Horse-Human Entanglements in the English Novel of the Anthropocene

Sinan Akıllı
Cappadocia University
Dpt. of English Language and Literature
sinanakilli@gmail.com

Lennard Davis in *Factual Fictions* (1983): "The gaunt figure of **a man on a horse**, out of place and out of time, seems to cast his shadow over any discussion of the European novel."

Point 1: Horses and the Rise of the Novel

- The dependence of the novel on horses in the 'early Anthropocene' (from about 1740s to 1850s)
  - in the middle of this period, James Watt's invention of a working steam locomotive (1784)
  - horses began to be replaced with 'horse power' first, and by 'iron horses' (locomotives) by the end of the early Anthropocene
  - Also the period in which English novel rapidly grew into maturity
  - Michael McKeon: with the works of Fielding and Richardson in the 1740s, the English novel "come[s] to the end of its origins" and "begins . . . to enter new territory."
- Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1848)

Point 2: Darwinian Revolution and Dead Horses

- The breakthroughs of the Darwinian revolution
- Ontological affinity and continuity between humans and animals, "different only in degree, not in kind"
- Authors reflect on the loss of a horse and how this loss could create ruptures in the narrative progression of their novels
- "Narrative agency" (Oppermann and Iovino) of Wildfire in George Eliot's *Silas Marner (1861)* and Prince in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891)*

- Horses , whether living or dead, were extremely powerful agents in the English novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Why Horses?

- Horses had a place in human society and human history that is unmatched by any other nonhuman animal.

- A useful focus for considering animal agency in literature because the horse has occupied a central place in the human imagination since primordial times.

- Mario Ortiz-Robles: "the history of literature as a whole could be read . . . as an attempt to define the role of the horse in human culture."

Why Dead Horses? - 1

- The value encoded in living horses
  - The increase in the uses of horses prompted by industrialization.
  - In urban centers where the local transport of goods and people was undertaken by horse-drawn vehicles, horses constituted a part of the urban working classes, "undernourished, overworked, and kept in dank, cramped, and squalid quarters" (Doreé).
  - In the rural countryside, horses continued both to perform agricultural labor and to be necessary for short-distance travel.
  - Across English society horses maintained significant "use value" despite the increased use of machines.

Why Dead Horses? - 2

- Equine mortality was an event one was very likely to witness in everyday life.

  - "It only took three years for cab horses to become exhausted . . . if they hadn't already dropped dead in the streets" (Velten).

- The horse also remained a signifier of social status and prestige among the landed gentry, aspiring middling ranks, tenant farmers, yeomen, and tradespeople.

- The ascription of "sign value" and "exchange value"

- Even in the age of the 'iron horse,' then, the death of a 'flesh and blood' horse meant a great loss, whether the horse in question was valued for its flesh, its muscle power, or for its bloodlines.

My Question

- What happens if we look at works of literature as products of the interspecies dependence and entanglements of the human and the non-human animals, and also take into account the roles of *matter* and *semiosis* in this production process as well?

My Response

- Put the Anthropocene context in dialogue with the "rise of the novel" debate
- Adopt a critical position informed by quantum physicist/philosopher Karen Barad's "agential realism"
- See literature as a plane on which the "confus[ion] and conflati[on]" (Ortiz-Robles) of humans and animals take place

An Anthropocentric Anthropocene

- A new geological age defined by the profound and unprecedented impact of the *Homo sapiens* activity on our planet since the Industrial Revolution (Crutzen and Stoermer).

- 'Age of Humankind' (Rustick)

- "The pond itself does not exist for Narcissus; the trees and sky above the pond do not exist. All that exists is the gazer enrapt by his own image" (Rustick).

Animals and the Anthropocene

- Even though they too played a "central role in how the Anthropocene emerged," "[t]he role and place of animals has so far received relatively little attention" (Tønnessen and Oma). Therefore, we need to start seeing this period in history as being "co-authored by humans and animals" and the "the deep interspecies entanglements" as one of its "defining traits" (Tønnessen and Oma).

- I take the "co-authoring" analogy quite literally and argue that horses had a major role in the rise and maturation of the English novel as a distinct literary genre in the 'early Anthropocene.'

