

## Shakespeare Ever After: Posthumanism and Shakespeare

Shakespeare's plays anticipate the impending displacement and disappearance of their world, and they solicit the reciprocal recognition that our world, likewise, conceals the evolving past of a prospective present. Their aim is to project us forward in time to a point where we can look back on Shakespeare's age and our own as the prehistory of an epoch whose advent humanity still awaits. (Ryan, 2001: 199)

### *Shakespeare "After" Shakespeare*

Shakespeare, like the sun, is a metaphor; he always means something other than he is. (Scott Wilson, 1996: 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: 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-stylised radicalism of the new dissidents sees discontinuity, 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, namely that the anti-humanism of theory has always relied in fact on a caricature of (“liberal”) humanism in order to detract from the fact that the humanities have always depended and thrived on dissensus rather than enforced 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 this venerable humanist institution called “University” – as thriving on dissensus rather than agreement. And it is true that some of the antihumanist stances of theory today, upon re-reading, appear somewhat “naïf” and, its use of politicised jargon, almost feels like agit-prop. But the idea that a return to some idealised “radical” humanist tradition might be possible sounds equally unconvincing, simply because its institutional support, the cherished humanist university, ceased to exist at the same time as theory, cultural studies and the new interdisciplinarity became all the rage. The university (and the humanities) have been “in ruins” ever since (cf. Readings, 1997) and merely survive in their neoliberal, managerialised, “posthistorical” and “postcultural” form. And with them ceased not only the consensus of a “unified discourse” (for example in Shakespeare criticism), but also, in a sense, a certain “Shakespeare” as such. As Scott Wilson wrote, in 1996, Shakespeare has become a mere icon, an empty metaphor, a commodity and an “object of an institutionally channelled desire” (Wilson, 1996: 129). Hence also Wilson’s conclusion that whatever remains of Shakespeare is 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, this heterology can still be recuperated by a new form of humanism, which is of course one possible reading of the phrase “posthumanism and Shakespeare” in the title of this essay. Shakespeare may have become a “collapsing star” and a “black hole” (following Gary 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: 130-31); but the human and humanist urge of the Shakespeare scholar past, present and to come should never be underestimated. Shakespeare’s “solar unassailability” is unlikely to stop engulfing humanistic scholarly labour any time soon. So, what to do when humanism in its most antihumanist, political and theoretical form becomes a cynical “reflex”? If this sounds almost like an existentialist dilemma, it probably is, and thus the call for “authentic” action cannot be far off. We know, thanks to Jean-Paul 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 have been proliferating ever since and while even these readings are not immune to a recuperation by humanism

they can nevertheless no longer be called entirely human(ist). One might therefore suggest, they are, for want of a better word, “posthumanist”.

However, posthumanist cannot imply a simple turning away, neither from humanism nor from theory, but rather a “working through” or a “deconstruction of humanism” for which something like theory is still very much needed. It also is no turning away from historicism and materialism, but it is a historicism and materialism adapted to the changed, namely “posthuman condition”. One aspect of this condition “after” humanism is the lost consensus, the lost universalism, concerning history and culture. The relevance of Shakespeare after humanism it seems lies in the combination of “presentism”, strategic anachronism, even futurism, which are expressed in Linda Charnes’s well-known essay “We were never early modern” (2006: 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 or moral 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 one might claim, humanism) remains a “virtuality”, 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: 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: 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 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 probably mellowed somewhat as a result. 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 around the notion of “humanism”, and around the relationship between literature and life. Humanism, having been one of the main targets of theory, continues to be the main battleground,

this time, however, in its pluralised form: i.e. humanisms. A new dissensus about the past, present and future of humanism and its subject – the human – emerges, as a result of new perceived 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 this 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 defamiliarise, detach and surprise. The phrase “posthumanism and Shakespeare” does not merely highlight the resurfacing of the human and humanism in their fragilised forms. In fact, it is rather a form of care for the human, humanness, humanity that should motivate a posthumanist shift in Shakespeare criticism. It embraces the new plurality and the new questions that are put to humanism, by anti-humanism, posthumanism, even transhumanism alike: questions of human survival in late-modern, global, techno-scientific, hypercapitalist societies with their technocultures. Above all, it confronts humanism with its “specters” – the inhuman, the superhuman, the nonhuman in all their invented, constructed or actual forms. It is a strategic move away from many anthropocentric premises, so that the human can no longer be taken for granted, humanity as a universal value is no longer self-legitimizing, and humanism as a reflex or self-reflex cannot be trusted. To remain “critical”, nevertheless, in a humanistic, or “philological” (cf. Said, 2004) sense in these times of plurality and risk, means to re-read, to read carefully but also

