The Vulnerable Animals That Therefore We Are:
(Non-)Human Animals in D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*
Abstract

Central to animal studies is the question of words and how they are used in relation to wordless beings such as non-human animals. This issue is addressed by the writer D.H. Lawrence, and the focus of this thesis is the linguistic vulnerability of humans and non-humans in his novel *Women in Love*, a subject that will be explored with the help of the philosopher Jacques Derrida’s text *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. The argument is that *Women in Love* illustrates the human subjection to and constitution in language, which both enables human thinking and restricts the human ability to think without words. This linguistic vulnerability causes a similar vulnerability in non-human animals in two ways. First, humans tend to imagine others, including non-verbal animals, through words, a medium they exist outside of and therefore cannot be defined through. Second, humans are often unperceptive of non-linguistic means of expression and they therefore do not discern what non-human animals may be trying to communicate to them, which often enables humans to justify abuse against non-humans. In addition, the novel shows how this shared but unequal vulnerability can sometimes be dissolved through the likewise shared but equal physical vulnerability of all animals if a human is able to imagine the experiences of a non-human animal through their shared embodiment rather than through human language. Hence the essay shows the importance of recognizing the limitations of language and of being aware of how the symbolizing effect of words influences the human treatment of its others.

**Keywords:** D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, animals, non-human animals, animal studies, animals in literature, Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, logocentrism, vulnerability, language, words, posthumanism.
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Introduction

In recent years, the question of the relationship between human and non-human animals\(^1\) has been given much thought within the humanities. However, as Cary Wolfe argues, “animal studies, if it is to be something other than a mere thematics, fundamentally challenges the schema of the knowing subject and its anthropocentric underpinnings sustained and reproduced in the current disciplinary protocols of cultural studies” (“Human, All Too Human” 568f). In other words, animal studies cannot be yet another aspect of identity politics, extending the liberal idea of the subject to non-human animals as well as formerly excluded groups such as women and non-Europeans. It has been possible to include these groups in the originally phallo- and Eurocentric Enlightenment project of humanism because they share the capabilities it is founded upon, such as words and logic, capabilities that many would argue that non-human animals lack. Hence, the insights of animal studies, such as the realization that the line between humans and other animals is to a large extent verbally and culturally constructed, overthrow the very basis of the humanities and their foundation in the idea of an Enlightenment subject. In particular, studies of literature are confronted by their own limitations when trying to analyze their relation to beings that exist outside the very basis of the literary discipline: words.

These themes are central to the works of D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), who explores the insufficiency of words and rationality in many of his texts, and who also repeatedly returns to depictions of and discussions about non-human animals. This is

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\(^1\) The expression *non-human animals* is both awkward and unfortunate since it constructs humans as a positive, the negative of which is other animals. At the same time, referring to those animals who are not humans merely as *animals* is equally problematic, since humans are in fact animals too. Because *Women in Love* clearly discusses human animalism I have chosen to refer to all other animals as non-human ones in order to indicate when human animals are included in the category *animals*. 
especially true of the novel *Women in Love* (1920), which “can seem a novel about animals as much as about people” according to Jeff Wallace (“Introduction” XIII). Although few of the large number of non-human characters appear more than once, they are often part of key scenes, and their presence is usually central to that episode. In addition, there is a profusion of non-human animals that appear in similes and other tropes, as well as ones that are used as theoretical examples in discussions between human characters. It may seem as if these two latter categories are not really about non-human animals at all since there is no actual, albeit textual, animal there, only a signifier or a philosophical idea. Nevertheless, the ways in which non-human animals frequent such human constructions can still say something about how they are defined by humans. The very fact that the many non-human animal signifiers in the text may be read as relating to human signifieds tells us something about the way that humans construct their understanding of themselves as animals or non-animals, of other animal species, and of the limit between “them” and “us.”

Human language defines and limits what we as humans are capable of understanding about ourselves and our animal others. Categorizations and dichotomies are inescapable parts of verbal expression since language is a closed system, the words of which do not refer to anything outside of itself. Therefore, the meaning of words can only be identified through categories and opposites: black is classified as a color and defined by its being contrasted with white, woman is the gender that is not man, and the human is the species whose opposite is the non-human animal. As Jacques Derrida puts it in “Differance,” (1968) “[t]he elements of signification function . . . by the network of oppositions that distinguish them and relate them to one another” (139). However, many things cannot be so neatly categorized and contrasted as human language would have them. At the same time, because words are the very foundation of the human processing of experience, even the attempt to think outside the language box will frequently result in seeming contradictions. This is a human vulnerability: we are often unable to imagine outside our verbal premises.² This human linguistic vulnerability causes a similar vulnerability in non-human animals, who are constantly being imagined through human language but who are unable to respond in it. They are therefore seldom

² *Vulnerability* is a central concept in this essay, and it will be discussed further in the Theory and Methodology section, where its connection to Derrida’s animal philosophy, especially as it is understood by Wolfe, will become clear.
understood by humans as their own non-verbal selves, and they cannot express their objections to human abuse of them in a medium that is acknowledged by humans.

In this essay, I will explore these linguistic vulnerabilities and how they affect both humans and other animals. The argument of the essay is that *Women in Love* illustrates the human subjection to and constitution in language, which both enables human thinking and restricts the human ability to think without words. This linguistic vulnerability causes a similar vulnerability in non-human animals in two ways. First, humans tend to imagine others, including non-verbal animals, through words, a medium they exist outside of and therefore cannot be defined through. Second, humans are often unperceptive of non-linguistic means of expression and they therefore do not discern what non-human animals may be trying to communicate to them, which often enables humans to justify abuse against non-humans. In addition, the novel shows how this shared but unequal vulnerability can sometimes be dissolved through the likewise shared but equal physical vulnerability of all animals if a human is able to imagine the experiences of a non-human animal through their shared embodiment rather than through human language.

Walter Benjamin states in his “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man” (1978) that “because the mental being of man is language itself, he cannot communicate himself by it, but only in it,” while “[s]peechlessness . . . is the great sorrow of nature” (65; 72). While this is rather anthropocentric—a nightingale probably does not grieve its inability to pronounce words but rejoices in its aptitude for singing—it says something about the human preoccupation with language and the way that we define our ideas about non-human beings through a medium they do not have access to, which both leaves them unable to reply and obscures our understanding of them since their existence is in fact wordless. These are problems that Lawrence was acutely aware of. In the essay “Art and the Individual,” he states that “thought . . . depends entirely on language, and so is limited, and leaves untouched even the majority of our feelings” (138f). In his fictional works these limitations of thoughts and words are often related to non-human animals, as in the poem “Fish” from the collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), where the poetic “I” tries to understand fish through different verbal descriptions of them and their lives, but finds that it is impossible because he and they live in separate realities: “I am not the measure of creation. / This is beyond me, this fish. / His God stands outside my God” (ll. 139ff, Lawrence’s emphasis). Similarly, in “Snake,” another
poem from the same collection, the “I” condemns “the voices of my accursèd human education” that make him commit “a mean act” towards a snake he encounters (ll. 65; 64).

Likewise, the restrictions of human language is remarkably evident in *Women in Love*, which is explicitly suspicious of words and their ability to “convey meaning,” and which depicts characters desperate to escape the boundaries of language (186). However, most of their attempts to do so become mere verbal discourses in which they try to animalize themselves but instead revert to intellectualization and romantic notions of the purity of non-human animals. The heroine Ursula Brangwen “love[s] best of all the animals, that were single and unsocial . . . Each was single and to itself, magical” (244). Her lover Rupert Birkin is described as being trapped in a “violent and directionless reaction between animalism and spiritual truth” by his former lover Hermione Roddice (297). The characters are caught in words, and so is the text itself. It endeavors to break away from a logocentric perspective, but finds itself ensnared in the binary structure of language. The result is a novel full of paradoxes and inconsistencies: it condemns anthropomorphism, but repeatedly anthropomorphizes non-human animals; the characters change their minds from one page to another and then back again; central terms are used in incompatible ways; and words are used to criticize human language and to express wordless experiences and promote a non-verbal way of being. In this, the human vulnerability in relation to language becomes evident.

In addition, non-human animals share this linguistic vulnerability. This can be seen in the way they are used as symbols, signifying not themselves, but humans since what they represent in such symbols are human characteristics or emotions. This is a form of exploitation since it uses the animal signifier as a means that denies its reference not just in the sense that all signifiers are separated from their signifieds, but in that it does not even attempt to signify the non-human animal that it outwardly seems to refer to. In addition, the existences of non-human animals can be intellectualized so that their experiences and feelings become a matter of cerebral debate rather than moral consideration. They cannot articulate their wish to live and not suffer in a discourse that is acceptable and relevant to the human philosophy that takes it upon itself to grant or refuse them these “rights.” Therefore, they are left at the mercy of humans who attempt to articulate these wishes for them, but who are thereby submitting to the principles of the logos that oppress non-human animals in the first
place. Such a defense of animal “rights” is consequently left open to the criticism that it tries to speak for beings who do not have speech and who accordingly cannot ask or decline to be spoken for. This is a logocentric trap: one needs to have access to the logos to be considered morally significant, and only the logos itself—words and rational reasoning—is accepted as a means of questioning this.

This is illustrated in a number of ways in Women in Love, which both is logocentric (it is after all a novel, consisting of words) and undermines its own logocentrism. I have already mentioned the large number of animal tropes. On the one hand, these are examples of animal signifiers that do not actually refer to animals, but on the other, their vast quantity eventually distances the reader from their rhetorical function; they stop working as symbols or comparisons that define humans and draw our attention back to the fact that these words originally signify non-humans. Hence, the first few animal tropes may seem merely descriptive, defining the human character they are related to, but after a while the opulent use of them becomes apparent so that they begin to seem intertextual, referring back to all the previous tropes. In effect, this unsettles the reading of them, necessitating an interpretation that takes into account that they are precisely animal tropes.

Also unsettling but in a somewhat different manner are the episodes that feature non-human characters. These scenes tend to illustrate the difficulties of relating to non-human animals, often by letting human characters demonstrate an extreme way or inability to do so. Ursula’s sister Gudrun Brangwen and her lover Gerald Crich repeatedly dominate non-human animals cruelly, for example the rabbit Bismarck that they abuse and the Arab mare that Gerald tortures. In contrast, Gerald’s sister Winifred Crich treats her pets as toys and speaks to them as if they were human children whose cognitive development she wishes to delay: “Darling one, will you be drawn? Shall its mummy draw its portrait?” (235). Gerald and Gudrun fail to engage with non-verbal beings and instead dominate them, whereas Winifred reverts to a condescending affection. None of them meet these non-human animals as fellow individuals, but instead abuse them verbally or physically. These are not unusual ways to treat non-human animals, but they are defamiliarized when the reader becomes an outside observer of them. When these non-human characters are read not as symbols, but as living (but textual) beings, the reader’s encounter with them becomes disconcerting since a human logocentric framework is shown to be inadequate in understanding them and thus the human interpretive position is destabilized.
In the analysis, I will discuss how the limitations and dominating effects of language expose both the humans and the other animals in *Women in Love* to a lack of control. Humans appear to be the masters of words, but precisely because of their mastery they almost always fail to escape a verbal mode of experience and perception. Conversely, non-human animals do not have words, and therefore they do have a wordless access to the world. However, for the same reason they are susceptible to verbal appropriation and cruel treatment that they cannot protest against in a medium that is accepted and acknowledged by humans. As will be elaborated in the Theory and Methodology section, I will explore these issues with the help of Derrida, whose *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006) similarly deals with issues of language and animals.

*Literature Review*

A number of scholars have examined the topic of non-human animals in Lawrence’s works. In addition, there are a few texts that are relevant to this essay because they deal with language or similar related issues that are important to the present study. What has not yet been thoroughly investigated is the close relationship between the language and the animal themes, and it is an understanding of this that I hope to contribute with.

As early as 1971, Kenneth Innis’ *D.H. Lawrence’s Bestiary* was published. In this book, Innis attempts to categorize and define the different ways in which non-human animals “appear meaningful” in Lawrence’s works, which is the kind of symbolic reading that I hope to avoid (13). In contrast, another early study, Margot Norris’ *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985), argues that Lawrence’s novella *St. Mawr* (1925) is a “dismantling of an anthropocentric ontology” (170). Norris is attentive to the dilemma of trying to do this with the help of “anthropomorphic resources” such as words and reason and proposes that Lawrence’s writing can be seen as “an act” that can stir “the animal self . . . prior to the secondary activity of . . . discursive critique” (173f). Although Norris only mentions *Women in Love* in passing, her reading of *St. Mawr* is an example of how to surpass mere symbolic interpretations.

One of the most successful studies that deals with the non-human in Lawrence is Wallace’s *D.H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman* (2005). Wallace’s focus is
the relationship between Lawrence and science, and in the chapter that is concerned with non-human animals the question of anthropomorphism and how we can claim to have knowledge about our non-human others outside of a purely human system of meaning is raised. This is related to my own interest in words and their limiting function. Similarly, Deanna Wendel discusses *Women in Love* in relation to posthumanism in her article "'There will be a new embodiment, in a new way': Alternative Posthumanisms in *Women in Love*" (2013), finding that the novel explores different notions of beyond-humanness. Wendel is alert to the many inconsistencies in the novel’s attitudes towards the question of what it means to be a human and a non-human animal, and claims that they invite a posthumanist perspective, but only if we think of it as “posthumanisms,” in the plural (135). From a somewhat different angle, I will argue that these inconsistencies are the product of the novel’s unwillingness to stay within the boundaries of human systems of meaning and its inability to break out of them.

In addition, Wallace’s monograph also gives a detailed account of the influence of science upon Lawrence and his works, a topic that Carrie Rohman similarly develops with regard to modernist literature in general in the first chapter of her *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (2009), which investigates how modernist literature uses non-human animals in the construction and dismantling of human identity. Lawrence was close in time to two revolutionary theories that displaced the human understanding of itself: Charles Darwin’s discovery of the biological continuity between humans and other animals and Sigmund Freud’s ideas about the human unconscious, which imply a lack of rationality and control over the self. Rohman’s reading of *Women in Love* is implicitly Freudian, finding in the novel an exploration of “animal consciousness” where animality is connected to “spontaneous, self-forgetful, nonmechanistic and nonrationalist modes of experience” (107). I share many of Rohman’s interpretations in this respect, but by focusing on human language I will try to look beyond what the text is suggesting in order to discern the framework that predefines these suggestions and the implications that this may have on the reading of the novel as well as our human understanding of ourselves and our fellow animals.

