

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO LITERATURE AND THE
POSTHUMAN

The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman is the first work of its kind to gather diverse critical treatments of the posthuman and posthumanism together in a single volume. Seventeen scholars from six different countries address the historical and esthetic dimensions of posthuman figures alongside posthumanism as a new paradigm in the critical humanities. The three parts and their chapters trace the history of the posthuman in literature and other media, including film and video games, and identify major political, philosophical, and techno-scientific issues raised in the literary and cinematic narratives of the posthuman and posthumanist discourses. The volume surveys the key works, primary modes, and critical theories engaged by depictions of the posthuman and discussions about posthumanism.

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POSTHUMAN

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PREFACE

Literature, Posthumanism, and the Posthuman

The Literary Posthuman

In 1977, literary scholar Ihab Hassan published a scholarly article in the form of a performance script, “Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes.”¹ This piece is often cited as the original announcement within the critical humanities of the advent of a “posthumanist culture.” Describing the ways that the sciences and technologies of that moment were breaking up the engrained image of “man” while prompting renewed flights of Promethean questing, Hassan’s remarks are worth recalling from the vantage of 40 years’ hindsight: “At present, posthumanism may appear variously as a dubious neologism, the latest slogan, or simply another image of man’s recurrent self-hate. Yet posthumanism may also hint at a potential in our culture, hint at a tendency struggling to become more than a trend . . . We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism” (843). Moreover, engaging with supercomputer HAL from Stanley Kubrick’s movie *2001 – A Space Odyssey* (1968), he adds that “the human brain itself does not really know whether it will become obsolete – or simply need to revise its self-conception. . . . Will artificial intelligences supersede the human brain, rectify it, or simply extend its powers? We do not know. But this we do know: artificial intelligences, from the humblest calculator to the most transcendent computer, help to transform the image of man, the concept of the human. They are agents of a new posthumanism” (846). Registering the critique of the humanist subject already extant in structuralism as well as the appearance of the cyborg as a cultural figure, Hassan’s early survey of the posthumanist landscape remains entirely serviceable today.

Yet the passages I have cited come forward not in any ponderous manner but as dramatized in a comedic vein of “postmodern performance” (831), to wit, a “University Masque” whose characters are Pretext, Mythotext, Text, Heterotext, Context, Metatext, Posttext, and Paratext. In the decades that have elapsed since then, in overall fulfillment of Hassan’s predictions, the interrogation of humanism’s long reign has indeed become a new paradigm within the humanities – a discourse we must still “helplessly call posthumanism” as an umbrella term covering diverse approaches and viewpoints.

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Nonetheless, we do well to remember the humorous tonality – indeed, the audacious literary styling – of Hassan’s seminal cultural meditation. Even while critical attention and philosophical treatment have been extracting the more sober lineaments of an ever-enlarging set of posthumanist discourses, literary treatments cannot help but turn the image of the posthuman into narrative play, into performance pieces of one sort or another.

The risible side of the literary posthuman is nicely captured in Mark McGurl’s 2012 essay “The Posthuman Comedy.”² McGurl notes that the posthuman image is cultivated most vigorously in literary forms that high humanist taste once derided, for which one uses “the term genre fiction (its science fiction and horror variants in particular) . . . those literary forms willing to risk artistic ludicrousness in their representation of the inhumanly large and long” (538). In our own cultural era, when the claims of posthumanism are being taken increasingly seriously, the posthuman comedy arises as “scientific knowledge of the spatiotemporal vastness and numerousness of the nonhuman world becomes visible as a formal, representational, and finally existential problem” (537). Ironically enough, it is we humans who are turning the tables, one after the other, on our own cherished pretensions, for instance, to personal autonomy, to impersonal objectivity, to collective significance in the cosmos. Ethically speaking, to practice posthumanism means to relinquish claims of spiritual absolution from natural contingencies. The comic tonality of the posthuman image results when such ontological decentering of the human is depicted in a bathetic light, as a sort of pratfall deflating human affectations or ostentations, especially by foregrounding abiding human affinities with the inorganic machine or the non-human animal.

McGurl’s distinction between the posthuman comedy’s first and second acts helpfully maps the modern and contemporary fields of discussion traversed by this *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. Spanning the modernist sensibility – references are to Henri Bergson’s 1901 treatise on comedy and Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 *Modern Times* – and connecting it to the post-World War II era of the cyborg, the posthuman comedy’s first act is the one “in which we realize that we cannot be understood apart from our technological prostheses” (549). The second act then follows the strong recent turn in posthumanist discourse from the machinic posthuman to the planetary nonhuman:

While mechanism in the modern technological sense is one key to comedy, even more basic are the mechanisms of nature, the entire realm of natural processes that enclose, infiltrate, and humiliate human designs. The second act of the posthuman comedy is in this sense a turn (and continual return) to naturalism, one in which nature, far from being dominated by technology, *reclaims*

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technology as a human *secretion*, something human beings under the right conditions naturally produce and use. (550)

