive loyalty ("And am").
- 37 Much more could be said about Hardy's poetic writing to illustrate the fragmentation of the self, but it would seem particularly appropriate to end with one piece that expresses a form of reconciliation of such fragmented parts and summarizes once more the Deleuzian

idea of the individual as a "bloc of variable sensations": the aptly named "So Various" (*Winter Words*, 1928; Hardy 2001, 870-871). The poem exposes all the identities of the speaker, albeit contradictory identities, as distinctive personalities, yet concludes by revealing their essential consistency, the fundamental multiplicity that is one:

Now. . . . All these specimens of man,
So various in their pith and plan,
 Curious to say
 Were *one* man. Yea,
 I was all they.

- 38 Curious to say, that what elicits that "strange" or "extraordinary respect for the individual" is the perception of the latter's essential fragmentation or inconsistencies. Like Hardy's biography – the biography of him by him – the poem operates a levelling of the subjective and objective forms of the persona (note the two pronouns framing the last line) which is indeed the ultimate form of dispossession of the self, striking a perfect balance between ipseity and sameness.
- 39 One man, so various. As the term "specimens" may reveal, Hardy's reflections on the variousness of identity exemplifies – on a larger scale – the methods and position of a keen explorer of humanity in all its diversity.

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NOTES

1. My translation. "Le Wessex n'est pas objet de connaissance posé face aux personnages, il est comme un limon déposé au fond des consciences, selon une sorte de solidarité constitutive de l'espace et du temps. Le monde perçu est bien plus que le simple monde sensoriel : il est tissé de toutes les expériences vécues".
2. See Bénédicte Coste, "Charles du Bos, lecteur de Thomas Hardy", *Miranda* 4 (2011), Online since 01 June 2011, connection on 04 January 2015. URL : <http://miranda.revues.org/2056>.
3. My translation. "Mais ce sens de la vie en général dont Hardy nous aère et nous suffoque est toujours, en dernier ressort, tonifiant, salubre et comme chargé de sel ; et le miracle dans le cas de Hardy, c'est qu'il puisse exercer sur nous telle action sans avoir jamais vraiment aimé la vie.
For Life I had never cared greatly
[...] Oui, mais parfois chez les grands, – quand ils sont très grands, – de n'aimer pas la vie n'a d'autre résultat que de faire que davantage encore l'on aime les êtres humains, qu'on les aime précisément parce qu'ils sont comme soi sujets au sort de vivre."
4. "Even in these smallest of nature's manifestations there is an intensity of life which serves to enlarge one's sense of the far greater intensity within the human protagonists" (Irwin 6).

