

**Beyond Character**  
**A Post/Humanist Approach to Modern Theatre**

**Louise Emma LePage**

Royal Holloway College, University of London

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
2012

## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Louise Emma LePage, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Louise LePage

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011

## Abstract

### **Beyond Character: A Post/Humanist Approach to Modern Theatre**

The thesis explores what it means to be human; specifically, what characters in drama and theatre reveal about what it means to be human. It also explores what it means to talk about dramatic character; specifically, what the human's various forms reveal about dramatic character and how such forms interact with critical approaches to character. The thesis, thus, has a dual focus but the human and dramatic character are, in the context of my project, importantly, entwined and mutually enlightening.

One of the aims of this thesis is to rehabilitate dramatic character. In doing so, it works to rehabilitate humanist subjectivity, too, albeit of a sort that is modified by hybrid structures of being and identity which are informed by posthumanist discourse. Such a structure, I argue, enables humans to be conceived simultaneously as creators *and* creations. I name this structure *post/humanist*.

The first three chapters consist of theoretically engaged discussions which present the post/humanist framework underpinning this thesis's arguments for identity, subjectivity, and modern dramatic character. Chapter One claims it is a mistake to view the modern human being in exclusively liberal humanist terms and employs Donna Haraway's cyborg to reveal and argue for its indeterminate post/humanist form. Chapter Two makes the case for this thesis's alternative post/humanist account of modern subjectivity by revealing that the representation of liberal humanist subjectivity as the orthodox form of the modern period may have been overstated. Chapter Three argues for a post/humanist method of analysing dramatic character that conceives it as a structure of natural and cultural parts.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six present case studies of the characters of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (circa 1599-1601), August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888), and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995). Focusing in these three different versions of modern dramatic characters, detailed analyses reveal forms and identities in process in a world – dramatic and real – that *forms* character and is, in turn, also formed *by* character.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	6
<b>Introduction: What Makes a Human?.....</b>	<b>7</b>
What Makes a Human?.....	7
A Post/Humanist Approach to Dramatic Character.....	8
Frankenstein and the Creature: Which the Monster, Which the Human?.....	11
The Problem of Finding an Approach for the Study of Dramatic Character.....	14
Narratives that Create Worlds: The Coupling of Fact and Fiction, Literature and Science, Nature and Culture.....	23
Apocalyptic Narratives and the Posthuman.....	27
‘The Death of Character’.....	33
The Study of Dramatic Character: A Post/Humanist Approach.....	36
The Focus and Scope of this Thesis.....	40
A Note on Terminology.....	44
Outline.....	45
<b>1. The Human and the Cyborg: A History of Border Play.....</b>	<b>48</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	48
1.2 Introduction to Donna Haraway’s ‘Cyborg’.....	52
1.3 Cyborg Origins.....	56
1.4 The Human-Animal Boundary.....	57
1.5 The Human-Machine Boundary.....	59
1.6 The Physical-Nonphysical Boundary: Technology and the Re-Emergence of Mind.....	67
1.7 An Emergentist Model of Mind: The Possibility of Indeterminacy in a Physical Universe.....	72
<b>2. The Subject(s) of Humanism.....</b>	<b>78</b>
2.1 The Concerns of the Chapter.....	78
2.2 Some Posthumanist Views of Humanism.....	81
2.3 A Post/Humanist Tale of Subjectivity.....	87
2.3.1 The Liberal Humanist Subject: An Historical Product.....	87
2.3.2 The Early Modern Humanist: A Hybrid and Indeterminate Individual.....	95
<b>3. Beyond Character.....</b>	<b>101</b>
3.1 An Argument for Character.....	101
3.1.1 The Problem with Character.....	101
3.1.2 What is Character?.....	102
3.1.3 ‘The Death of Character’: A Problematic Tale.....	105
3.1.4 Putting Character Back into Drama: The Importance of Subjective Being and the Role of the Imagination.....	111
3.2 Modern Dramatic Character.....	118
3.2.1 The Search for Hamlet and the Rise of Modern Dramatic Character.....	118
3.2.2 A Very Modern Hamlet: Problems of ‘The Gap Technique’.....	124
3.3 New Character Criticism.....	131

3.3.1 A Post/humanist Approach to Character.....	135
<b>4. Post/humanist Hamlet: A Protean Performer.....</b>	<b>140</b>
4.1 Hamlet: A Protean Actor.....	140
4.2 The Protean Character of ‘Man’.....	144
4.3 David Tennant <i>is</i> Hamlet: A Post/Humanist Interpretation of Actor and Character.....	147
4.4 Human Borders and <i>Hamlet</i> ’s Ghost.....	153
4.5 ‘What a piece of work is a man’.....	154
4.6 Nature and its Mirror.....	158
<b>5. A Question of Human Character: August Strindberg’s Natural Actors....</b>	<b>167</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	167
5.2 Casting Modern Character in a Physical Universe: A Clash of Perspectives...	168
5.3 Strindberg’s Human Character: More than an Automaton, More than an Animal?.....	174
5.4 Strindberg’s Scale of Humanness.....	176
5.5 Miss Julie: Breaching the Borders of ‘The Human’.....	179
5.6 Self-Navigating Cyborgs: Strindberg’s Characterless Characters.....	183
5.7 ‘Theatricality <i>and</i> Authenticity’: Strindberg’s Natural Actors.....	186
<b>6. Sarah Kane’s Dramatic Worlds: Moving Beyond Character.....</b>	<b>192</b>
6.1 Sarah Kane’s Characters: The Story So Far.....	192
6.2 Some Problems with the Story of the Death of Kane’s Characters.....	195
6.3 The Importance of Borders.....	199
6.4 The Politics of Storytelling and of Character.....	201
6.5 ‘Posthumanist Identities in Sarah Kane’.....	205
6.6 <i>Blasted</i> ’s Ian and Cate: Never Really Naturalist Characters.....	209
6.7 Kane’s Human Characters.....	211
6.8 Kane’s Characters: Underneath It All, Just Animals?.....	213
6.9 Metaphysics and Hope in Kane’s Creation of Character and Place.....	216
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>225</b>
‘What makes a human?’.....	225
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>233</b>

## Acknowledgements

Thanks go to...

The Drama and Theatre Department at Royal Holloway for my Studentship and the ongoing support its members of staff have shown me. (Especial thanks go to Chris Megson, Lynette Goddard, and Sophie Nield.) I think it is pretty much the most wonderful Drama department on the planet.

David Barnett who was my MA supervisor, the individual who said I could do this thing called a PhD.

Adam Alston, Sofia Apospori, Laura Higgins, Marissia Fragou, Marie Kelly, Daniel O’Gorman, Emer O’Toole, Billy Smart, and Jesse Weaver, who I am fortunate to count as friends and peers and who gave so generously of their time, energy, and expertise in reading and responding to sections of my work. Without their critical insights my chapters would not be in the shape they are in. Thanks, too, to my Mum for her proof reading prowess.

The wonderful Gilli Bush-Bailey, my advisor, whose interest, encouragement, and criticism has been unstinting and inspiring.

The superhuman Dan Rebellato (I am going to buy you a cape), without whom this PhD thesis, quite simply, would not exist. Thank you, Dan, for sticking with me even when I was totally clueless; thank you for endlessly prodding me with your critical questions, which pushed me (sometimes kicking and screaming) to research better, write better, and question better; and thank you, finally, for all the myriad additional ways you have supported me through my PhD career (facilitating my teaching, being my emotional counsellor, delivering keynotes - organising keynotes!, giving incredibly short-notice feedback, and being an all-round fabulous person).

Finally, there is my family to thank. In getting to do exactly what I love for the last five years, Todd, my long suffering husband, has put up with being poor and over-stretched; Lucien, my son, has lately come to have a virtually absent mother; and Mum and Dad have a mortgage they didn’t have before and a grandson who has recently become more or less resident at their house. Each of you has made this PhD possible for me. I do not know where or how I can possibly start to thank you; words are inadequate. I don’t just think I am the luckiest daughter and wife in the world; I know it. All I can hope is that I have made you proud. I have done it; *we* have done it: Dr. Louise LePage! (Well, pending that small thing called a viva...)

Sincerest thanks to you all.

## Introduction

### What Makes a Human?

#### **What Makes a Human?**

In the National Theatre's production of Nick Dear's *Frankenstein* (2011), Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller played the Creature and Victor Frankenstein in alternating performances.<sup>1</sup> Such a theatrical device manifests several notable effects. Firstly, the audience, watching Cumberbatch perform the role of Frankenstein, knows that on the preceding night he had played the role of the Creature. The performance of two distinct roles and personalities in nightly succession not only constitutes a remarkable feature of the production that demands virtuosic acting skill; more importantly, in relation to this thesis, the capacity of the actor to perform two such distinct roles implies, and foregrounds, a quality of selfhood that is remarkably protean.

A second effect of the role-swapping concerns the kinds of characters being played by Cumberbatch and Miller: the rational *human* scientist and creator and the purportedly *inhuman*, animalistic Creature. Performed by both actors, the roles of human agent (creator) and inhuman, monstrous product (creature) are refused their traditional formulations and situations as distinct, because dichotomous, identities and ontologies. In performing the roles, Cumberbatch and Miller embody and represent both. Indeed, the alternating of roles serves to clarify and confirm the suspicion posited by Mary Shelley's original story (1818) that the characters' two forms of being - monster and human - are, in fact, far from being essentially distinct and, instead, clarify their forms in culturally specific performances of roles that are relative and mutually defining.

The question underpinning Dear's play version of Shelley's novel is whether or not a human might be artificially built and given life by a man (as opposed to Nature or God) and still be accounted human. The answer, it seems to be suggested by the play and by such a theatrical technique as outlined above is, 'yes': all humans are, in fact, *made*, be the act of creation natural or artificial. In effect, Frankenstein, as well as the Creature, is a creature. Frankenstein's father, towards the end of the play, following the discovery of the murdered body of Elizabeth (Victor's new wife), says of his son, 'I can't look at him.

---

<sup>1</sup> I attended a matinée performance on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2011, at which Cumberbatch played Frankenstein and Miller played the Creature.

He's monstrous! [...] What have I brought into the world?' (77). This echoes Frankenstein's earlier line when he recalled his own reaction to the artificial birth of the Creature: 'What had I done?' The Creature answers: 'Built a man' (38). With these words, father and son reveal their belief that the figures and behaviours of Frankenstein and the Creature, respectively, are at least partially their responsibility along with the catastrophic chains of events that their acts of creation instigated.

For this play, then, the answer to the question, 'what makes a human?', does not lie in the naturalness of its status. Frankenstein and the Creature were both 'made'. Having been created, importantly, these characters go on to recreate themselves and each other to some degree as they pursue their individual, yet connected, paths, and thereby reveal the form of 'the human' as something plastic, dynamic, and relative. Human character, thus, lies in both the experiences of, and choices that are made by, individuals who are situated, simultaneously, as creators *and* creations, as agents *and* products.

### **A Post/Humanist Approach to Dramatic Character**

The thesis explores what it means to be human; specifically, what characters in drama and theatre reveal about what it means to be human. It also explores what it means to talk about dramatic character; specifically, what the human's various forms reveal about dramatic character and how such forms interact with critical approaches to character. The thesis, thus, has a dual focus, but the human and dramatic character are, in the context of my project, importantly, entwined and mutually enlightening. Indeed, one of the arguments of the thesis is that an explicit conjoining of the theory of the human with that of character functions to open up character to more precise analysis.

Focusing on representations of the human in theatre as well as in the texts of philosophers, dramatic commentators and theorists, cultural theorists, historians, and scientists through the modern period, this thesis works to rehabilitate humanist subjectivity as it argues for the political importance of self-determination in relation to the human. Such a rehabilitation of humanist subjectivity also functions to rehabilitate dramatic character, which is another aim of the thesis. However, the humanistic model advocated in these pages is not of the sort figured by liberal humanist subjectivity; in fact, its model is informed by posthumanist discourse.



Posthumanist theory articulates the human as a hybrid, natural-cultural, and essentially indeterminate entity. As such, posthumanism rubs up against modernity's orthodox model of the human as a fixed entity, which finds its identity in relations of difference. These relations of difference depend upon the human's traditional, identifying borders with animals, machines, and the supernatural, which function to define the human as such (i.e. *not* animal, *not* machine, *not* supernatural). In contrast to this orthodox and purportedly stable and distinct modern human figure, the posthuman finds 'the other' within and locates the form and meaning of the human on shifting sands.