McGurl's cosmic comedy unveils the profound naturalistic currents driving posthumanist discourse at the moment, coming in on waves of natural science channeled through quantum theory, symbiotic theory, complexity theory, and systems theory.³ These currents have converged to describe life altogether as a "secretion" of the material-energetic cosmos as that has coalesced in the Earth system. In their term of evolutionary emergence and transformation, *all* living beings "secrete technology" as a matter of course – from laterally transferred genetic packets distributing metabolic capacities among microbes to metazoan acquisitions of bones, beaks, eyes, wings, and fingers.⁴ The pervasive preoccupation with hybridity in both the profuse productions of the posthuman imaginary and the diverse discourses of posthumanism are repercussions of these recognitions. Nature at all scales is penetrating the prior boundaries we thought to place around the human essence.

The Posthumanist Academy

The past decade has witnessed growing numbers of seminars and conferences dedicated to topics such as "The Nonhuman," "Radical Methodologies for the Posthumanities," and "Approaching Posthumanism and the Posthuman." Special issues on posthumanist topics have appeared in journals such as *Biography*, *Cultural Critique*, the *European Journal of English Studies*, *Postmedieval*, *Subjectivity*, and *Subject Matters*. Moreover, curricula in academic departments across the world testify to the development of posthumanism into a substantial and vibrant topic crossing many fields. Literary critics and historians have brought a range of theoretical and methodological paradigms to their examination of the posthuman, contributing to the development of the humanities into the posthumanities.

Posthumanism comprises responses by writers, artists, and scholars to the general intellectual ecology of contemporary modernity, reactions and engagements symptomatic of a growing awareness that the human (as "we" have known and conceptualized it for at least 500 years) is an incoherent concept. However, the various doctrines of posthumanism may be distinguished in principle from the many notions of the posthuman. We have employed the term "posthuman," poised ambiguously between noun and adjective, for expressions such as the cybernetic posthuman, the posthuman subject, posthuman bodies, the posthuman condition, posthuman culture, or posthuman society. Here the term refers to images and figurations in literary and cultural productions, in various genres and periods, of states that lie

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before, beyond, or after the human, or into which the human blurs when viewed in its essential hybridity.

Instances of the posthuman present an image, extant or speculative, coupling the human to some nonhuman order of being. This formula is epitomized by the figure of the cyborg, in which a cybernetic or computational technology is spliced to an organic body. The phenomenal fecundity of the cyborg imaginary has been vigorously developed in narrative fictions, in particular, in science fiction and cyberpunk literature. The cybernetic posthuman is sometimes portrayed as an inevitable future, or in a manner continuous with transhumanist visions. The apotheosis of prosthetics would be the downloading of the human mind into a computer – a posthuman scenario developed in earnest 30 years ago in the roboticist Hans Moravec's *Mind Children* and brought to the screen in movies like *Transcendence*. However, these and other related fantasies are better termed instances of retrohumanism. Transhumanist prostheses are skeuomorphs of humanism, vestiges of heroic aspirations that preserve rather than challenge the Cartesian mind–body split so definitive of Western modernity and the Eurocentric myth of progress as technoscientific development.

Alongside such historical and esthetic dimensions of the posthuman imaginary one can also track the reflective and critical discourses of posthumanist philosophies. For instance, drawing on the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's notion of supplementarity – based in the first instance on the way that writing can be considered a *technical supplement* to the capacity for spoken language – one can expand the range of phenomena by which posthumanism observes the inhuman or nonhuman other inhabiting the ostensibly human and so deconstructing the humanist concept of the human. The digital prosthesis is only one among the many forms of the nonhuman supplement. In contrast to images of the cybernetic posthuman as trans- or super-human, posthumanist discourses promote neither the transcendence of the human nor the negation of humanism. Rather, critical posthumanisms engage with the humanist legacy to critique anthropocentric values and worldviews. Posthumanist scholars have brought attention to the potential as well as the fault lines of humanist knowledge production while also problematizing the narrative of the progressive trajectory of the posthuman.⁵

Posthumanism questions how relations between humans and nonhumans operate within the environments where they are assembled. What forms of political agency, what codes of ethics, but also what aesthetic principles would be needed to arrive at a posthumanist world? It is certainly no coincidence that such questions are being discussed today, that the figurations of the posthuman mentioned above proliferate in our time, or that the venerable traditions of humanism are now under challenge. In the face of global threats (ecocides, climate change, human and nonhuman extinctions) unfolding in real time, posthumanism is a historically specific response to our present moment and currently possible forms of futurity. However, neither the

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current situation nor this line of critical thinking nor its esthetic reworkings have suddenly emerged *ex nihilo*. The humanist era itself has never been a homogenous and fully consensual affair. If the limits of the human have always exercised both our thinking and our esthetic practices, then some aspects of what is now termed “posthumanism” and “the posthuman” go as far back as the beginning of the human itself.