Rise of the Novel and the Anthropocene

- Is there more to be said about the novel?

- We can add to the "rise of the novel" debate if we acknowledge the agency of non-human animals and consider the functions of *matter* and *semiosis* in an age when improved printing technologies caused an explosion of *sign*s in Britain.

- After all, in 1726, Defoe himself had announced that "the Printing Art has out-run the pen, and may pass for the greatest Improvement of its kind in the world."

What really is a printed novel?

- The recent 'material turn' in the Humanities, however, is now causing a change in the perception of printing as "art" and human "improvement."

- Robertson recently considered print materials as "marked surfaces …. that underwrite a social agreement" (1). Robertson's work is not self-reportedly informed by posthuman theories but his remark corresponds to "material-discursivity" in Barad's "agential realism."

- In other words, this view illustrates a re-definition of print material such as a novel as the human animal's discursive engagement, entanglement, and intra-action with *matter*.

Agential Realism - Entanglement

- The concept of "entanglement" rejects any static and individual existence or pre-existence, causality, or agency.

- In her rejection of the essential separateness of "word and thing," "human and non-human," and "discourse and *matter*," Barad proposes that we are "intra-actively (re)constituted as part of the world's becoming."

- We are only "a part of that nature we seek to understand."

Agential Realism – Ethico-onto-epistemology

- "Agential realism" suggests a fundamental inseparability of epistemological, ontological, and ethical considerations. This inseparability offers an understanding of the role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices.

Agency

- Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT): "attributes agency to anything that has an *effect*, whether animate or inanimate," and therefore assert that "every thing has agency, and agency is the ability to have an *effect*" (Carter and Charles).

Animal Agency

- "Animal *agency*" and "animal *being*" are not different from each other (Nimmo).

- "Agency is no longer simply a matter of reflexive and intentional action, conceived in terms of a duality with some notion of 'structure', but is rather about the multiple and dispersed *effects* of a certain mode of being-in-the world upon other elements in a heterogeneous *network* or *assemblage*; less about active behaviour, and more about *relational* existence [all italics mine]." (Carter and Charles)

Animal Agency in Literature

- This *relational existence*, that is the entanglement of horse and human in this case, is enough grounds to attribute agency to horses to not only in human society but also in the material-discursive entities, such as novels, produced by the human animal.

Rise of the Novel and Semiosis/Semioactivity

- The "rise of the novel" was also a result of the intensively 'semioactive' environment, as I would like to call it, of the early Anthropocene when human *semiosis* reached unprecedented levels in Britain.

- This 'semioactivity' was enabled to a great extent with the increased availability and affordability of the materials necessary for printing.

The Semantic Humanimal

- From within this 'semioactive' environment, what I call the 'semantic humanimal,' in this case the English novelist of the early Anthropocene, was born.

- An extraordinary human animal who, in her/his conscious or unconscious entanglement, intra-acts with the world not only gesturally, but also agentically through *semiosis*, through all kinds of signs – whether grammatical or not – by way of discursively and "onto-epistemo-logically" inscribing them on *matter* by using the necessary tools (i.e. pen, paper, ink, paint, etc.) and through the "performance" of her/his bodily extensions.

No Horse, No Novel

- The 'semantic humanimals' of the period frequently intra-acted with both the semiotic sign of the horse and the flesh and blood horse, and, in turn, responded by assigning considerable amount of labor on the equine species in long prose narratives that depicted long sections of the lives of human characters who were in constant mobility.

- In due time, these narratives came to be known as "novels" as different from "histories."

Joseph Andrews – Ride and Tie

"The two travelers set out together, one on horseback, the other on foot: now as it generally happens that he on horseback outgoes him on foot, the custom is, that when he arrives at the distance agreed on, he is to dismount, tie the horse to some gate, tree, post, or other thing, and then proceed on foot; when the other comes up to the horse, he unties him, mounts, and gallops on, till having passed by his fellow-traveller, he likewise arrives at the place of tying."

Horse-Human Entanglement in *JA*

- The main events and revelations that drive the plot take place during the intervals when the two characters are physically distant from one another.

- They take turns "riding" and "tying" not only the horse, but also the episodes of the story.

- Fielding was replicating and even simulating a particular form of the human-horse relationship as he organized the narrative and the physical space of the paper he was using.