Combining this posthumanist point of view of the human as a transformational figure with the humanist model, which insists upon human agency, the aim is to analyse the components and forms of the humans that are represented in drama, theatre, and other culturally resonant texts, and to reassess the traditional stories about the human and dramatic character during the modern period. These stories are conventionally and problematically bound to a liberal humanist model of subjectivity, which posits the self as autonomous, unified, self-determining, and free. This subject, having been conceptually killed off by poststructuralism, signalled the death of dramatic character, too. Character, however, if it is detached as a term from the liberal humanist subject to signify, more generally, a dramatic representation of the human, or human-like, person, appears to live on in new writing and productions as an embodied speaker and agent, as Dear's *Frankenstein*, for example, reveals. Approaching such a character is, though, problematic because existing frames dichotomously prescribe talking about character as an autonomous and sovereign human speaker and agent or else as an inhuman, culturally constituted product and subject. As such, critical commentators are frequently left without the means by which to study characters that seem to be both agent *and* product, at least with any particularity, veracity, or completeness. How, then, might we move beyond such conventional and polarised narratives – the humanist versus the postmodern – such that character might become, once more, a cogent form of dramatic discourse?

The answer, this thesis argues, lies in changing the way we conceive of the human. As this thesis aims to show, the Renaissance humanist subject that was born in the early modern period demonstrates a striking hybridity and indeterminacy of form that is commensurate with that of the present-day posthuman. This being so, an alternative genealogy of modern human subjectivity is opened up, which this thesis entitles *post/humanist*. Located, from the first, in a scale of being (the Great Chain of Being), this

post/humanist subject is essentially protean and capable of re-making herself<sup>2</sup> as a god or an animal, since the ‘seeds’ of all possible forms are found to constitute him or her. (This position is outlined at length in Chapter Two.) Such a post/humanist model importantly allows us to engage with representations of the human in the form of dramatic character – in particular, to engage with matters of identity and theories of mind - through the modern period as it develops and renegotiates itself into historically specific forms while maintaining its hybrid, natural-cultural structure.

This thesis, therefore, aims to contribute towards, and develop, the discussion and thought about the human in dramatic character discourse and humanist theory. Today, so-called New Character Criticism (Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights (2009)) is emerging out of Shakespeare studies. Working to answer the question ‘what is character?’, New Character Criticism presents a variety of perspectives and methodological tools that, nonetheless, cohere in their account of ‘real fictive characters’ (Yachnin and Slights 4), which treats characters as representations of agents and, frequently, embodied entities, too, while persisting with the assumption that character and the human represented are also partially culturally produced. In a way that is consistent with such a project, the overarching argument of this thesis is that a certain model of post/humanist being, as offering a natural-cultural constitution and a compatibilist model of mind,<sup>3</sup> allows us to view not only the human being as a product and an agent tied to its material context (the body, the text, the world), but to approach character, his dramatic representation, in such terms, too.

In this Introduction, I outline why this research into representations of the human form and dramatic character during the modern period is important, and justify the methods I have adopted, and the choices I have made, in conducting it. The Introduction will also include some play analyses, in order to begin to elaborate some of the ways in which the human is cast as, or in relation to, machines in post/humanist terms, and what such representations reveal. The Introduction will also locate this thesis in relation to the discourse of dramatic character, before, finally, outlining the thesis chapters.

---

<sup>2</sup> Whenever the human or character is referred to in a generic sense and requires personal pronominal referencing, the masculine and feminine forms will be employed interchangeably and arbitrarily (i.e. he, she, his, her).

<sup>3</sup> Defining ‘compatibilism’, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* concisely states: ‘Compatibilism offers a solution to *the free will problem*. This philosophical problem concerns a disputed incompatibility between free will and determinism. *Compatibilism* is the thesis that free will is compatible with determinism’ (Michael McKenna). In short, compatibilism offers the view that humans live in a physicalist universe but remain, nonetheless, capable of *self-determination*.

### **Frankenstein and the Creature: Which the Monster, Which the Human?**

Dear renames Shelley's Monster the 'Creature' and, accordingly, shifts the story's emphasis from the supernatural and gothic to the scientific and natural, while allowing questions of a metaphysical nature to persist. The rendering of Frankenstein and the Creature's forms as equivalent kinds of creations (in that both are situated as products of the decisions and acts of other humans), functions to open the play up to questions such as, 'is life but the product of physical processes?' 'Are humans but machine-"men", with minds and consciousness cast as epiphenomenal products of physiology?' If the answer is in the affirmative, then minds, consciousness, and even, possibly, souls, potentially become the property of machines and animals as well as humans. It is evident, for example, that the Creature has a mind. His skills with language, his appetite for literature and knowledge, and his capacity for learning, all demonstrate the supposedly uniquely human quality of reason. The play also posits the possibility that the Creature has a soul: Frankenstein asks the Creature, 'Do you have a soul, and I none?' (80). With mind and, even, soul, becoming, in principle, qualities attributable to nonhuman entities, the border between 'men', animals, and machines is revealed as merely provisional, something premised upon differences that are a matter of *degree* as opposed to *kind*, and other distinctions than reason must be found to differentiate the human.

As Armand Marie Leroi observes in the programme to the National Theatre's production of the play, Dear's renaming of the Monster as Creature is significant: 'Monsters are deformities of nature; [by contrast,] creatures are *created* by God, evolution or man. They may be beautiful or terrible and the Creature is a bit of both'. In effect, naming the character Creature takes us beyond the realm of monstrosity and opens up the fundamental theme of the play – the making of 'man' – to more contemporary associations, for example, genetic or synthetic engineering, which are bound to relevant and urgent twenty-first century questions pertaining to metaphysics and ethics (for example, should we be cloning animals or even, possibly, humans?). The renaming also works to position Frankenstein, by implication, as a creator and thereby to emphasise and trouble the border between humans and gods, while concurrently posing the possibility that Frankenstein is both (human and god). And, finally, the renaming eradicates any inherent portentous, supernatural denotations and moral judgements from the form of the Creature/Monster itself. Calling it Creature renders it an uncanny, but not necessarily

abominable, product of nature, 'man', and culture. The creature is made, not born. It is the product of meticulous and deliberate action. Whether it is 'good' or 'bad' is yet to be decided.

One of the propositions of this play is that the human is not naturally and essentially fixed. Instead, 'human' is located as something 'manufactured', in the senses both of being made by other humans and their cultural structures, and of being self-made. The human is conceived as being, partly, a creature, a product of nature and nurture. He starts out an 'innocent' (Dear describes the Creature, early in the play, as '*Adam in the Garden of Eden*' (7)) and the play's stage directions read: '*[The Creature] is made in the image of a man, as if by an amateur god. All the parts are there, but the neurological pathways are unorthodox, the muscular movements odd, the body and the brain uncoordinated*' (4). Having been given physical form (though according to a slightly eccentric organisation) and life, the Creature is unceremoniously cast out into the world by the horrified Frankenstein and becomes, through personal experience, something unique - an individual - and 'human'. He learns to be a human from his first- and second-hand (literary) experiences of human beings. A 'natural' creation of Frankenstein's scientific experiments, he becomes capable of deceit and murder, it is implied, because of his experiences with other humans.

However, that the Creature is a causally determined product of physical processes remains at issue through the play and, in being such, he is conceived as a kind of machine. By implication, this is what 'man' and, even, God is accounted to be, too. (Dear's identification of the Creature as 'Adam' works analogously to resituate Frankenstein, who is a physical man, as God.) But the Creature is more than a machine. In becoming the individual that he becomes, the Creature reveals himself as exceeding his 'natural', physically determined form by demonstrating himself to be a creator, too, an intelligent agent whose decisions re-make the self and the world. The Creature may have been literally engineered by a scientist and he may be a product in the sense of being the formative result of cultural experience; however, the Creature is a creator, too, in that he takes deliberate action in the world that contributes to his own developing identity and character.

Frankenstein, meanwhile, is the purported human in this relative pairing of creator and creature. Indeed, he is an archetypally modern human, in the sense that he is representative of Enlightenment ideals and endeavours to mobilise the power of reason in

order to extend scientific knowledge into the god-like realms of the creation of life itself. Frankenstein says, 'Look at me, I breathe the breath of God!' (60). But Frankenstein rejects his creation, finding himself 'repulsed by the filthy, slimy being sprawled in front of him' that 'babbl[es] incoherently' and gives him a 'ghastly smile' (4). Through scientific ingenuity, Frankenstein has conjured a figure of the imagination, but in doing so he has made real that which has been characterised as the stuff of nightmare in countless different stories through history. In consequence, it seems he cannot stop himself, having been thus startled by the uncanny form of the Creature, from giving in to his irrational and atavistic impulses of terror and self-preservation.

While the god-like quality of reason and the pursuit of knowledge render Frankenstein an ideal human of modernity, the play suggests that this is not all he is. He is also a product of his instincts and the stories of monsters that have found form in his imagination. By the end of the play, too, Frankenstein is revealed to be a kind of machine, determinedly set on the destruction of the Creature: 'you give me purpose', he says. 'You must be destroyed' (80). Via his choices and experiences through the course of the play, Frankenstein loses his capacity to love and becomes machine-like, an inhuman product of desires that he knows and accepts will lead him to his death. In effect, the Creature who gave Frankenstein purpose in his construction, now gives him purpose in bringing about his death.

There is a sense, then, in which Frankenstein has been both more and less than human and has himself been monstrous. In the hubris of his scientific ambition, Frankenstein simultaneously but paradoxically reveals himself as god-like creator *and* as an inhuman product of Enlightenment ideals, which construct and constrain his ambitions to discover the secrets of (physical) life. Latterly, he is revealed as monstrous in his god-like ambition to destroy life while simultaneously proving himself inhumanly machine-like in his unwavering determination to destroy the Creature. Also, Cumberbatch's performance of Frankenstein implies that he may be as capable of monstrous acts (or are they human acts?) as the Creature. During a rather chilling moment in the National Theatre production, Frankenstein, who is contemplating the creation of a bride for the Creature, someone/thing 'beautiful', seems to look upon his own fiancée as a potential specimen. Stepping back from Elizabeth, Cumberbatch as Frankenstein regarded her with cold calculation and said, 'You are beautiful. You will make a beautiful wife' (51). In this disturbing moment, a kind of hiatus of human potential was opened up that intimated

Frankenstein's sacrificial contemplation of his fiancée to science. In that moment, the scientist took on truly monstrous proportions.

In short, although the Creature demonstrates himself a monster by his looks and abominable actions (he murders Frankenstein's young brother and rapes and murders his adversary's new wife, Elizabeth, in revenge for killing his own bride), he is, ultimately, presented as more human than his creator for his capacity to love. At the end of the play, despite being joined in mortal battle on a one-way journey to the Pole, the Creature weeps when he thinks Frankenstein has died, crying, 'All I wanted was your love. I would have loved you with all my heart. My poor creator' (80).

This last phrase is almost, but not quite, an idiom. 'My poor creator' almost reads - but, importantly, does not, read - 'my poor *creature*'. At first glance, this may strike the reader as a misreading. One expects to find, 'my poor *creature*'. In the slippage between creature and creator, common assumptions, which are bound to hierarchically constituted identities and relationships, are brought to the fore. 'My poor *creature*' is indicative of prejudices held against ostensibly inferior kinds of beings, be these animals or, sometimes, humans; at the same time, the expression implicitly posits greater capacities of understanding and, possibly, empathy with the speaker who, in this case, strikingly, is the *Creature* as opposed to the creator.

In short, the identities of human and monster, of creator and created, are detached from their conventional objects, and complexly merged in the forms of the characters of Frankenstein and the Creature. Though the first is naturally human and the second is an unnatural and 'amateurish' manufacture of a man, by the end of the play the meaning of 'human' coheres more happily with the Creature than with the natural human. Indeed, it is clear that the physical, natural, biological fact of humanness and its meaning, the latter of which is negotiated in relation to the form and meaning of machines, animals, and gods and ghosts, are two very different aspects of being 'human'.

### **The Problem of Finding an Approach for the Study of Dramatic Character**

The discussion of the play and production of *Frankenstein* has started to open up some of the ways in which drama and theatre can reveal what it means to be human at a given point in history. This particularly contemporary version of *Frankenstein*, for example, conceives the human as being composed of natural and cultural parts such as the brain, neurological pathways, muscles, language, emotions, stories, and so forth. These parts go

together to produce a new whole – the character of the Creature – and yet, though they produce him, these elements remain inhuman in the sense of pre-existing him and as extending, in some cases, beyond his borders. The nonhuman forms and identities of the machine, monster, animal, and god are all located, simultaneously, within and beyond the borders of this human.

The hybrid form of *Frankenstein's* representation of the human is, of course, paradoxical in the sense that it signifies an entity that is concurrently a creation and a creator, a pre-determined product and an origin of production. Being so, furthermore, it constitutes a challenge in terms of approaching it as a dramatic character. Such an elucidation of the human resists a traditional humanist interpretation and approach to character. To simplify, the humanist model conventionally depends upon a stable and autonomous conception of character, which is deemed to be a cause, and not a manifestation, of history (and, by implication, of the play). Such an assumption of character is typified by the interpretations of character offered by A. C. Bradley around the beginning of the twentieth century. Assumptions of a humanist sort of character also, frequently, implicitly underpin an actor's approach to a role as she asks herself, 'Who is my character?'