The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman

Because figures of the posthuman have a long prehistory, the *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* begins with chapters on pre-modern literary periods. At issue is the extent of modern technology’s role in or responsibility for humanity’s becoming posthuman or posthumanist. This volume’s authors are skeptical of simple one-way links between the rapidly accelerating potential for radical technological modifications and the proliferation of posthuman figurations in literature, film, and philosophy. Rather, a current challenge for posthumanist thinking is to confront the specters of those premodern animals, gods, angels, monsters, and other real and conceptual entities that, in order to keep the human “proper,” humanist modernity had to expel. In doing so, we find that the prehistory of the posthuman underscores our evolutionary situation from its very beginning as inextricably bound up with the nonhuman, technical and otherwise. In the context of posthumanism and the posthuman, then, literature and fiction have always been privileged speculative discourses haunted by the ghosts of humans, nonhumans, and posthumans.

Part I: Literary Periods

The first section of the *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* presents a selected genealogy of the posthuman in literature from the Middle Ages to the present. Karl Steel’s chapter “Medieval” opens this volume with a meticulous posthumanist critique of pre-modern literature. Determining the medieval period’s dominant rules for being human clarifies these rules’ potential sites of failure. In Steel’s analysis, the dominant form of medieval humanism defined the human as “not animal,” as possessing a body destined for immortality, and as receiving supposedly unique endowments of language and free will. Steel interrogates each of these points of differentiation of the human in a set of texts – among them the life of Christina the Astonishing, Marie de France’s werewolf tale, “Bisclavret,” and *Barlam and Iosaphat*, the medieval Christian adaptation of the life of the Buddha – from which one conclusion is that “a great deal of medieval art and literature is indifferent or even hostile to any systematic effort to cordon humans off from other life.” Steel brings to light other literary instances that counter

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complacent humanist presumptions about medieval certainties, while also confronting assumptions about the body, the self, logocentrism, and choice that persist into the present day.

In Chapter 2, Kevin LaGrandeur notes how dramatic instances of artificial humanoid and intelligent systems in the early modern period anticipate the philosophical issues that cyborgs and intelligent networks like supercomputers bring up for the contemporary notion of the cybernetic posthuman. If humans have never really been autonomous entities, but rather have always been intimately linked and interdependent with their environments, then the seemingly modern idea of a reciprocal dependency upon mechanical devices is a variation of a much older theme. LaGrandeur traces precedents for the cybernetic intermingling of the categories of human and machine back to Aristotle's fourth-century BC treatise *Politics*. When the intelligent-servant networks presented by William Shakespeare's Prospero in *The Tempest* and Christopher Marlowe's protagonist in *Dr. Faustus* provide both an enhancement and a distribution of their makers' agencies, these dramatic inventions may be read as updating classical philosophy as well as anticipating twentieth-century developments. These early modern networks depict artificial magical proxies for their human makers, and so they can be seen not just as prosthetic supplements but as distributed systems extending their makers' selves, and thus as early modern predecessors to the contemporary posthuman subject.

Ron Broglio's treatment of the Romantic period recalls the critical tradition by which the Romantic artist no longer held up a neoclassical mirror to nature but rather expressed an inner state that illuminated from within the world around. Chapter 3 first explores how, in the canonical ode "Tintern Abbey," the archetypal early Romantic poet William Wordsworth constructs this privileged interiority of the humanist subject. Broglio develops this analysis in order to compare such poetic humanism to more recent critical models of Romantic agency. His posthumanist reading of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" opens the poem up "to a nonhuman phenomenology of wonder beyond fact, reason, and mimetic description." Additionally, he argues, in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley creates a monstrous being who moves from a blank slate to human skills, but who, when his creator and society reject him, abandons the interiority of the subject for posthuman modes of life and expression.

Jeff Wallace opens his discussion of modern literature in Chapter 4 by considering Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* and its fictional avatar, Zarathustra, especially in their powerful ideological ambivalence, as proto-modernist archetypes of posthumanism's philosophical and literary figures. Their shadows loom over literary modernism in the form of images and agents of higher consciousness, characters "beyond good and evil," and narratives that speculate on an overcoming of Western moralities, of "all too human" affective or cognitive limits. A succession of modernist artist-heroes

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forge themselves or their literary proxies as would-be transgressors of human norms: James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, Dora Marsden's *Freewoman* and *Egoist*, Ezra Pound's Vorticist persona, and Wyndham Lewis's Tarr. Yet alongside these heroic models of existential crisis, literary modernism also enacts other, quieter, yet equally radical posthumanist critiques of the boundaries between organic and nonorganic, abstract and concrete, self and other, a counter-movement for which the philosophical avatar is no longer Nietzsche but the British philosopher of science A. N. Whitehead. The writings of Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and Samuel Beckett also demonstrate how far literary modernism, in its reconfigurings of technology and animality, sketches out the artistic fault lines of the contemporary posthuman.

