

## **Introduction – Shakespeare Ever After**

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*Shakespeare 'After' Shakespeare*

Shakespeare, like the sun, is a metaphor; he always means something other than he is.  
(Wilson, 1996, p. 128)

Edward Pechter's *What Was Shakespeare* (1995) set out to evaluate Shakespeare Studies after the so-called 'Theory Wars' and concluded that, at the turn of the millennium at least, there was no 'end of Shakespeare Studies as We Know It' in sight, rather a 'transformation' (Pechter, 1995, p. 14). This transformation – the result of ideological battles over the role of literature, history, politics and aesthetic value – seemed to have shattered a kind of previous consensus, or, as Pechter calls it, a 'unified discourse' (18) in Shakespeare criticism. The unified discourse was that of 'formalist humanism' (30), which collapsed as a result of the combined attack of poststructuralist theory, postmodernism, feminism, postcolonialism, new historicism and cultural materialism. At the centre of this 'alternative' and 'political' Shakespeare were 'questions about textuality and history, and about subjectivity, agency, and political effectiveness' (38). Where the self-stylized radicalism of the new dissidents saw discontinuity, however, Pechter in his critique sees nothing but continuity – since dissidence and radical critique are the very backbone of the humanities and humanism itself. This is a tenet that has become quite strong in recent years: the anti-humanism of theory and new historicism often relies in fact on a caricature of ('liberal')

humanism and detracts from the idea that the humanities have always depended and thrived on dissensus, rather than a kind of enforced ideological consensus, as their fundamental form of knowledge production – an argument most forcefully made in Edward Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004).

There is of course something utterly disarming about the idea of the humanities – the core of the venerable humanist institution called 'University' – as thriving on dissensus rather than agreement. And it is true that some of the antihumanism of theory today, upon re-reading, appears somewhat 'naïf' and, its use of politicised 'jargon,' at times sounds almost like 'agit-prop.' But the idea that a return to the some idealised 'radical humanism' might be possible is equally unconvincing, simply because the cherished idea of a humanist university ceased to exist at the same time as theory, cultural studies and the new interdisciplinarity apparently came to rule over it. The university (and the humanities) has been 'in ruins' ever since (Readings, 1997) and merely survives in its neoliberal, managerialised, 'posthistorical' and 'postcultural' form. With it ceased not only the consensus of a 'unified discourse' (for example in Shakespeare criticism), but also, in a sense, 'Shakespeare' himself. As Scott Wilson explains, Shakespeare has become a mere icon, an empty metaphor, a commodity and an 'object of an institutionally channelled desire' (Wilson, 1996, p. 129). Hence Wilson's conclusion that whatever remains of Shakespeare must be subject to 'heterology.' Shakespeare criticism 'after' Shakespeare has been looking for what remains 'other' and 'utterly heterogeneous to his homogenized cultural body' (129). As Wilson rightly points out, even this heterology can still be recuperated by a new form of humanism – this volume is certainly not immune to this danger ('posthumanism' is still some form of humanism, after all). Shakespeare may have become a 'collapsing star' and a 'black hole'

(Taylor, 1990), or a ‘dense, retentive abyss reflecting nothing but the horror, the impotent plight of the would-be uniquely clever, honest and above all disciplined Shakespeare scholar faced with over 4,000 items lodged by the World Shakespeare Bibliography every year and the certain knowledge that any and every interpretation evaporates the instant it is written’ (Wilson, 1996, pp. 130-31); but the human and humanist urge of the Shakespeare scholar past, present and to come should not be underestimated. Shakespeare’s ‘solar unassailability’ will not stop engulfing humanistic scholarly labor. So, what to do when humanism in its most antihumanist, political and theoretical form becomes a cynical ‘reflex’? If this sounds like an almost existentialist dilemma it probably is, and hence the call for ‘authentic’ action cannot be far off. We know, since Sartre, that existentialism is also a humanism, a ‘dogged’ and desperate humanism ‘*malgré tout.*’ Wilson’s proposed ‘authentic’ action, in fact, follows Bataille’s logic in ‘putting [Shakespeare] back into the use circuit *as shit*’ and ‘putting all of Shakespeare’s shit, all that is remote, revolting, terrible, Other and so on back into play’ (136). Shakespeare’s texts thus become the ‘resident evil,’ that which cannot be recuperated by any humanism, simply because it is not (entirely) human. Investigations into the ‘inhuman’ in Shakespeare are what has been proliferating ever since and while these readings are not immune to a recuperation by humanism they are nevertheless no longer entirely humanist. We would suggest, they are, for want of a better word, ‘posthumanist,’ and thus constitute a new approach within Shakespeare studies.