*Frankenstein's* characters, by contrast, fundamentally change through the course of Dear's play, making any sort of definitive answer to the question, 'Who is the Creature?', problematic. Indeed, the play works hard to demonstrate the ways in which the Creature learns to become 'himself' and, in doing so, the character is located as a character in process and as being materially bound and produced. Accordingly, *Frankenstein's* characters are evidently products of their histories and natures, constitutive of natural and cultural parts, processes, and structures: they are not, in short, fixed and fully coherent sovereign agents.

Is, then, a Cultural Materialist approach the answer? Located as, perhaps, the major alternative frame by which to study character, Cultural Materialism redefines character as an historical product, a formal manifestation of patriarchal and bourgeois ideology. In consideration of identity, Cultural Materialism offers itself as a politically enlightening methodology in that its object is to articulate the ideological constitution of particular kinds of human subjects; crucially, the Cultural Materialists recognise that identity is not essential but something constituted in and by society and its structures and, in being so, is only ever provisionally enacted and lived.

From the perspective of this thesis, such a method usefully enters into dialogue with the humanist project in that it argues any (fixed) essentialist humanist ideology of the human as being false, as constituting nothing more than an ideological product of history. This thesis similarly proposes that the human is neither essentially fixed nor autonomous while arguing that the conception of the liberal humanist subject is an anachronism. (See Chapter Two for an extended discussion on this subject.) In such ways, my position corresponds, in general terms if not in specifics, with the Cultural Materialist position and is particularly indebted to the work of the theorists Catherine Belsey and Jonathan Dollimore who both offer extended and fascinating discussions on the formation of subjectivity and identity in the modern period. Importantly, too, in similar vein to my own project, these theorists posit a decentred form of subjectivity as the true account: the subject is accounted as being constituted by culture and, as culture changes, so the subject is accounted to change, too. So, for example, Belsey, in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (1985), in charting the emergence of the liberal humanist subject, identifies some illuminating descriptions and models of a *changing* self between the medieval and modern periods in historical and theatrical terms. Contemplating Shakespearean drama and theatre, she looks to find the liberal humanist subject and its ideological construction even as she identifies the in-between nature of characters in this period that oscillate between the medieval and more modern modes of identity and knowledge forms.

Dollimore, meanwhile, in *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (2010), which was first published in 1984, argues that the human subject is a decentred subject and has been thus since the early modern period, when the Christian mystification of the soul started to become eroded. In effect, Dollimore argues that the decentring of God meant a corresponding decentring of the subject. In contrast to the orthodox view, which assumes that it was at just this moment that the modern individual - significantly, an *essentialist* subject - came into being, Dollimore argues that, in fact, it was at this point that the subject was first and significantly decentred and that the essentialist humanist subject did not configure itself until the Enlightenment. For evidence, Dollimore turns to scores of sources from the medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment periods as well as from Jacobean drama, which he claims posits just such a decentred subject in the form of the



[A]nti-hero: malcontented, dispossessed, satirical and vengeful; both agent and victim of social corruption; inconsistent and contradictory in ways which are incapable of being understood in terms of individuality alone, and which turn our attention outwards to the conditions of the protagonists' social existence (Ixiv).

In outlining the transformations of their decentred subjects, both Belsey and Dollimore reveal and treat their human subjects as historically specific and as microcosms, which, via their particular, contradictory, and unstable forms, reveal the contradictions and instabilities of their macrocosmic contexts, since they are constructed by cultural structures that not only attach them to their worlds but construct them, too.

Such an approach to subjectivity and character, which is underpinned by and develops out of the assumption of a decentred and culturally specific and changeable human character, shares much with my own post/humanist approach. Indeed, Belsey and Dollimore's projects and narratives have been influential of my interest in, and negotiation of, the liberal (or essentialist) humanist subject. Their work has also informed my approach to identity, which I conceive with these particular Cultural Materialists as culturally determined. However, there are some problems attaching to the projects of such a Cultural Materialist as Belsey, for example, which John Lee recognises. Writing of those Cultural Materialists who are indebted to Michel Foucault for their 'master narrative' on the topic of subjectivity, Lee observes that the answer to the question, 'Who's there?' is met with 'a particularly bleak form of "no one" or "everything"' (81). In effect, by Lee's account, the human subject and, by implication, character, according to the Foucauldian narrative, is pure product and, in being so, is deprived of the powers of agency. Such an account of the human subject and its fictional representation, character, may be purveyed in Francis Barker's observation that '[a]t the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is [...] nothing' (37).<sup>4</sup> Belsey's explanation of the subject, meanwhile, which is informed by Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Louis Althusser, posits a similar sort of essential vacancy or lack of individual selfhood:

---

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, it is this nothingness at the centre of Hamlet, argues Barker, that enables or, possibly, invites the sort of character criticism of the humanist tradition: he writes: it is 'into this breach in Hamlet that successive generations of criticism – especially Romantic and post-Romantic variants – have stepped in order to fill the vacuum' (ibid). Such a Cultural Materialist view, then, locates the humanist literary approach as seeking out an essential and mysterious form of character subjectivity that does not exist as such. In the process, this Cultural Materialist assumes an antithetical position to the humanist. Whereas the latter looks for a unified and essential subjectivity and locates autonomous agency with character, the former articulates the human as a creature of culturally located, and ideologically inscribed, forces.

To be a subject is to have access to signifying practice, to identify with the 'I' of utterance and the 'I' who speaks. The subject is held in place in a specific discourse, a specific knowledge, by the meanings available there. In so far as signifying practice always precedes the individual, is always learned, the subject is a subjected being, an effect of the meanings it seems to possess. Subjectivity is discursively produced and is constrained by the range of subject-positions defined by the discourses in which the concrete individual participates. Utterance – and action – outside the range of meanings in circulation in a society is psychotic. In this sense existing discourses determine not only what can be said and understood, but the nature of subjectivity itself, what it is possible to be. Subjects as agents act in accordance with what they are, 'work by themselves' to produce and reproduce the social formation of which they are a product (*The Subject of Tragedy* 5-6).

Though Belsey writes of the subject as an agent, her construction of the idea and identity of the subject as, apparently, entirely 'discursively produced and constrained', makes it difficult to conceive how, precisely, this subjected subject is able to take action, to perform herself. 'Subjects as agents act in accordance with what they are'; but if the subject is entirely a discursive product of the 'social formation' – if, in effect, this is all they *are* – then how is agency effected? And how is it possible for such subjects to offer utterance and action 'outside the range of meanings in circulation' if they are made of a limited and limiting range of meanings in circulation? I do not mean to refute Belsey's assertion that subjects as agents exist, or, at least, appear to exist, but for that to be so there must be more to the subject-agent, some extra ingredient or factor, that Belsey, at least, has not accounted for.

The problem for the student of character is that such a Cultural Materialist position as is offered by Belsey, whatever its professions, makes it difficult to approach character as a representation of an 'individual' in the sense of the term denoting an agent, a human subject capable of, at least in principle, intentionally constructing meaning and taking action in the world. In approaching a play such as Dear's *Frankenstein*, such narrow articulations of the human self severely restrict what the play might otherwise communicate about human identity and potential for action. To adopt a humanist approach: to ask, 'Who is the Creature?', and to set about identifying his character, which is accounted something stable, permanent, and autonomous, is to ignore the premise of a narrative that represents the self as a natural and cultural *construction*. Unfortunately, adopting the sort of Cultural Materialist approach proposed by Belsey and Barker does not meet with greater success. Dear's *Frankenstein* is fundamentally interested in

exploring issues of human agency and responsibility, asking, for example, ‘Should life be created just because it is possible to do so?’ In posing the question, the play presumes that the human and its dramatic correlative, character, enjoy some degree of choice and are capable of deliberate thought and action that are, to some extent, free. However, these particular Cultural Materialists, in proposing that the self is a creature of material forces, fail to give sufficient weight to the consideration that she may also, importantly, be conceived as a *creator*.

A secondary and related problem attaching to the Foucauldian narrative of subjectivity adopted by a number of Cultural Materialists including Belsey is that of the body or, more precisely, the body’s absence. Lee writes: ‘although Foucault is concerned to write a “political anatomy of the body”, the body is oddly incorporeal [...]; its wants and physical desires rarely appear, even in *The History of Sexuality*’ (82). As such, the possibility that the body constitutes a locus of agency for the individual is overlooked, as is the body’s potential for constituting the basic ingredients of, and conditions for, the manifestation of the individual’s character and capacity for thought and action.

Such factors, this thesis proposes, represent shortcomings for any approach to character, in particular to dramatic character, which is intended for performance by a concrete human body on a physical stage. If Dear’s *Frankenstein* is considered, for example, the human is foregrounded not only as a product of punitive power structures, which make, control, and repress him; he is also an embodied being formed of neurological pathways, muscles, body, and brain (*Frankenstein* 4). Indeed, the first fifteen minutes of the National Theatre’s production were entirely wordless as Miller showed us the Creature’s graduated attempts to come to terms with, and to learn how to use, his body. With such a foregrounding of the body in the play and the production, so character, mind, and the facility for self-awareness were posited as physiological matters, which tie notions of selfhood explicitly to the body. Here, the Cultural Materialist approach fails in that it is insufficiently comprehensive, focusing too narrowly in cultural forces at the exclusion of the natural.

At this point, it is timely to acknowledge that not all Cultural Materialists posit subjectivity and character in such structuralist, or poststructuralist, and vacant terms. The work of Dollimore, for example, and particularly that of Raymond Williams, who first coined the term ‘cultural materialism’, by comparison offer more weight to culture as a social order that is not merely productive of subjects, but also ‘communicated,

reproduced, experienced and explored' by them (Williams qtd. in Andrew Milner 9). So, whereas Belsey's work, for example, is heavily influenced by Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan – both of whom read Marxism and Freud, respectively, in structuralist terms such that agency is subsumed into a general theory of structural determination – Williams' view, as Milner notes, is that signs 'function within "lived and living relationships", and it is these relationships, sociologically determinate rather than arbitrary in character which, in Williams's view, "*make all formal meanings significant and substantial*"' (48). In short, Williams's Cultural Materialism posits not just culture but, by implication, people as made of matter and as being *both* productive *and* produced with agency reinserted into the cultural picture.

Milner concisely and helpfully identifies that the differences between the various strands of Cultural Materialism 'revolve around their respective concepts of structure, agency and subjectivity' (101). So, for those influenced more heavily by structuralism (such as Belsey), structure starts to look like something 'all-determining', agency becomes 'an illusion', and subjectivity is rendered 'the ideological effect of structure' (ibid); by contrast, for the likes of Williams,

[S]tructure sets limits and exerts pressures, agency takes place within those limits and pressures, and takes the characteristic form of an unavoidably material production, and subjectivity, though socially produced and shared, is nonetheless both real and active (ibid).

The picture of the human subject indicated here is more contradictory than the one posited by the structuralist orientated Cultural Materialist but in being so, I suggest, it is also more 'lifelike'; here we have a subjectivity that is structurally limited and materially subjected and yet capable of action and experience in the real world.

In relation to the work of Williams and E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall writes that 'the concept of "culture" in Williams and that of "experience" in Thompson perform fundamentally analogous theoretical functions' (Milner 79), which he explains as simultaneously denoting and, thereby, eliding 'the distinction between, active consciousness on the one hand, and relatively "given", determinate conditions on the other' (ibid). Put simply, the subject in this equation is permitted her subjectivity – an experiencing sense of 'individuality' – at the same time as she is found to be determined as a product of culture. For Milner, the result of such an equation is 'a theoretical humanism, with two distinguishing characteristics: first, a general "experiential pull", and

second, an “emphasis on the creative” (ibid). Such simultaneity of the subject’s capacity for conscious agency and his ‘given’, determinate conditions is, of course, philosophically paradoxical but it offers, in a broad sense, a template of subjectivity that is advocated by this thesis.

Dollimore, meanwhile, describes Williams’s position, along with a number of other Cultural Materialists, as offering a moderated form of humanism, which takes into account those material, determinant ‘givens’. Williams’s humanism, writes Dollimore, is valuable, necessary, and constitutes a ‘spirited reiteration of Marxist humanism’ (‘Shakespeare’ 481), the latter of which ‘has affirmed a faith in Man, the individual, and the progressive liberatory potential of high culture’ (479-80). However, as Dollimore emphasises, Williams’s humanist formulation improves upon the Marxist model because Williams attends ‘to the reasons for the failure of [‘man’s] potential to be realized’ (481). In doing so, his position contrasts with, and avoids the mistakes of, the sort of ‘essentialist humanism’<sup>5</sup> that Dollimore ties to the Enlightenment as demonstrating a false and naïve optimism and belief in the inevitable progress of ‘man’. For Williams, as for Walter Benjamin, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, to name but a few, ‘the short- or medium-term possibilities of progressive change’ are but illusions (Dollimore, ‘Shakespeare’ 481). Importantly, Dollimore remarks of Williams and his like that

[T]heir pessimism was distinct from fatalism: for them it was a contingent historical reality that prevents development towards a radically better society, and not fate, human nature, or any other kind of absolute which makes such development always and forever impossible. Some such distinction animates Gramsci’s famous maxim, ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’ (‘Shakespeare’ 481-2).