Jane Austen and Simulacrum of Englishness

- An icon of Englishness for representing the nineteenth-century landed gentry class to which she herself belonged.

- A 'semantic humanimal' who used the typically English act of novel writing to create simulacra of Englishness. In fact, she herself became one such simulacrum of middle-class Englishness in due course.

- By depicting a patriotic 'pride and prejudice,' in her Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* she established the image of the English gentleman traversing the countryside on the back of fine horses after the land enclosures of the 18th century.

Northanger Abbey– John Thorpe

"Pray, pray stop, Mr Thorpe"

"do but look at my horse; did you ever see an animal so made for speed in your life? . . . Such true blood!"

"...but look at his forehead; look at his loins; only see how he moves; that horse cannot go less than ten miles an hour; tie his legs, and he will get on."

Whistlejacket (1762) by George Stubbs

England's countryside gentry understood fine horse flesh and made it a symbol of "Thoroughbred Englishness."

"a national icon, perpetually among the top ten most popular reproduced images at the National Gallery, emblematizing a 'shared national culture'" (Landry).

Horse-Human Entanglement in *NA*

Brontës and Animals

- 2015 exhibition entitled "The Brontës and Animals" at Brontë Parsonage Museum

- Brontë sisters used animals in their novels as "a device to reveal personalities and for developing relationships between characters, as well as to drive the plot forward."

- The curator of the museum reported that the family did not own any horses or ponies. Emily's favorite was a pet dog named Keeper.

- 91 horses of various sizes were recorded in the tax documents of 1831. About a half of these horses (42 in total) were ponies.

The Galloway Pony
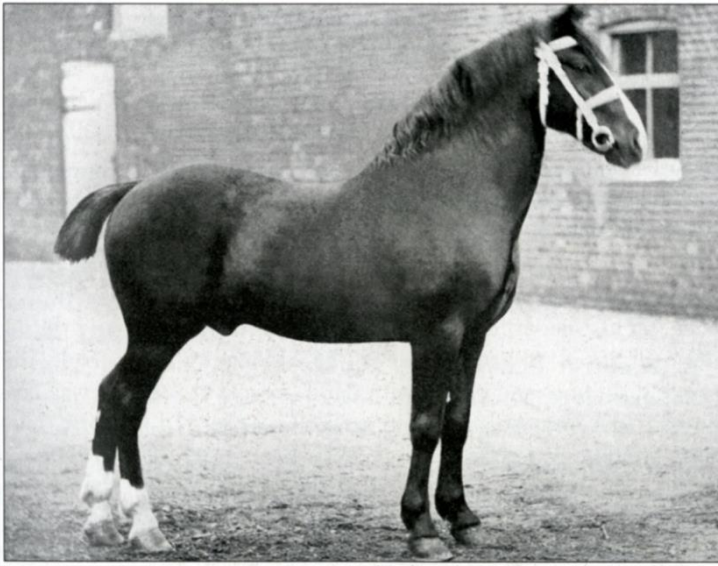
PACKHORSE TRIUMPH II – THE LAST OF THE GALLOWAYS?

Galloway, a pony breed of Scotland and northern England that was "a strong multipurpose black or bay horse" with a significantly long mane.

Emily saw the Galloways doing labor on a daily basis and responded by assigning them immense amount of narrative labor.

Narrative Labor of the Galloway Pony

- Daughter Cathy's first arrival at Heathcliff's residence is on the back of Minny, expressly described as a Galloway.

- Also influenced Emily's imagination of Heathcliff.

- It is on the back of such "a handsome black pony" that Cathy's mother returns from the Lintons after her transformative stay with them.

- That return is to a Heathcliff who is soon afterward insulted by Edgar Linton who likens his lock as "a colt's mane over his eyes!" Just like a Galloway.

- Heathcliff soon disappears and returns to Wuthering Heights "dressed in dark clothes, with dark face and hair" and as "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement."