differently. While there is of course no agreement about what exactly needs to be done and what role Shakespeare (and literature) can play, in the face of this uncertainty, we have been promoting the label “critical posthumanism” 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 in this context are: is there life beyond Shakespeare? What Shakespeare for the age of life sciences? What does Shakespeare tell us about our post-anthropocentric or maybe 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 more relaxed and open-minded theoretical approach that values the lessons learned from the theory wars and subsequent wars, including the so-called science 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, the question of the human and the question of the relationship between literature and life come back to haunt the humanities. A phrase like “posthumanism and Shakespeare” therefore signals to everyone interested in literature, culture and the sciences that by referring to the current climate as posthumanist, one should not read “dehumanising” but simply that the human and humanity are in transition or transformation. Humanism – the discourse explaining and legitimating 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 anxieties and desires that this change and uncertainty cause reopen, for Shakespeare studies, the question of the bard’s, or to borrow Linda

Charnes's phrase, "CyberBard's" (Charnes, 1996: 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) in any of the related counter-positions. It is in any case not a question of polarisation between pro- and anti-humanists that is needed in order to continue to make Shakespeare and the early modern period relevant to our arguably 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, or postmodern, on the other, or between early humanism and a humanism that may be on its last legs, awaiting either its renewal, its working-through, its transformation, or, indeed, its end. This therefore opens onto what is meant by posthumanism. Posthumanism, as we understand it, 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-conceptualisations influenced by these outlooks – among

them the possibility that Shakespeare may 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 one needs to 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: 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 politicised 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 "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 "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 Shakespearean 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 Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness. (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 liberal humanism: an aestheticism that makes moral political (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 or relativism turn to quite unlikely allies, like evolution, biology and genetics. Quite surprisingly, 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 or neuroscience. It is certainly true that in the light of technoscientific change literary criticism cannot stand still, but 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) is 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). Ironically, however, this project might in the end 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, it might be preferable to imagine a different, namely critical posthumanist, materialism which does engage with technological challenges not by comparing concepts of "human nature" but, precisely, by denaturing the human. One simply does not need the mystification of a phrase like "human nature" to explain what constitutes our species' 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-anthropocentralise" 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, or metaphors. A "critical" posthumanism is neither turning its back 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 humours, 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" (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 contextualised 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 than showing 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, or indeed renewed, intensified, modulated etc. *relevance* to our own, equally constructed, stance regarding *our* present time? One should 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, and towards a constructed human nature, as probable 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:

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 applauds

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”; 16, 17) – which was and continues to be the justified target of theoretical scepticism – and “other humanisms”, especially existentialist forms that do not presuppose 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 is, existentialism, is a humanism, because it starts from a radicalised 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*”. Reading mainstream humanism back into the Renaissance results, according to Mousley, in seeing Shakespeare as “a bridge between Renaissance humanism and modern literary humanism”, who “broadens and deepens the Renaissance humanist preoccupation with ‘how to live’”, and “who intensifies the existential significance of otherwise abstract ideas and precepts by converting them into vividly realised forms of life” (21). In short, Shakespeare was both, a sceptic and a sage, a kind of ironic humanist, and Mousley, as a result, 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, it is hoped, may help us to “become human” (30), after all.

Mousley, in what one might call his “yearning for the human” – paraphrasing Akeel Bilgrami’s introduction to Edward Said’s *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004) – is following in the footsteps of eminent and critical humanists like Said, for whom humanism is first of all, literally speaking, self-criticism. And this means, of course, that the 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 might seem, the implied radical openness of the human and the idea of thinking the human “at the limits”, remains a high-risk strategy. Humanism has never been able to guarantee anything, and even Shakespeare as “life coach” cannot perform miracles. There have always been humans who yearned for something entirely other than (being) human – and currently their number seems to be on the rise again. One can yearn for God, or spiritual community, but also for the machine, artificial intelligence, or a transhuman successor species, in short, (self)transcendence in any form. This is why merely radicalising the critical potential that undoubtedly lies in some forms of humanism (cf. Halliwell & Mousley, 2003) is probably not enough and one should instead insist on using the admittedly awkward “posthumanist” label, at the risk of being mistaken for a “techno-enthusiast”. But the historical-material imperative compels one to take the newness of the posthuman challenge seriously and to a certain extent, literally. Shakespeare after humanism is still humanist – that maybe true, but the challenge to the humanist tradition does not just stem from anti-humanist theory, it also lies in “post-, de-, super-, trans-” etc. humanising tendencies *within* modernity and thus at the heart of technoscience and late capitalist humanity. In this sense, Shakespeare might not be merely “after” humanism, but he might also be “after” technology and, ultimately, “after” the human as such.