In Chapter 5, Stefan Herbrechter notes how in the latter half of the twentieth century, the time of the postmodern is also the time of the emergence of the posthuman as an explicit concept. Framing his discussion with passages from Graham Swift's 1991 novel *Waterland*, Herbrechter examines a series of postmodern theoretical texts, including Jean-François Lyotard's *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* and *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction*, and Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. Such works tend to splinter the humanist understanding of a unified self by, among other strategies, highlighting an existential or ontological plurality, a fragmentation of identity, and a breaking up of esthetic norms, by mixing "high" and "low" elements of culture, liberally citing intertextual allusions, breaking up narrative continuity and teleology, and celebrating radical plurality. Herbrechter's explorations of postmodern thought show the extent to which the postmodern literary condition is now in the process of opening up and arguably giving way to a number of contemporary trends that could represent the beginnings of a posthumanist literature.

Part II: Posthuman Literary Modes

While the motif of the posthuman can be tracked across literary history, in the present moment it also transforms the typology of traditional literary genres. This part looks at posthuman figuration through a variety of literary and post-literary modes. It starts with science fiction, then moves to analyses of other recent and more established genres. For example, autobiography is undergoing far-reaching changes as life-writers become less certain about what it means to be human and about where to locate the boundaries between human and nonhuman. Also, through graphic novels, cinematic narratives, and the merging of literature and digital affordances in areas like electronic literature, technological changes and new media are having a remediating effect on literary practice. In light of these developments, it may be that the traditional notion of literature itself as the humanist

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enterprise par excellence has to be revised. Part II offers a glimpse at what is happening to literature under posthumanist conditions.

Chapter 6 turns immediately to the genre most commonly associated with the literary posthuman, science fiction (SF). Lisa Yaszek and Jason W. Ellis catalog a wide range of science-fictional literary productions, characterizing the works of authors from Mary Shelley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, H. G. Wells, and Olaf Stapledon, to A. E. Van Vogt, Arthur C. Clarke, Theodore Sturgeon, Philip K. Dick, William Gibson, Joanna Russ, and Octavia Butler. Yaszek and Ellis's historical narrative observes that while proto SF authors of the nineteenth century responded to the emergence of modern scientific principles with stories about the dubious results of scientific experiments designed to alter human bodies and life processes, early and mid-twentieth-century SF writers responded to the ascendancy of engineering, eugenics, and cybernetics with stories about beings that were hybrids of organic and technological components. Since then, newer technologies of simulation and replication have engendered a wide range of stories about the meaning and value of posthumanity, especially when conceived, particularly by feminist authors, as a way to envision the overcoming of past and present prejudices and social injustices.

In Chapter 7, Kari Weil writes that while autobiography might be regarded as the most humanist of genres, one whose authors sought to depict the autonomy and agency of the self in relation to its world, the most important examples of the genre have always questioned what it means to be human. Just as the genre arose, with St. Augustine's *Confessions*, from a concern for self-divisions between soul and body, for connections to God and to sin, so do many contemporary life writings put in question where our humanness is located and to what extent we are able to discover it. Weil traces recent posthumanist contestations of autobiography's humanist subject, seeking to locate and describe a posthuman subject in recent autobiographical works in various narrative mediums by autistic author Temple Grandin, video artist Bill Viola, and writer-philosopher Hélène Cixous. "We might then come to think," she notes, "of a posthumanist autobiography as one that attempts to know or at least account for that in- or non-human out of and through which one comes to recognize and be recognized as a 'human' self."

In "Comics and Graphic Narratives," Lisa Diedrich explores how notions of posthuman subjectivity may be constituted by formal innovations in mingling verbal and visual expressions. These hybrid literary forms have become important resources for communicating about a range of ethical and esthetic issues in modes that purely textual literary genres cannot duplicate. Chapter 8 focuses on the hybrid subjects constituted by "graphic medicine," the comics and graphic narratives that have followed developments in medicine and the life sciences. Diedrich's examples of such graphic memoirs and narratives range from *Epileptic* by French cartoonist David B. and *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* by Ellen Forney to *Mom's Cancer*

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by Brian Fies and “Becoming Bone Sheep” by Martina Schlünder, Pit Arens, and Axel Gerhardt. For medical practitioners, patients, and families and caregivers dealing with suffering, illness and disability, such narratives help to rethink the boundaries of health, life and death, and not least of all, the status of the human in its entanglement with nonhuman, equally precarious and liminal lives.

In Chapter 9, Anneke Smelik examines popular images of the cyborg in science-fiction film. Unlike earlier figures of the mad scientist producing evil machines, the cinematic cyborg is no longer a figure that instills fear or anxiety. Instead, it points to profound desires for “posthumanization” through fusion with machines and their technologies. The scientific imaginary in cinema has stimulated the self-fashioning of posthuman bodies: in the digitized cinema of the last decade, the posthuman predicament takes the form of spectacular images expressing memories, emotions, and experiences in loops of time and space where present, past, and future are all connected. Smelik pays particular attention to recurrent cinematic tropes and techniques to register the psychic and somatic interiority of the cyborg body: subjective point-of-view (POV) shots, scenes of self-reparation before a mirror, emphasizing a machine agent’s capacity for self-reflection, and various technological mediations of memory, suggesting continuity between organic and machinic capacities to remember experiences, to forget, or to refashion self-recollections. The popularity of the cyborg body in science-fiction films has translated into cultural practices of enhancing and altering the human body by entering into intimate relationships with the machines themselves. These cinematic narratives have thus become a significant agency of “posting” the human.