Galloways and Heathcliffs

Horse-Human Entanglement in *WH*
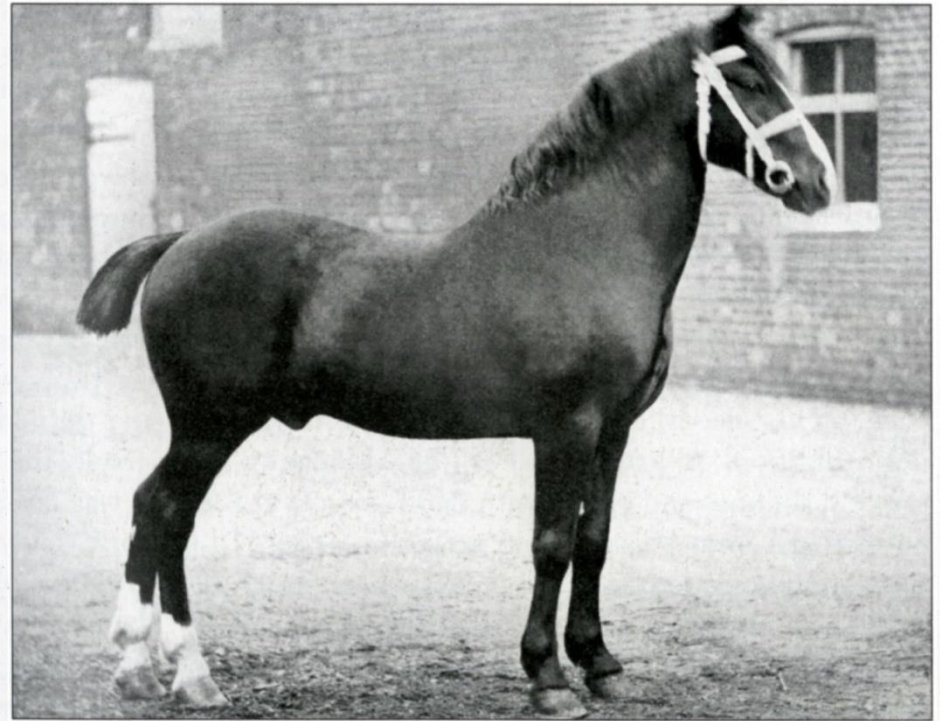
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Agency of the Dead Horse

- Derrida's engagement with a question Jeremy Bentham posed in 1823 about the nature of animal subjectivity: "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?"

- Derrida suggests: "Mortality [i]s the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion…"

'*Morior, ergo sum*'

- I suggest a reformulation of Descartes's logocentric *Cogito ergo sum* as ***Morior, ergo sum*** (I die, therefore I am)

- More to the point philosophically

- We are in need of developing a notion of (animal) ***mortality*** rather than being tied to the evidently limited notion of (human) ***morality*** to understand and acknowledge the agency of animals, both human and nonhuman.

Ethico-onto-epistem-ological Sensibility

- It is in the understanding of death through "the death of another" (Derrida) that the ethico-onto-epistem-ological sensibility begins.

- George Eliot and Thomas Hardy had a deep understanding of the value of horses not only through their observations of everyday life, but also given their awareness of the scientific and philosophical debates about the origin, evolution and entanglement of organic beings.

Silas Marner: Conventional Reading

- The novel's overt focus is on the reconciliation of Silas, a secluded weaver obsessed with hoarding and counting the gold he earns from his trade, with the countryside community of Raveloe.

- Silas's appeasement with life and the society begins when he adopts a baby girl, Eppie. Silas's initial motivation for adopting Eppie is the expectation that he will be compensated for the loss of gold stolen from him a few weeks earlier.

- The most visible climax in the plot: the golden-haired infant Eppie miraculously replaces the lost gold with human connection.

Silas Marner: The Problem

- When we look carefully at the plot to see what comes of Silas's loss of his gold, however, we encounter the death of a fine horse: Wildfire.

- A "valuable" hunter owned by Godfrey Cass, Wildfire turns out to be the only means by which Godfrey can regain the rent money he has collected from a tenant for his father, Squire Cass, but which has been spent by his younger brother Dunstan drinking and gambling.

- Dunstan suggests that Godfrey sell his horse, he eventually agrees.

Silas Marner: The Solution

- Dunstan "enjoyed the self-important consciousness of having a horse to sell, and the opportunity of driving a bargain."