However, posthumanist does not imply a simple turning away, ‘either from humanism or from theory’, but rather a continued ‘working through’ or a ‘deconstruction’ of humanism for which something like theory is needed more than ever. It also is no turning away from historicism and materialism, but it is a

historicism and materialism adapted to the changed, 'posthuman' condition. One aspect of this condition 'after' humanism is the lost consensus and the lost universalism concerning history and culture. The relevance of Shakespeare after humanism lies in a combination of the 'presentism,' the strategic anachronism, even futurism, as expressed in Linda Charnes's well-known essay 'We were never early modern' (2006, pp. 43-52), in which she claims that Shakespeare in contemporary culture stands for 'Historicity itself' (42). It is not so much 'calendar time' but the intensity of 'subjective time' outside the dialectic between early and late modernity that resonates in Shakespearean characters like Hamlet. They are 'always already postmodern, or rather, *amodern* – since... one cannot "post" something that has not yet happened' (47). This is not to say, however, that their value lies in a timeless aestheticist human essence, or that they speak to the 'heart of human feeling,' but that they highlight – in analogy with Bruno Latour's argument in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) – that modernity (and we would claim humanism) remains a 'virtuality,' or an impossible task:

If Latour is correct that we have never been modern, then Hamlet has never been early modern, we have never been postmodern, and we are all, along with the pesky Prince, stuck in the same boat with regard to what, exactly, 'being historicist' means...

Hamlet continues to speak to us because he continues to be 'timeless': not because he 'transcends' history but because *we were never early modern*. (Charnes, 2006, pp. 48, 52)

*Shakespeare 'After' Theory*

A conjunction between tradition and novelty in Shakespeare's plays exercises an enchantment at once renewable and altogether singular. (Belsey, 2007, p. 20)

It seems thus that after several decades of heated ideological debates, theory, canon and culture wars, if not settled, have petered out in the general crisis and decline of the humanities. Hardened ideological positions on historicist and cultural relativism and the role of truth, politics, ethics and aesthetic value in literature and culture have mellowed. However, the role of the early modern period, the Renaissance and Shakespeare after having been hotly contested by new historicists, cultural materialists, traditionalists and humanists, remains as unclear and ambiguous as ever. As a result there is a new uncertainty in Shakespeare and early modern studies. The uncertainty this time however seems more profound – too pressing are the 'future of the humanities' and the 'role of literature' questions to allow for a simple return to business as usual in the post-theoretical English department. What returns instead is a new kind of pluralism, precisely around the notion of the human and humanism, and around the relationship between literature and life, and between mind, body and technology. Humanism, having been one of the main targets of theory, continues to be the main battleground, arguably this time in its pluralised form: i.e. humanisms. A new dissensus about the past, present and future of humanism and its subject – i.e. the human – emerges, as a result of a number of new threats. The 'posthuman' and 'posthumanism' are starting to take shape, but just like the fragmentation of humanism into mainstream or liberal humanism, existentialist humanism, radical humanism etc., the uncertainty and pluralisation spills over into that which is supposed to supersede it. Posthumans promise and threaten in many familiar and

sometimes less familiar forms. Posthumanisms reevaluate, reject, extend, rewrite many aspects of real or invented humanisms. There is no surprise in this, because that is what the prefix ‘post-’ does. This is its rhetorical essence: it ambiguates. It plays with supersedence, crisis, deconstruction, regression and progression at once. Its main virtue, if one chooses to take it seriously, is to defamiliarize, detach and surprise. ‘Posthumanist Shakespeares’ does not want to be dogmatic about the resurfacing of the human and humanism in their fragilized forms. It wants to show ‘care’ for the human, humanness, humanity, but also embrace the new plurality and the new questions that are put to humanism, anti-humanism, posthumanism, even transhumanism alike: questions of human survival in late-modern, global, techno-scientific hypercapitalist societies with their technocultures. Above all, it wants to confront humanism with its ‘specters’ – the inhuman, the superhuman, the nonhuman in all its invented, constructed or actual forms. It is a strategic move away from anthropocentric premises: the human can no longer be taken for granted, humanity as a universal value is no longer self-legitimizing, humanism as a reflex or self-reflex cannot be trusted. To stay ‘critical’ (in a humanistic, or ‘philological’ [cf. Said, 2004] sense) in these times of plurality and global risk means to re-read, to read carefully but also differently. This is what combines the contributions to this volume despite their obvious differences in their respective interpretation of what needs to be done and what role Shakespeare (and literature) can play, in the face of this uncertainty. We would like to suggest the label ‘critically posthumanist’ as a compromise that shows the care, the scepticism and the openness towards Shakespeare ‘after’ Shakespeare, or Shakespeare after humanism. Some of the guiding questions are: is there life beyond Shakespeare? What Shakespeare for the age of ‘life sciences’? What does

Shakespeare have to tell us about our post-anthropocentric or even post-biological times? Can we still make him our contemporary?