Philip Armstrong, who traces the presence of non-human animals in literature from the Enlightenment until today in his *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (2008), devotes a chapter of his book to modernism, finding that it largely
accepted the “dichotomy between civilization and primitivism” it inherited from the Victorians, but only “by reversing its values,” privileging animality over humanity (143). Armstrong finds Lawrence to be a good example of this, claiming that “Lawrence’s real interest is in animality conceived as an ideal and protean state . . . within which any particular animal could only be a temporary stand-in” (149). Thus the non-human characters are once again reduced to symbols. While I do not think this kind of interpretation is incorrect, I find it insufficient since there are non-human characters in the novel that clearly make their individual presence known on the page and who thereby function as “particular animal[s].” Of what kind “Lawrence’s real interest” in non-human animals was is not really significant to my essay, but I will show that in addition to using non-human animals as symbols, *Women in Love* also invites the reader to see the non-human characters as the living (textual) beings they are by putting them in extreme positions to which the reader becomes a witness.

Similarly to Armstrong, in his “*Women in Love: Sacrifice, Sadism, and the Discourse of Species*” (2009), Gerald Doherty illustrates how the human characters’ attitudes towards non-humans form the demarcation between the novel’s two protagonist couples: Ursula and Birkin with their “biocentric” embracement of their own animality on the one hand, and Gudrun and Gerald with their cruel use of non-human animals in their own sadistic games on the other (71). This is yet another example of merely using the non-human characters to interpret the human ones. Nevertheless, Doherty’s understanding of Lawrence in comparison to his contemporaries differs from that of Rohman and Armstrong, who both examine Lawrence’s tendencies to show preference for characteristically animal features and in this view him as a typical modernist. In contrast, Doherty finds Lawrence to be more radical than most other modernists in his rejection of a stable human identity, arguing that contrary to other modernist works, *Women in Love* does not “accept their [the characters’] status as human as . . . already given,” but instead “seeks to articulate human being along the precarious fault line where the human and non-human intersect” (69). In this unstable notion of identity, Lawrence almost seems to surpass modernism.

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3 The celebration of “primitive” cultures and the association of non-Western humans with non-human animals are ideologically problematic positions, but it is not something I will discuss in this essay since that would require a more postcolonial focus.
This is a view of Lawrence that is supported by Amit Chaudhuri in his *D.H. Lawrence and ‘Difference’* (2003), which explores intertextuality in Lawrence’s poetry from a postcolonial perspective. Chaudhuri goes so far as to find “a miniature simulacrum of post-modern, rather than modernist, consciousness” in Lawrence (126). While I am uncertain about the meaningfulness of such an anachronistic classification, Chaudhuri’s discussion about Lawrence’s “[a]lternative [a]esthetic” shows how his use of fragmentation differs from that of his contemporaries (113). Contrary to, for example, James Joyce, who creates unity in fragmentation, Lawrence uses no such strategy of “[a] single homogenizing instinct, working towards a heterogeneous text” according to Chaudhuri (125). In this, he shows that Lawrence diverges from humanism in crucial ways:

> The humanist consciousness . . . in order to operate, has to inhabit a fixed vantage point, from which it comprehends the world, and even tries accommodatingly to ‘understand’ objects and cultures different from itself. Yet, while doing so, it clings to its own centre, a plenitude it takes to be natural, spontaneous, automatically self-evident, and self-cognitive, but which is actually the outcome of history. The Lawrentian consciousness is . . . one without a fixed and assuring presence, but shot through with absences and decenterings and plenitudes[.] (128, Chaudhuri’s emphasis)

Although Chaudhuri’s analysis primarily concerns Lawrence’s poetry, his insights are crucial to *Women in Love* as well since the novel shows a similar lack of a fixed center from which its different perspectives can be cohered. I will argue that this is a result of Lawrence’s attempts to surpass logocentric modes of understanding and expression. Chaudhuri’s book is also important to my study because it brought my attention to the intertextuality of Lawrence’s use of tropes, something that I will discuss in the second section of the essay.

Another book that deals with incoherence in Lawrence’s works is Michael Bell’s *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (1991). Bell examines the relationship between how Lawrence thematizes and how he uses language, detecting a self-awareness in *Women in Love* and its tendency to illustrate “the vulnerability of its own existential and rhetorical premises” (104). This is essential to understand the novel’s inconsistencies and how they are the result of the text trying to undermine its
own medium, something that I will analyze particularly in the first section of the essay.

Lastly, as a bridge to the next part of the introduction where I will discuss Derrida’s animal philosophy and how it will be used to understand *Women in Love*, yet another text by Doherty must be mentioned: *Theorizing Lawrence: Nine Meditations on Tropological Themes* (1999). Doherty devotes a chapter to discussing Lawrence in relation to Derrida, showing how both of them are “ardent deconstructor[s] of logocentric modes of completion and closure,” but also stresses the fact that Derrida’s insights are often more sophisticated than Lawrence’s, in part due to the former’s access to Ferdinand de Saussure’s insights about language (146f). Doherty has proven useful when trying to explicate the similarities and differences between Lawrence and Derrida.

As can be seen, then, the topic of non-human animals in Lawrence and *Women in Love* has been given some attention, but most of the previous studies have failed to move beyond a mere symbolic reading of the animal theme. This is hardly surprising since the novel does symbolize to a great extent, but as I will show, there are also features of the text that resist an outright symbolic reading. To demonstrate this, I will need the help of Derrida and a cat that unsettles the anthropocentric perspective of the philosopher.

*Theory and Methodology*

In a seminar that was part of the lecture series *The Beast & the Sovereign* (2008), Derrida performs a reading of Lawrence’s poem “Snake.” In the poem, Derrida seems to find a foreshadowing of some of his own theories about animals: “it concerns just about everything we’ve approached directly or indirectly” in the former lectures (*The Beast* 236). I have already referred to the affinity between Lawrence and Derrida in their criticism of logocentrism, but in addition to this, *Women in Love* and Derrida’s seminal work on animals, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, share a number of themes and topics such as a skepticism towards language, a destabilization of the Enlightenment subject, an emphasis upon individuality and difference, and discussions about the limits and continuities between humans and other animals. Therefore, Derrida is a useful instrument through which some of the tensions within the novel can be analyzed.
The starting-point of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is a meeting with the cat Derrida shares a home with. Unsettled by her gaze upon his naked body, he sees himself become an object of the cat-subject’s stare, allowing him “to see and be seen through the eyes of the other, in the seeing and not just the seen eyes of the other” (12, Derrida’s emphases). From this recognition of the other as a subject follows that of our moral obligations towards her. Nonetheless, at the very moment that the cat gives Derrida this moral insight, she becomes a symbol of it, and his narration of the event further establishes her as a representative of an idea. As a consequence, it is only in the actual, physical moment of the meeting that the philosopher can see the cat as nothing but a fellow subject, however much he insists that she is exactly that.

In addition, it is his nudity, and the experience of physical vulnerability it entails, that makes Derrida aware of the cat as someone who sees him. As he points out, the human is the only animal that ever dressed itself (5). Therefore, clothes function as a symbol of the human removal from nature and other animals, and the philosopher’s nudity becomes a reminder of the physicality humans share with other animals. The embarrassment Derrida feels at his own exposure brings about the insight that the other living presence in the room is as much an individual as he is himself: “I have trouble repressing a reflex of shame. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against . . . the impropriety that can come of finding oneself naked, one’s sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see . . . The gaze of a seer” (4). Hence, it is the physical meeting with the non-human other that holds the hope for the human understanding of the “unsubstitutable singularity” of this other (9). However, this is only the case if the meeting entails a recognition of our shared vulnerability in our animal embodiment. In effect, this recognition is a tricky thing to discuss, since the verbalization of it turns it into an abstract idea. At the same time, the subjection of the non-human other that this idea entails must be examined because of its consequences for how humans treat other animals and how we perceive ourselves.

Derrida finds that the realization of the cat’s subjection is what separates him from previous animal philosophers:

[T]here are texts signed by people who have no doubt seen, observed, analyzed, reflected on the animal, but who have never been seen seen seen by the

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4 All subsequent page references to Derrida refer to *The Animal That Therefore I Am* unless otherwise specified.
animal . . . If, indeed, they did happen to be seen seen furtively by the animal one day, they took no (thematic, theoretical, or philosophical) account of it. They neither wanted nor had the capacity to draw any systematic consequence from the fact that an animal could, facing them, look at them, clothed or naked, and in a word, without a word, address them. (13, Derrida’s emphases)

Because they have never felt themselves being seen by a non-human animal-subject, they have been able to turn “the animal” into a philosophical idea that confirms their status as humans and that is separated from the actual animals it seemingly refers to. Hence, they have “made of the animal a theorem,” which parallels how literature often uses it as a trope or symbol (Derrida 14, Derrida’s emphasis).

Even Emmanuel Levinas, who found the basis for his ethics in the face of the other, in difference rather than likeness, failed to see the subjecthood of non-human animals. Levinas claimed that “[i]n looking at the gaze of the other . . . one must forget the color of his eyes; in other words, see the gaze, the face that gazes before seeing the visible eyes of the other” (Derrida 12). However, in the faces of non-human animals, Levinas found it hard to identify a gaze that could see him, and thus only saw eyes, as becomes evident in an interview which is one of the few times that he discusses non-human animals: “The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal . . . We do not want to make an animal suffer needlessly . . . But the prototype of this is human ethics” (49f). Thus, in alignment with the Kantian tradition, Levinas attitude towards ethics is that it is “the space of a relation between humans . . . It is only afterward, by means of an analogical transposition, that we become sensitive to animal suffering. It is only by means of a transference, indeed, through metaphor or allegory, that such suffering obligates us” (Derrida 108). In ethics as well as literature, then, non-human animals have almost exclusively been considered symbolically.

In contrast, Derrida repeatedly emphasizes that the cat whose gaze disconcerts him is one real and individual cat, not a literary cat or a representative of the feline species. Therefore, the cat herself is the very point that Derrida is trying to make. Since she is an existing individual, she is the epitome of Derrida’s animal philosophy, but precisely because of this she cannot be reduced to an example, illustration, or representative of it since that would rob her of her very realness and individuality. Hence, once she is given as an example of non-human individuality, she can no longer
represent it since she has become a symbol of it and is no longer perceived purely as an individual. As Anne Emmanuelle Berger and Marta Segarra put it in their introduction to the book *Demenageries: Thinking (of) Animals after Derrida* (2011), in traditional philosophy, “[t]he animal, any animal, exists only in ‘theory,’ counts only as ‘theory,’” while Derrida in his actual meeting with the cat experiences her “unsettling otherness” and thereby his own perspective of the world as one among many (6). This experience requires precisely that the cat is perceived in her realness and singularity and not as a theoretical representative, but as was mentioned above, this can only be done in the physical moment when the meeting between cat and philosopher takes place, before he has processed what her individuality means from a philosophical perspective. Hence, Derrida’s animal philosophy and ethics is based upon a recognition of each animal as “this irreplaceable living being[,] . . . an existence that refuses to be conceptualized” (9, Derrida’s emphasis). This is an insight that is crucial to this essay since I emphasize the fact that many of Lawrence’s non-human characters can be read as individual beings in the same way as human ones.

Derrida’s statement can be used to criticize the practice of reading non-human characters as mere symbols of human drives and projections, since such readings fail to acknowledge the presence of the textual animal as itself. They interpret textual animals in the same way that humans often interpret actual ones and so such readings become symptomatic of an ethics that fails to see our animal others as the sentient individuals that they are. In *Women in Love* some non-human characters, such as the Arab mare and the rabbit Bismarck, defy such one-sided interpretations. Gerald and Gudrun treat them as symbols of their human emotions and desires, but both horse and rabbit fiercely but unsuccessfully fight back. In this resistance, they communicate their suffering at the hands of the humans and thereby demand to be recognized as beings with their own interests and feelings.

Derrida is acutely aware of the suffering of non-human animals as a result of human symbolization, going so far as to compare the industries that produce animal products to the Holocaust, not just because of the immensity of the suffering, but also because of the industrialized efficiency and the “cleanness” of the killing that characterizes both the gas chambers and the slaughterhouses (26). For Derrida, this treatment of non-human animals is intimately related to how humans speak about them. Invoking Jeremy Bentham’s assertion that “the question is not, Can they
reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?,” Derrida reformulates the millennia old discussion that ascribes value or lack thereof to non-human beings on the basis of their cognitive faculties (Bentham chapter 17, footnote 122, Bentham’s emphases). According to Derrida, Bentham’s question “changes everything,” not merely because it utilitaristically appoints the ability to suffer, rather than for example to speak, as the determining factor in moral considerations (27). Rather, the question changes the issue being discussed from capability to inability, or a “passivity”: “The word can changes sense and sign here . . . What counts at the origin of such a question is not only the idea of what transitivity or activity (being able to speak, to reason, etc.) refer to; what counts is rather what impels it toward this self-contradiction . . . ‘Can they suffer?’ amounts to asking ‘Can they not be able?’” (Derrida 27f, Derrida’s emphases). Thus the prerequisites of the animal discourse also changes. The answer to the question is beyond doubt for Derrida: “No one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness” (28). We cannot deny it because we recognize it in our own mortal bodies, “as 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, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower . . . the anguish of this vulnerability” (Ibid 28). In the vulnerability of our embodiment, there is no difference between humans and other animals.

In addition to this physical vulnerability, there is a second kind that is the result of the logocentric limitations of our thinking: “To think the war we find ourselves waging is not only a duty, a responsibility, an obligation, it is also a necessity, a constraint that . . . no one can escape . . . And I say ‘to think’ this war, because I believe it concerns what we call ‘thinking’” (Ibid 29). Wolfe interprets this inability to escape thinking as a human vulnerability in language, “in our subjection to and constitution in the materiality and technicity of a language that is always on the scene before we are, as a precondition of our subjectivity” (“Humanist and Posthumanist” 57). We cannot think outside of language—“no one can escape” it—and therefore language limits what we are able to think. This limitation results in the

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5 The word *passivity* links the vulnerability discussed here to the one Derrida experiences in his nudity before the cat: “Nudity is nothing other than that passivity, the involuntary exhibition of the self” (11).