---

<sup>5</sup> Dollimore’s identification of the essentialist humanist subject differs from Belsey’s liberal humanist subject in terms of the specific conditions and ideas that produced him (so, for example, for Dollimore this subject is conceived in the Enlightenment) but, ultimately, the ontological model pictured by both is the same. Dollimore describes this essentialist humanist subject as being individual centres of consciousness, which accounted self-determining, free and rational by nature. He writes: ‘Those forms of individualism (e.g. ‘abstract individualism’) premised on essentialism tend, obviously, to distinguish the individual from society and give absolute priority to the former. In effect the individual is understood in terms of a pre-social essence, nature, or identity and on that basis s/he is invested with a quasi-spiritual autonomy. The individual becomes the origin and focus of meaning – an individuated essence which precedes and – in idealist philosophy – transcends history and society’ (*Radical Tragedy* 250).

In short, history, on the views of such as Williams, is not determined and neither is it progressive; it is *contingent*, it is in process, and it is at least partially bound to human agency.

Such Cultural Materialist views correspond closely with my own as they refuse to fall within the either/or tradition of cultural and literary theory which dominated much of the twentieth century and was ‘polarised between idealist accounts, most obviously those proposed by traditional literary humanism [...], and materialist accounts’ (Milner 8). In contrast, the sort of ‘theoretical humanism’ or, to use Dollimore’s phrase, the ‘spirited reiteration of Marxist humanism’ offered by Williams and his like presents a conception of human form and identity that answers to the human’s complexity and lived experience. Given the commonalities between such a Cultural Materialist position and my own, the question arises: why am I not, therefore, adopting a Cultural Materialist frame of the sort offered by Williams or, perhaps, Dollimore, for my study of dramatic character? Why do I choose, instead, Donna Haraway’s cyborg as a tool to interrogate the human form?<sup>6</sup> And why do I turn to humanism – specifically Renaissance humanism – to identify a structure of subjectivity to frame and focus my character studies? Partially, in relation to the cyborg, the answer lies in the fact that this figure explicitly foregrounds modes and narratives of human being – natural, cultural, organic, artificial, technological, and so on – that are historically and philosophically important to my interrogation of the human form. Furthermore, the cyborg form, in foregrounding its hybrid material *and* semiotic structure, works to imply and negotiate issues of mind and body which, as I will explain in Chapter One, are especially pertinent to questions of subjectivity, character, and agency. In short, the cyborg, in quite graphic terms, models the material and semiotic, the natural and cultural constitution of humans in a hybrid structure that I identify and employ in my approach to dramatic character. Also, of course, posthumanism, the discourse that locates the cyborg, in both its name and concerns negotiates issues of human individuality and self-determination and, in doing so, establishes a dialogue into and against which I situate my own position and argument.

---

<sup>6</sup> In fact, the work of Donna Haraway demonstrates unmistakable commonalities with the Cultural Materialists in that her Marxist feminist theoretical position and focus is technology, identity, gender, and power. Furthermore, her cyborg, which shall be examined and discussed at length in Chapter One, is conceived as a *material-semiotic actor* and, in being so, reveals itself as a paradoxical agent-product at the same time as it explicitly figures the assertion of Williams that relationships are ‘lived and living’ and, being so, ‘*make all formal meanings significant and substantial*’ (Williams qtd. in Milner 63).

Important, too, is the fact that my project differs from that of the Cultural Materialist because it is more philosophically engaged and focuses more tightly and explicitly in the form and nature of humans. Like the Cultural Materialists, I start with the assumption that subjectivity is decentred; however, I take the view that the human is complexly formed and structurally tied in very particular ways to the natural-cultural world and it is in this broader context that she is understood as an agent *and* a product. From such an assumption, I go on to ask what the effects of such a form and structure have upon questions of human identities, individual action, and the potential for change, and how they might open up an approach to character. Though my project is certainly interested in the politics of how and where the individual is situated and formed in relation to her world, my focus, very differently to the Cultural Materialists, is not to reveal the subject as an ideological product: although the matters of power, identity (specifically, for the Cultural Materialists, gender, sexuality, race, and class), and action are of interest to me, they are not my focus; neither do the marginalised or oppressed constitute particular objects of study (though I do not eschew such objects or considerations, either, as the humanists have been accused of doing). Rather, my focus is in the formation of humans and characters, how this form negotiates with identity, and what the implications may be for action and change.

The post/humanist approach adopted by this thesis will be outlined in this Introduction in due course, and again later and more fully through Chapters One, Two, and Three. For the present, some consideration of the creative capacity of the human to make, and remake, himself and the world warrants consideration since such capacities are not only relevant to the argument of this thesis – that the human is a product and agent, a natural-cultural entity tied to the text and the material world – but are also directly relevant to the question of what human beings are becoming, and the narratives that are told on the subject.

### **Narratives that Create Worlds: The Coupling of Fact and Fiction, Literature and Science, Nature and Culture**

The ‘scientific’ process adopted by Frankenstein to create the Monster is alluded to in relatively obscure terms by Shelley in her novel but, generally, it involves ‘[t]he collection of assorted body parts from dead people and their reconstruction and

revivification through a (vaguely defined) process of surgery, galvanism and electrification’ (Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle 257-8).

Today, the principles and processes of the creation of life are somewhat different. In 2010, the world’s first human-made cell, capable of surviving and reproducing itself, was created. Called JCVI-syn 1.0, this bacterium has cell walls that are the hybridized product of yeast and E Coli cells, and a 1.08 million base pair genome that was sequenced on a computer and ‘booted up’ into the cell ‘to create the first cell controlled completely by a synthetic genome’ (J. Craig Venter Institute, ‘First Self-Replicating Synthetic Bacterial Cell’).

The creation of a bacterial cell is hardly on the gothic scale of *Frankenstein*, with its construction of a ‘man’, but it denotes, nonetheless, the creation of life. Evolutionary developmental biologist, Leroi, writes: ‘Now the question is not whether we can make Life – we can, we have – but whether we can make it better than Nature ever did’.

Synthetic biology is the science that is making such advances possible, a science that was new to the latter part of the twentieth-century. Using tools and principles equivalent to those of engineering, the science of synthetic biology ‘breaks down life’s complexity into standard biological parts and uses these as a parts list for new biotechnologies’, with the aim of engineering, or synthesising, new biology ‘from parts from the bottom up, much as a new mechanical machine can be built from nuts, bolts and a blueprint’ (Centre for Synthetic Biology and Innovation (Imperial College), ‘Our Research’). This *is* the stuff of *Frankenstein*, then: like Frankenstein’s unwavering pursuit of the Creature across the Arctic wastes at the end of Dear’s play, ‘forever in pursuit of the thing he made and is’ (Leroi), so the men and women of science continue to pursue the secrets of life, of which they, themselves, are made.

As Shelley’s novel, and Dear’s play, attest, ‘life’ and what it means to be human are not merely the province of science but of literature, theatre, philosophy, art, and religion, too, to name but a very few. Indeed, in a fascinating side-note about the JCVI-syn 1.0 project, its press release reports how quotes, including those from literature, have been inscribed onto the synthesised cells as ‘watermarks’ so as to identify them as synthetic as opposed to natural. These quotes read: ‘To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life’ (James Joyce); ‘See things not as they are, but as they might be’ (from the biography, *American Prometheus*); and ‘What I cannot build, I cannot understand’ (Richard Feynman, physicist) (J. Craig Venter Institute, Press Release, ‘First



Self-Replicating Synthetic Bacterial Cell'). Fragments of literature and matters of philosophy are, thus, literally embedded in the coding of the synthetic cell to symbolise the efforts and ethos of the scientists involved in this project to create new life.

While literature and philosophy pose questions and hypothetical scenarios pertaining to the nature of human being, science attempts to answer or to realise them, while asking questions in its turn in a relationship of intimate coupling that sees all constituents pushing and pursuing the development of knowledge about the human form. Indeed, it should be no surprise to discover that Shelley's *Frankenstein* is accounted, by some, a monstrous kind of creation, 'mutated or created out of [Shelley's] reading' (Bennett and Royle 258) of contemporary poetry, scientific and medical works, social, political, and moral philosophy, classical works of historiography, and the Bible.

The novel, then, as well as the character of the Monster, is a hybridised creation or 'machine' of distinct parts, which, though it is composed of parts, nonetheless manifests a sort of agency of its own. *Frankenstein*, from a certain point of view, though it is but an object, is not entirely devoid of agency. Its dispersal into popular culture, for example, 'into popular mythology' as an 'uncontrolled, uncontrollable outgrowth' (Bennett and Royle 257), implies it has an influence and power of its own that situates it as more than a simple product of Shelley, its creator.

From the consideration of such narratives about creation, narratives that are, themselves, both creatures and creators – from the novel to the bacterial cell, from character to the human – the complexity of unravelling fact from fiction, science from literature, and creator from creation, starts to become evident. Scientists and dramatists are both creative agents of new forms, identities, ideas, and worlds. Indeed, to deny the human powers of agency by persisting in seeing the human as a mere product of pre-existing forces is to deny the potential for intentional change, for thinking and making the self and the world differently. Furthermore, in some ways, it also seems politically and ethically irresponsible to do so. In a world that is newly capable of creating life, it is, perhaps, more important than ever that people be responsible for their actions; just as Victor Frankenstein is asked to take responsibility for his Creature, so must the scientists of JCVI-syn 1.0.

In the Introduction to her book, *Primate Visions*, the cultural theorist, philosopher, and scientist, Donna Haraway, explores the relationship between fact and fiction. She writes that 'in all its meanings, fiction is about human action. So, too, are all the

narratives of science – fiction and fact – about human action’ (4). What humans *do*, then - their acts - form the very foundation of the stories of science and drama. Accordingly, any methodology that sets out to study the representation of the human would do well to take into consideration the human as an agent.

Fact and fiction, according to Haraway, are entwined in projects of ‘worlding’, where worlding confers a ‘kind of Foucauldian sense of discourse producing its objects’ (Gane 144). But this is no disembodied landscape of cultural forces; Haraway’s world, which might be called posthumanist in its construction, insists upon the material, *physical* nature of living with stories and discourse: ‘Stories are means to ways of living’ (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 8). In effect, ways of speaking, thinking, seeing, relating, and so forth, are semiotically constituted but they are tangibly real, too. Dramatists, novelists, and scientists alike tell their stories and, in the process, re-make, re-imagine, re-perform, and re-tell the human self in the world; and importantly, in being simultaneously constituted by that world, the human re-makes the world in its turn.

The object of this section has been to start to open up some posthumanist ways of thinking about the world, its objects, and its humans. Methodologically, by refusing the traditional binaries of nature and culture, science and literature, and fact and fiction; by identifying objects as complex nodes of natural *and* cultural parts, the human starts to find form as a composite, often contradictory, product but also as an entity capable of manifesting agency in its own right. Humans, thus, are the product of factual and fictional stories but they are authors of stories, too. This being so, this thesis suggests that characters in drama and theatre are not merely informative of what it means to be human at any given point in history; they also retain the potential to exert influence in the world themselves.

In methodological defense of her own fascinating study of identity and subjectivity in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*, Belsey writes the following:

Fictional texts do not necessarily mirror the practices prevalent in a social body, but they are a rich repository of the meanings its members understand and contest. And in order to be intelligible at all, fiction necessarily ascribes certain meanings, however plural and contradictory, to subjectivity and to gender. It therefore constitutes a possible place from which to begin an analysis of what it means to be a person [...] at a specific historical moment (5).

This defense holds good for my own project's focus in drama and theatre to illuminate what it means to be human, which also engages with matters of identity and subjectivity. I would simply add to the case put forward by Belsey that representations of the human are not merely reflective of historical attitudes and facts but potentially manifest effects in the world themselves, influencing the way people perceive themselves (and character) and behave, which affords drama, by implication, a distinctly, and importantly, political potential.