It must be clear, however, that this kind of question cannot be answered without theory. But it is theory no longer entrenched in ideological dogmatism but a much more relaxed and open-minded theoretical approach that values the lessons learned from the theory and other wars. Theory that puts its ear to the ground and listens to the new sounds, which, it is true, mostly come from the sciences these days – bio-, info-, cogno-, neuro- etc. sciences to be precise. It is no wonder that, in the face of the challenges that these new sciences, after the so-called ‘science wars,’ the question of the human and the question of the relationship between literature and life come back to haunt the humanities. *Posthumanist Shakespeares* would therefore like to signal to everyone interested in literature, culture and the sciences that by referring to the current climate as posthumanist, we do not mean dehumanizing but simply that the human and humanity are in radical transition or transformation. Humanism – the discourse about what it means to be human – is in the process of transformation and hence the object of this discourse – the human (who is also its subject, but maybe no longer exclusively so) – is being rewritten. The anxiety and desires that this change and uncertainty cause reopen, for Shakespeare studies, the question of the bard’s (or by now also the ‘CyberBard’s’ [Charnes, 1996, p. 142]) role within the history of humanism.

The argument as to what exactly Shakespeare’s humanism entails and what function it plays in his work is far from being settled, and remains to be pursued in all its complexity. It goes beyond critiques of the positioning of Shakespeare as a mainstay of a ‘liberal’ education, or the temptation to read decadence or ‘anarchy’ (as Matthew Arnold might have had it) in any of the related counter-positions. It is in any

case not a question of polarization between pro- and anti-humanists that is needed in order to continue to make Shakespeare and the early modern period relevant to our so-called ‘posthumanist’ moment. What is at stake, instead, is a historically and textually informed clarification of the privileged relationship between the early modern on the one hand and the late modern, or even postmodern, on the other: between early humanism and a humanism that may be on its last legs, awaiting either its renewal or, indeed, its end. This opens onto what we mean by posthumanism. Posthumanism, as we understand it here, is a critical stance that is at one and the same time aware of at least three choices for a contemporary literary criticism mindful of the interdisciplinary temper of our time. The first of these choices reacts to the consequences of what is most canonical within the canon becoming increasingly detached from any of the assumptions that consolidated a humanist paradigm. The second choice responds to outlooks that distance themselves even further from those assumptions, and recognizes that the implications of bio-, nano-, cogno- and info-technology on body, mind, culture, and epistemology have now become part of mainstream debate within the humanities and within interdisciplinary explorations of the integrity of the human. It should therefore be possible to read Shakespeare according to re-conceptualizations influenced by these outlooks – among them the possibility that Shakespeare may actually have ‘invented’ the posthuman as well as the human. The third choice remains doggedly insistent that nothing much substantially has changed, that Shakespeare has survived far worse upheavals than these, and that it continues to be perfectly feasible to read him as if there were no hint of a brave new world that has such posthumanists in it.

It is with all this in the background that the contributions to *Posthumanist Shakespeares* revisit the humanist/anti-humanist debate in the light of current

thinking, cultural practices, and re-orientations towards the posthuman. In practical terms, this involves recognizing that at present the question of what it means to be human is being asked in the context of dramatic technological change. Rereading Shakespeare within this present therefore takes on a new and exciting relevance. To discuss whether Shakespeare's work coincides with the invention of the human is surely to question also his understanding of the inhuman, the non-human, the more-than-human, the less-than-human. Above all, it involves exploring whether the posthuman, too, finds itself there already. Is it prefigured, represented, contested in Shakespeare? If so, is it possible to come up with a posthumanist approach to Shakespeare that would be able to respond to his work in the light of critical perspectives that retain the memory of humanism but which also seek to exemplify what posthumanist interpretation might entail?

### *Shakespeare 'After' Humanism*

Life itself has become a naturalistic unreality, partly, because of Shakespeare's prevalence... To have invented our feelings is to have gone beyond psychologizing us: Shakespeare made us theatrical... (Bloom, 1999, p. 13)

The question of Shakespeare's humanism has created a vast amount of controversy and heated debate between self-proclaimed humanists and proponents of a politicized new historicist and cultural materialist Shakespeare. The argument has mostly been fought at an ideological level and has involved some strategic misrepresentations of the other camp. New Historicists and cultural materialists have been reduced to

‘postmodernists,’ or ‘constructivist anti-essentialists,’ while all too often defenders of Shakespeare’s presumed ‘humanism’ have themselves been caricatured as politically naïve, reactionary, or idealist-*cum*-aestheticist. Those who seek a ready point of reference for this debate need go no further than reactions to Harold Bloom’s notorious equation of Shakespeare with the ‘invention of the human,’ and his idea that we were ‘pragmatically invented’ by Shakespeare.