It may be that literature and literary culture are not where the main action is today. Perhaps the world of letters is not straightforwardly reconcilable with the digital cultures that dominate the posthuman age. It might thus seem that there is no longer any place for discussions of “literariness” or the “singularity of literature” that once dominated literary theory. More fundamentally still, literature itself – as discourse, tradition, institution, practice, field of study and focus for diverse investments and passions, even now in this moment of its announced precariousness – is claimed to be losing much of its recognizable form, resonance, and valence. In other words, there is a congruence between the posthuman and the “post-literary.” In Chapter 10, “E-Literature,” Ivan Callus and Mario Aquilina explore such ideas. What does literature become within a posthuman imaginary, and what exactly would the “post-literary” be? Their chapter considers how the practice and theory of electronic literature appear to be more intuitively complementary with posthumanism than is the case with literature’s and criticism’s more orthodox guises, though it also cautions against overinterpretation of the seeming affinities between the posthuman and the post-literary.

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Part III: Posthuman Themes

The *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* concludes by identifying major philosophical, political, esthetic, and existential perspectives raised in fictional and other discourses about the posthuman. Following our literary genealogy of the posthuman and its main motifs, modes, and narrative mediums, Part III moves the discussion to primary issues of posthumanism, as these appear in literature and related discourses, themes constituting the major theoretical fields on which discussions about the posthuman are currently playing out. As a rethinking of the human, the nonhuman, and their shared environments, posthumanism is a key component of current trends in ecological theory, animal studies, social systems theory, gender and sexuality studies, object-oriented ontology and speculative realism, as well as in the ongoing debates on the nature of the “Anthropocene” and on the prospect of climate change radically transforming conditions for all life on Earth. Thus, we present chapters on the nonhuman, on posthumanist relationships with various forms of bodies, objects, and technologies, and on the shapes we can conceive of “post-anthropocentric” futures.

In Chapter 11, Bruce Clarke examines the category of the nonhuman in relation to the discourses of the posthuman and of posthumanism. Whereas the post- of the posthuman carries along the connotation of temporal relations, the non- of the nonhuman posits an atemporal relation between the human and its others. Nonetheless, the nonhuman also has a conceptual history that runs parallel to the emergence of the notion of the posthuman. Attention to the nonhuman is a factor in Bruno Latour’s distinction of the nonmodern from the postmodern, in Romanticism and the sublime in William Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, in natural selection in Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and the extraterrestrial alien in H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, in the modernist misanthropy in D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, and in Ronald Wright’s satirical near-future apocalyptic fantasy in *A Scientific Romance*. The present theoretical moment has crafted a positive concept of the nonhuman, a mobile signifier under which to place the multifarious ontological positivities currently imputed to the other-than-human.

Manuela Rossini argues in “Bodies” that within posthumanist discourse since the 1970s, the “nonhuman turn” is to a large extent accompanied by, if not the result of, a heightened critical attention to “corpo-reality,” the material being of the body. In the wake of feminist interventions and Michel Foucault’s work, the body acquired a history. It has since been analyzed as socially and culturally constructed in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and other categories of corporeal difference. More recently, however, such discursive constructionism has also been challenged, notably by feminist new materialism and other approaches that deprioritize language as what makes human beings special and superior. Within these new analytical frameworks, and influenced by quantum theory and the new

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biology, the (human) body is understood as a porous ecosystem, dependent on other organic as well as nonorganic and nonhuman matter and beings for its survival. The *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* altogether testifies to nature–culture entanglements and evolutionary “transcorporeality” across the species divide. Chapter 12 examines such material-semiotic figurations of posthuman bodies and embodiment in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century writings. It focuses in particular on French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s post-transplant essay “L’Intrus” (“The Intruder”) and Shelley Jackson’s widely discussed hypertext *Patchwork Girl* (a rewriting of *Frankenstein*). These discussions are intersected by brief references to Jackson’s *my body – a Wunderkammer*, her tattoo project “Skin,” her stories in *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, and her print novel *Half Life*, all paradigmatic examples of the posthuman *corpus* as always already intertextual and *in*-formed by its contingent “outsides.”

In Chapter 13, Ridvan Askin reviews how traditional humanist approaches to literature tend to overlook the status of the literary text as an object in its own right, and thus, how literature operates not by virtue of what it is *about* but by virtue of what it *is*. One route to a posthumanist theory of literature, he proposes, is via explorations of its ontological constitution, that is, its status as an *esthetic object* that acts upon us in cognitive and bodily ways. Drawing on the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky’s “Art as Device,” Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of becoming, and the recent resurgence of speculative thought and metaphysics in continental philosophy, Askin lays a groundwork for treating literary texts as lures for affective encounters, displacing attention from humanist subjectivities to nonhuman objectivities. With readings of Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* and Charles Olson’s “The Ring of” as test cases, Askin traces how literary texts qua esthetic objects constitute veritable speculative experiments in metaphysics.