- Enjoyment coming from appearing as the owner of a commodity with considerable prestige and exchange value.

- Dunstan's "horse-dealing . . . one of many human transactions carried on in this ingenious manner," ends with Bryce's purchase of the horse for "a hundred and twenty, to be paid on the delivery of Wildfire, safe and sound, at the Batherley stables."

Silas Marner: The Real Climax

- Instead of taking the horse to Batherley at once, however, he is overcome by "the inclination for a run . . . especially with a horse under him that would take the fences to the admiration of the field."

- Perhaps the most climactic moment in the novel: "Dunstan . . . took one fence too many, and 'staked' his horse. His own ill-favoured person, which was quite unmarketable, escaped without injury, but poor Wildfire, unconscious of his price, turned on his flank, and painfully panted his last."

The Death of Wildfire

He felt a satisfaction at the absence of witnesses.

Silas Marner: A Narrative Wildfire

- This loss of the only opportunity to find the money that he owes his elder brother, Dunstan goes to Silas's cottage and steals his gold, thereby connecting the novel's two subplots.

- The entanglement of the subplots as an *effect* of the death of Wildfire is the very point at which Eliot's ethico-onto-epistem-ological intra-action really takes off: when a dead horse becomes powerfully agential both in the narrative and in an entangled world of human and nonhuman beings.

- The stake that pierces Wildfire's body in fact also pierces the narrative of a novel that initially seems to be exclusively focused on the experiences of human characters.

Thomas Hardy and Animals

- Thomas Hardy represents "a wholly different stylistic and philosophical approach to animals and their relationship to mankind" (Asker).

- Quite familiar with the works of Darwin.

- He had an "organicist and integrative perspective" in which "[d]escribing an animal becomes the same technical problem as drawing a human being" (Asker).

- In his novels, this awareness takes shape in representations of death and suffering.

Horse-Human Entanglement in *Tess*

- The plot of the novel relies heavily on the "use value" of a horse and the loss of this value when it dies.

- Tess's tragedy, which includes rape, the loss of her infant child, abandonment by her husband, and eventually execution by hanging, begins with the death of Prince, a weak wagon horse.

- Although he has little actual "exchange value" and no "sign value," Prince's labor is necessary to the subsistence of this large peasant family.

Prince's Blood

- At about half-past one in the morning she goes out to the stable to harness Prince, who "looked wonderingly around . . . as if he could not believe that at that hour . . . he was called upon to go out and labour."

- Growing drowsy during the ride, Tess falls asleep, only to be awakened by a "hollow groan, unlike anything she had ever heard in her life" that "proceeded from her father's poor horse Prince."

Prince's Blood

She immediately discovers that the horse has been badly injured by **"the pointed shaft"** of the speeding morning mail-cart that pierces him **"like a sword."** Prince staggers, "his life's blood . . . spouting in a stream."

The entire tragedy of Tess is symbolically manifest in both "the blood-pool [that] was still visible in the middle of the road."

Princely Blood

- The theme of heredity, or bloodlines, is an essential part of the plot: so much so that it is possible to describe it as a novel about blood.

- In imagining Tess's tragedy, Hardy seems to have expanded Darwin's understanding of "the same great natural class" and written from the larger Darwinian idea of the interconnectedness of all species in "confusing and conflating" the tragedies of human and horse.

- In the novel the economic or use value of animals (first and foremost, the horse, Prince) get refracted back on the human characters, particularly Tess.

Conclusions-1

- The English novel grew into maturity within the semioactivity of the early Anthropocene.

- The semantic humanimals lived in an age when beliefs about the human's place and role in nature were beginning to be replaced with a new understanding based on interconnectedness.

- They also responded to the horse through ethico-onto-epistemological intra-action and grafted their performance on *matter* by writing novels.

Conclusions-2

- Horses were literally everywhere, not only in the streets or on the fields, but also in the names of the machinery that was ultimately to replace them.

- Horses were in the English novel in its formative centuries; carrying load, carrying narratives, carrying people, jumping fences, and galloping for miles on end…

We failed to see for a long time... But they were/are

'Always there...
Somewhere...'

Thank You...

Sinan Akıllı

Cappadocia University

Dpt. of English Language and Literature

sinanakilli@gmail.com