Indeed, Harold Bloom’s *Shakespeare – The Invention of the Human* (1999) insists on explaining Shakespeare’s pervasiveness through his apparent universalism. It is of course a very Western universalism Bloom has in mind because he equates it with the invention of (modern) personality, which, in turn, is taken to be, as the subtitle professes, the ‘invention of the human’:

More even than all the other Shakespearian prodigies – Rosalind, Shylock, Iago, Lear, Macbeth, Cleopatra – Falstaff and Hamlet are the invention of the human, the inauguration of personality as we have come to recognize it. The Idea of Western character, of the self as a moral agent, has many sources: Homer and Plato, Aristotle and Sophocles, the Bible and St. Augustine, Dante and Kant, and all you might care to add. Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearian invention, and is not only Shakespeare’s greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness. (Bloom, 1999, p. 4)

For Bloom, Shakespeare *is* the Western and *therefore* the universal canon, and thus the only defense against the ‘anti-elitist swamp of Cultural Studies’ (17) which has presumably led to the current identity crisis within the humanities. Quite obviously, Bloom represents all that has been discredited in ‘mainstream’ humanism: an

aestheticism that makes moral political (i.e. liberal) judgments on the basis of an apparent ‘empirical supremacy’ (16).

While Bloom defends the universalism and meliorism of the humanistic project against postmodern cultural relativism, others, like Robin Headlam Wells in their defense of humanism and their attack on theory’s anti-essentialism and cultural constructivism turn to quite unlikely allies, like evolution, biology and genetics. Quite ironically, the idea that there may be a human ‘essence,’ after all, even if it is not cultural but genetic, is seen as somehow ‘liberating.’ Humanity is not a construct but a ‘predisposition,’ the self not an invention but a neuropsychologically explicable effect of hard-wired evolution-driven brain activity. As a result, literature (including criticism), strictly speaking, become a branch of ‘cognitive poetics’ and neuroscience. We would certainly agree – and some of the contributions in this volume actually take on the cognitive and neuroscientific challenge – that in the light of technoscientific change literary criticism cannot stand still. But, from our point of view, it is precisely because of this change that a straight-forwardly humanist understanding of literature is no longer possible. Replacing theoretical anti-essentialism and constructivism with a new bioscientific essentialism cannot repair humanism, and using genetic notions of human ‘nature’ to defend oneself against antihumanist theory only accelerates the proliferation of a rather uncritical form of posthumanism. Wells’s project in *Shakespeare’s Humanism* (2005) to show ‘the centrality of human nature in Shakespeare’s universe,’ ‘by listening to what other disciplines have to say about human nature,’ in order for criticism to ‘move on from an outdated anti-humanism’ (5), might turn out to be rather counter-productive. The anti-anti-essentialism directed against new historicism and theory is bought at the price of a new ‘naturalism’ and techno-idealism. Instead, there is a new, and we would claim, critically posthumanist,

materialism at work in the contributions to this volume, which does engage with technological challenges not by comparing concepts of human nature but, precisely, by denaturing the human as such. One simply does not need the mystification of a phrase like 'human nature' to explain what constitutes our species's biological and cultural characteristics once evolution is no longer confused with teleology. This does not invalidate the theory of evolution, it merely helps to 'de-anthropocenter' it. It is important not to confuse or freely slide between universalism and essentialism in terms of human nature. The fact that members of the species *homo sapiens (sapiens)* share genetic and cultural characteristics which, at a basic non-normative level, are undoubtedly universal, does not *automatically* lead to moral aesthetic values about human nature since the concept of nature just like all the concepts used in science (from 'life' to 'gene') are first and foremost linguistically and culturally mediated entities. A *critical* posthumanism is turning its back neither on constructivism, nor on materialism and historicism, nor on the idea that universal *meaning* like truth is not given but *made*. A statement like Wells's 'If there were no universal passions and humors, we would have no means of evaluating literature from another age or another culture: a text would have value only for the community in which it was produced' (Wells, 2005, p. 192), is not an argument against a presumed theoretical 'presentism,' because it neglects the fundamentally hermeneutic condition of all human and maybe also non-human knowledge, namely that meaning, including historical and scientific meaning always needs to be appropriated and interpreted by a materially, historically, and radically contextualized subject. This is, in fact, precisely what Wells is doing in attempting to redress what he thinks is an imbalance. What else does it prove to show that Shakespeare and his historical Renaissance or early modern context were already in many ways anti-essentialist, than to increase (and construct) Shakespeare's

continued, renewed, intensified, modulated etc. relevance to our own, equally constructed, stance regarding *our* present time? We regard the opening up of literature and criticism ‘after’ humanism, following on from and thus inheriting postmodern theory, towards what appear to be fundamental technoscientific challenges, towards a constructed human nature, as inevitable but not as unproblematic – hence our appeal for a *critical* posthumanism.