R. L. Rutsky reminds us in “Technologies” that heightened literary engagement with the promises and threats of mechanical technologies go back at least to the eighteenth century if not to the Renaissance. More recently, from Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* to Richard Power’s *Galatea 2.2*, figurations of the posthuman have been depicting technological systems as living systems, oscillating between technologies that mimic human life and those that portray a mechanized inversion of human life. However, changing conceptions of the posthuman have emerged precisely in concert with corresponding changes in the conception of technology. New concepts of the posthuman have emerged as technologies have increasingly come to be seen more broadly as complex and interactive environments, populations, systems, networks, and processes, which need neither serve nor imitate human life. Alongside treatments of pertinent theoretical authors, including Bernard Stiegler, Herbert Marcuse, Guy Debord, and Donna Haraway, Rutsky assembles a wealth of literary and filmic examples in which conceptual changes toward technology are mirrored in posthuman images of altered human relations to the planetary

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environment. Technological developments presage a nonhumanist post-humanity in which human beings come to be superseded by complex bundles of interactions, processes, and networked systems.

The *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* comes to an apt conclusion with Claire Colebrook's chapter on "Futures." How we conceive of the posthuman has direct implications for our imagined and possible futures, both in utopian and dystopian dimensions. Colebrook searches through a range of speculative futures, giving special attention to the statements of leading philosophers, including Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Bernard Stiegler, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Manuel De Landa, and Bruno Latour. She also contemplates their posthuman futures under the shadow of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal return. The image that arises from her survey is complex, one of "multiple worlds, multiple futures, and multiple lines of time," and this is precisely what one finds in the literature and cinema of the last century and the current moment. Twenty-first-century film and fiction in particular have both challenged and intensified the modern awareness of humans as exceptional, not just in moral terms, but as a geological force. We just may be too exceptional for our own good. Many of our imagined futures are now posthuman only insofar as humans begin to witness the end of their own being. Literary texts depict such images of the future in literal rather than theoretical terms.

NOTES

1. Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" *The Georgia Review* 31.4 (Winter 1977): 830–50.
2. Mark McGurl, "The Posthuman Comedy," *Critical Inquiry* 38 (Spring 2012): 533–53.
3. See, for instance, Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Bruce Clarke, "Evolutionary Equality: Neocybernetic Posthumanism and Margulis and Sagan's Writing Practice," in *Writing Posthumanism, Posthuman Writing*, ed. Sidney I. Dobrin (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press), 275–97; Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Niklas Luhmann, "The Autopoiesis of Social Systems," in *Essays on Self-Reference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1–20; Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); Humberto Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Boston: Riedel, 1980); and Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
4. See Bruce Clarke, ed., *Earth, Life, and System: Evolution and Ecology on a Gaian Planet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).
5. For a detailed survey of these issues, see Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

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- 865 Ratramnus of Corbie, “Letter on the Cynocephali”
 1000 Leo the Archpriest, *Battles of Alexander*
 1170 Marie de France, “Bisclavret”
 1200s? Anonymous, *Saga of Hrolf Kraki*
 1232 Thomas of Cantimpré, *Life of Christina the Astonishing*
 1393 Jean d’Arras, *Melusine*
 1400 Geoffrey Chaucer, “Nun’s Priest’s Tale”
 1400s Anonymous, “Disputation between the Body and Worms”
 1450 Anonymous, *Barlam and Iosaphat*
 1604 Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*
 1610 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
 1805 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*
 1818 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
 1833 Mary Shelley, “The Mortal Immortal”
 1839 Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man That Was Used Up”
 1843 Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”
 1844 Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*
 1844 Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter”
 1871 Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*
 1886 Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, *Future Eve*
 1890 Mary E. Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy*
 1892 Grant Allen, “Pallinghurst Barrow”
 1895 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*
 1898 H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*
 1913 D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*
 1914 Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*
 1914 Rebecca West, “Indissoluble Matrimony”
 1915 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*
 1916 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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- 1920 D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*
 1920 Kurt Schwitters, “Merz”
 1922 Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*
 1923 Gertrude Stein, “If I Told Him”
 1924 *L’Inhumaine*, dir. L’Herbier Marcel
 1927 J. B. S. Haldane, “The Last Judgment”
 1927 *Metropolis*, dir. Fritz Lang
 1928 Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (2nd, revised version)
 1929 Clare Winger Harris, “The Evolutionary Monstrosity”
 1929 Leslie F. Stone, “Out of the Void”
 1930 Lilith Lorraine, “Into the 28th Century”
 1930 Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men*
 1931 Edmond Hamilton, “The Man Who Evolved”
 1932 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
 1933 Laurence Manning, “The Man Who Awoke”
 1934 C. L. Moore, “No Woman Born”
 1934 E. E. “Doc” Smith, *Triplanetary*
 1935 Harry Bates, “Alas, All Thinking!”
 1936 H. P. Lovecraft, *The Shadow Out of Time*
 1937 Dorothy Quick, “Strange Orchids”
 1938 Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*
 1938 George S. Schuyler, *Black Empire*
 1938 E. E. “Doc” Smith, *Galactic Patrol*
 1940 E. E. “Doc” Smith, *Gray Lensman*
 1940 A. E. Van Vogt, *Slan*
 1942 Isaac Asimov, “Runaround”
 1942 E. E. “Doc” Smith, *Second Stage Lensmen*
 1948 E. E. “Doc” Smith, *Children of the Lens*
 1948 Judith Merrill, “That Only a Mother”
 1949 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
 1950 E. E. “Doc” Smith, *First Lensman*
 1953 Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood’s End*
 1953 Charles Olson, “The Ring of”
 1953 Lewis Padgett, *Mutant*
 1953 Theodore Sturgeon, *More Human Than Human*
 1954 Philip K. Dick, “The Golden Man”
 1958 Samuel Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*
 1959 Carol Emshwiller, “Day at the Beach”
 1960 Mary Armock, “First Born”
 1964 Daniel F. Galouye, *Simulacron-3*
 1964 Phyllis Gottlieb, *Sunburst*