5. My translation. "À bien des égards George Eliot et Thomas Hardy sont très loin l'un de l'autre ; ici pourtant ils se rejoignent, comme ne peuvent pas ne pas se rejoindre tous les génies que volontiers j'appellerais *génies de sympathie*, ceux qui ont pour religion – et parfois pour seule religion – celle qu'en une formule injustement décriée on appelait naguère "la religion de la souffrance humaine".
6. "Junkers" is a historical term referring to members of the German nobility, more particularly Prussian aristocrats.
7. Michael Millgate comments: "The shift from the homely and, surely, personal instance (the tankard 'must' have been his beloved father's) to the abstract formulation is typically Hardyian, and the conception itself – so crisply exemplified by the later image of England as 'scored with prints of vanished hands' ['On an Invitation to the United States', *CP* 75] – had already informed his 'reading' of the Dorset landscape in *The Return of the Native*, especially of the heath itself in the famous opening chapter" (Millgate 189). Hardy's consideration of "the beauty of association" is also expressed in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, when, a year after Angel married and deserted her, the distraught heroine considers the magnificence of the Vale of Blackmoor, an objective beauty which her personal experience necessarily transforms before her eyes: "Beauty to her, as to all who have felt, lay not in the thing, but in what the thing symbolized" (Hardy 2003, 297).
8. See Laurence Estanove, "Thomas Hardy, *Two on a Tower* : vers une redéfinition cosmique de l'appartenance", *Cahiers Victoriens et Édouardiens* 67 (avril 2008) : 55-66.
9. See Carl J. Weber, "Hardy's Copy of Schopenhauer", *Colby Quarterly* 4:12 (November 1957): 217-224.
10. My translation. "Ce refus de toute philosophie d'une conscience constituante qui donnerait lieu et sens aux objets qui l'entourent, cette préférence avouée pour un sujet qui soit à peine sujet, et tout entier "pris dans le tissu du monde" ou dans le "milieu des choses", est aussi ce qui amène Hardy à exalter le primitif, l'enfant, le naïf, le fou, et tous ces paysans aussi simples que superstitieux [...] qui vivent sur un mode mineur de la conscience et de l'intentionnalité, mais sont par là même plus proches du monde auquel ils se croient prédestinés, et dont ils savent écouter le langage silencieux, irréductible à la connaissance et à l'entendement. Ceux-ci mêlent à l'étonnement une forme d'oubli de soi qui est elle aussi gage d'ouverture, de complicité et de sympathie envers le monde."
11. The phrase is used by Isobel Armstrong in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* to evoke poems, or dramatic monologues of the Victorian era that offer a dramatized vision of the divided consciousness. In E. Warwick Slinn's words, these are poems "in which the Victorian poet dramatizes and objectifies the simultaneous existence of unified selfhood and fracturing self-awareness" (Slinn, 56).
12. "Le problème de l'identité personnelle constitue à mes yeux le lieu privilégié de la confrontation entre les deux usages majeurs du concept d'identité [...]. Je rappelle les termes de la confrontation : d'un côté l'identité comme *mêmeté* (latin : *idem* ; anglais : *sameness* ; allemand : *Gleichheit*), de l'autre l'identité comme ipséité (latin : *ipse* ; anglais : *selfhood* ; allemand : *Selbstheit*)" (Ricoeur 1990, 140).
13. It also seems interesting to note how the blurring of identity is particularly well conveyed by the obsessive use of the reflexive term ("self") which for François Récanati constitutes a marking of opacity, as explained by Paul Ricoeur: "Under the evocative title *La Transparence et l'énonciation* [1979], François Récanati introduces pragmatics by making reflexivity appear as a factor of opacity that interferes with the presumed transparency of a sense that, without it, would allow the referential intention to pass through." (Ricoeur 1992, 41). One might also refer to Hardy's poem "At a Seaside Town in 1869" (*Moments of Vision*, 1917; Hardy 2001, 499-501) where the speaker compares the external reality with the ideal world of his thoughts ("the pure/ Thought-world") by alternately standing "outside myself", "inside myself", "Beyond myself".

14. Although the poem "I Was Not He" (*Late Lyrics and Earlier*, 1922; Hardy 2001, 571-572) would seem to highlight the impossibility of such equation, it nonetheless creates the possibility of an encounter between "he" and "I" via the "you" of the woman loved by each successively.

ABSTRACTS

This paper uses Deleuze's reflections on Hardy's writing to examine the sense of the latter's humanity as it attaches itself to a passionate celebration of the individual. Though scarce, Deleuze's remarks on Hardy open the way for an exploration of how questions of identity, of the self and the subject are dealt with in Hardy's poetry. Hardy's humanity is here considered as a form of humanism expressed through the author's sincere attachment to the living and the human, to the individual's commonplace experiences of everyday life, but also in a wider perspective that offers universal sympathy – an altruism at the core of many war poems in particular. Ultimately, Hardy's interest in the human scale allows the poet to convey through his verse the sense of a fragmented self, many illustrations of which can be found in the poet's personal or introspective pieces.

En partant des réflexions de Deleuze sur l'écriture de Hardy, nous souhaitons ici étudier le sentiment d'humanité de ce dernier, célébration de l'individu tout empreinte de compassion. Bien que très éparses, ces remarques de Deleuze sur Hardy ouvrent la voie à une exploration de la façon dont la poésie hardyenne traite les questions d'identité, du sujet et du soi. L'humanité de Hardy s'envisage ici comme un humanisme qui s'exprime dans l'attachement sincère de l'auteur au vivant et à l'humain, aux expériences ordinaires de l'individu au quotidien, mais également dans la perspective plus large d'une compassion universelle – altruisme qui se trouve au cœur de plusieurs poèmes de guerre, notamment. En dernier lieu, l'intérêt que porte Hardy à l'échelle humaine lui permet de relayer, par le biais de sa poésie, le sentiment d'un être fragmenté, sentiment que viennent illustrer de nombreux poèmes personnels ou introspectifs.

INDEX

Keywords: humanity, altruism, ordinary, identity, self, subject, philosophy, poetry

Mots-clés: humanité, altruisme, ordinaire, identité, soi, sujet, Deleuze (Gilles), philosophie, poésie

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