## *Shakespeare “After” Technology*

...a close study of Shakespeare’s plays indicates that the metaphorical or symbolic transformation of the human being into a technological implement [“turning tech”] was well under way in the early modern period. (Cohen, 2006: 18)

In many ways, the posthuman gestures towards technology and cultural change, which, if not driven by, are at least inseparable from, technological and scientific development. However, it is equally clear that this is no one-way street. One could take one’s cue from inspiring and provocative work by Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday in *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (2000) or in Arthur F. Kinney’s *Shakespeare’s Webs: Networks of Meaning in Renaissance Drama* (2004), or in 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 work is obvious; 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 theatre, the mixing of human and machine, and thus

early modern forms of “cyborgisation”, are never far away – a process that Cohen names “turning tech”, by which he means the “description of the individual as a machine” (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 (as Sawday claims, in Fudge, Gilbert & Wiseman (1999): 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. 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 represents a kind of reinforcing and bridging continuity. One further meaning of “Shakespeare and posthumanism” could be: 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 digitalised culture and the major conceptual reorientations this might bring. As Rhodes & 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: 11-12)

Even though the Shakespearean text will undoubtedly survive and even thrive in the digital age, the idea and the available technologies relating to text and textuality (cf. the wonderful French phrase for “word processing”, *traitement de texte*, or the more functionalist German *Textverarbeitung*) – text, Graham Holderness reminds us, is itself, 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*

...what we are living through now is not some (post)modern collapse of Western subjectivity but another mutation in its enduring dynamic.  
(Dollimore: 1998: 271)

Ultimately, the effect of the collapsing of the humanist tradition and the radical opening-up of the human and its meaning, is prompted by certain ethical questions, which explains 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, there is the post-anthropocentric thrust of posthumanist theory that concerns itself with all kinds of nonhuman others, especially animals. Gabriel Egan explains his motives in writing *Green Shakespeare* (2006) by claiming to “show that our understanding of Shakespeare and our understanding of Green politics have overlapping concerns” (1). The increasingly urgent and concrete

threat of environmental disaster, questions of sustainability and the contemporary critique of “speciesism” actually go hand in hand. What can early modern forms of “ecology” and attitudes towards nature and animals 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 promise 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: 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: 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 and anthropocentrism, speciesism and humanism. 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 (10); but anthropomorphism allows for both, the sentimental humanisation of animals and the animalisation 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, and posthumanist culture, in which the boundaries between human and animal (like all those boundaries between humans and their significant others, which have played and continue to play a role in the process of shoring up and guaranteeing the humanity of the human, e.g. the monster, the machine etc.) once again, this time through bio- and other technologies, have become porous. “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: 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). The phrase “posthumanism and Shakespeare” therefore also speaks to 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 “leaky” (Haraway, 2004: 10).

*Conclusion, or We Have Never Been Human*

Even a presumably postmodernist – if not post-humanist – vision... harbors a deeply humanistic yearning insofar as it underscores the necessity of narrative memory in the creation and maintenance of subjectivity. (Charnes, 2000: 202-203)

“Posthumanism and Shakespeare” – the phrase thus 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’s standpoint? Who, in fact, is the “real” posthumanist, Shakespeare or “us”? Two humanisms are here in doubt – Shakespeare’s and ours. Doubting, after a period of prolonged theoretical anti-humanism, can also mean several things: on the one hand, it can simply be a rather stubborn confirmation of humanism, a return to “common sense” in 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 ancient, premodern or rather “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 post-anthropocentric and posthumanist, but hopefully not posthuman, future.

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Stefan Herbrechter

*Coventry University*