### *Life ‘After’ Shakespeare*

Can Shakespeare help us with the question of how to live? (Mousley, 2007, p. 1)

For Andy Mousley, in *Re-Humanising Shakespeare* (2007), Shakespeare’s greatness undoubtedly lies in his ‘humanity.’ He tries to revive the idea of ‘Shakespeare as sage’ or of the great writer’s wisdom as that part of Arnoldian criticism that looks upon literature as a ‘coherent criticism of life.’ Mousley sees a resurgence of ‘literary humanism’ after anti-humanist theory that reaffirms literature as an ‘antidote to dehumanisation, alienation and instrumentalism’ (8). Shakespeare’s ethics and the ‘existential significance’ of his writings for living an ‘authentically human’ life should not, however, do away with anti-humanist theory’s ‘scepticism’ (12). Mousley tackles this seemingly impossible task by differentiating between what he calls ‘mainstream humanism’ (‘individualism,... sovereignty, unbridled freedom, autonomy and a magnified image of humanity;’ pp. 16, 17) – which was and continues to be the justified target of theoretical scepticism – and ‘other humanisms’ that do not depart from a ‘transcendent’ human ‘nature,’ but see the essence of humanness as an

exploration of its limits – or, as Jean Paul Sartre famously explained, in defending existentialism against what he called ‘*les naturalistes*,’ that it, existentialism, is a humanism, because it starts from a radicalized idea of freedom (namely, as responsibility and task) and from the lack of determination in anything human, captured in the phrase: ‘*l’existence précède l’essence*.’ For Mousley, however, we cannot be just anything. Having examined the various scepticisms and nihilisms staged by Shakespeare in Part 1 of his book, Mousley turns in Part 2 to plays which indicate the persistence of certain bodily and emotional needs or affects, and explores the implications of these needs for questions of value and ethics. In short, Shakespeare was both, a sceptic and a sage, a kind of ironic humanist. Mousley thus puts his trust in Shakespeare to achieve a ‘better humanism’ (23), one that constitutes an attempt ‘to answer the question of what remains of the human, when “the human” like all else is liable to evaporate’ (25). Shakespeare, he hopes, may help us to ‘become human’ (30), after all.

Mousley, in what we would call his ‘yearning for the human’ (paraphrasing Akeel Bilgrami’s “Foreword” (in Said, 2004, p. x), is following in the footsteps of eminent and critical humanists like Edward Said, for whom humanism is first of all, literally speaking, self-criticism, while the foremost task of every humanist scholar or ‘philologist’ is to be critical of humanism itself. As admirable and noble as this existential, almost desperately hopeful, yearning for our ‘promised’ humanity is, the radical openness of the human and thinking the human ‘at the limits’ are part of a risky strategy. Humanism has never been able to guarantee anything, and even Shakespeare as ‘life coach’ cannot perform miracles. There have always been humans who yearn for something entirely other than (being) human – and currently their number seems on the rise again. One can yearn for God, the machine, artificial

intelligence, transhuman successor species, in short, transcendence in any form. This is why we have no confidence in merely radicalizing the critical potential that undoubtedly lies in some forms of humanism (cf. Halliwell & Mousley, 2003) and instead insist on using the strategically ambiguous ‘posthumanist’ label, at the risk of being mistaken for ‘techno-enthusiasts’ ourselves. But the historical-material imperative compels us to take the newness of the posthuman challenge seriously and to a certain extent, literally. Shakespeare ‘after’ humanism is still humanist – maybe. But the challenge to the humanist tradition does not just stem from anti-humanist theory, it also lies in ‘post-, de-, super-, trans-’ etc. humanizing tendencies *within* technoscience and late capitalist humanity itself. In this sense, Shakespeare is not only ‘after’ humanism, he is also ‘after’ technology and, ultimately, ‘after’ the human as such.