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- 1965 J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World*
 1965 Philip K. Dick, *Dr. Bloodmoney*
 1966 Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*
 1967 Samuel R. Delany, “Aye, and Gomorrah . . .”
 1967 Harlan Ellison, “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream”
 1968 Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
 1968 2001 – *A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick
 1969 Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*
 1969 Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
 1969 Anne McCaffrey, *The Ship Who Sang*
 1971 Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*
 1972 Ira Levin, *The Stepford Wives*
 1973 Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*
 1974 Suzy McKee Charnas, *Walk to the End of the World*
 1974 Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*
 1974 James Tiptree Jr., *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*
 1976 Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*
 1976 Frederik Pohl, *Man Plus*
 1977 Joseph McElroy, *Plus*
 1978 J. G. Ballard, *The Drought*
 1978 Suzy McKee Charnas, *Motherlines*
 1978 John Varley, *The Persistence of Vision*
 1979 Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *The Ugly Swans*
 1981 Philip K. Dick, *Valis*
 1982 *Blade Runner*, dir. Ridley Scott
 1984 *The Terminator*, dir. James Cameron
 1984 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*
 1985 Greg Bear, *Blood Music*
 1985 Don DeLillo, *White Noise*
 1986 William Gibson, *Count Zero*
 1986 Alan Moore, *Watchmen*
 1986 Joan Slonczewski, *A Door into Ocean*
 1986 Art Spiegelman, *Maus, Volume 1*
 1986 Bill Viola, *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*
 1987 Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
 1987 *RoboCop*, dir. Paul Verhoeven
 1988 Octavia Butler, *Adulthood Rites*
 1988 William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*
 1989 Octavia Butler, *Imago*
 1990 *Eve of Destruction*, dir. Duncan Gibbins
 1990 Michael Joyce, *Afternoon, a Story*

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- 1990 *Total Recall*, dir. Paul Verhoeven
 1991 Pat Cadigan, *Synners*
 1991 *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, dir. James Cameron
 1991 Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden*
 1991 Art Spiegelman, *Maus, Volume 2*
 1991 Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*
 1991 Graham Swift, *Waterland*
 1992 Vernor Vinge, *A Fire upon the Deep*
 1993 Nancy Kress, *Beggars in Spain*
 1993 John McDaid, *Uncle Buddy's Phantom Funhouse*
 1994 Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*
 1994 Kathleen Ann Goonan, *Queen City Jazz*
 1994 *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, dir. Kenneth Branagh
 1995 Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*
 1995 *Johnny Mnemonic*, dir. Robert Longo
 1995 *The Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Mamoru Oshii
 1995 Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2*
 1996 Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix Plus*
 1997 *All is Full of Love* (videoclip), dir. Chris Cunningham
 1997 Greg Egan, *Diaspora*
 1997 Kathleen Ann Goonan, *Mississippi Blues*
 1997 Shelley Jackson, *my body – a Wunderkammer*
 1997 Ronald Wright, *A Scientific Romance*
 1998 Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata, Escaping Texts*
 1998 Maggie Gee, *Ice People*
 1998 Ken MacLeod, *The Cassini Division*
 1999 Romy Achituv and Camille Utterback, *Text Rain*
 1999 Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Conqueror's Child*
 2000 Kathleen Ann Goonan, *Crescent City Rhapsody*
 2000 Joan Slonczewski, *Brain Plague*
 2002 Kathleen Ann Goonan, *Light Music*
 2002 Shelley Jackson, *The Melancholy of Anatomy*
 2002 *Minority Report*, dir. Steven Spielberg
 2003 Shelley Jackson, *Skin Project* (launched in 2003, ongoing)
 2004 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, dir. Michel Gondry
 2004 *The Butterfly Effect*, dirs. Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber
 2004 *Final Cut*, dir. Omar Naïm
 2004 Kate Pullinger, Chris Joseph, and Stefan Schemat,
The Breathing Wall
 2004 2046, dir. Kar Wai Wong
 2005 Maggie Gee, *The Flood*
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- 2005 Charles Stross, *Accelerando*
 2006 Shelley Jackson, *Half Life*
 2006 *The Butterfly Effect 2*, dir. John R. Leonetti
 2007 *Sunshine*, dir. Danny Boyle
 2010 *Inception*, dir. Christopher Nolan
 2011 Joan Slonczewski, *The Highest Frontier*
 2011 *Melancholia*, dir. Lars von Trier
 2011 *Source Code*, dir. Duncan Jones
 2012 Cory Doctorow and Charles Stross, *The Rapture of the Nerds*
 2012 Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me*
 2012 Nick Montfort and Stephanie Strickland, “Sea and Spar between”
 2013 Art Spiegelman, *Co-Mix: A Retrospective of Comics, Graphics, and Scraps*
 2013 Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book*
 2013 *Her*, dir. Spike Jonze
 2013 *Oblivion*, dir. Joseph Kosinski
 2014 *Transcendence*, dir. Wally Pfister
 2014 Martina Schlünder, Pit Arens, and Axel Gerhardt, *Becoming Bone Sheep*