6 The war Derrida refers to is that between “those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion, and . . . those who appeal for an irrefutable testimony to this pity” for non-human animals (28f).
paradoxes and inconsistencies of *Women in Love*. The novel tries to resist the binary thinking that Lawrence finds reductive, but because he uses words to do this, he is forced into the same dichotomies he wants to disclaim. However, the inconsistencies of the novel can also be seen as a way (intended or not) to destabilize logocentrism by refusing to adhere to its ideals.

Derrida’s strategies are sometimes similar to Lawrence’s in the sense that he also refuses to accept the binary structures that human language gives us to think with. From his encounter with the cat who through her gaze shows herself to be an individual subject follows the realization that to refer to all non-human animals with the term *the Animal* is absurd, since there are as many divisions between and within different non-human species as within the human species and between it and another (47f). Hence, there is no single limit between humans and other animals, but several diverse ones. To illustrate this, Derrida coins the term *l’animot*, which emphasizes the fact that the category the Animal is nothing but a word (*mot*) because there is no such thing as the animal, only different individual animals and animal species (*animaux*) (47f). At the same time, that word is extremely potent because it defines the way that humans think about other animals, and Derrida thus highlights how language controls our understanding of non-human animals more than any real animal does. Because the term *l’animot* sounds strange to speakers of French, with its plural sounding ending and its singular article, it also destabilizes the mastering power of words, instead emphasizing their subversive potential.

Just as embodiment is a precondition of life but also the cause of mortality, so language is at once a precondition of human thinking and a limitation to it. Both embodiment and language are a form of vulnerability, but vulnerability is not the same thing as impossibility; humans are occasionally able to surpass words and their boundaries. The present essay explores the point where the subversive potential of language and its tendency to master and dominate intersect. I will study what *Women in Love* has to say about non-human animals, but also what it is unable to express and what these failures imply.

**Disposition**

The essay is divided into four sections, each of which examines non-human animals and the human conceptualization of them and of itself in *Women in Love* from
different angles. The first section explores different examples of how the novel and its human characters are trapped in a binary way of thinking, where the presumed irrationality of non-human animals defines the superiority or inferiority, depending on perspective, of humans. At the same time, there is a certain ambivalence in the novel’s construction of human and non-human identity. A word such as inhuman is often used to describe humans, and its different connotations seem incompatible. Such ambivalence can be seen as a side effect of trying to think outside the binaries of human language, but also as an expression of Lawrence’s unease at the boundaries of that language. The result is an undermining of the logocentric ideals of coherence and consistency.

In the second section, I examine the theme of words more closely, as well as the novel’s many animal tropes. I argue that the abundance of such tropes invites an intertextual reading where they are considered together, as animal tropes, in addition to interpretations of each trope’s specific meaning in the context in which it occurs. The great quantity of the animal tropes draws attention from their symbolic description of humans to their connection with each other and the animal signifier they have in common. This kind of intertextual reading, where the tropes are read in relation to each other rather than individually, resists symbolization of non-human animals since their signifiers are considered as animals used in symbols, instead of animal symbols used to describe humans. I illustrate how different kinds of tropes convey different kinds of relationships between humans and other animals: a simile supposes likeness but excludes sameness, while what appears to be a metaphor can either be read literally, implying sameness, or metaphorically, rejecting it. This instability of human language is openly thematized in Women in Love and the characters’ reluctance to rely on words. At the same time, this is a very verbal novel, full of dialogues and discussions, which suggests that while the characters may wish to escape the boundaries of language, they are unable to do so. This inability may be one of the causes for the romantic view of non-human animals as truer in their existence that is held by primarily Birkin and Ursula.

In the third section of the essay, I discuss how this romantic view of non-human animals as uninhibited by language produces an understanding of non-human animals as better at being individuals than humans. Individuality is connected to spontaneity and letting go of the self and of social convention in Women in Love, and humans are depicted as almost incapable of this, while non-human animals do it
naturally. Humanity is caught in the Cartesian idea of the self as pure thinking, whereas non-human animals cannot say or think the word *I*, and they are therefore not shut off from the present moment by their self-consciousness.

The fourth and final section of the essay evaluates different forms of anthropomorphism in *Women in Love*. Primarily, Ursula and Gudrun’s comparison of a robin with a proud British politician is contrasted with Ursula’s advocating of the “rights” of the Arab mare that Gerald tortures. The two examples are significantly different in that the former is based upon human modes of understanding while the latter interprets the expressions of a non-human animal through the vulnerability of the embodiment she shares with humans. In one case, the non-human animal is only seen, whereas in the other, she is acknowledged as a seeing individual. This acknowledgement occasions a recognition of the ethical responsibility we have towards not only humans but other animals as well, and our physical vulnerability is thus shown to hold the possibility for a momentary surpassing of our linguistic vulnerability. Regardless of whether we recognize it or not, non-human animals do see us. What will happen if we dare to meet their gaze?
Limiting Concepts and Ambivalent Dichotomies

In a letter written shortly after finishing *Women in Love*, Lawrence states that “[t]he book frightens me: it is so end-of-the-world” (*The Letters* 25). This end-of-the-world-ness can be explained by numerous factors, such as the prevalent theme of death, the dreariness of the industrial setting of large parts of the novel, and the characters’ recurring apocalyptic fantasies about how the world is coming to an end. For the present study, what is noteworthy about this apocalyptic mood is the fact that the ideas about the end of the world are usually related to the failures of humanity, such as when Gudrun and Loerke enjoy imagining “the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of man’s invention” (453). Similarly, Birkin, whose “dislike of mankind . . . amounted almost to an illness,” finds it “the most beautiful and freeing thought” to think of the world “cleaned of all the people” (61; 127, Lawrence’s emphasis). Not only is humanity seen as corrupted enough to cause its own destruction, but the thought of it fills the characters with pleasure. Lawrence himself shared much of Birkin’s dislike: “I must say I hate mankind . . . I have got a perfect androphobia” (*Selected Letters* 134). The scholar Peter Fjågesund traces this androphobia to Lawrence’s secularized horror at the human responsibility for the First World War (34). While the war itself is never mentioned in *Women in Love*, Lawrence wrote in his foreword to the novel that he “wish[ed] the time to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters” (485). Their dispirited outlook on life is the result of living in a world of human failures not merely with regard to one historical event but to human progress in general.

The androphobia of the novel is perhaps most evident in the descriptions of Beldover, the industrial mining society in which most of the novel takes place. This is not so much because of the human inhabitants themselves, but because of the way they are affected by industrialization, itself a product of human development. As the critic Anne Odenbring Ehlert shows, technology is depicted as dangerous, putting the future of both humans and the rest of nature at risk (98). It has turned the colliers working in the mines into machinery, and the “blackness” from the pits is described to stench “the fields and the wooded hills, and [it] seemed darkly to gleam in the air” around Beldover (12). While mechanical labor and soot are not new consequences of the mines that surround the town, Gerald’s reforms upon taking over his father’s
mining company have worsened the situation. Contrary to his charitable philanthropist father, Gerald sees “the pure instrumentality of mankind” and as an effect rationalizes the running of the mines and the conditions of the colliers: “Everything was run on the most accurate and delicate scientific method . . . the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments . . . The joy went out of their lives, the hope seemed to perish” (223; 230). This rationalization results in “pure organic disintegration and pure mechanical organization[,] . . . the first and finest state of chaos” (231). The fact that this is the result of human creativity marks the rationality that is its first principle as the very core of the problem. Thereby, one of the primary qualities perceived to characterize human beings as a species is associated with destruction.

According to Lawrence, this human advancement, which has resulted in modernity and all its technological developments, is characterized by a particular way of seeing that limits perception. In the essay “Art and Morality” (1925), he argues that mimetic art, and particularly photography, has given humans a “kodak-vision” (168). This vision may seem to be objective, but it is really an inaccurate way of perceiving things, and one that humans have taught themselves: “whatever the image on the retina may be, it is rarely, even now, the photographic image of the object which is actually taken in by the man who sees the object. He does not, even now, see for himself. He sees what the kodak has taught him to see. And man, try as he may, is not a kodak” (164, Lawrence’s emphasis). Lawrence asks his reader to imagine the impression of a cow through touch instead of sight, claiming that this blind perception would be something quite different from our “kodak-vision.” A similar proposition is made by the London bohemian Halliday in Women in Love, who wishes he could always walk around naked: “one would feel things instead of merely looking at them . . . I’m sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual” (78, Lawrence’s emphasis). Thus sight is analogous to language in that it preconditions the way that we perceive things. For centuries, pictorial art strove to realistically depict the world and thereby shaped what we imagine the world to be like objectively. This does not only affect how humans see other objects, but also how they see themselves: “Man has learnt to see himself. So now, he is what he sees. He makes himself in his own

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7 While Halliday is one of the characters that Lawrence satirizes, his words foreshadow an experience that Birkin has in a later scene, where he forswears the society of which Halliday is one representative, undresses and lies down among some flowers, “saturat[ing] himself” in them (106).
image” (“Art and Morality” 165, Lawrence’s emphases). Self-awareness in modern humans is seeing oneself from the outside rather than feeling oneself from within. Hence, it is not the same thing as self-assurance but rather an internalization of an external gaze.

This form of self-awareness is discussed in the chapter “Class-room” in Women in Love. At the end of a school day, Birkin and Hermione visit Ursula’s classroom, and the former two are caught in an argument to which Ursula becomes a witness. Hermione questions the usefulness of educating children instead of “leav[ing] them untouched, spontaneous. Hadn’t they better be animals . . . rather than this self-consciousness[?]” (40, Lawrence’s emphasis). For this, she is fervently attacked by Birkin, who accuses her of hypocrisy:

You are merely making words . . . knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want to be an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them . . . What is it but the worst and last form of intellectualism, this love of yours for passion and the animal instincts? . . . what you want is pornography—looking at yourself in mirrors, watching your naked animal actions in mirrors, so that you can have it all in your consciousness, make it all mental. (41f, Lawrence’s emphasis)

According to Birkin, passion and instinct is a pose to Hermione, something she enjoys perceiving herself to possess rather than something she actually experiences. Through her self-awareness, she constructs her own animality or, at other times, lack thereof. This can be seen already in the first chapter, where Hermione is introduced to the reader as a highly intellectually accomplished woman who is described to “kn[o]w” a large number of things about herself (16). Among them is the certainty that she is “invulnerable,” but still “[s]he always felt vulnerable . . . It was a lack of robust self, she had not natural sufficiency, there was a terrible void, a lack, a deficiency of being within her” (16). Because of her knowledge she senses herself to be indestructible, but it is precisely this abundance of knowledge and lack of “being” that constitutes her “deficiency.” Her knowledge makes her feel in control, but she cannot let go of her knowledge, so ultimately it controls her, and it is only by means of yet more intellectualization that she can question knowledge, as is evident in the classroom scene.
Hermione’s logocentric vulnerability would not have been remarkable had it been a characteristic that was unique to her. She is after all one of the antagonists in a novel that is critical towards rationality. However, Hermione is only the most explicit example of something that distinguishes *Women in Love* as a whole. For all its aversion towards rationality, this is far from an anti-intellectual novel. Endless discussions about various subjects take place, to the point where the plot often seems secondary to ideas. Almost every main character of *Women in Love* expresses a wish to escape their self-conscious selves, but the instances when they succeed are exceptionally few. Hence, Birkin may claim that he wants nothing but sensuality, “the great dark knowledge you can’t have in your head,” but he can only express this through an eloquent rationalist discourse that demands consistency from Hermione (43). In fact, Birkin is by far the character who is given most space to intellectualize, and he readily delivers his views on numerous topics such as love, knowledge, art, education, England, and humanity. Throughout the novel, Birkin uses a great amount of words to articulate a yearning for a “beyond, where there is no speech” (146). Hermione describes this as a “violent and directionless reaction between animalism and spiritual truth [that] would go on in him till he tore himself in two between the opposite directions” (297). Birkin is not unaware of his own contradictions and claims that any “rightness” he may have “lies in the fact that” he knows that he is not right, but this is merely yet another form of knowledge and of the self-awareness that he is trying to escape (126).

In this way, *Women in Love* illustrates the linguistic vulnerability that Derrida discusses in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. The name of the conference where the chapters of the book were given as lectures in 1997 was *The Autobiographical Animal*. This animal that tries to write its own biography is the human, but throughout Derrida’s texts it becomes clear that the *auto*, the self, of *autobiographical* is not actually the human, but language. Humans may speak language, but language also speaks us. In this sense, we are as much automatons as René Descartes claims other animals to be. As Wolfe puts it:

’[W]e’ are not ‘we’; we are not that ‘auto-‘ of the ‘autobiography’ that humanism ‘gives to itself.’ Rather, ‘we’ are always radically other, already in- or ahuman in our very being . . . in our subjection to and constitution in the materiality and technicity of a language that is always on the scene before we are, as a precondition of our subjectivity. (“Humanist and Posthumanist” 57)
Hence the frustration of the characters of *Women in Love*: they can only express their wish to escape this subjectivity, or self-awareness, through the language that subjects them to it.

This idea of self-awareness as a product of language is a central insight in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* as well. Derrida shows that the autobiography that the human thinks it writes about itself, what the human uses to define itself, is the term “the animal.” Derrida argues that this is the idea “on which has been constructed . . . the autobiography of the human species, the whole history of the self that man recounts to himself, that is to say, the thesis of a limit as rupture or abyss between those who say ‘we men,’ ‘I, a human,’ and what this man among men who say ‘we,’ what he *calls* the animal or animals” (29f, Derrida’s emphasis). Derrida does not question this abyss as such, only the idea that it is “a single indivisible line” (31). If there are instead multiple, heterogeneous lines, there is no human-animal dichotomy, only animals of different kinds. It is the binary nature of language that creates the perception of the abyss as a dichotomy: the word “human” needs an antonym with and through which it can be contrasted and defined.

Often, this idea, or symbol, of “the animal” results in actions of cruelty towards non-human animals and a view of them as inferior. Gudrun and Gerald notoriously mistreat the non-human characters they encounter, and in the scene in which they abuse Winifred’s pet rabbit Bismarck they show their presumption of human superiority. The scene describes how Gudrun decides to take Bismarck out of his hutch so that she and Winifred can draw him. To do this, Gudrun takes hold of his ears, which the rabbit objects to by “set[ting] its four feet flat, and thrust[ing] back” (240). Once Gudrun gets Bismarck out of the cage, holding him so that he hangs “suspended from the ears,” he “lung[es] wildly” and scratches her (240). Gudrun finds herself unable to get a proper hold of Bismarck, and Gerald comes along and takes him from her, also by the ears, finally managing to hold the rabbit fast under his arm. Rohman reads the human treatment of Bismarck metaphorically, perceiving their “violent subordination” of the rabbit as a seal of their “intimate bond” (115f). In a similar manner, Doherty sees Bismarck as a sacrificial symbol in a transference of sexual energies (“*Women in Love*” 83f). It is correct that the human lovers project their sadomasochistic desire for each other upon Bismarck, but Bismarck’s own reactions to their treatment of him is also a protest against being treated as a symbol.
whose physical discomfort does not matter. Rohman points out the “unusual attention” that Lawrence pays to the details of the rabbit’s resistance (115). These details communicate Bismarck’s physical, suffering presence. Any reader who, contrary to Gudrun and Gerald, is alert to the fact that a non-human animal may “address” them,” as Derrida calls it, will be attentive to the rabbit’s objections to the human characters’ treatment of him (13, Derrida’s emphasis). His “lashing out,” “writh[ing],” and scratching makes it clear that he does not wish to be picked up by the ears, and “the unearthly, abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death” that he utters testifies to his terror at the hands of the humans (240f). Through these actions, Bismarck communicates his existence as an individual living being who does not care for being reduced to a symbol. This reveals the insufficiency of human symbolization through language in encounters with non-verbal beings, which undermines the reader’s own linguistic perspective of Bismarck.

Gudrun and Gerald are blind and deaf to this. Unlike Derrida when facing his cat naked, they are unconscious of the vulnerability that unites them with Bismarck, and in the rabbit’s attempts to communicate his distress they therefore only find confirmation of their human superiority. Gudrun is “arrested with fury at the mindlessness and the bestial stupidity of this [Bismarck’s] struggle,” and Gerald calls him an “insensible beast,” both of them completely disregarding how the rabbit may interpret their actions; they see him but do not see themselves seen by him (240; 242). Bismarck’s behavior is found remarkably irrational:

‘It’s mad,’ said Gudrun. ‘It is most decidedly mad.’

. . .

‘The question is,’ he [Gerald] said, ‘what is madness? I don’t suppose it is rabbit-mad.’

‘Don’t you think it is?’ she asked.

‘No. That’s what it is to be a rabbit.’ (243)

In other words, to act like a “fool,” is madness in humans, but not in rabbits because they are not rational in the first place (242, Lawrence’s emphasis). In Doherty’s words, this “subtly redraws the species fault line: as opposed, Gerald implies, to the cool rationality that marks human behavior, madness is the very essence of rabbithood” (“Women in Love” 85). Thus, Gudrun and Gerald confirm their firm status as rational humans through contrasting it with the irrationality of rabbits. Their
coined term “rabbit-mad” implies that while Bismarck’s behavior may seem irrational, it cannot be judged by human standards of rationality, and that this does not mean that Bismarck is mad according to the already irrational standards of rabbits. This shows how Bismarck becomes vulnerable to the structures of human language when they are used to justify the humans’ abusive treatment of him on the basis of his being their opposite.

However, the lovers’ own linguistic vulnerability is also exposed when they construct an idea of themselves that is evidently not correct; they are not as rationally unbothered by their struggle with Bismarck as they wish to think. When he fights to get out of her grasp, Gudrun “almost los[es] her presence of mind,” and the scratch he makes in Gudrun’s arm unsettles Gerald so that he feels the wound to be “torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness” (240; 242). Gudrun comments that Bismarck’s scream was “the most fearful noise,” but her own voice is twice described as “high” and “like a seagull’s cry” in this scene (241). When this is contrasted with her “strong, slow, almost man-like way” of speaking two pages later, it suggests a lack of control over the words she utters (243). Hence, while the humans may see themselves as calm and detached, the text tells us otherwise. This is the second part of the dialogic exchange quoted above:

‘God be praised we aren’t rabbits,’ she said, in a high, shrill voice.

... ‘Not rabbits?’ he said, looking at her fixedly.

... ‘Ah Gerald,’ she said, in a strong, slow, almost man-like way. ‘—All that, and more.’ (243)

Here Gudrun suddenly expresses the idea that there is a connection between humans and rabbits by claiming that she and Gerald are in fact rabbits themselves. However, the signifier rabbit here ceases to denote a mammal species. Instead, it functions metaphorically, designating an aspect of the two humans. Bismarck is not a rabbit in the sense that Gudrun and Gerald are. Most likely, the word rabbit is here used as a symbol of sexuality, allowing Gudrun to hint at the sexual tension she and Gerald cannot verbally acknowledge but which they are both intensely aware of: “He felt the mutual hellish recognition. And he felt he ought to say something, to cover it... They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries” (242). Hence, the actions that
seem to them to confirm their human opposition to non-human animals in fact brings out what could be considered their animalistic drives.

However, non-human animals are not only used to confirm human superiority, but also its inferiority. Both Birkin and Ursula express a similar androphobia to the one Lawrence claims to suffer from, and non-human animals are often posited as a positive contrast to humans. Birkin thinks the world would be a better place without humanity: “If only man was swept off the face of the earth, creation would go on so marvellously, with a new start, non-human,” leaving the uncorrupted “trees and ... grass and birds ... and hares and adders” to live in peace (128). Similarly, Ursula finds non-human animals preferable to humans: “From the bottom of her heart, from the bottom of her soul, she despised and detested people ... She loved best of all the animals, that were single and unsocial as she herself was. She loved the horses and cows in the field. Each was single and to itself, magical” (244). This view of non-human animals may seem more sympathetic than Gudrun and Gerald’s, but it is really an expression of the same binary structure and therefore of the same linguistic vulnerability.

At the same time, Women in Love also resists this dichotomous understanding of humanity and animality. When Hermione suggests children would be better off if they were not educated but stayed “mere animals,” this also means that humans themselves can be animals (41). This is a recurring idea in the novel. As Doherty puts it, “[b]ecause they share the same root identity, the nonhuman is directly intuited as a constituent part of the human—an ever-present ‘within’ upon which man constructs a precarious species identity” (“Women in Love” 71). The following two quotations are illustrative examples of this:

Gerald looked at him [Maxim], and with a slight revulsion saw the human animal, golden skinned and bare, somehow humiliating. Halliday was different ... The animal was not there at all, only the heavy, broken beauty. (77)

Birkin was looking at Gerald all the time. He seemed now to see, not the physical, animal man, which he usually saw in Gerald, and which usually he liked so much, but the man himself, complete, and as if fated, doomed, limited. (207)

Both of these examples propose a hesitant form of animalism: a human is an animal, but the animal in the human can be more or less apparent in different people or at
different times. Here a certain ambivalence can be detected, not just with regard to the positive or negative value of animals, but to what it means to be one and to be a human.

This ambivalence is a pervading principle in *Women in Love*. Because the text does not accept the idea that contradictions are impossible, it often disagrees with its own propositions. Wendel observes that the novel tends “to adamantly state the opposite of a claim that, on the previous page, it asserted with fervor” (122). Similarly, Doherty argues that *Women in Love* “cultivates a differential rhetoric that undermines its own (often) strident assertions of meaning and truth” (*Theorizing Lawrence* 145). For example, the characters all keep changing their minds, advocating several opposing positions or ones that are shown to be incompatible with their actions. Hermione asserts that the mind, knowledge, and education is “death,” but treasures a small piece of information that Birkin gives her about catkins as if it were a gem and passionately exclaims that “it is the greatest thing in life—to *know*” (41; 86, Lawrence’s emphasis). Birkin declares the utmost hatred for humans and the highest reverence for the nobility of non-human animals, but approves of Gerald’s cruel treatment of his horse because horses really want to “resign [their] will[s] to the higher being [i.e. humans]” (141). Ursula claims to know that the very same horse never “want[ed] to put itself in the human power,” but believes with equal certainty that non-human animals “are really unknown to us” (140; 264). This is not a matter of character development, where experiences and insights create new perspectives: the characters’ changes of mind fluctuate back and forth, discarding any form of stability or continuity.

Here, then, is the same lack of “a fixed and assuring presence” and center that Chaudhuri observes in Lawrence’s poetry (128). Similarly, the critic Colin Clarke stresses “the manifest impulse . . . *towards* the paradoxical” in Lawrence’s fiction in general and in *Women in Love* in particular (18, Clarke’s emphasis). This paradoxical understanding of the world is part of a general anti-rationality that rejects rationalist ideals of logical coherence, criticizing the limitation of a logocentric perspective that presupposes binaries in the first place. Thus, the text refuses to align itself with one point of view and dismisses the idea that reason and consistency is sufficient, or even required, to understand what it means to be human and animal.

This can also be seen in what Bell calls “the apparent instability of the core vocabulary” in *Women in Love*, through which the novel undermines its own
terminology (106). Being an individual is, somewhat counter-intuitively, connected to losing one’s self, as will be shown in a later section of the essay. Similarly, the word love is explicitly dismissed by Birkin and Ursula because it has lost its meaning through vulgarization:

‘The point about love . . . is that we hate the word because we have vulgarised it. It ought to be proscribed, tabooed from utterance, for many years, till we get a new, better idea.’

‘But it always means the same thing,’ she [Ursula] said.

‘Ah God, no, let it not mean that any more,’ he [Birkin] cried. ‘Let the old meanings go.’

‘But still it is love,’ she persisted.

‘No,’ he said, ‘it isn’t. Spoken like that, never in the world. You’ve no business to utter the word.’ (130)

Nonetheless, the couple almost obsessively returns to discussions about what love is and whether they want it, which shows how their linguistic vulnerability makes them unable to completely disregard words, even when they are aware of their semantic deficiencies.

A third example, and the one that is most significant for this study, is the use of the word inhuman. Compared to the comparatively neutral non-human, which is only used five times in the novel and which merely seems to imply “not human”, the more often used term inhuman has a less stable meaning. The way it is employed breaks down the connotative dimension of the word since it is constantly connected to presumably opposite things, some of which have positive and some of which have negative associations in the novel as a whole: Ursula “look[s] forward to . . . the inhuman transcendent death” (194); Gerald is “inspired” by the “inhuman principle in the mechanism” that guides his management of the mines (228); Ursula is startled by the “inhuman” appearances of “[s]ome yellow-ammers” (264); Birkin’s “fingers upon” Ursula’s body are “inhuman” (320), and Ursula believes in “something inhuman . . . [which] comes out of the Unknown” (438). Hence, the inhuman can be found in as various things as non-human animals, industrialization, death, a loving touch, and the mystical universe. In addition, the word is often used to describe
human characters and a way of being that they attain (something that will be discussed further below). This seems to render the term almost meaningless: if the inhuman can actually be a part of a human, it would appear it is not inhuman in the first place. This is one way in which *Women in Love* deconstructs its own human-animal dichotomy, through a process that Doherty describes effectively: “Like the Derridean dyads, the Lawrentian pairs ceaselessly cancel each other, generating a perpetual third term that ruptures the self-possession of each of the terms that generated it” (*Theorizing Lawrence* 152). Like animalism, the inhuman is such a third term that links the dyadic pair of human and non-human. What is important here is not so much the fact that it is difficult, even impossible, to determine the exact meaning of the term *inhuman* in the novel, but to note that the way it is used unifies opposites and invalidates the idea of words as stable and coherent.

This fusion of opposites is one of the ways in which *Women in Love* rejects the idea that contradictions exclude each other. In a statement that is a pertinent description of the novel as a whole and its attitude towards dichotomies, Birkin claims that “[i]t’s a lie to say that love is the greatest. You might as well say that hate is the greatest, since the opposite of everything balances” (127). This declaration disintegrates the logos in the sense of words as well as rationality. That something “might as well” be said as its opposite suggests that every statement entails its own contradiction, which unsettles the semantic content of words. Birkin’s assertion also denies the laws of logic by implying that paradoxes are actually the natural state of things: a contradiction is not an impossibility but an inevitability. At the same time, some contradictions may only be apparent, caused by the structure of human language, which exposes humans to their own inability to think outside of it. In the classroom scene, Birkin states that the problem is not knowledge per se, but that people are “[i]mprisoned within a limited, false set of concepts” (41). This remark is left uncommented by Hermione and Ursula, so Birkin is never given the chance to develop it, but at least from the perspective of the present essay it invokes the idea that human concepts are like the “kodak-vision” Lawrence discusses in “Art and Morality”: they are seemingly used to form an accurate understanding of things, but in fact they constrain instead of expand what can be imagined. The ambivalence of the novel can both be seen as a result of the limitations and binary structure of human concepts and as a strategy or an attempt (intended or not) to think outside of these very limitations by rejecting their basic principles.
Words and Tropes

The limitations of language is something that many of the characters of *Women in Love* are highly aware of, and in this part of the essay I will investigate the novel’s relationship to and thematization of its own medium. I will begin this discussion by studying how words are used in the form of tropes—mainly similes, but also metaphors and, at least in a sense, synecdoches—that compare humans to animals, since this illustrates the way that human language forms patterns that determine the way the world is perceived by users of words. I am not primarily interested in what particular tropes mean, but rather in reading them structurally, examining what their vast quantity implies about the relationship between humans and other animals. Likewise, I will not focus so much on the inability of particular words to convey meaning as on the restrictions words as words impose upon human beings.

The constant comparisons of human characters to other animal species of different kinds are a striking feature of *Women in Love*. To name just a few examples, Gerald’s “totem is the wolf” and he swims “like a water-rat” (14; 181); his mother is also a “wolf,” as well as “a tiger,” “a hawk,” and an “eagle” (15; 213; 215; 216); Gudrun’s cries are often gull-like and she dresses “like a macaw” (239); Ursula is “unconscious like the butterflies” and “fe[els] like a bird flying in the air” as she is singing to the guests at the German inn (119; 407); Birkin “is a chameleon” and “like a wild animal” (92; 123); the Pussum gets her nickname because she is “like a cat . . . or a young, female panther” (71); Hermione’s party of swimmers “are just like great lizards” and “a shoal of seals” (101); Winifred’s Mademoiselle is “like a little French beetle” (239); and Loerke is, among other things, compared to “a mouse,” “a magpie,” “a bat,” “a brown seal,” an “insect” and “a flea” (405; 422; 423; 427; 448; 455). The animal tropes are so numerous they divert attention from the meaning that each individual one is trying to convey to their structural function in the text. They may seem to be a symbolic exploitation of non-human animals, using their signifiers without regarding their actual existence, but their quantity undermines this symbolic function of the tropes since it becomes obvious that they all denote precisely non-human animals.

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8 The many and usually negatively coded animal epithets that Loerke is given combined with the fact that he is a Jew is problematic, but the issue lies outside the scope of this essay. See Granofsky (217ff) and Fernihough (27ff) for a discussion about the anti-Semitism in the description of the Loerke character.
In Chaudhuri’s study of the intertextuality of Lawrence’s poetry, he finds that the poems are connected in that they are “made up of a recognizable assortment of signs which recur within the fabric of the larger Lawrentian discourse itself” (2f). Similarly, in Women in Love there are recurring signs that are structurally related and which must therefore be read in relation to each other. Chaudhuri’s conclusions about this kind of intertextuality are somewhat different from mine. He argues that the repetition of a signifier shows that “the link . . . between signifier and signified is arbitrary” (110). However, our seeming disagreement here is probably more apparent than real. I would agree that the second and third times that Gerald is compared to a wolf does not primarily suggest the idea of an actual wolf or describe Gerald’s appearance or behavior, but forms a link back to the first time that his wolf-ness was remarked upon and thus to previous signifiers rather than a signified. However, my point is that a great amount of repetitions also draws the reader’s attention to their very repetitiveness and to what it is that is repeated. In the case of the animal tropes, the repeated element is animal signifiers, and hence, all taken together, they invoke the non-human animals in the tropes rather than the humans who are being compared to them. Hence, in addition to interpreting individual tropes, which I do at other points in this essay, it is also important to examine their structural implications.

The most apparent function of the animal tropes is the characterization of the human characters through their resemblance to non-human animals, thereby elucidating something about their appearances or personalities. The Pussum’s nickname and the fact that she is “like a cat” says something about how she moves and talks, and Ursula’s free spirit is conveyed through the comparisons to animals with wings (71). However, the similes also reverse the comparison: if there is a hawk-ness in Mrs Crich, then there must also be a Mrs Crich-ness in hawks, or, more precisely, in human perceptions and ideas of them. In a scene that will be discussed further on in the essay, the Brangwen sisters see the British politician Lloyd George in robins, and similarly it would be possible to see Mrs Crich in hawks. Wallace expresses a similar idea, suggesting that human and non-human identity “might ‘leak’ in more than one direction” so that it is not merely a question of humans being animals, but non-human animals being human (135). As an effect, the features of the human character being compared to a non-human animal are absorbed by the idea of that animal. This becomes especially evident when Ursula looks at “Hermione’s long, grave, downward-looking face” and sees “something of the stupidity and the
unenlightened self-esteem of a horse in it” (292). On other occasions, Ursula fervently defends the sensitivity of horses, but here it seems her dislike of Hermione affects what she recognizes a horse to be like (138; 430). Thus Hermione’s face reminds Ursula of that of a horse, and because she perceives Hermione to be full of stupid and unenlightened self-esteem, her idea of the woman momentarily alters her idea of horses. In this way, the comparisons of humans to other animals not only characterize the humans, but also the non-human animals.

By extension, the comparisons address the issue of the limit between humans and non-human animals. In addition to expressing something about the characters, the tropes all taken together communicate a likeness between humans and other animals, or perhaps rather likenesses in the plural, since being like a wolf is different from being like a flea. If humans can be similar to other animals, then there must be something that unites them. However, different kinds of tropes convey different kinds and structures of likeness. The vast majority—one hundred and thirty eight—of the tropes are similes of different kinds: the human character is said to be like another animal, does something as a non-human animal does it, resembles an animal of a different species, or reminds another character of one. These similes both pose a limit between humans and other animals and obscure that very limit. In stating that A is similar to B, a simile also implies that A is not the same as B. Hence, if Birkin “resemble[s] a deer,” that at one and the same time means that he is not a deer and that he has something in common with one (24). Thereby the similes simultaneously point towards a limit between humans and other animals and towards affinities, thereby refining the division.

A somewhat special case is the instances where humans are compared to animals as a generic category. This occurs nine times in the novel both in the form of similes and other tropes. The similes are of particular interest because a simile excludes the possibility of identity, which means that the humans are here positioned not merely as different from other animals, but as different from animals per se, which would contradict the animalism of humans that the novel also proposes. Hence, when Halliday squeals at the Pussum and the people at the café Pompadour “looked up like animals when they hear a cry,” it seems they are not actually animals (humans ones) that look up, but non-animals that do it like animals (65). This is related to the

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9 At least that is my estimation, but I may have missed one or two.
discussion about animalism in the first section of the essay. As was mentioned there, there are several instances in the text that suppose a kind of dualism in humans, proposing that they have an animal and a non-animal part. From such a perspective, it would seem the human part of the café guests act like their animal part, and while this is phrased like a simile, the structural implications are then in fact those of a synecdoche. However, this is yet another example of the ambivalence of the novel, since a synecdoche presupposes partial identity and therefore a certain amount of sameness in humans and other animals, while a simile excludes such identity.

In addition, the statement that someone is doing something like an animal begs the question what this means more precisely. That an “animal-like smile comes over Gerald’s face” suggests either that all animals smile in the same way or that there is something animalistic that unites all animals that can define the way that Gerald smiles even though different species may smile in different ways, or not at all (455). Likewise, when Mr Brangwen sits down by the fire “like a defeated animal” after one of his arguments with Ursula, this either means that all animals look the same when they are defeated or that Mr Brangwen looks defeated in an animal-like way although different animals may look defeated in different ways (366). If the latter is the case, smiling like an animal and looking defeated like an animal would amount to doing two very different things in the same way, or with the same quality. It would then be this quality that is referred to in the instances when the word animal is used as an adjective or an adverb, as in the sentence “The room was charged with excitement and strong, animal emotion” (411). In addition, it would mean that all animals could sometimes do things in animal-like ways, as well as in ways specific to their species or to them as individuals. Gerald and Mr Brangwen would then be human animals that are doing things with this animal quality. Exactly what kind of quality the novel proposes this to be depends upon how it defines what it is to be an animal, and so it would probably be a form of spontaneous and emotional lack of self-awareness, as will be seen in the next section of the essay.

To complicate matters further, the novel contains twenty-one animal metaphors in which humans are described to be a certain kind of animal. For example, Gudrun is “a bird of paradise” and Ursula one “that prefers the bush” (94; 289); Birkin is accused of being a “scavenger dog” (307); Gerald is “a calf” in certain ways, but a “wolf” in others (451; 455); and Loerke is “a mag-pie,” a “little dry snake,” and “a flea” (422; 454; 455). Superficially, it may seem as if similes and metaphors
function in the same way, but on a deeper, structural level they actually suggest
different things. While a simile is straightforward in that it implies likeness but rejects
sameness, a metaphor is more complex since it both implies and rejects sameness
since the verb to be can be read both literally and figuratively. Metaphorically,
Gudrun’s words “they are dogs!” simply mean that the bohemians at the café
Pompadour to whom she refers behave in a dog-like way, and also, since the words
are in fact a metaphor, that they are definitely not dogs (385, Lawrence’s emphasis).
However, taken literally, the words imply that the bohemians are in fact dogs, which
would also mean that being a dog is not a matter of species identity, but of a way of
behaving and being, and that an individual of any species could be a dog. The
italicized are in Gudrun’s statement does indicate that she is seeing an actual canine
identity in the bohemians, further emphasizing the possibility of a literal meaning of
the words. This is a far-fetched line of reasoning, and there is nothing in the novel that
suggests that what seem to be metaphors should be taken literally; certainly, they are
metaphors. However, this cannot be surmised from the words themselves, only from
our understanding about what it means to be a human and that this excludes being a
dog, and so it still illustrates that our immediate recognition of these tropes as
metaphors rests upon a presupposed recognition of species identities and differences.

The point with this examination of some of the novel’s animal tropes is to
show how the interpretation of what kind of trope something is depends largely on
context and on more or less unconscious axioms or prejudices. A simile may be
synechdocical, and what may seem to be a metaphor can also be literal. The
interpretation of which it is depends upon other interpretations of the work and the
actual world, and when it comes to the animal tropes, which trope it is says something
about the limit between human and non-human animals. This is important to note in a
discussion about the ambiguity of words in relation to a novel that shows a clear
awareness of their instability.

It is well established that Women in Love displays a skepticism towards words
and their ability to express meaning (Bell 99f). This skepticism is initially expressed
in the beginning of the first chapter, at the end of the characteristic introductory
dialogue that circles around some of the major themes of the novel. Ursula and
Gudrun repeatedly find themselves unable to express their thoughts, and finally
Gudrun dismisses the usefulness of further discussion with the exclamation “What is
it all but words!,” thereby implying that further talk is futile since human language
cannot express what is significant (10). This is the first of a large number of instances where the insufficiency of words is stated. There are numerous examples of the following kind: “She [Ursula] knew, as well as he [Birkin] knew, that words themselves do not convey meaning, that they are but a gesture we make, a dumb show like any other” and “What was the good of talking, any way? [sic] It must happen beyond the sound of words” (186; 250). There is a constant sense of the characters feeling that words are insufficient, but also that they have no other means of connecting with each other.

From a Derridean perspective, this is unsurprising. As Derrida stresses, language is in “a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside . . . These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, are themselves not only human” (“Eating Well” 116, Derrida’s emphasis). This does not merely mean that other animal species may also have different kinds of languages, which Derrida points out that scientific studies seem to suggest (“Eating Well” 116f). It is also a matter of recognizing that while we may perceive language as a human instrument, it is itself more than human, and it cannot be completely mastered by humans; rather, language has a kind of agency of its own. This non-human agency of language means that the subject trying to express itself through words is never in control of the meaning that is expressed. At the same time, it is only through words that humans can begin to conceptualize in the first place. Hence, the human subject is mastered by human language. As Wolfe puts it in a discussion about Derrida’s theories, humans experience a “finitude . . . in our subjection to a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language. This technicity has profound consequences . . . for what we too hastily think of as ‘our’ concepts, which are therefore in an important sense not ‘ours’ at all” (“Humanist and Posthumanist” 56). It is this linguistic vulnerability that the characters of Women in Love express, and which they can only express through language.

Now, I do not wish to propose that Lawrence in his skepticism towards words is an anachronistically early Post-Structuralist. As Doherty remarks, it is only through Saussure’s linguistic theories that Derrida can recognize language as a closed system that refers only to itself, an insight that was unavailable to Lawrence (Theorizing Lawrence 147). At the same time, as Bell thoroughly illustrates, it is clear that Lawrence was “conscious[ly] problematising . . . language” (2). Hence, what I am suggesting is that while Lawrence did not have the tools that might have allowed him
to articulate his attentiveness to the elusiveness of words in a more theoretical manner, the distrust towards human language inherent in many of his works shows an awareness of the lack of control on the part of the enunciative subject. Therefore, Wolfe’s observation of the “technicity” and “mechanicity” of language is interesting, since it is precisely such characteristics that Lawrence was wary of, be it in language, science, or sex (“Humanist and Posthumanist” 56).

In this mechanicity, humans are connected not only to machines, but also to other animals. Wallace shows how non-human animals in *Women in Love* are sometimes depicted as mechanical since instinct can be seen as a form of automatized reaction (*D.H. Lawrence* 135f). Ursula is amazed at the stupidity of Mrs Salmon’s canaries when she learns that they go to sleep “automatically” if their cages are covered so that night seems to have arrived: “How ridiculous! . . . It really thinks the night has come! How absurd! Really, how can one have any respect for a creature that is so easily taken in!” (134f). However, the gullibility of the canaries is just an example of the “shared condition of mechanism or automatism” of all animals, including humans (*Wallace D.H. Lawrence* 136). While Ursula may be able to stay awake even when it is dark, she tends to be seduced by words almost as easily as the canaries are by darkness: “She was always frightened of words, because she knew that mere word-force could always make her believe what she did not believe” (437). It is tempting to echo her own mockery of the canaries: “how can one have any respect for a creature that is so easily taken in!” (135). To be a living being is to be subjected to structures that determine our ideas and impulses. Most likely, Ursula is no more inclined to be persuaded by words than other humans, only more aware of the mechanism.

However, just as the canaries would probably be unable to decide that they want to base their sleep pattern on something other than a lack of daylight, so Ursula and Lawrence, for all their awareness, cannot escape human language. Many of Lawrence’s texts question the ability of words to be meaningful, but this theme is particularly interesting in *Women in Love* since it is such a verbal novel. Most novels consist almost exclusively of words, but *Women in Love* is based on dialogues to the extent that it sometimes gives the appearance of being one long discussion with a few interruptions in which the characters move from one location to another. However,

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10 Graphic novels being one notable exception.
very few of these dialogues result in an understanding between the participants. As Bell notes, “an unresolved argument” both opens and closes the novel (99). Rather, it is only once the characters stop trying to reach each other through words that they can harmonize in a non-verbal acceptance. Hence, Birkin and Hermione are caught in a destructive battle of wills where they try to possess and hurt each other. They only escape it once Hermione hits Birkin in the head with a paper-weight in what seems to be an attempt to kill him, to which Birkin’s reaction is that “[y]ou were quite right, to biff me—because I know you wanted to” (108). Similarly, Ursula and Birkin spend endless pages discussing what kind of relationship they want, if any at all, and repeatedly fail to agree. Finally, after yet another argument, Ursula angrily storms off, only to return with a token of love in the form of a flower to replace the useless words that will not allow the two to reach each other. In both relationships, words are shown to be incapable of saying what needs to be communicated.

Because of this obstructing effect of human language, Lawrence imagines non-human animals to have an advantage over humans: while humans often need to take a detour through verbal expression, other animals have a more immediate access to experience, as will be elaborated in the next section of the essay. Non-human animals cannot conceptualize the world through words and they would therefore be more instantly aware of it, rather than their own interpretation of it. The word, the logos, that has traditionally been the primary mark of human superiority is thus a vulnerability. As Derrida illustrates in his discussion on Jacques Lacan in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, “[t]he subject of the signifier is subject(ed) to the signifier,” and therefore human “superiority . . . gains its assurance from the privilege constituted by a defect” (130). However, as Derrida also states, it is quite unlikely that only humans have a language, even in the sense of a “network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside . . . I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différence*” (“Eating Well” 116, Derrida’s emphasis). Here is a clear discrepancy between Lawrence and Derrida: where the former romantically ascribes a purity and immediacy to non-human animals’ perceptions of the world because of their lack of words, thereby turning them into symbols of his ideas, the latter questions whether words are really the only means of conceptualization that may obscure a being’s perception.
Selfhood and Individuality

Lawrence’s often romantic ideas about non-human animals and animality can partly be seen as a counter-reaction to the Enlightenment privileging of humans and humanity. By “valorizing the repressed or underprivileged term,” he attempts to invalidate the dichotomies that are the basis of a logocentric world-view (Doherty, *Theorizing Lawrence* 146). Showing a preference for things that are coded as irrational can be seen as a strategic attempt to undermine logocentrism. However, such an approach is ultimately equally problematic to the one it is trying to counter since it is based upon the same dynamic. Hence it is yet another failure to escape the binary structure of the logos. In *Women in Love*, the somewhat elusive concept of individuality and its connection to animality is an illustrative example of this. While humanity at large is found contemptible in the novel, there is still a small hope for individual humans. The destructiveness of Gerald’s mines is linked to his disregard of the individual, which allows him to perceive human beings as machinery: “The sufferings and feelings of individuals did not matter in the least . . . What mattered was the pure instrumentality of the individual” (223). In contrast, Birkin argues that “[h]umanity is less, far less than the individual, because the individual may sometimes be capable of truth” (126). In this section, I will explore what kind of truth this is and how capable individuals really are of it.

In the introduction of the essay, I described how Derrida stresses the importance of recognizing each living being as an individual. In *Women in Love*, individuality is a prominent theme, and one that is connected to animality, but as will be seen, being an individual does not have the same meaning in the novel as it does to Derrida. First of all, it is noteworthy that all the main characters of the novel are portrayed as original and different from other people in some way. Both the Brangwen sisters are remarkable, with their elaborate clothing and colorful stockings. Gudrun has escaped the conventional boundaries of East Midland society by becoming a fairly successful London artist, and while Ursula may seem less original in her life as a teacher, she is all the more so in her self-sufficiency which gives her an aloofness that annoys both Birkin and her father. Gudrun asserts that she and her sister are “not just the ordinary run,” and Ursula agrees that she and Gudrun “are more intelligent than most people,” and declares that “one wants to strut, to be a swan among geese” (51f, Lawrence’s emphasis). Similarly, when Birkin is first introduced,
in the wedding scene of the first chapter, he is described as “clever and separate” and it is pointed out that he does “not fit at all in the conventional occasion” (20). Likewise, his lover at the beginning of the novel, Hermione, is far from ordinary as one of the “free women who have emancipated themselves from the aristocracy” (50). Even Gerald, who “stickles for the convention,” is “exceptional” and does not “want a world same as” regular people according to Birkin (142; 205, Lawrence’s emphasis). As Lawrence’s friend, biographer, and fellow-author Catherine Carswell remarked to him upon reading the manuscript of *Women in Love*, it is full “of people . . . removed from the general run, people . . . sophisticated and ‘artistic’ and spoiled” (42).

However, to be original or unusual is not necessarily sufficient to be an individual. Birkin proposes a more radical form of individuality, based upon “the fact of intrinsic difference between human beings” (209). Nevertheless, because most people “only like to do the collective thing,” they fail to live up to this potential for individuality (33). The fact that people tend to follow the lead of the majority makes Birkin hate “the mass of mankind” (61). To follow social convention is to mark oneself as part of the “common ruck,” since “[a]nybody who is anything can just be himself and do as he likes” (32).\footnote{As has rightly been pointed out, this extreme form of individualism combined with a loathing of the assumedly inferior collective has very uncomfortable political implications. See Fernihough for a thorough investigation of Lawrence and ideology.} This tension between the inherent difference between individuals and these individuals’ preference for the collective suggests that while each person is capable of being an individual, it is far rarer to actually achieve this state of singularity. In fact, as will be seen, the narrative questions whether Birkin’s vision is at all possible for humans.

What is important about this from an animal studies perspective is the fact that Birkin’s radical notions of individuality undermine the idea that there are essential similarities between humans based on their species identity. On the contrary, Birkin claims any affinities between humans, such as having “two eyes, one nose and two legs,” are mere “mathematical abstraction[s],” while “[i]n the spirit, I am as separate as one star is from another, as different in quality and quantity . . . One man isn’t any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically other, that there is no term of comparison” (103f, Lawrence’s emphasis). While Birkin himself may think his arguments are about humanity, they actually have more far-reaching implications. If there is nothing essential that unites humans, then neither
can there be one absolute limit between the human and the animal as stable categories, since the former of them lacks substance; together with Derrida one may wish to point out that so does the latter. As Doherty puts it, Birkin’s “assertion undoes the notion of a kinship connection between people, based on attributes held in common, that transforms the human race into one immense family unit” (Theorizing Lawrence 86). Hence, there is as little that connects one human to another in any significant way as a human to an animal of a different species.

In addition, the ability to live up to one’s individuality is connected to animality in the novel. The first example of individual action takes place just before the wedding in the first chapter. Gerald’s sister Laura happens to arrive at the church just before her bridegroom, Lupton. Seeing her at the church steps, he tries to catch up with her, in reaction to which she “on the reflex . . . started, turned, and fled,” and he, “[l]ike a hound . . . was after her, . . . his supple haunches working like those of a hound that bears down on the quarry” (19). Birkin later tells Gerald he thinks this behavior was “almost a masterpiece in good form” since it was an example of Laura and Lupton “lik[ing] the purely individual thing in themselves, which makes them act in singleness” (32f). Significantly, when Lupton does this, he is compared to a hound, which links the individuality of his action to a non-human animal. Parenthetically, it may be worth noting that this simile also constructs the couple according to traditional gender roles where men are hunters and women prey, which makes their actions appear less unbound and outside of social convention than they may first seem. Nonetheless, there are many similar instances where human singularity is connected to animality in the novel, such as when Ursula becomes so absorbed by watching some butterflies that she forgets herself, “r[ises] and drift[s] away, unconscious like the butterflies” (119). Another example is Gerald’s discomfort with Birkin’s “animal-like spontaneity of detachment,” and Ursula is unsettled by this same detachment when she dances with Birkin and “he move[s] towards her with subtle, animal, indifferent approach . . . lifting [her] with mocking, suggestive impulse” (206; 412). In another scene, Birkin “look[s] at her with his strange, non-human singleness” (317). Loerke, who is probably the human character most often compared to non-human animals, is described as “single and . . . absolute in himself” (452). As these examples show, there is often an animal or a non-human quality to actions that are marked by singleness or unconventional spontaneity. The ability to be single and “act
spontaneously on one’s impulses” is thus related to doing something like a non-human animal (32).

What is also interesting is that words such as “unconscious,” “detachment,” and “indifferent” suggest that these types of individual actions are marked by a “surpass[ing]” of the conscious self (369). This brings to mind Birkin’s wish that Ursula should let go of herself so that they can be united impersonally, telling her that “I want you to drop your assertive will, your frightened apprehensive self-insistence . . . I want you not to care about yourself, just to be there and not to care about yourself, not to insist—be glad and sure and indifferent” (250f, Lawrence’s emphasis). Later, when the couple has managed to negotiate a shared idea about what kind of love theirs is to be, Birkin reflects that what he feels is “something beyond love, such a gladness of having surpassed oneself . . . How could he say ‘I’, when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This I, this old formula of the ego, was a dead letter” (369). These words deserve further scrutiny since they reject the Enlightenment idea of the human self that has also denied non-human animals the possession of such a self.

Birkin’s thoughts echo a letter Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett while working on what was to become The Rainbow (1915) and Women in Love:

That which is physic—non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent . . . I don’t care so much about what the woman feels—in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman is—what she is—inhumanly, physiologically, materially . . . You mustn’t look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable[]. (Selected Letters 78, Lawrence’s emphases)

Thus, it is only by letting go of the ego, of the stable, consistent self, that one can come into contact with one’s actual, non-human being. In his comments regarding this letter, Wallace notes that “[t]he individual, for which Lawrence borrows the Freudian term ‘ego’ to designate an idea of the self, becomes ‘unrecognizable’, its impulses subsumed within a collectivity” (D.H. Lawrence 107, Wallace’s emphasis). What makes an individual a human ego, in Lawrence’s sense of the word, is socialization,
which in turn represses individuality. This helps explain what may seem contradictory about the idea that acting as an individual requires a relinquishing of the stable self.

For the purpose of the present study, what is most relevant about this idea of individuality as ego-less is the fact that Lawrence connects this state of being to the non-human, something that Derrida’s discussion about the Cartesian cogito can help clarify. Derrida shows how Descartes distances the thinking “I” from the body and from life when he tries to pinpoint precisely what constitutes this “I”: “in order to define access to a pure ‘I am,’ [Descartes] must . . . detach, precisely as detachable, all reference to life, to the life of the body, and to animal life” (72). Thinking is the sole thing that is inseparable from the “I” of the cogito, and so the definition of this human, thinking “I” cannot be that it is a rational animal (in itself a problematic concept) since animality would entail embodiment (Ibid 71f). The “I” is therefore essentially and exclusively pure thinking.

To Lawrence, this idea of the self is very troublesome since he is wary of over-rationality, which he sees as “crippling” (Rohman 132). Birkin shares this wariness, claiming that he wants nothing but “sensuality” which is “the great dark knowledge you can’t have in your head,” but which is “[i]n the blood” (43). As Rohman notes, this sensuality of the blood, or blood-consciousness in Lawrence’s own terminology, “defines Lawrence’s rejection of the overly intellectualized and his concomitant desire for a recuperation of the animal in the human” (107). This makes sense if we consider Derrida’s statement that there seems to be “an abyss” between ideas of the self of an animal as consisting of “sensibility, irritability, and auto-motricity, a spontaneity that is capable of movement,” and the self consisting of “the I of the ‘I think’” (49f, Derrida’s emphases). Sensibility and spontaneity are examples of features that Lawrence thinks we need more of, as opposed to thinking. Birkin’s unwillingness to use the word I is thus a form of rejection of the cogito and the, in his assessment, destructive implications its Enlightenment logocentrism has on the idea of what it means to be a human, with its denial of the embodiment, sensuality, and spontaneity this entails. In the Cartesian dualist theory, non-human animals are denied the cogito and the logos it is based upon, both because they are assumed to lack rationality and because they are incapable of the enunciative act of verbally saying or thinking “I,” as in “I think”: “’I think’ is something that an animal cannot utter. No more than ‘I’ in general” (Ibid 86). However, in Lawrence’s estimation, this is a strength rather than a weakness. Since non-human animals do not have the logos, they
are perceived to be truer to their individuality than most humans, for example by Ursula, who believes, they are “single and to” themselves and “not referred away to some detestable social principle” (244). In contrast, because of their linguistic vulnerability, it is difficult for humans to escape the self-awareness of the cogito and act individually.

This difficulty can be seen in the scene in Women in Love that is probably the best example of a human character acting as an individual by being almost purely in the present and attempting to surpass self-awareness. After having been hit on the head by Hermione, Birkin leaves her house and wanders off “barely conscious . . . moving in a sort of darkness” (106). On a hillside, he undresses and lies down among some flowers, “saturat[ing] himself with their contact” (107). Wendel pertinently calls Birkin’s behavior “more bizarre than a few short quotes can illustrate,” but sees it as the “most nonhumanist, ‘real sensual’ experience of all the scenes in the novel” (126). The sensuality and eccentricity of Birkin’s actions is an example of the kind of spontaneous and singular behavior that he praises elsewhere, but it is remarkable that even in this state he cannot help but ask himself “if he were mad”:

But if so, he preferred his own madness, to the regular sanity. He rejoiced in his own madness, he was free. He did not want that old sanity of the world, which was become so repulsive . . . As for the certain grief he felt at the same time, in his soul, that was only the remains of an old ethic, that bade a human-being adhere to humanity. But he was weary of the old ethic, of the human being, and of humanity . . . He would overlook the old grief, he would put away the old ethic, he would be free in his new state . . . He wondered again how much of his heaviness of heart, a certain depression, was due to fear, fear lest anybody should have seen him naked lying with the vegetation. (108)

However much Birkin assures himself that “he want[s] nobody and nothing but the lovely, subtle, responsive vegetation, and himself” and that he will not mind “the old ethic,” he is unable to completely shed what seems to be a sense of shame (107f). Even in this pure sensuality he cannot let go of his “kodak-vision” of himself from the outside, a self-awareness based upon how others see him rather than how he feels inside. As a human, he is trapped in “the regular sanity” of humans, no matter how much he tries to escape it (108).
In this way, Birkin’s ideals of individuality are undermined by the narrative when he is himself shown to be unable to accomplish it even in his fairly extreme actions in the flower scene. Birkin’s difficulty further clarifies the link between individuality and a loss of the self. As was seen above, when explaining his ideas about individuality he emphasizes its connection to a disregard for social convention and collectivism. It is a pure, spontaneous presence in the moment without the self-awareness—what Lawrence calls the ego—that society creates in humans. Birkin’s experience among the flowers is the closest he can get to letting go of this ego, but even in his utterly unconventional actions and his disclaims of society he still sees himself from the outside. Characteristically for a human, he is unable to shed his self-awareness and be an individual, purely present in the moment.

Considering the fact that non-human animals are viewed as unaffected by self-awareness and that they are clearly linked to individuality in *Women in Love*, it is remarkable that there are no equivalent scenes that describe a true individual experience from a non-human perspective. In part, this may be because in the matter of individuality, non-human animals are used as symbols of a human wish for experiences beyond self-awareness (which does not mean that they cannot be read unsymbolically in other contexts). However, in addition to this, the reason may be that a true individual experience by definition cannot be put into words. Almost in passing, Derrida points out that his cat is “a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance” (9). Thus alluding to Lacan’s understanding of human language as a result of lack—there is no need to name what is always immediately present—Derrida hints at an aspect of words that helps explain Lawrence’s frequent frustration with them. “We have no language for the feelings, because our feelings do not even exist for us,” Lawrence writes in the essay “The Novel and the Feelings,” but perhaps the reason is rather that our feelings are never absent from us, and therefore no language has been invented for them (203). Pure individual experience is pure presence devoid of self-awareness, and so it cannot be named since naming it would imply its eventual absence and thus rob the current moment of its pure presence. Perhaps the human tendency to experience and think through words thereby removes us from the present and thus from our immediately present feelings and our ability to act spontaneously on them; in this Lawrence would then be partly right in that they “do not even exist for us.” How this verbal removal from emotion may validate mistreatment of our non-human others will
be shown in the next section, where I will discuss the virtues and vices of anthropomorphism, and how verbal intellectualization can be used to trivialize the suffering of other beings.
Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is a central concept when discussing non-human animals since ascribing what is believed to be typically human characteristics to them implies some kind of continuity between humans and other animal species. Although the term is often used pejoratively, to imply naivety or sentimentality with regard to non-human animals, the opposite, saying that there are no similarities at all between humans and other animals, seems at least as naïve. As Greg Garrard stresses, anthropomorphism can be both “crude” and “sophisticated,” and the latter kind has proven useful even to ethologists (154; 157). In Women in Love, both forms are depicted when the human characters interact with non-human animals, and both forms are zealously criticized. Derrida shows a similar ambivalence, but asserts that we are wrong both to reject and to embrace anthropomorphism indiscriminately. For example, he is wary of “assign[ing] to it [the cat] the words it had no need of,” which would be “overinterpreting what the cat might . . . be saying to me” (18). At the same time, he deems “suspending one’s compassion and . . . depriving the animal of every power of manifestation, of the desire to manifest to me anything at all” equally unwise (18, Derrida’s emphasis). In other words, it may be foolish to imagine the experiences of non-human animals to be transmittable through human words, but that does not mean that they are unable to be conscious of their experiences or that they do not wish to communicate them to humans and each other. In this section, I will discuss how the human characters interpret some of the non-human characters and the moral implications of anthropomorphism as well as a complete rejection of it, arguing that the novel emphasizes the insufficiency of words and rational thinking when trying to understand other species, but also that it shows how the embodiment humans share with other animals can function as a way to surpass linguistic restrictions.

In a scene that explicitly illustrates the problems with anthropomorphism, Ursula and Gudrun sarcastically compare a robin to the British politician Lloyd George. Ursula finds the comparison so apt that “for days, [she] saw the persistent obtrusive birds as stout, short politicians lifting up their voices from the platform, little men who must make themselves heard at any cost” (264). The robin is interpreted from a purely human perspective, transferring the manners of birds into the context of human culture. The sisters code its behavior in the same way that they would a human with a similar body language, failing to take into account the many
ways in which the bodies and cultures of humans and robins differ. This is similar to Winifred’s way of speaking to her pets: “Beautifullest,” she calls the Pekinese dog Looloo, “sit still while its mummy draws its beautiful portrait” (235). Likewise, after Gudrun and Gerald set Bismarck free, she tells him “Eat, eat my darling! . . . Let its mother stroke its fur then, darling, because it is so mysterious” (243). Because Looloo and Bismarck do not have some of the abilities that characterize post-infant humans, such as speech, Winifred treats them in a manner she may find appropriate to humans who have not yet developed these abilities. In this sense, her anthropomorphization of her pets is of an inverted kind: because they do not have certain human characteristics she treats them as humans who do not have them either.

Ursula, Gudrun, and Winifred all make the same mistake: they fail to see the other from any perspective but their own anthropocentric one. Ursula recognizes this, when she is later startled by a flight of yellow-ammers that “looked to her so uncanny and inhuman, like flaring yellow barbs shooting through the air on some weird, living errand,” and she despises herself for “defam[ing]” the robins:

‘[I]t is impudence to call them little Lloyd Georges. They are really unknown to us, they are the unknown forces. It is impudence to look at them as if they were the same as human beings. They are of another world. How stupid anthropomorphism is! . . . making everything come down to human standards . . . The universe is non-human, thank God.’ It seemed to her irreverence, destructive of all true life, to make little Lloyd Georges of the birds. (264)

However, Ursula’s revulsion is as extreme as the anthropomorphism she reacts against. In a sense, it is another way of making symbols out of animals by using them to represent awe for the mysteries of the universe. In addition, claiming that non-human animals “are of another world” is highly problematic, since it denies any form of relation between them and humans. Surely the yellow-ammers breathe the same air, are warmed by the same sun, and are alive in the same way as Ursula, although the sensations that these experiences create may differ. An outright rejection of any connection between humans and other animals is as absurd as its opposite.

Such a rejection can also be used to justify violence and repression against the non-human other. In the beginning of the chapter “Coal-Dust,” Ursula and Gudrun witness Gerald tormenting his Arab mare by forcing her to stand by a railway crossing while a train passes. The terrified horse rears and bucks desperately but is unable to
escape Gerald’s control over her body. In a scene a few chapters later, during a picnic with Gerald, Birkin, and Hermione, Ursula confronts Gerald about his brutal behavior, telling him that the mare “has as much right to her own being, as you have to yours” (139). Gerald defends himself by claiming that the horse “is there for my use. Not because I bought her, but because that is the natural order . . . I can’t help being master of” her (139). He is backed up by Hermione, who thinks “there is something wrong, when we look on every living creature as if it were ourself [sic] . . . it is false to project our own feelings on every animate creature. It is a lack of discrimination” (139) To this, even Birkin agrees, despite his oft-stated admiration for non-human animals. Their claims are similar to Ursula’s with regard to the yellow-hammers in that they refuse to acknowledge any connection between humans and other animals. Hence it seems that the same structure that creates a sense of reverence for the other in Ursula can also be used to defend the use of violence to oppress that other. If it is “a lack of discrimination” to ascribe feelings to the mare because we cannot know what she feels, then we are also free to treat her as we please (139).

Correspondingly, defending the mare’s rights is based upon the same anthropomorphism as seeing something human in the robins. Wendel discusses these structural similarities, arguing that Ursula’s vindication of the horse’s rights to her own body and will cannot escape the humanist perspective that oppresses non-human animals: “to talk about equal rights . . . draws attention to the beneficence of the human who extends the rights” (129). This is a valid point, and one that reveals some of the problems with the animal rights discourse that Ursula enters into in order to explain her position. Nevertheless, while Ursula’s choice of the word “rights” may be unfortunate because of its connotations—at least from a contemporary perspective—her interpretation of the mare’s feelings is not as humanist as it may seem since it is based upon a sensibility shared by all animals rather than upon rationality, which suggests that feelings may be an instrument that can be used to escape the restrictions of language.

To illustrate this requires a careful close reading of the Arab mare scene. Before that, however, it is interesting to note that while the mare is at the centre of the scene, most critics have focused on the undercurrent of emotions passing between the human characters rather than on the mare herself. For example, Rohman states that Gerald’s refusal to give in to the horse’s terror parallels his unwillingness to acknowledge his own animality, and that this is one of the first instances of the
sadomasochistic game that will shape the relationship between Gudrun and Gerald throughout the novel (114f). Similarly, Doherty sees Gerald’s domination over the horse as a display of “his male mastery to two female spectators” and analyzes the differences in the reactions of the sisters (76). I have no major objection to these readings as such, but their one-sided focus on the human participants of the scene is unfortunate since it represses the mare in the same way that Gerald oppresses her. Certainly, the horse functions as a symbol, but reducing her to nothing but this ignores her physical presence (in the sense that the human characters are physically present) in the scene. Both the readings and Gerald are blind to the horse as an actual, living, individual being and to what she may be trying to express.

Examining the scene closely, it seems the mare’s experiences are narrated in two complementary ways: one observing and one interpretive. The vast majority of the verbs describing the mare’s actions refer to movement: she is noted to “wince,” “rock,” “recoil,” “spin,” and “swerve” (110f). The mare’s bodily expressions are carefully described, and they are vivid: “She roared as she breathed, her nostrils were two wide, hot holes, her mouth was apart” (111). Hence, the narrator’s interpretation that “[t]he mare did not like” the approaching train is an almost objective understatement, and the use of the words “terror,” “horror,” and derivations of them nine times in two pages seems justified by the mare’s body language (110f). To a large extent, then, the descriptions of the mare’s feelings consist of reports of her body’s movements and inferences about what she is feeling drawn from these. I emphasize this to point out that although the mare is ascribed emotions she cannot communicate through words, these projections are not arbitrary.

In addition, the mare’s feelings can be surmised from what is done to her by Gerald and the train. Gerald “was heavy on the mare, and forced her back . . . It seemed as if he sank into her magnetically, and could thrust her back, against herself” (110). Gudrun notices his “spurs c[oming] down, pressing relentlessly” on the mare’s bleeding sides, and the spectator and the reader can imagine the feeling of a sharp

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12 A man riding a horse is in fact something of a standard symbol: “a man on horseback represents reason reigning in the passions,” highlighting the “image of the bifold nature of the human as it was commonly understood: animal flesh and immortal soul; brute body and knowing, judging mind” (Armstrong 7). This symbolization is certainly present in the Arab mare scene, especially considering Gerald’s role in the novel as an over-rational industrialist. However, there are plenty of such readings of the scene, and I am here more interested in the ways in which the mare resists symbolization.

13 Obviously, the horse is not a real living being who can actually express something since she is a verbal creation. However, in the world of Women in Love she is as “real” as Ursula or Gerald, and so it must be possible to interpret her communication and feelings in the same way that theirs are discussed.
object being pressed into an open wound, thus becoming conscious of their own physicality (112). Also, some sentences do not merely describe, but imitate the scene and the mare’s experiences of it:

But he [Gerald] sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wind, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will, nor escape from the mad clamour of terror that resounded through her, as the trucks thumped slowly, heavily, horrifying, one after the other, one pursuing the other, over the rails of the crossing. (111)

The reader is thrown between the commas like the mare between Gerald and the train, and the sheer length of the sentence mimics the suspense of the endless passing trucks whose thumping is described in five different ways before reaching the final adverbial phrase. Thus the reader is forced to struggle herself out of the sentence like the mare struggles to escape Gerald’s control. The spectators as well as the reader can understand what the horse feels because like her they are physically vulnerable beings who know the fear and pain that physical force results in.

I quote at great length here in order to show that Ursula’s interpretations of the mare’s suffering are not mere sentimentality, but a valid interpretation based on the horse’s body language and the treatment she is given. Derrida argues that “[n]o one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness” and explains this power to understand animal suffering with the “[m]ortality . . . that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs . . . to the experience of compassion” (28). Precisely because we are humans we know what it is to be and to suffer like a mortal animal. To base animal ethics on non-human animals’ assumed lack of the logos is therefore to misunderstand the issue completely, as Bentham argues when stating that “the question is not, Can they [non-human animals] reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (chapter 17, footnote 122, Bentham’s emphases). Derrida returns to Bentham’s argument repeatedly, finding in it an ethics based on inability, since the ability to suffer implies a “not-being-able” (27). Contrary to traditional animal philosophy, such a perspective claims that moral consideration should not be based upon skills such as the power of speech, but on powerlessness. To say that a non-human animal suffers is therefore not crude, naïve, or sentimental, but a recognition of all sentient beings’ shared capacity to feel agony. Ursula’s anthropomorphism is not based upon arbitrary projections but
upon a vulnerability that she shares with the horse, and which she is made aware of through the mare’s expression of her suffering, just as Derrida is made aware of his own physical vulnerability through the gaze of the cat upon his naked body. Because of this shared vulnerability that is based upon being a mortal body, Ursula knows what it is to bleed and she can understand the panic caused by being denied control over one’s body. Like the mare, she finds the noise from the train “intolerable” and is relieved when it leaves behind a “[l]ovely, grateful silence” (112). Hence, Birkin is wrong to call her defense of the horse a “maudlin attributing of human feelings and consciousness to animals” (139). Feelings are not a human attribute, but one that is shared by many, or possibly all, animal species.

Radical skeptics may wish to insist that we cannot know beyond doubt that non-human animals do feel things, or that their feelings are similar to our human ones, but then again, we cannot know beyond doubt that other humans actually feel things, or that anything exists outside our own consciousness.14 To revert to such radical skepticism would render any discussion about ethics pointless. This kind of intellectualization can be used to evade the question of human responsibility towards our fellow animals, as can be seen in particularly Birkin’s reaction to Ursula’s accusations against Gerald. Instead of discussing what kind of situation, if any, could justify using a spur to make a horse bleed, Birkin argues that it is not really a matter of Gerald imposing his will upon the horse, but of the horse having “two wills,” one that wants freedom and one that wants to submit “to the higher being” of the human; it is these two wills that struggle, not Gerald and the horse (140f). That Birkin, who elsewhere expresses nothing but contempt for humans, suddenly considers them “higher being[s]” is a clear example of his inconsistency. So is the fact that if he cannot presume to know what a horse may be feeling, it is hard to see that he could know anything about the construction of its psyche. However, aside from that, Birkin’s words turn the discussion away from the particular Arab mare to the idea of “the horse.” Although he does not use the linguistic construction of a general singular, he nonetheless generalizes about a vast number of individuals. In this he commits the same mistake as philosophers talking about “the animal” when referring to all non-human animals, thereby theorizing them into a homogeneous category. His statement is problematic not only because any serious study of non-human animals would notice

14 See part III of Duncan Pritchard’s What Is This Thing Called Knowledge? (2006) for a basic overview of different versions of and responses to radical skepticism and solipsism.
the heterogeneity of the species and individuals categorized as such, but because it turns what is the experience of an actual living being into a theoretical construction, and theoretical constructions are usually not considered entitled to moral consideration, while living individuals may be. Thereby, Birkin circumvents the question of the mare’s suffering.

Once the topic of discussion becomes the nature of horses in general rather than Gerald’s treatment of his horse, Ursula goes remarkably quiet. Wallace argues that she is “exposed as sentimental and anthropomorphic” by the three other characters and that her position entails “an intellectual vulnerability” (D.H. Lawrence 133). To this I would object firstly that accused would be a more accurate word than exposed, and secondly that intellectual soundness is beside the point since it is sensibility rather than rationality that is needed to understand the mare’s suffering. Ursula’s lack of response does not necessarily imply that her arguments are disproven, and certainly not that she herself is convinced by the others’ arguments since she lets them intellectualize in peace and then repeats her original statement that humans have no “right to violate the feelings” of other animals, and that it would have been “much more sensible and nice of” Gerald to let the horse keep some distance to the train (143). The others cannot possibly win the argument because they refuse to engage in it in the first place; they do not respond to the original question of the suffering of the mare, but speak instead of their theoretical ideas about horses and non-human animals. Such an intellectual approach represses the empathetic emotion necessary to engage with the suffering of this particular horse. Perhaps this suffering cannot even be expressed through words since that would turn it into a human, linguistic discourse in a similar way that Derrida’s narration of his meeting with the cat makes the cat a symbol of the individuality that is opposed to symbolization. The “intellectual vulnerability” in this discussion is thus not a matter of an inability to think rationally, but of the inability of rationality to comprehend emotion and of human language to express it. It may seem as if this emphasis upon feeling in the interaction with other animals would be an instance of the human-animal dichotomy that connects the former to rationality and the latter to emotion. However, on the contrary, since emotions are something that animals, human and otherwise, share, the dichotomy is in fact destabilized. In this way, physical vulnerability can function as an instrument for resisting logocentrism.
Before concluding this section I would like to examine a third form of anthropomorphism. In the chapter “Mino,” Ursula visits Birkin, and they end up having one of their usual discussions in which they attempt to define their relationship. Ursula tries to make Birkin admit that he loves her, and he tries to explain to her his vision of a less traditional relationship that is more than mere love. Their conversation is interrupted twice, first as they watch Birkin’s cat Mino encounter a female stray cat with whom he interacts by “cuff[ing]” and “box[ing] her” (148f). Ursula scares away the stray cat when she scolds Mino for his “bossiness,” and the human discussion is resumed (150). Soon afterwards, Birkin’s landlady interrupts the two humans by letting them know their tea is ready, whereupon “[t]hey both looked at her, very much as the cats had looked at them, a little while before” (151). Thus, the courting of the humans is explicitly compared to that of the cats, which both anthropomorphizes the behavior of the cats and animalizes that of the humans.

What is interesting here is that species identity is partly subordinated to gender identity in this scene. Ursula accuses Mino of being “a bully like all the males,” and perceives that he is trying to dominate the stray cat with his paws in the same way that Birkin tries do dominate Ursula with his “fine words” (149f). Birkin, on the other hand, identifies with Mino, claiming he is only trying to convince the stray cat of his “male dignity, and . . . higher understanding” (150). This kind of intersectionality, in which species and gender identity interact, is also evident in the symbolism of the Arab mare episode. Charles Burack calls Gerald’s and the train’s joint torture of the mare a “symbolic double rape,” and there is a tangible sexual tension in the scene (96). Gerald is “keen as a sword pressing in to” the mare, and as Gudrun is watching the struggle between man and horse, she has an orgasmic experience where “the world reel[s] and passe[s] into nothingness . . . she could not know any more,” and afterwards she cannot stop thinking of the horse being “enclos[ed] and encompass[ed]” by Gerald’s “loins and thighs and calves” (111ff). Hence, while the mare herself experiences no sexual pleasure, she becomes the object of Gudrun and Gerald’s sadomasochistic projections. It is hard to imagine that the scene would have
played out in the same way had the horse been a stallion, and so, like the stray cat, it is partly because of her femininity that the mare is dominated.\textsuperscript{15}

For female non-human animals there is thus a double oppression, one based upon species and one upon gender. Likewise, the oppression of female humans is justified by their presumed likeness to non-human animals, as is indicated by Birkin’s comment that “woman is the same as horses: two wills act in opposition inside her. With one will, she wants to subject herself utterly. With the other she wants to bolt, and pitch her rider to perdition” (141). Conversely, Hermione practices a similar attempt at subjugation of males regardless of species: “Hermione talked to the stag, as if he too were a boy she wanted to wheedle and fondle. He was male, so she must exert some kind of power over him” (88). In this, Women in Love recognizes that both human and non-human identity is based upon other parameters than only species, and this intersectional understanding multiplies the limits as well as the continuity between humans and other animals.

This last, intersectional form of interpretation of non-human animals may seem to differ from that of the robins and the horse in that sex is not actually a human characteristic. Is this really anthropomorphism then? As was noted above, the ability to feel is also shared by all animals, but it may still be considered anthropomorphic to translate the expressions of a non-human animal into a human understanding of what that animal feels. More importantly however, while the sexual organs and their reproductive functions may be similar in most mammals, this does not mean that all mammal species have the same gender roles and structures as humans, especially considering that those of the latter vary across cultures and times. In this way, intersectional anthropomorphism shows a similar inability to see non-human animals from a non-human perspective as Ursula and Gudrun in their anthropomorphization of the robins.

However, considering the general human inability to escape human means of conceptualization, which I have discussed throughout this essay, anthropomorphism may be the only available means of relating to non-human others. No one, neither humans nor other animals, can understand outside of their own conceptual resources. Nonetheless, there are different kinds of anthropomorphism, and when relating to our non-human others we may be able to choose whether we do so by seeing them as

\textsuperscript{15} In fact, there is a comparable scene in Lawrence’s novella St. Mawr, where a stallion refuses to be dominated and instead throws off his male rider, seriously injuring him.
individuals and imagining what we may have perceived in their position, as Ursula does with the mare, or by seeing them as symbols, merely perceiving them without imagination, as she and Gudrun does with the robins. Through Ursula’s emotional response to the mare’s expression of her feelings, the human is able to perceive the physical vulnerability she shares with the horse and thereby escape her own linguistic vulnerability.
Conclusion

This essay has focused on two interrelated aspects of *Women in Love*: its approach to the limitations of human language and how they affect its depictions and understanding of non-human animals. These limitations make both humans and other animals vulnerable but in different ways. Humans are victims of their own powers of conceptualization: “The subject of the signifier is subject(ed) to the signifier” (Derrida 130). Thus the characters’ inability to escape the intellectual discourses some of them abhor and Ursula’s worry that words might “make her believe what she did not believe” (437). The text attempts to resist this subjection to language by dismissing logocentric ideals of coherence. Irrationality, spontaneity, and animalism are promoted as means to true experiences uninhibited by socialization. This is something that non-human animals are perceived to be better at than humans, but it is also suggested that humans are animals and hence capable of it. At the same time, human characters are shown to have a difficult time overcoming their self-awareness, and the two protagonist couples confirm what they perceive to be human superiority or inferiority through dichotomous comparisons between their own species and other animals. In this way they are trapped in human language and its binaries. However, they also constantly change their minds about their own position in relation to other species, just like the text changes its use of some of its central terms, such as the *inhuman*. The ambivalence that this creates can be seen as a revolt against logocentrism in that the text thus refuses to align itself with principles of consistency. At the same time, the ambivalence can also be seen as a byproduct of attempts to think outside of the laws of human language. Because it is impossible it results in self-contradiction, both in the text and in the characters that try to resist language.

This human vulnerability in turn causes the linguistic vulnerability of non-human animals. Humans find it difficult to think outside of language, but when they try to relate to non-verbal beings their words are insufficient, which results in an inability or unwillingness to understand non-human animals on their own premises. Bismarck and the Arab mare cannot communicate their anguish at the abuse of the human characters in the words most of the humans require to take notice of them and so what they do express is left unheard by everyone but Ursula. Even when the horse’s suffering is perceived by Ursula through her empathetic emotions, this understanding cannot be communicated to the other humans since it cannot be
translated into the words they understand through. Instead, the horse and Bismarck, along with most of the other non-human characters, are intellectualized and turned into symbols, which denies them their existence as individual beings. Only when the emotions humans share with other animals because of their embodiment are recognized is the individuality of non-humans acknowledged.

Hence, if I have at times read non-human characters in a way that seems opposed to the symbolic way in which they appear to have been written, that is partly because certain of these characters’ actions resist a purely symbolic reading, most notably, Bismarck and the Arab mare who both express their physical discomfort at the human characters’ treatment of them. However, at least as importantly, the tendency to interpret textual non-human animals symbolically confirms an ideology that does the same thing to actual, non-textual ones, and this, in turn, has consequences for human behaviors towards them. In other words, how we read non-human animals is intimately related to how we understand and treat actual ones, which is something that Women in Love can teach us. In “Eating Well,” Derrida discusses how human eating habits are not merely a matter of dietary needs but of language and symbols:

I feel compelled to underscore the sacrificial structure of the discourses to which I am referring [of Levinas’ and Heidegger’s ethics] . . . it is a matter of discerning a place left open, in the very structure of these discourses . . . for a noncriminal putting to death. Such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse. An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is ‘animal’ (and who can be made to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable?) (112, Derrida’s emphasis)

For this statement, he has been criticized for not taking the suffering of non-human animals seriously, for example by the philosopher Paola Cavalieri, who accuses him of “eras[ing] the problem of the value of animal life” by turning the matter into a question of symbols instead of actions (such as becoming a vegetarian) (98). However, this misses Derrida’s point about how human language, our discourses, shapes how we understand ethics in the first place. If the “Thou shalt not kill” does not mean “Thou shalt not put to death the living in general,” this is because there is “a place left open” in our language that presupposes that the subject, and therefore the
other worthy of ethical consideration, is by necessity human: “the other-man is the subject” (Derrida “Eating Well” 112f). Ending the abuse of non-human animals is therefore largely a matter of becoming conscious of how we use them as symbols, which is why non-symbolic readings of non-human animals in literary texts are important not only because they may be found interesting by humanist academics, but because they illustrate a dynamic that affects the lives of billions of actual, living, individual beings.

Perhaps the most straightforward example of symbolic readings of non-human animals outside of literature and art is the wearing of fur. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a symbol as “[s]omething that stands for, represents, or denotes something else . . . esp. a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract.” Fur is such a material object that represents not what it is—hair that once grew on the skin of an animal that is now dead—but something immaterial: style. Likewise, a Thanksgiving turkey or a Sunday roast are seldom perceived as the skinned and cooked remains of once living individuals who were bred and murdered for the sake of the human fondness for consuming dead bodies. Instead, they come to represent such immaterial values as tradition and family. Even a deer that is shot by a hunter is immaterialized when the killing of it is turned into a symbol of skill, luck, or whatever else the hunter chooses to interpret the deed as instead of as the taking of a life. Admittedly, the hunter does see the individual deer before shooting it, which is more than can be said of regular omnivorous humans who hire others to perform their killings for them, but does s/he see it as an individual? What would happen if the hunter were to be “seen seen” by the prey (Derrida 13, Derrida’s emphasis)? To see oneself seen, one must imagine oneself from the perspective of the other, and thereby the other as a perceiving individual. Who would be able to eat a dead calf after thoroughly and honestly imagining the life of that particular calf (even if it were what would be deemed a “good” life by animal welfarists): the comfort it finds in its cow mother, the joy it feels after being let out of the stables in the spring, and its terror on the way to the slaughterhouse? Who would look into the eyes of an other (a turkey, a deer, a pig, a mink) and see it as itself, rather than as an abstract idea, and still choose to kill “this irreplaceable living being” who is thereby robbed of its equally irreplaceable life (Derrida 9, Derrida’s emphasis)?
As has been suggested in this essay, the symbolization of our non-human others can sometimes be resisted when the physical vulnerability we share with them is recognized. When Derrida feels the gaze of a cat upon his naked body he becomes conscious of his own exposure and by extension of the subjecthood of the non-human other that he is exposed to. Without the symbolic shelter of his clothes, he is a purely physical presence in the same way as the cat. Similarly, Ursula recognizes the physical suffering of the Arab mare because she knows what it is to be a suffering body, and she can therefore sympathize with the horse’s feelings. In this way, the physical vulnerability that all animals share can sometimes momentarily protect us from our linguistic vulnerability in relation to each other.

Lawrence himself may not always have been concerned with non-human animals as animals, but instead with animals as symbols of something that is missing in modern humans. However, his choice of this symbol can teach us something about our relationship to other animals. His skepticism towards words reveals our own linguistic vulnerability and thus our own conceptual limitations, and his focus on emotion rather than rational thought emphasizes the embodiment we share with other animals, which must be the basis of an ethics that respects non-human animals as individuals. When Gerald says the mare “is there for my use . . . because that is the natural order,” he does not consider her but his idea about horses, an idea he treats her as the representative of (139). In contrast, when Ursula sees the mare as “a living thing, . . . a sensitive creature,” she recognizes the horse as that particular horse (113). However, human language consists of symbols, or signs, and so, as *Women in Love* suggests, perhaps we cannot choose not to symbolize. Even animal studies, which tries to avoid traditional notions of animals, inevitably uses them as abstract concepts to discuss questions that are related to actual non-human animals. Maybe it is really a matter of choosing our symbols carefully, minding the fact that they may have consequences for beings that are as living and sentient as we are. Still, Ursula’s passionate defense of the mare indicates that we may sometimes be able to look beyond language with the help of the feelings Lawrence claims we have no words for and which we share with other living beings. Hence, our physical vulnerability may sometimes allow us to escape our vulnerability in language.
Works Cited


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