### *Shakespeare ‘After’ Technology*

In many ways, the posthuman gestures towards technology and cultural change that, if not driven by, at least is inseparable from technological and scientific development. However, that this is no one-way street is demonstrated by a number of the contributions to this volume, which take their cue from inspiring and provocative work like Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday’s *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (2000) or Arthur F. Kinney’s *Shakespeare’s Webs: Networks of Meaning in Renaissance Drama* (2004) or Adam Max Cohen’s *Shakespeare and Technology: Dramatizing Early Modern Technological Revolutions* (2006). Shakespeare’s own awareness of technological

change in early modern culture takes place at a time when modern knowledge partitioning was not yet in place and thus interdisciplinarity or rather ‘transdisciplinarity’ made a dialogue between early scientific investigation and humanistic study relatively simple. There was also no modern sense of technology but merely mechanical practices, tools, new instruments, machines and artefacts or ‘techniques.’ That technical and machinic metaphors are present in Shakespeare’s works is no secret; but their ambiguity is also a reflection of a developing general cultural ambiguity towards the machinic human ‘other.’ Especially in such a mechanical environment as the theater the mixing of human and machine, and thus early modern forms of ‘cyborgization,’ are never far away – a process that Cohen names ‘turning tech,’ by which he means the ‘description of the individual as a machine’ (Cohen, 2006, p. 17). If the early modern age is the beginning of the *homo mechanicus*, and if early modern literature gives rise to something like the literary cyborg (cf. Sawday “‘Forms Such as Never Were in Nature’: the Renaissance Cyborg”, in Fudge, Gilbert & Wiseman, 1999, pp. 171-195), there is also ambiguity about the distinction between nature and culture, the boundaries of the body, biology and spirituality, materialism and idealism, emotion and cognition and the role and nature of affect. No wonder that cognitive and neurosciences are increasingly called upon to explain the cognitive cultural ‘map’ of the early modern mind and ‘Shakespeare’s brain’ (cf. Crane, 2000). All these are attempts to demonstrate the continued if not increasing relevance of Shakespeare and the privileged relationship between early and late modern culture. One useful analogy here might be the image of ‘retrofitting,’ in the sense of creating an adaptability between old and new (technologies, and by analogy cultures and their readings) which thus represent a kind of reinforcing and bridging continuity. *Posthumanist Shakespeares* is therefore also

about ‘retrofitting’ the early modern in this sense – combining technological change with continuity and cultural ‘ecology.’ Links are forged between the ‘first age of print’ and that which presents itself as maybe the last age of print with its transition to digital and digitalized cultures and their respective major conceptual reorientations.

As Rhodes and Sawday put it:

The computer, through its possibilities for interactivity, ‘play’ and the creativity of hypertext, is now rapidly undoing that idealization of stability [underpinning the age of print], and returning us to a kind of textuality which may have more in common with the pre-print era. (2000, pp. 11-12)

Even though the Shakespearean text will undoubtedly survive into the digital age, the idea and the available technologies relating to text and textuality (cf. the wonderful French phrase *traitement de texte*) – text, which itself, as Graham Holderness reminds us, is in its irreducible multiplicity a piece of technology (2003) – will change, have already changed the practice of textual editing and literary criticism. It is thus becoming increasingly difficult to disentangle ‘pastism’ (historicism), ‘presentism’ and ‘futurism’ in Shakespeare studies after technology.

### *Shakespeare ‘After’ the Human*

Ultimately, the effect of the collapsing of the humanist tradition and the radical opening of the human and its meaning is motivated ethically, hence the major focus on non-human others, the inhuman, the subhuman but also the superhuman. On the

one hand, there is the ‘greening’ of Shakespeare through various forms of ecocriticism; on the other hand, the postanthropocentric thrust of posthumanist theory that concerns itself with all kinds of nonhuman others also radicalizes the so-called ‘animal question.’ Gabriel Egan explains his motives in writing *Green Shakespeare* as an attempt to ‘show that our understanding of Shakespeare and our understanding of Green politics have overlapping concerns’ (Egan, 2006, p. 1). The increasing and concretizing threat of environmental disaster, questions of sustainability and the contemporary critique of ‘speciesism’ actually go hand in hand. What do early modern forms of ‘ecology’ and attitudes towards nature and animals have to teach late modern Green politics and animal rights movements? There is a new organicism, vitalism and ideas of interconnectedness between nature and culture, humans and their environment, networks and nodes, that promises new forms of interdisciplinarity between the sciences and the humanities outside or ‘after’ the humanist tradition, producing new, posthuman(ist) forms of subjectivity. To what extent can the beginning of modernity and humanism be helpful in making choices for us who find ourselves at the other end of five hundred years of modernity and humanism? Again, the notion of retrofitting seems appropriate here:

Shakespeare’s plays show an abiding interest in what we now identify as positive-negative-feedback loops, cellular structures, the uses and abuses of analogies between natural and social order, and in the available models for community. Characters in Shakespeare display an interest in aspects of this natural world that are relevant for us, and if we take that interest seriously we find that there is nothing childlike or naïve about their concerns. (Egan, 2006, p. 50)