CHRONOLOGY 2: POSTHUMANISM

- 1859 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*
 1885 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
 1901 Henri Bergson, “On Laughter”
 1907 Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own* (English translation)
 1909 F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism”
 1912 F. T. Marinetti, “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature”
 1914 Wyndham Lewis, ed., *BLAST* 1
 1914 Mina Loy, “Aphorisms on Futurism” and “Feminist Manifesto”
 1917 Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Device”
 1918 Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto”
 1919 T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”
 1924 Dorothy Richardson, “Women and the Future”
 1926 A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*
 1936 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”
 1936 *Modern Times*, dir. Charlie Chaplin
 1947 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
 1947 Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (English translation)
 1948 Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*
 1949 Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”
 1950 Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*
 1964 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*
 1964 Norbert Wiener, *God and Golem, Inc.*
 1967 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*
 1970 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (English translation)

Chronology 2: Posthumanism

- 1976 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (English translation)
 1976 Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*
 1980 Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*
 1981 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*
 1981 Heinz von Foerster, *Observing Systems*
 1984 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (English translation)
 1984 Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*
 1985 Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”
 1986 Temple Grandin, *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*
 1987 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (English translation)
 1987 William Irwin Thompson, ed., *Gaia: A Way of Knowing*
 1987 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*
 1988 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*
 1988 Hans Moravec, *Mind Children*
 1989 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*
 1991 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*
 1991 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (English translation)
 1992 Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*
 1992 Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*
 1993 Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*
 1993 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (English translation)
 1994 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (English translation)
 1994 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (English translation)
 1994 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*
 1995 Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies*
 1995 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (English translation)
 1996 Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*
 1996 Margrit Shildrick, “Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body”
 1996 Joseph Tabbi, *The Postmodern Sublime*
 1999 Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*
 1999 Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman, eds., *At the Borders of the Human*
 1999 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*
 1999 R. L. Rutsky, *High Techne*
 2000 Neil Badmington, *Posthumanism*
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Chronology 2: Posthumanism

- 2000 Pamela Caughie, ed., *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*
- 2000 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*
- 2002 Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*
- 2002 Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple*
- 2002 Margrit Schildrick, *Embodying the Monster*
- 2003 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*
- 2003 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*
- 2003 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*
- 2003 Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Acquiring Genomes*
- 2003 Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites*
- 2004 Neil Badmington, *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*
- 2004 Andy Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs*
- 2004 Susan Squier, *Liminal Lives*
- 2007 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*
- 2008 Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*
- 2008 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (English translation)
- 2008 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*
- 2008 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (English translation)
- 2008 Colin Milburn, *Nanovision: Engineering the Future*
- 2009 Bruce Clarke and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds., *Emergence and Embodiment*
- 2010 Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*
- 2010 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*
- 2010 Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*
- 2010 Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto’”
- 2010 Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*
- 2011 Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*
- 2012 Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, eds., *Posthumanist Shakespeares*
- 2012 Patricia MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*
- 2012 Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals*
- 2013 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*
- 2013 Mary Bryden, ed., *Beckett and Animals*
- 2013 Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism*
- 2013 Kevin LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks in Early Modern Literature and Culture*
- 2014 Ridvan Askin, Andreas Hägler, and Philipp Schweighauser, “Introduction: Aesthetics after the Speculative Turn”

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- 2014 Michael S. Burdet, *Eschatology and the Technological Future*
2014 Claire Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction*
2015 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*
2015 Sidney I. Dobrin, ed., *Writing Posthumanism, Posthuman Writing*
2015 Greg Ellerman, “Speculative Romanticism”
2015 Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn*