

EDITOR'S NOTE

Literature, Social Isolation and the Quest for Emotion in the Accelerated Post-Humanities

If the humanities is the study of what it means to be human, to partake of communal feeling, experience emotion and empathic concern, it must be that around and about the beginning of the twenty first century, the discipline, as we know it, faded away, moving with these accelerated times, having to shift its object of enquiry to realms closer to apocalypticism, animism, environmental and extinction studies. And it is not because 'on and about' the year 2000 'human character changed,' nor because ours are unprecedented times in terms of crisis, anxiety and loss, although in many ways they are; this moment in time is unique, not so much in terms of the drama that it sees unfolding, but in the futureless horizon of humankind and the pathetic part humans get to play in the 'grand scheme' of planetary things. In its transformative potential, the pandemic pushed further the question of what comes after the human. For in posthumanism, human character, history, indeed culture become inconsequential, made redundant by the pressures of a resized, rescaled equation: human- animal world, hence their ceasing to form the focal point of debate. Arguably, the experience of being human itself underwent unparalleled change against the backdrop of techno-science, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence. The resurgence of the material with a vengeance makes it impossible for humans to exercise 'mind over matter,' with climate change and the current pandemic getting the upper hand, pressing on towards a new planetary consciousness, demanding new alliances and a new ethical accountability. Doubtless, beyond the actual condition that it describes, posthumanism configures itself as a negative, radical critique of 'traditional humanism,' and, as such, it is, in the broadest sense, anthropocentrism and the global anthropocene turned obsolete.

A subject at a crossroads, postdisciplinary humanities calls for structural, paradigmatic changes in disciplinary knowledge, integrative theoretical frameworks and methodologies, reflective of the new modes of imagination and forms of materialism, capable of taking the leap into the post-humanities. Above all, it calls for transformations in the very cognitive patterns and tools of thought, in Cary Wolfe's eloquent, apt account: "the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist" (xvi).

In nearly two years of pandemic experience, as we have gone into repeated quarantines and lockdowns, empowered by digital connectivity at the expense of social connection, we longed for human closeness, public spaces, sharing and emotion. It was at the peak of the pandemic, when faced with the highest degree of derealisation, that we sensed with enhanced acuity the ineffable role of literature and of the arts to create emotion, instil hope, heighten perception, brighten up our daily horizons, and in the process, restore healing. To this new insight into the therapeutic, cognitive and emotive value of literature, added a revelatory, reassuring sense of the happy marriage of creative writing and technology that enabled us to see the crisis as an occasion to celebrate 'truth and beauty' as part of a reunified sensibility.

Illustrative of the continuing effort to reconceptualise and do hermeneutic justice to the authenticity constitutive of literary works, the present volume gathers a body of critical enquiries that engage, in different modes and fashions, the inexpressible quality of being human from a contemporary, global perspective. Diverse, indeed eclectic at first sight, they cohere in the intensity with which they zero in on this faculty and the astute regard for continuity, discontinuity and change. At this juncture in 'decentralised' humanities, it is the kind of variety we need to embrace for it makes for the very substance of the process of writing.

With education itself at a turning point, moved into the remote and distanced realms of online learning, interrogating traditional scholarship could hardly be timelier. In "Poetic Madness in Malcolm Bradbury's Eating People Is Wrong," Noureddine Friji offers a refreshing approach to aspects of creative talent and mentorship, defining of the academic novel subgenre, with emphasis on the motif of poetic genius and madness. Revisiting form as a mode of 'trans-formation,' Roxana Doncu brings to light the balance between formal innovation and formal

dissolution in the poetic output of American literary critic Dana Gioia, whose trajectory from Romanticism through Modernism and 'Expression Poetry' she explores from the vantage point of poetic discourse as a form of enchantment. With technology at a tipping point as this volume sees the light of print, one cannot but appreciate "Narrative Quantum Cosmology in Michael Frayn's Copenhagen" contributed by Omid Amani and Hossein Pirnajmuddin, a piece that examines the double-barrelled nature of science in Frayn's controversial play, in its articulations with history and politics. At the heart of the tribulations of the posthumanist era, hubris encapsulates the consequences stemming from the violation of natural order. "L'enfer, c'est les autres': En-gendering Sin in Middle English Religious Drama. The Case of Chester" reverberates tragic guilt in relation to Christian construals of self and Christianity's redemptive theology as represented in the Chester scriptural plays presented at Corpus Christi, Noah's Flood, the Harrowing of Hell and the Last Judgement. Dwelling on "the Christian imaginary of sinfulness," Estella Ciobanu seeks to uncover here the metamorphoses underlying Christian conceptualization of sin. In the digital environments we inhabit, the multiplicity, indeed 'ubiquity' of the self complexifies a centuries-long debate on the 'real' and the 'authentic.' The legacy of Covid-19 is nothing short of linguistic in nature, terms such as 'covidioy,' 'herd immunity,' 'zoonotic,' 'retrovirus' having become an integral part of the pandemic vocabulary. Beyond the corpus-based, computer-mediated processes associated with these terms, "Self-Mention in Science Communication Associated with COVID-19 Research: A Comparison of Computer-Mediated Communicative Practices in the United Kingdom and USA" contributed by Oleksandr Kapranov gives us a sense of how deeply ingrained in the collective unconscious the pandemic phenomenon has become. Loran Gami's "Dualistic Vision in Virginia Woolf's The Waves" reconsiders Woolf's enduring, high modernist text in terms of the binary oppositions that it foregrounds with a view to shed new light on the solipsistic idea of the human mind. Pandemic times, at various stages in the history of mankind, saw a revival of relief, solicitude and empathy in the face of adversity. Piety, benevolence and Christianity form the object of investigation of Elena Butoescu's "Charitable London: F(o)unding the First Philanthropic Societies in the Metropolis." Here the author traces the philanthropic effort to some of the starkest periods in London's culture

history. A signature mark of the pandemic, anosmia has acquired symbolic overtones, embodying the predicament of the posthumanist subject, temporarily deprived of some of the quintessential attributes of living creatures, the sense of smell and taste. "Proust in Transylvania: Smell and Memory in Romania," an inquisitive, long-term project by Sebastian Groes and Tom Mercer, dares the 'comfortably numb' global subject to tap into the atavistic reservoirs of sensory memory, following Proust's memory-laden 'madeleine passage' and touch the bottom of nonverbal emotions and olfaction, with a stopover for Bran Stoker's *Dracula* and Patrick Süskind's *Perfume*. "Ferris Wheels, Faust, and Forms of Influence in Malcolm Lowry and Graham Greene" by Randall Stevenson is a demonstration of 'reading historically,' combining temporality and symbolism to evoke the dark recesses of the human mind in a key illuminating the fecundity of the Faustian theme. Bringing the categories of utopia and dystopia to bear upon the North-American ethos of the suburbia, David Howard looks into the idealities and projections of the "Home for Canadians," deconstructing the cartographies and ideologies therewith.

The wisdom of economic theory and praxis urges not to 'let a good crisis go to waste.' Going beyond the questionable, passé, indeed 'redundant' category of 'humanism,' the contributions comprising this volume point toward a faculty that transcends humanist boundaries, perhaps best described for now as humanness. One can only hope it will prove enduring and not confined to 'museal' value.

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Works Cited

Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010.