In analogy with the indeterminacy of nature and culture in early modern times, there is also a 'space of ontological indeterminacy' between humans and animals, according to Bruce Boehrer (2002, p. 1). It is worth studying the 'distinctions between human and animal nature,' which are 'central to western cultural organization..., help to license particular forms of material and economic relations to the natural world;... help to suggest and reinforce parallel social distinctions on the levels of gender, ethnicity, race, and so on' historically (3), but it is also necessary to draw parallels with contemporary forms of anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism and speciesism. In *Perceiving Animals* (2000), Erica Fudge argues for this kind of continuity, this retrofitting of early modern and late modern speciesism. The 'degradation of humanity in the face of the beast in early modern thought is a recurring theme,' she explains (Fudge, 2000, p. 10); but anthropomorphism allows for both, sentimental humanization of animals and animalization of humans. If this mutual dependence of the violent and speciesist process of 'becoming human and 'becoming animal' is a major concern in early modern culture and in early modern humanism, then it increasingly comes back to haunt a late modern, posthumanist culture, in which the boundaries between human and animal (including all those between humans and their other related significant others which have played and continue to play a role in the process of shoring up and guaranteeing the humanity of the human: the monster, the machine etc.) once again, this time through bio- and other technologies, have become, to use Donna Haraway's word, 'leaky.' 'Thinking with animals' becomes thus a major task, since 'ignoring the presence of animals in the past [as in the present or the future one might add] is ignoring a significant feature of human life' ((Fudge, 2004, p. 3). Nonhuman animals can be agents in human culture, they can also be subjects: 'humans cannot think about themselves – their cultures, societies, and political

structures – without recognizing the importance of nonhumans to themselves, their cultures, societies, and political structures’ (4). *Posthumanist Shakespeares* means therefore also sharing in this ‘dislocation of the human’ brought about by the return of its nonhuman others and the possible parallel between the challenges to early modern and late modern humanism, where, as Donna Haraway (1985) puts it, the distinctions between human and animal, and human and machine have become blurred (Haraway, 2004, p. 10).

### *We Have Never Been Human*

*Posthumanist Shakespeares* – the phrase thus ultimately opens up several lines of questioning: what would it mean to read Shakespeare no longer ‘as’ humanist – neither as a humanist author nor from a humanist (reader’s) standpoint? Who, in fact, is the ‘real’ posthumanist, Shakespeare or ‘we’? Two humanisms are thus in doubt – Shakespeare’s and ours. Doubting, after a period of prolonged theoretical anti-humanism, can also mean several things: one the one hand, it can simply be a rather stubborn confirmation of humanism, a return to ‘common sense’ in seemingly post-theoretical times (cf. Bloom, Wells). It can also lead to a reevaluation of humanism, in the form of a critical return to and an affirmation of the radical potential within humanism itself (cf. Said, Mousley). But it may also be understood as an attempt to read Shakespeare through all sorts of figurations of the ‘inhuman’ (either in its late modern, technological forms, like cyborgs, machines, computers etc., or in its more timeless, even premodern or ‘amodern’ appearances, like ghosts, monsters, animals, etc.). Finally, critical posthumanism can also work its way back to Shakespeare and

construct genealogies between his work and a perceived or real current shift away from a humanist knowledge paradigm, the possible advent of a new ‘episteme,’ in which the human again becomes a radically open category, for the promise of a postanthropocentric, posthumanist future.

### *The Contributions*

The contributions to this volume take up this variety of angles in their respective readings of Shakespeare’s plays and Shakespeare criticism. While the first part (‘Reading Shakespeare “After” Humanism’) groups five essays that reflect on the legacy of humanist and anti-humanist criticism, the four essays in the second part (‘“Posthumanist” Readings’) contain readings of individual plays that at the same time critically engage with some ‘clichés’ found in posthumanist theory.

It is of course no surprise that some Shakespearean plays figure more prominently than others. Inevitably, *Hamlet* with its insistent questioning of ‘man’ takes centerstage, and we have therefore grouped the three essays on *Hamlet* in this volume in a separate section (‘Hamlet, Posthumanist?’) to emphasize the specific affinity between posthumanist approaches and both *Hamlet* the character and the play. The volume concludes with a ‘post-posthumanist’ afterword, co-written by Adam Max Cohen and David B. King. Sadly, this afterword has by now indeed become a posthumous contribution. Adam Max Cohen here first narrates his experience of ‘forced illiteracy’ due to the blindness induced by a brain tumor. This tumor has since claimed his life.

The first chapter by Neil Rhodes helps to contextualize the shift from humanist to anti-humanist and posthumanist Shakespeare criticism by redrawing the discussion around and ‘invention’ of ‘human nature’ and the ‘science of man’ in the Eighteenth Century (and the Scottish Enlightenment in particular). It highlights the importance of Henry Kames’s role in establishing a ‘humanist’ Shakespeare at the heart of English Studies. Rainer Emig uses Shakespeare’s late plays (*Timon of Athens* and *Pericles* in particular) to problematize Greenblatt’s notion of (Renaissance) self-fashioning by focusing on the complexity of Timon and Pericles as characters who turn themselves into ‘aliens’ and ‘disappointed’ humanists. Their misanthropy unsettles the foundations of humanist sociality and shows that ‘a thinking through and thinking beyond the supposed essentials of an emerging Humanism already and exactly at the time when these were first formulated.’

Bruce Bohrer builds on his influential work on early modern animal studies and demonstrates ‘the role played by the species divide in the development of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century models of literary character.’ He thus approaches ‘Shakespearean posthumanism from the perspective of animal-studies.’ Shakespeare’s hinge-like position at the threshold of modernity preserves a privileged relation to the ‘prehuman’ which forms a point of contact with the ‘post-anthropocentric’ posthuman. This is also the argument of Stefan Herbrechter’s detailed critique of Harold Bloom’s *Shakespeare – The Invention of the Human*. Against humanism and anti-humanism he argues for a ‘critical posthumanism’ which would ‘need to overcome the ideological confrontation between liberal humanists and cultural materialists mindful of both the historical context and current cultural change.’ Shakespeare’s work in general, and *The Merchant of Venice* in particular, can thus be understood to be formally and historically located ‘at a certain turning point within the

process of “post/humanization” in which Shakespeare is both ‘the possible starting point of a certain humanism’ and already anticipates ‘its decline and ultimate ruin.’

Gabriel Egan, in his contribution, shows that the anti-cartesianism of the ‘cognitive revolution’ in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries had been anticipated by Shakespeare in a complication of the distinction between the inanimate, the merely living (‘machine-matter’) and the ‘immaterial’ mind, the ‘hard distinction’ between ‘mechanical’ and ‘living’ processes, which, according to Egan, favors an eco-critical reading of the ‘dramatizations of self-regulation’ (homeostasis) in Shakespeare and early modern culture.

Even though the tragedies and the problem plays figure prominently in this volume, there are also some less predictable choices. The second part starts with Mareile Pfannebecker’s discussion of the ‘early modern cyborg’ theme. While Coriolanus’s character might look like an obvious choice for this form of reading, the essay breaks new ground by addressing ‘how the theme of obstinacy in *Coriolanus* is relevant to human politics and a politics of the human.’ Andy Mousley’s contribution is an account of ‘the humanisms and versions of the human in contention in *King Lear*’ and argues against the excesses of posthumanist scepticism and its lack of ‘care’ for the human. Mark Robson’s revaluation of *Measure for Measure* focuses on the potential within the phrase ‘measure for measure’ for a posthumanist politics as for example in Derrida, Rancière and Nancy.

The ‘Hamlet, Posthumanist?’ part contains three essays that reengage with the philosophical problematics of ontology ‘after’ the ‘ends of man’ debate provoked by Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Gilles Deleuze and others in the 1980s. Laurent Milesi uses Derrida’s reading of *Hamlet* to show that posthumanist theory underestimates the extent of Heidegger’s and Derrida’s (and by implication

Shakespeare's) earlier critique of humanism and anthropocentrism. Hamlet's "posthumanity" (both posthumous and posthuman) stems from the "non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present", Milesi argues, slightly repositioning Derrida's well-known verdict on Hamlet's 'hauntology.'

Marie-Dominique Garnier's essay is a questioning of the human/posthuman pair in the context of a fireworks of seriously playful transformations of Hamlet's 'name' and the play's 'lexical encounters.' Ivan Callus focuses on the Graveyard Scene in *Hamlet* and argues against the dangers of the repression of death and finitude in some posthumanist (or 'transhumanist') scenarios. As Callus explains: 'The graveyard scene seems to predestine the reminder that as we move towards the posthuman death pulls us back'. To the extent that arguably the 'most clichéd scene' in *Hamlet*, maybe in all of Shakespeare, reminds us, 'humans', of our 'familiarity with death,' it is almost enough to 'allay posthumanism's fondest hopes.' What *Posthumanist Shakespeares* thus reminds us of is this curious 'yearning for the human' that always anticipates but never reaches its very essence of being 'posthum(an)ous.'

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