### **Apocalyptic Narratives and the Posthuman**

Discoveries in science, medicine, and technology during the modern period have advanced in an exponential curve that, today, see human beings becoming creators of life, albeit on the scale of a bacterial cell. The human is also experiencing more and more intimate couplings with technology, which seem to posit her in more and more cyborg-like terms: a British man has recently been given an entirely artificial heart that is powered by a portable power pack; a surgical procedure is now available to cure depression that inserts wires into the brain to electrically stimulate or inhibit brain circuits, which are involved in the regulation and control of emotion; and the technology of augmented reality (AR) is contemporarily being explored as a technique that overlays information on an image in the real world in such a way that it seems to float, with some predictions that augmented reality glasses will become widely available by 2015.<sup>7</sup> In science fiction, meanwhile, cybernetic species such as *Star Trek Voyager's* Borg conjure highly dramatic and graphic images of what advances in technology might lead to at the same time as indicating the anxieties attaching to the human's tendency to tamper with the 'natural order' of things.

Apocalyptic narratives about the future of the human species sound familiar warnings on such a subject, telling a tale of transformation from the human to the in-, or post-, human. Given the recent advancements in science and technology, the human is frequently accounted as having reached a kind of crisis point, its borders on the very brink of being breached, such that a reexamination of who or what we think we are seems to be called for.

---

<sup>7</sup> Claire Boonstra, co-founder of an augmented reality mobile app provider, has been quoted as stating: 'By 2015 augmented reality glasses will be mass market, so you won't walk around holding your phone up to things. With one gesture, you could show that you like a pair of shoes you see someone wearing and could buy them online. And you could switch on the sun on a rainy day. It's totally immersive' (Jemima Kiss).

Posthumanist discourse is one response to such a contemporary human border crisis. As Catherine Waldby puts it, posthumanism derives from ‘recent attempts to reconceptualise the relationship between the rapidly transforming field of technology and the conditions of human embodiment’ (42-3). Posthumanism, then, attempts to answer what it means to be a human when *life*, formerly conceived as being something mysterious, becomes something that can be engineered or programmed; when *intelligence* and, possibly, *consciousness*, come to be conceived as things equally attributable to animals and machines as to humans; and when the human starts to look more and more like a cyborg.

Humans find specific form in specific material contexts and historical moments. The project of posthumanism, by focusing its examination of humans at their borders and in their relations with their nonhuman others (animals, machines, and supernatural entities) aims to probe what such border negotiations and relationships might signify.

Posthumanist theory, however, is not without its problems. Posthumanist study oftentimes concerns itself with (frequently science-fictional) narratives that respond to advances and encroachments of contemporary technologies upon the organic human form. These narratives are too apt to cast the human as being on the brink of extinction, projecting a transformation from human to, literally, *posthuman*. Indeed, the possibility that an apocalyptic or dark future awaits the human species, which is paving its own path to extinction or dystopia by interfering with the natural or providential order, is a familiar and fearful tale. Aldous Huxley’s novel, *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (written 1920-1), Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), to name but a very few novels, offer various accounts of what the world could look like for human beings if their hubristic aspirations are given form without due care and consideration.

Closer to home, in the field of drama and theatre, just such an apocalyptic end is conceived in Karel Capek’s play, *R. U. R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)* (written in 1920 and published in an English translation in 1923). This play depicts a future in which humans are on the very brink of extinction, destroyed by robots that have become self-aware.

Capek’s play was hugely popular in its day and actually coined the word, *robot*. Tellingly, the word, which derives from the Czech word, *robota*, means ‘drudgery’ or

‘servitude’, while *robotnik* denotes a peasant or serf (Dennis G. Jerz). Giving form and life to the robots is a scientist with Promethean ambitions who is looking to usurp the role of the Creator, and a profit-hungry industrialist, Domin, whose utopian dream is to create a cheap, mass-produced, and expendable workforce. Domin says, ‘People will no longer be labourers and secretaries, digging the streets, sitting at desks, paying for the bread they eat with their lives and with hatred, destroying their souls with work they hate!’ (23). With such jobs now done by the robots, ‘Man will only do what he loves doing, free and sovereign, with no other task than to better himself’ (ibid).

*R. U. R.* was written immediately post-World War I, when the potential abuses of technology were still palpable. This being so, the play, perhaps predictably, depicts Domin’s dream as spectacularly backfiring as the robots rise up against their human masters to destroy them. Importantly, it is the robots’ acquisition of ‘souls’ that renders the uprising possible. All robots had, from the start, been ‘programmed’ with the capacities to learn and to reason but, before the uprising, they had lacked the potential to ‘come up with anything new’ (14). However, in their obtainment of ‘souls’, they correspondingly gain the abilities to act freely and to experience emotions such as love and hate and, in doing so, they become distinctly human-like. This being so, as a much more recent play, *Heddatron* (2008), puts it: ‘If you’re a robot and you figure out you’re a robot – are you still a robot? Who do you become?’ (57).

*Heddatron* by Elizabeth Meriweather, which was first performed in 2006 in the United States by Les Freres Corbusier, before being published in 2008, also explores the relationship between robots and humans and the potential for robots to attain self-awareness. Less apocalyptic than *R. U. R.* and more farcical and satiric in nature, this play is based on Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and sets out the scenario of a pregnant wife and mother being abducted by robots in order that she play the part of Hedda in the robots’ production of Ibsen’s play.

The play’s interest in human and robot identity is immediately articulated when the character of the Engineer opens the play, saying: ‘Robots don’t abduct women. It’s just not possible. They aren’t savages. Not that savages abduct – I’m not saying any particular culture -’ (9). Robots, failing to be human – failing even to meet the standards of behaviour of the most, supposedly, ‘inferior’ kind of human: the ‘savage’ – are, here, deemed incapable of any kind of intention or thought.

The Engineer's words betray common cultural attitudes, which identify certain kinds of humans or machines or robots as corresponding with a limited and pre-determined range of behaviours. So, for example, 'savages', by implication, are deemed naturally capable of the lawless abduction of women; robots, in contrast, are not, presumably because they lack the biologically and primitively constituted desires or instincts to do so. What is notable about such identifications is that they imply a deterministic relationship between form and role, between physical type and behavioural characteristics, which conform to certain roles. Such a restriction of potential kinds of actions to certain kinds of humans and robots interestingly locates all forms – human and mechanical – as operating according to deterministic principles of cause and effect. Conspicuously, such a marrying of identity to behaviour may be recognised in, and is typified by, the casting of particular character identities and types (i.e. a beautiful and innocent young woman) in corresponding roles (i.e. heroine).

Such deterministic connections, however, become subverted when the play proposes that the Engineer's traditional view – that robots are incapable of abducting women – is no longer, necessarily, true. Some robots, it seems, may be achieving self-consciousness and, by implication, self-determination:

**Engineer** There's a theory bouncing around that robots are becoming exponentially more intelligent – that we are quickly approaching uh a moment – an era – called The Singularity.

**Film Student** The Singularity –

**Engineer** The moment when robots will break out of the network of communications and achieve self-awareness. You know: The Toaster talks back (9).

In conceiving the possibility of intelligent and self-aware machines, the play takes its lead from the futurist Ray Kurzweil's theory of Singularity,<sup>8</sup> which posits a time when humans will be overtaken by machines (Strong Artificial Intelligences) and cybernetically augmented humans.

Such a scenario locates consciousness as an unpredictable, emergent quality of certain machines: a sort of unexpected, evolutionary accident. Accordingly, consciousness is conceived as materially constituted and the possibility is raised that though machines are designed according to physical principles of cause and effect, the

---

<sup>8</sup> This is an explicit influence, as the play's Production Notes acknowledge: 'Singularity is a theory of engineer Ray Kurzweil, and the ideas in this play are creatively derived from his essays' (Meriweather 5).

potential also exists for them to exceed their programming, to become, somewhat mysteriously, more than the sum of their programming and parts. Just as Frankenstein's Creature and Capek's robots, which are all types of *organic* machine, are depicted as attaining individualised forms of selfhood, so Meriweather's mechanical robots, to greater and lesser degrees, achieve such a capacity, too.

The playwright, Henrik Ibsen's, focus in his Naturalist drama was confined to the human and, perhaps particularly, her potential for free and self-determined action. Freedom, in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), for example, is formulated as something the human should strive for. The protagonist, Nora, finally attains self-consciousness in relation to the world at the end of the play. Notably, it is this state of self-awareness that enables her to 'over-ride' her cultural 'programming' as wife and mother – as a kind of *doll* or automaton - and to set about creating a new life, and, potentially, character for herself.

The focus of *Heddatron's* character of Ibsen, meanwhile, is not merely the human individual but all creatures, organic and inorganic. Meriweather's Ibsen says: 'all creatures move towards freedom, some more slowly than others, but there will come a day when the tiny concerns of the living room will be obliterated by freedom everywhere' (21).

It is the element of unpredictability which attaches to their artificial creations that seems to be most worrying to the human characters and creators of these science-fictional narratives. When Frankenstein, in Dear's play, destroys/kills the bride he has created for the Creature, he is responding to a dream he has had in which his younger brother, who has been murdered by the Creature, appears and puts a series of questions to him: William asks Frankenstein if the Creature and his 'wife' will breed; if so, how fast the cycle will be; if the new species will be good or bad; and, crucially, if it will be controllable (60). Frankenstein finds himself unable to answer William's questions and it is the doubt indicated in this failure – the doubt and fear that he might, in fact, spawn a new and stronger species of creature to threaten the survival of humankind - that cause him to '*hack[] up the Female with a cleaver*' (64).

Victor Frankenstein's view of the world is positivist and scientific in tenor and is demonstrated, observes Leroi, in the character's obsession for learning, his scorn for received wisdom, and his belief 'that the mysteries of the world can be understood, and

nature bent to human will'. However, Frankenstein – 'The New Prometheus'<sup>9</sup> and the first scientist of literature<sup>10</sup> – doubts that he can foresee the mystery of the future and control his creations. Despite the fact that the Creature and his bride, the Female, are entirely physical products of his own biological 'engineering', Frankenstein fears what might ensue if they are permitted the freedom to live and procreate. This fear either derives from a lack of faith in scientific determinism (i.e. the future cannot be predicted because human-like creations are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and possibly free) or else from a distrust in his capacity to make such predictions (i.e. because the determining factors are simply too many and complex).<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, however, while *Frankenstein's* story of human hubris and potential species extinction is given form by Enlightenment thought and ideals – humans, through rational and scientific endeavour, advance knowledge in their discovery of the mysteries of life – the story's structure is quasi-religious and punitive: the over-reaching human, in daring to aspire to Promethean and godly ambitions, is punished by having his markedly human shortcomings – his failure to foretell the consequences of his creations – sensationally demonstrated to him. Despite all his intellectual and creative powers, Frankenstein could not foretell what his creation of the Creature would lead to in all its violent and tragic detail. Notably, such a retribitional framing of the play functions to elaborate life forms, including the human, as being *naturally* constituted by Nature or Providence, with the moral attaching that the natural way of the world is not to be tampered with.

However, *Frankenstein* and *R. U. R.*'s punitive structure, which pits nature against culture, settles uneasily upon the plays' narratives, which depend upon materialist assumptions of life for their premises, conceiving all forms (organic and artificial) as being potentially capable of life, mind, and acts of creation, given that humans and machines are equally and fundamentally physically formed.

---

<sup>9</sup> This is the subtitle Shelley gave her novel. Prometheus was a Titan, a deity, who, in some stories from antiquity, is said to have stolen the divine fire from Zeus and given it to man, for which he was condemned to suffer an eternity of torment.

<sup>10</sup> This is according to Leroi, who writes: Victor Frankenstein 'is the first modern scientist of literature. (Goethe's Faust is just a whimpering medieval alchemist).'

<sup>11</sup> Such a view maintains a causal account of the world, such as was first given by Pierre Simon Laplace. Laplace was an eighteenth century mathematician and astronomer and the first to publish an account of causal or scientific determinism, theorising that, given a sufficiently powerful 'intellect' or 'demon' (or, today, we might add, *computer*), the future is predictable. Bryan Greetham explains: 'Laplace had such faith in [the Principle of Universal Causation] that he argued if he knew the location and motion of every object in the universe and the laws governing their movements, he could predict the location and motion of every object at any time in the future' (238).



This thematic organisation of nature versus culture, human versus machine/animal/god or ghost, notably, does not merely permeate science-fictional and sensationalist narratives of literal, dystopian posthumanity; it also underpins conventional stories of, and approaches to, subjectivity and dramatic character. As has already been observed, the humanist and materialist character approaches locate themselves at dichotomous poles of the human, where the human is conceived as comprising a natural and essential human agent *or* a culturally constructed product. But just as this structure sits uneasily and paradoxically upon narratives that depend upon the human as a materially constituted being who is located on a scale of being, so accounts of dramatic character that locate the form in dichotomous terms as agent or product frequently function to tell only part of a story of character in any drama. Indeed, the representation of the human in the form of dramatic character, particularly of *modern* dramatic character, is frequently revealed as a compendium of contradictions and parts. This being so, any methodology or narrative that seeks to identify and treat dramatic character as a natural *or* cultural entity risks reducing or simplifying it.

### **‘The Death of Character’**

Elinor Fuchs’s book, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism* (1996), tells the influential story of the decline of character and its eventual postmodern death, which it links to the trajectory of modernist and postmodernist theatre aesthetics. Fuchs observes that the autonomous and distinctly individual (human) agent of Romantic drama starts to come under attack around 1890 with the symbolist playwrights’ enthusiasm for ‘de-individualization’, which corresponds with their foregrounding of ‘the Idea’ over character (29). In modernist drama, writes Fuchs, ‘character comes to the stage partly de-substantiated’ (35). By the time postmodernist theatre practices become prevalent, character has shrugged off any fears it may once have entertained about becoming ‘associated with posthumanist thinking’ (*ibid*) (where posthumanist signifies *after* humanist) and accepts as normal its conceptual form as a flat, inhuman ‘social construction or marker in language, the unoccupied occupant of the subject position’ (Fuchs 3).

According to Fuchs, the apogee of character is located in Romantic and Hegelian models, which indicate sovereignty of self: ‘in drama the inner will, with its demands and intentions, is the essential determinant and permanent foundation of everything that goes

on. The things that happen appear to be entirely the result of a character and its aims' (Hegel qtd. in Fuchs 26). Character's death, meanwhile, is bound to postmodernist theory, which identifies self as a product of cultural structures and forces, which literally compose it: in short, *character* dies, to be replaced by *subject*.

Hans-Thies Lehmann approaches the subject of character in his book, *Postdramatic Theatre* (originally published in German in 1999), via the thinking of Elfriede Jelinek and G. Poschmann. Identifying language, as opposed to character, as the autonomous element in the constitution of the human subject in some recent trends in theatre form and practice, Lehmann remarks that such a shift does not reveal 'a lack of interest in the human being', but a 'changed perspective on human subjectivity' (18). In similar vein to Fuchs, Lehmann observes a contemporary state of human subjectivity that is distinctly inhuman in form, one that, in effect, problematises the very notion of subjectivity. (It is difficult to entertain subjectivity as an idea that signifies a personal and private experience or account of consciousness and 'I'-centred selfhood, when the self has been rendered the effect of language.) In direct contrast to Hegel's position, this new perspective, claims Lehmann, doubts the 'intentionality' of the 'I' of character; in effect, the contemporary, postdramatic theatre text decentres the humanist subject to focus 'less [in] conscious will than desire, less [in] the 'I' than the "subject of the unconscious"' (ibid). As Lehmann explains, in postdramatic theatre, 'the real issues are only decided in power blocks, not by protagonists who in reality are interchangeable in what Hegel called the "prose of civic life"' (182). In short, this theatre no longer accounts the individual an agent in the world but affords all power to inhuman cultural (and biological) structures that extend beyond, pre-exist, and compose the effect of the subject.

These sorts of narratives of character conceive of character in binary terms, as existing or not existing as an individual agent. The problem with such stories is that representations of dramatic, or even, sometimes, postdramatic, character, rarely depict such wholly coherent, dichotomous forms. Consider Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), for example, to choose one of Lehmann's 'no longer dramatic theatre text[s]' (Poschmann qtd. in Lehmann 18).<sup>12</sup> It is immediately evident that this play obstructs any possibility of adopting a straightforward humanist interpretation of character, since it refuses to provide the basic ingredients of character: psychologically coherent, named, and speaking

---

<sup>12</sup> Lehmann writes: 'Retaining the dramatic dimension to different degrees, Werner Schwab, Elfriede Jelinek, Rainald Goetz, Sarah Kane [...] have all produced texts in which language appears not as the speech of characters – if there still are definable characters at all – but as an autonomous theatricality' (18).

individuals who are located as agents in the world. The reader does not know whether one or more characters are meant to be imagined, what the identity of the speaker(s) is (are), where or when the play is taking place, and so on. Although the play does offer fragments of dialogue that appear to be taking place between a doctor and a patient (and in its capacity to denote this, the language of the play demonstrates its ‘autonomy’, its capacity actively to construct and position certain kinds of people), it is possible that the dialogue offers simply fragments from the memory of the mind, which is ‘the subject of these bewildered fragments’ (4.48 210), or, it may merely symbolise those aspects of the mind that denote its ‘psychiatric voice of reason’ (4.48 209). In such ways, the play demonstrates ‘Elfriede Jelinek’s idea of juxtaposed “language surfaces” (*Sprachflächen*)’ (Lehmann 18). In place of dialogue between identifiable characters in identifiable contexts, one finds merely fragments of text, devoid of context, which must be made sense of and imagined by readers as they will.<sup>13</sup>

Do these elements of the play mean that it should be approached via a postmodernist account of vacant subjectivity? Perhaps surprisingly, I would suggest that the answer is no. Although language certainly functions as the determining factor in the construction of 4.48’s character or characters, the postmodernist approach is as problematic as its humanist alternative, given that the power and purpose of this play is its expression of a *subjectivity*, of an *experiencing consciousness* (or, possibly, more than one subjectivity and consciousness). 4.48’s character, fragmented and puzzling as he is, does not correspond with the vacant subject position of the postmodern subject. Furthermore, the subject matter of Kane’s play is the question of whether or not this particular subjectivity should commit suicide. Though such an eventuality may or may not constitute a free act of volition (the character’s suicide may, for example, be a foregone conclusion, pre-determined by a ‘conglomerate’<sup>14</sup> of natural and cultural forces that compel this subjectivity to think and act as he does), the significant fact is that the play foregrounds living or dying as a decision. The fact is, despite 4.48’s demonstration of some features of postmodern or postdramatic theatre texts, the play is about being or not being and, accordingly, the adoption of a poststructuralist methodology for its analysis would serve to negate the play’s very *raison d’être*.

---

<sup>13</sup> I write about readers here, of course, and not audience, because any production of the play will necessarily have made its own interpretation as to the number and identity of ‘characters’ and thus narrowed down the possibilities for the audience.

<sup>14</sup> This is August Strindberg’s term, from his ‘Preface’ to *Miss Julie* (60).

The story of character's death-by-theory denies any possibility that character might constitute the origin of speech and meaning construction, and instead argues it as constituting a spoken subject. The possibility that character might be both a speaking and spoken agent-product is not permitted. This being so, it seems unlikely that such an account of character is capable of offering an enlightening route into the study of character in any comprehensive way because it does not take into account character's frequently paradoxical constitution as an agent-product. Additionally, the postmodernist account of character's death leaves the discourse of character in a distinctly awkward position. Having convincingly routed humanist approaches to character by denying that character exists as such (where character is given, narrowly, to signify a unified and sovereign 'I'), the dramatic commentator is left, in principle, with nothing to talk about. It is, perhaps, no surprise, then, that relatively little has been written on the subject since Fuchs's important and fascinating thesis on the subject. Indeed, although Bert O. States has written at some length about character, it is only recently, in the field of Shakespeare studies, that character finds itself, once more, attracting attention in academic discourse, particularly importantly in the research project and ensuing edited anthology of Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights, whose proposal and description of New Character Criticism is putting agency back into character and, in doing so, going some way to resurrect it.

It is at this point, it is proposed, that posthumanist theory comes into view as a potentially efficacious approach to the human self and dramatic character, since it facilitates an approach to human form that conceives of it as natural *and* cultural, agent *and* product, material *and* semiotic. Deriving from a model of human being that originates in the science of cybernetics, the posthuman is posited, structurally, as a system of parts, both organic and artificial. The posthuman's identity, then, is constituted, in part, by cultural elements and by natural ones (which puts the body back into any conception of the human and character).

It is to the post/humanist approach adopted by this thesis that discussion will now turn.

### **The Study of Dramatic Character: A Post/Humanist Approach**

Posthumanism casts itself as a distinctly contemporary theory as it argues that borders between the human and her nonhuman others – in particular, technology – are only recently being breached. According to posthumanist theorists such as N. Katherine

Hayles, Haraway, and Robert Pepperell, the identifying borders of human beings with their traditional others have become insecure only recently. The human, in short, contemporarily finds himself under pressure, conceived as already having become, or else as imminently becoming, posthuman.

Such a view is not, however, persuasive. Two of the plays discussed earlier in this Introduction are, certainly, products of twenty-first century new writing (*Heddatron* and *Dear's Frankenstein*). However, *R. U. R.* is ninety years old and yet that play seems equally as interested in exploring the human-machine border and responsive to the pressures that have been put on that border by advances in science and technology, as the later dramas. If the provenance of the story of the play, *Frankenstein*, is considered - Shelley's novel, which is almost two hundred years old - then it becomes difficult to conceive of how posthumanist conceptions of identity and being are definitively novel and limited to later twentieth-century technologies.

In fact, as this thesis argues, the human being is not on the point of becoming a machine; in fact, this thesis suggests that if we attend to such thinking as has been offered by the likes of the French physician and philosopher, Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709-1751), it becomes evident that a history of the human conceived as, and as always having been, a machine, already exists. La Mettrie proposes that the human is a Man-machine, constituted of physical, causally bound processes, which include the operations of mind. Hamlet makes reference to being a machine in a letter to Ophelia in Shakespeare's play as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. The idea that the human is not necessarily ontologically 'hygienic',<sup>15</sup> then, is not a new or particularly sensational one. This is not to suggest that the advancement of technology does not have implications for human being; it certainly does, for the human is systemically connected to, and formed by, technology, so if you change technology, you change the human (her actions, ways of communicating, thinking, remembering, imagining, and so forth). However, this thesis claims that developments in technology have been making themselves felt on the human form for as long as humans have worn clothes and spoken language and, this being so, the position adopted here refuses the human any claims to natural authenticity or innocence. The human has never been an essentially natural being and so it cannot 'fall' into cultural or artificial corruption.

---

<sup>15</sup> Elaine L. Graham refers to the human's tradition of maintaining her 'ontological hygiene' in her book, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (2002). This is an idea that will be discussed further in Chapter One.

A definitive breach of human borders, then, is not imminent, as Chapter One works to demonstrate. In negotiating the human's identity in relations of difference with animals, angels, gods or ghosts, and machines, the human has always found herself in possession of a form that is provisional and amorphous. When the status and form of any of her nonhuman others or 'test objects', as Sherry Turkle names them, change as a result of new scientific or philosophical ideas or facts, the human changes, too. The protean nature of the posthumanist human is not a new phenomenon. Apes and computers, for example, constitute kinds of test objects in the ongoing process of negotiating the distinct human form: how they are (re)conceived affects how humans are defined. Thus, when Linnaeus proposed that apes are 'Man's Cousins' (qtd. in Giorgio Agamben, *The Open* 23) or when Darwin proposed that we share our evolutionary ancestry with animals and plants; and when the computer Deep Blue beat the world chess champion at chess, conventional understandings of what it meant to be singularly human were put under stress and were consequently modified.

This thesis claims that the posthuman's hybrid constitution and provisional form finds its origins in Renaissance humanism, in particular, in the work of Pico della Mirandola and Juan Luis Vives. Given this origin, the argument formulated in these pages takes a contradictory view to that offered by the narrative of the decline and death of the liberal humanist subject, which is offered, conventionally, by commentators of posthumanism and dramatic character. In its place, this thesis finds a humanist subject of the Renaissance period that looks strikingly protean and hybrid in form and distinctly less fixed than the picture of the liberal humanist subject that has been painted by antihumanists. In consequence, the story of this thesis does not adopt the conventional structure, which proposes an ontological jump from human agent to inhuman product for the human and character; instead, it proposes that the humanist subject and character have been post/humanist at least since Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the sense of being ontologically multiple (paradoxical as that may be), formed of physical and cultural parts operating in systemic and causally consistent fashion, while concurrently permitting the possibility of self-determination and free will.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, this post/humanist character locates in *modern* character, which has distinguished character, since Shakespeare, as

---

<sup>16</sup> The theory that permits the possibility of such a compatibilist model of mind for the post/human is, this thesis suggests, *emergence*, or *emergentism*, which proposes that mind or consciousness is a qualitatively distinct phenomenon that derives from complex formations and interactions of basic, physical parts. This theory will be explored in detail in Chapter Two.

lifelike and, in being so, as complex and contradictory. This is a character that acts as, or as if, it is an agent while revealing itself, simultaneously, as a product of its nonhuman others.

It is by virtue of the identification of such an alternative form of humanist subjectivity; and it is by virtue, too, of this thesis's identification of an alternative genealogy for the posthumanist subject or 'cyborg', that this thesis uses *post/humanist* to identify the form of subjectivity that it argues manifests in the early modern period and constitutes a 'realistic' and enlightening structure for approaching dramatic character. In this usage I follow the lead of Graham who explains in her book, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (2002), her aim to distinguish her form of the term: she writes that references to 'postbiological' or 'the posthuman condition', with which the term, posthumanism, is bound, 'are misleading as characterizations of the human implications of twenty-first century technologies if they are understood as alluding to a transition from one axiomatic ontological state to another' (36). In contrast to the conventional posthumanist position, which recognises the posthuman as marking an ontological leap (and, as such, implicitly assumes that the human is a fixed entity), the post/humanist position argued for in this thesis is of a human that is inherently protean and as always having been so. Accordingly, sensationalist tales of apocalyptic endings to human being are curtailed, as is any suggestion of an inexorable evolutionary progress from '*Homo sapiens* or *Homo faber* into *Homo cyberneticus*' (ibid). Finally, of course, the use of the term, post/humanist, also aims to emphasise the creative, self-determining aspect of the subject form, in particular as it reveals itself in some early Renaissance humanist model of being.

Any narrative – be this fictional or theoretical – that posits a movement from Nature to Culture or from human to posthuman (where the *post* signifies a literal *after* the natural and essential human being) imposes dichotomous ontologies upon the evolution of the human or character that accounts them, first, as agents, and later, as products. By articulating such a trajectory, these studies risk failing to take account of the full, rich, multiply constituted, frequently paradoxical, hybrid, and protean form of modernity's lifelike and distinctly post/humanist character.

## The Focus and Scope of the Thesis

This thesis offers two propositions for approaching dramatic character. Firstly, it posits that character should be redefined in its widest sense as ‘designat[ing] any entity, individual or collective – normally human or human-like – introduced in a work of narrative fiction’ (Uri Margolin 66). In short, character is to be ‘succinctly defined as [a] storyworld participant’ (ibid). Opening character up in such a way, as identifying any model of human or human-like selfhood, circumvents any misleading, reductive, or apocalyptic narratives about its death.

Secondly, this thesis proposes a post/humanist approach to character, arguing that such an approach permits character to be viewed and analysed as a hybrid natural-cultural entity (as opposed to natural *or* cultural). The post/humanist approach also ties character to the dramatic and theatrical texts and world that produce it (much like the post/human is tied to her body and world). Finally, the post/humanist frame, importantly, enables character to be viewed in compatibilist terms, as a complex and lifelike product and agent.

In the following pages, I do not attempt a historically comprehensive examination of modern dramatic character that establishes continuities across periods and genres; nor have I attempted to test this post/humanist approach against an exhaustive range of modern dramatic character forms. Such ambitions are beyond the scope of this more modest thesis. However, my objects of dramatic study have been carefully selected. Firstly, my selections are tied to the criterion that they be ‘lifelike’ representations of people. As Chapter Three works to demonstrate, modern character is bound to the representation of individuals that are lifelike and, in being so, inconsistent and contradictory. The focus of this thesis, accordingly, lies in drama that attempts to ‘realistically’ represent people in the world. The reference to realistic representations, here, is not intended narrowly to denote a particular account of reality, such as is offered by Naturalism with its positivistic view of the world. There have been many forms of reality through history, some locating reality in the mind as opposed to the physical world, for example, and, accordingly, this thesis includes, amongst its case studies, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (circa 1599-1601), August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (1888), and Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995); Kane’s reality is not Strindberg’s, which is not Shakespeare’s. However, the characters in each of these plays, this thesis claims,



demonstrate complexity of form, contradictory or inconsistent behaviours, attitudes, and qualities, and a lifelikeness that is bound to their particular moments in history.

Though the basic requirement of this post/humanist study of character is for a play to represent lifelike human or human-like characters who are located in a dramatic storyworld, the three plays analysed in this thesis in Chapters Four, Five, and Six are the product of the additional criterion that they be keenly interested in exploring the question, 'What makes a human person?' As will be demonstrated, in each play, what it means to be human is significantly focused by matters of human identity in relation to animals, machines, and/or spirits and ghosts, and the related issue of ontology.

As for the reasons relating to the individual play choices, the selection of *Hamlet* stems from the way in which that play is importantly bound up in the historical project of distinguishing Shakespeare's drama as modern as opposed to classical, with the discourse of modern character actually developing out of discussions of the lifelike and contradictory nature of the characters of Shakespeare's characters, in particular, of Hamlet.

The choice of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, meanwhile, arose from its form as Naturalist drama. In aspiring to verisimilitude in its representation of character, it seems to situate the human as a self-determining agent and yet, paradoxically and simultaneously, it locates this human in a definitively physical universe. Such a contradiction struck me as puzzling and intriguing and as warranting further investigation. At the same time, Strindberg's 'Preface' to *Miss Julie*, which continues to stand as one of the most important tracts to have been written on dramatic character, poses a discussion of character as a 'conglomerate', which chimes with posthumanism's hybrid organisation and, thus, seemed to invite a post/humanist analysis of the play.

As for Kane's *Blasted*, the critical narrative that is often told about this play remarks upon a movement from 'naturalistic' and 'humanist' character to machine- or animal-like product of causal forces in a structure that mirrors that of the narrative of dramatic character's death. Thus perpetuating a narrative that, this thesis argues, is in some ways unhelpful and inaccurate, it seemed important to demonstrate the ways in which Kane's characters are, in fact, post/humanist in form and how such a reframing lends the play greater political agency.

All the plays referred to have been published and are available in print. Analysis locates mainly in dramatic play texts although plays in production are also analysed, as

appropriate, where these function to elaborate a significant view of human identity or character. Details of performances seen live or on film, or read about in theatre reviews or discourse, are particularly valuable when identifying historically specific interpretations of human identity and form. And since one of the objectives of this thesis is to persuade its readers of the relevance and efficaciousness of a post/humanist approach to modern character, it seemed important to locate discussion of character form and its material performance mainly in well-known plays that would be accessible to all its readers.

The drift of this thesis is humanist. However, my approach draws substantially upon, and is in dialogue with, posthumanist discourse. This being so, my use of posthumanism perhaps requires some comment. In some ways, posthumanist theory is an unusual, certainly unconventional, choice of theory by which to explore dramatic character. Posthumanist discourse, where it engages with theatre at all, navigates the terrain of performance and theatre technology. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck offers important and pioneering studies in such areas, bringing the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Giorgio Agamben, and, most significantly, Haraway (specifically, Haraway's cyborg) to bear on issues of ethics and subjectivity on the contemporary stage. Of course, performance and technology tender explicit affinities with the highly vivid, visual, and expressly technological qualities of, for example, Haraway's cyborg. However, the ramifications of the cyborg and a posthumanist way of thinking about subjectivity in fact extend much further than the parameters of such localised fields. If the cyborg and its human-nonhuman border issues are treated in more metaphorical, as opposed to literal, terms;<sup>17</sup> and if technology is opened up to include language, cultural assumptions and structures, dramatic forms, theatrical structures, and so forth (as opposed to denoting, more narrowly, technological objects and terrains such as virtual reality, the mobile phone, avatars, or the computer), then it starts to become possible to conceptualise the human as a cyborg and as always having been so.

This thesis does not claim that a post/humanist approach to character will be appropriate for all drama, theatre, or performance at all times. The character analyses

---

<sup>17</sup> Some fascinating analyses and arguments have been offered in relation to the more literal treatment of the cyborg by Parker-Starbuck and Hayles who have each written on the use and representation of animals and/or cybernetic fusions in the areas of performance and installation art. Consider Parker-Starbuck's 'Becoming-Animate: On the Performed Limits of "Human"' (2006), which effectively explores how the 'triangulation' of the human, animal, and machine, in the performance of Cathy Weis, for example, opens up a space by which to consider how identity is constructed. (Weiss includes representations of such animals as a gorilla and sharks.) Hayles, meanwhile, explores some interesting examples of art installations in 'Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments' (2002), which foreground the human-technology 'border'.

offered in these pages deliberately focus in specific examples of modern theatre, which articulate mimetic representations of ‘reality’, whatever form this reality takes. Modern dramatic character is lifelike: it may be an artificial and conventional representation of a fictional ‘real’ person but its characteristic complexity as a ‘realistic’ stand-in combined with its physical and imaginative re-memberment in the performance of the actor or the mind of the reader means that it requires an approach that engages with its natural *and* cultural, material *and* semiotic form. Furthermore, distinguished for its lifelike individual and inconsistent qualities and contradictory product-agent constitution, the compatibilist model of mind that attaches to the post/humanist form renders the figure an especially apposite trope by which to approach modern character. Finally, the composite and systemic form of the post/humanist self means that it is acutely susceptible to the influence of multiple, frequently contradictory, forces and parts, which are historically located and, as such, go together to construct a distinctly historical form of human identity that is demonstrative of the politics and ethics of any given play in any given time.

Such a composite structure also, importantly, allows for an engagement with the inconsistent quality of the lifelike modern character that represents the inconsistent quality of human being: composed of parts that are, at least partially, productive of him, and consisting, as these parts do, of countless different forms from countless different sources, this character could not be anything other than complex and contradictory. Fascinatingly, even here we find that the person’s inconsistency may, in fact, constitute a quality that is foregrounded as a result of the human’s relationship with machines: the person is inconsistent because the machine is not.

The Creature in Dear’s *Frankenstein* observes that human beings are frequently paradoxical and inconsistent. A machine himself, this infuriates him to start with. Remarking upon the ‘inconsistent’ nature of ‘man’ both from first-hand experience and from reading Plutarch, whose work reveals to him the capacity of ‘man’ both for goodness and for massacre (23), the Creature finds such a quality difficult to grasp and to accept, and unhappily bemoans, ‘Why must it be so?’ (ibid). But inconsistency, or so claims Dear’s play, along with the discourse of modern character, is a part of what it means to be human: surprising contradictions are a part of what distinguish the human from the machine, rendering him or her unpredictable and excessive of the deterministic dramatic, physical, and cultural processes and functions that construct him.

### **A Note on Terminology**

The term, post/humanism, has already been identified as this thesis's term for a way of thinking about the human and character that foregrounds the importance of humanist notions of self-determination while positing a compatibilist structure of being and identity that is informed by posthumanist discourse. Where discussion means to denote the generic form and meaning of the theory, or when it focuses on the work of particular theorists who use the conventional form of the word, then the more usual term, posthumanism, will be employed.

This Introduction has already identified 'character' as denoting any human, or human-like, storyworld participant, as opposed to its more limiting and problematic signification as a unified and 'I'-centred agent, such as is frequently linked to a Hegelian theory of dramatic character. By situating character as a more inclusive term, any necessity to refer to character in quotation marks or else as 'subject', in the sense that 'subject' denotes a postmodernist empty subject position, is removed.

This thesis will employ 'self' and 'subject' (as in humanist subject or postmodern subject) interchangeably. In some ways, the term, 'subject', stands as an appropriate term for this thesis, given that it designates, simultaneously, 'the self as originating reference and the self as it is "subjected", liable to the infringements of an external world' (Garner qtd. in Helen Iball 326). Such an articulation of the human character is manifestly fitting for the post/humanist model of selfhood articulated by this thesis, of a person that is an entity of, and for, itself *and* as someone/thing acted upon by power structures, which locate in wider society and culture. However, in the rare instances when the use of 'subject' may be potentially confusing (given its particular meaning in the discourse of Cultural Materialism and postmodern theories of 'character' offered by such as Fuchs), self will serve synonymously to denote a perceived personality and subject position that recognises the individual as an 'originating reference' and as a 'subjected' entity.

'Subjectivity', meanwhile, is given to denote, loosely, the self conceived in particularly personal and private terms and, as such, as being bound to matters of mind and consciousness.

## Outline

The first three chapters of this thesis are theoretical, variously presenting and building upon the post/humanist frame and arguments that this Introduction has already outlined. The latter three chapters offer case studies of modern dramatic characters and their representations of the human.

Chapter One, 'The Human and the Cyborg: A History of Border Play', introduces Haraway's cyborg and sets out to explain how its peculiar structure and materialist constitution embody certain qualities that render it productive for my examination of modern character. The human-as-cyborg, understood as a hybrid structure of organic and technological parts, manifests as a *fundamentally systemic entity* that, in its intimate couplings with its contexts, *changes its content and character with its changing parts and histories*. In short, the cyborg functions as an important metaphorical structure for the protean human agent and frames my arguments for, and analyses of, modern human characters through the course of this thesis. In this chapter, I present an extended argument that the human-as-cyborg constitutes an alternative form and history of the human for the modern period. Taking the contemporary figure of, and mode of thinking which is bound to, the cyborg, I look backwards and argue that humans have been provisional identities in process at least since the Renaissance. Though Haraway argues that the cyborg came into being with recent boundary breaches and ambiguities, this chapter contests that those boundary breakdowns have a history that is centuries, and not merely decades, old. In short, as I will show, exploring the historical borders of 'the human' with her traditional nonhuman others works to reveal a cyborg-like form and structure which is fundamentally protean. Formed of 'natural' parts it shares with animals and machines and, located in, and formed by, its cultural contexts, the post/humanist subject of this thesis manifests as a hybrid entity at once constituted by, and differentiated from, its others in a form and identity that is *both* partially self-determining *and* determined and, significantly, in process.

Chapter Two, 'The Subject(s) of Humanism', focuses in humanist subjectivity; specifically, it presents an alternative account of modern subjectivity than is presented in more conventional stories about the liberal humanist subject and, in the process of presenting its alternative account, the chapter re-examines humanism and works to rehabilitate it. Arguing that humanism is more subtle in some of its manifestations than is generally acknowledged, the chapter works to show that some humanist and posthumanist

forms may be closer kin than is generally acknowledged by the posthumanists. All this is argued in order to make the case that the modern human(ist) subject may have been too quickly consigned to history and that important reasons exist, both political- and character-based, to allow for a hybrid structure of subjectivity that is at least partially free.

Chapter Three, 'Beyond Character', argues for the continuing importance and relevance of dramatic character to theatre and its discourse as it articulates the problems attaching both to the conventionally and purportedly humanist approach to character and to poststructuralist accounts of its death. Looking to modern character's origins in Shakespearean dramatic discourse as a lifelike and inconsistent entity, this chapter identifies character as the evolving product of historically specific discourses and changing assumptions of human being. Arguing for a post/humanist method of positioning and analysing dramatic character as a system of parts, which are natural and cultural, fictional and factual, and material and semiotic, the chapter maintains character as the representation of a human who is an agent *and* product and finds, in line with Yachnin and Slight's New Character Criticism, that character can 'speak' from within the dramatic and real worlds that produce it and thence effect change.

Chapter Four, the first of the post/humanist character analyses, focuses in human identity and the relationship of subjectivity with theatricality in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. During the Renaissance, the mythic figure of Proteus commonly identified the human as a creative agent with a fluctuating form. Connecting such an idea of human nature with acting, Juan Luis Vives's *Fabula de homine* (after 1518) is shown to reveal the human as a protean actor. Hamlet, too, is cast in metatheatrical terrain, coerced, unwillingly, into the role of malecontent avenger in a revenge play. Taking such a starting point - the human as a protean actor - the chapter goes on to explore such a form and role against assumptions underpinning mimetic theatre and realistic acting in discussion that interrogates the relationship between (factual) performance and (fictional) dramatic play. The proposition of this chapter is that theatre serves to highlight the human - and, specifically, Hamlet - as a hybrid natural-artificial entity who fundamentally blurs the binaries of reality and representation, fact and fiction, self and other. This being so, this chapter extends the idea that the actor and character are indivisible and frames *Hamlet's* cast of characters in post/humanist terms such that their metaphorical identification as animals, machines, or divine entities in the play are reinterpreted in more literal terms as being, or as becoming, animal, machine, and divine.

Chapter Five, 'A Question of Human Character: August Strindberg's Natural Actors' interrogates the uneasy relationship between the philosophical underpinning of 'naturalism' and the identification of character as a lifelike and coherent origin of speech and intentional action. Distinguishing between the 'animal machines' of Émile Zola's Naturalistic characters and Strindberg's more complex 'conglomerates', the chapter explores the latter playwright's treatise on character in the 'Preface' to *Miss Julie*, and the play's treatment of character. Approaching these texts from a post/humanist vantage point, analysis functions to discover some ways in which 'the human' may be accounted as being more than, or different to, 'a poor, bare, forked animal' (Shakespeare, *King Lear* 3.4.101-102); how it may even be a cyborg. Finally, working from the discussions of George Henry Lewes (1817-1878) on the subjects of mind and the art of acting, the chapter concludes by exploring the relationships of nature and culture, mind and body, and actor and role to articulate a form of subjectivity that is authentically theatrical, with *Miss Julie*'s characters, Jean and Julie, given form as 'natural actors'.

The case studies conclude with 'Sarah Kane's Dramatic Worlds: Moving Beyond Character'. In this, the sixth and final chapter of the thesis, the conventional narratives circulating on the subject of Kane's characters and treatment of subjectivity are put under the microscope. Finding that Kane's characters are neither the socially and psychologically free speakers and agents that they are frequently accounted to be at the start of her work, nor the inhuman, vacant subjects that they are identified as being at its end, this chapter argues that Kane presents a form of character, identity, and subjectivity, theatre, and world that is post/humanist. Conceived in hybrid terms that refuse traditional dichotomies, Kane's characters and drama conceive of self and world as complex and connected systemic structures that, lacking definitive borders, locate the monster with the angel, the other with the self, and the elsewhere with the here. By doing so, as I will argue, Kane's drama identifies its politics, which sees connections in place of divisions while understanding the potential for 'worlding'.

## Chapter One

### The Human and the Cyborg: A History of Border Play

#### 1.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to rehabilitate modern character and in its project to do so, it works to rehabilitate humanism, too. In this sense, the crucial thrust and critical position of the thesis may be most precisely identified as humanist. However, the humanism championed by this thesis is not the sort of humanism or liberalism (or liberal humanism, to use a more recent term), which broadly characterises the critical tradition extending from A. C. Bradley through to Lionel Trilling in 1950s America. The humanism of this thesis, while it explicitly focuses upon humans and foregrounds the importance of the individual and his creative powers of self-determination, is influenced by the work of some Cultural Materialists and, more particularly, it is indebted to those ‘posthumanists’ who work to reveal the historically constructed and decentred nature of the human character.

The approach argued for and demonstrated in the pages of this thesis is not, itself, however, posthumanist. I do not, by and large, focus my attention in cyborgs, monsters, animals, or marginalised humans as the posthumanists do; my concern is with any and all humans. Indeed, in positing the human centre stage and arguing for the historical, political, and ethical importance of approaching him as a coherent and (partially) self-determining individual, my work opposes the project of posthumanism. However, my assumption of a structural indeterminacy of form for this human – the way in which her constitution is foregrounded as complex and hybrid (in the sense of being partially composed, in both nature and idea, of the animal, machine, and supernatural), my work is fundamentally informed by some posthumanist narratives and, as I will go on to show in Chapter Two, some Renaissance humanist narratives of human being, too.

Of particular importance and interest to this thesis is the work of cultural commentator, feminist, and philosopher Donna Haraway: specifically, her cyborg. Haraway has been appropriated by what I loosely term the ‘posthumanists’: her conception of the cyborg has become influential, for example, to the work of ‘cyborg feminists’ and, recently, it has extended its influence to new conceptions and forms of theatre, such as are identified and explored by Jennifer Parker-Starbuck in her recent book, *Cyborg Theatre* (2011). As Parker-Starbuck concisely informs, the cyborg is ‘created through an intertwinement and negotiation between organic and non-organic



materials, the body and technology' (xiv) and, in its historical forms as Golem or monster, for centuries it has 'manifested a fear and fascination with technologies' (ibid). However, though the cyborg which resurfaced with Haraway in the later years of the twentieth century continues to capture a fear and fascination with technology, it now comes to function in a more particularly political mode, standing in 'for feminized others, militaristic senses of control, as well as producing hope for joint kinships and political repositionings' (Parker-Starbuck xiv-xv). In this sense, some cyborg discourse, including Parker-Starbuck's, might be termed *antihumanist* for as it sets about its task of demonstrating the politically and ethically positive qualities of cyborg structures of identity and subjectivity, it does so by contrasting this contemporary form with '*the human*', that privileged, perfidious, and discriminatory entity that has only managed to maintain the purity of its ontological borders by means of excluding its 'nonhuman' others, including animals and certain humans who are marginalised or oppressed. 'The human' (or *human*), in short, designates an identity and ontology that we now know to have been false, imperialist, Euro-, and phallo-centric and as betraying a humanistic 'will to see sameness wherever it looks' and, by such a process, to betray 'a desire to *make* sameness, to impose a partial world-view as a universal truth' (Neil Badmington, *Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism* 144). In reaction against this humanist form and his propensity to exclude, the cyborg, appropriated by the critical posthumanist project, works against the production of any sort of an ideal human posited in terms of difference. The cyborg, in contrast to 'the human', furthermore, represents a definitively recent and, possibly, usurping phenomenon arising out of historically specific conditions, technologies, assumptions, and politics.

In contrast to the posthumanists, I divide the liberal humanist form from humanism in its broader sense and in Chapter Two I will show that, in fact, liberal humanism's identification as the orthodox subject position of the modern period may have been overstated. In fact, there are many forms of humanism, a detail that is frequently overlooked by antihumanists, and in Chapter Two I will show how Renaissance humanism reveals a *subjectivity* that is as changeable and hybrid as that of the cyborg.

I am going to write a lot about Haraway's cyborg in this chapter. Given the humanist drift of this thesis, this may seem surprising but the cyborg is important to my project for the following reasons. Despite the fact that Haraway's cyborg is

conventionally tied to posthumanist discourse and manifests a distinctly contemporary form of being (whereas my own study locates in the human through the modern period), the cyborg's peculiar structure and materialist constitution embodies, I argue, certain qualities that mean its potential implications extend beyond its usual contemporary feminist, militaristic, or kinship contexts and applications. Given this view and starting position, I contest that the cyborg can be usefully employed as an ontological trope to look back at some representations of the human in drama.

The implications of the cyborg for my examination of modern character specifically have to do with human identity and subjectivity. The cyborg's form and structure as an historically and materially constituted actor – or, to use Haraway's terminology, a 'material-semiotic actor' ('Situated Knowledges' 200) – when applied to the human form, works to generate fruitful possibilities for, and questions about, human ontology and identity, which are helpful to my approach to modern dramatic character. The human-as-cyborg, understood as a hybrid structure of organic and technological parts, manifests as a fundamentally systemic entity that, in being coupled to its contexts, changes its content and character with its changing parts and histories. In short, the cyborg functions as an important metaphorical structure for the protean human agent and frames my arguments for, and analyses of, modern human characters.

Another reason for my turn to the cyborg in my humanist (or, more specifically, post/humanist) project is that the cyborg demonstrates, I argue, a quality that is, in fact, *humanistic*, albeit of a moderated form. To summarise, it is my contention that Haraway's cyborg is not straightforwardly antihumanist, where to be antihumanist means to work to decentre subjectivity such that the self is reduced to structures and, in the process, loses any sense of itself as being self-determining and autonomous. Haraway certainly rejects the sort of humanism that articulates the form that has come to be known as the liberal humanist subject. However, Haraway never uses this label herself and her discussion of humanism is more subtle and precise than many of those posthumanists who make use of her cyborg. I posit that the thrust of Haraway's writing and her assumptions of human-cyborg being are, more precisely, akin to the sort of 'theoretical humanism' (Milner 79) or materialist left-humanism we find with those Cultural Materialists who emphasise the importance of cultural *agency*. Haraway's position develops out of Marxist theory and her Marxist feminist focus lies, unsurprisingly, in technology, identity, class, gender, and power. Haraway is critical of the sort of Marxist humanism that she describes as being

'polluted at the source by its structuring ontological theory of the domination of nature in the self-construction of man and by its closely related impotence to historicize anything women did that didn't that qualified for a wage ('Situated Knowledges', 186). She also critically historicises the sort of essentialist humanism that generally goes by the name of liberal humanism although, as I say, Haraway never uses such a term herself. However, Haraway, while she reveals her human-cyborgs as objects and remains deeply suspicious of any narrative 'implying immediate presence of such objects' ('Situated Knowledges' 200), nonetheless remains committed to the creative agency of humans to imagine, construct, and behave as 'active, meaning-generating' entities (ibid) that are partially responsible for themselves and their worlds. In short, Haraway's cyborg, which shall be examined and discussed at length in this chapter, is conceived as a *material-semiotic actor* and, in being so, shows itself as a paradoxical agent-product. Haraway illustrates this point when she writes: 'We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are *they*' ('A Cyborg Manifesto' 180).

Now, my approach is no more Harawayan than it is Cultural Materialist (or posthumanist) for my work is not informed by Marxist theory and it does not explicitly concern itself with technology, gender, class, power, literal cyborgs, monsters, animals, or marginalised humans. However, my approach is informed by the cyborg as a metaphorical structure of being and identity and this structure underpins or traces the conception of human form and structure throughout this thesis as characters are analysed for their relationships with, and constitutions as, animals, machines, and the supernatural.

In this chapter, I am going to describe how the cyborg works critically to map a hybrid animal-machine-supernatural structure of identity and subjectivity upon humans such that traditional modern dichotomous structures of being and knowing are countered. In the process of positing such a 'human', I mean to show – in contrast to the posthumanists, who posit the cyborg as a manifestly contemporary entity – that the classical humanist framework is not, in fact, the only way to frame modern human(ist) being: my claim, which I will argue through the course of this chapter, is that a post/humanist entity is constitutive of a form of modern human being that demonstrates the complex and indeterminate natural-cultural structure of the cyborg and, in doing so, manifests hybrid identities and an embodied subjectivity.

In the first section of this chapter, I will introduce Haraway's cyborg in more detail, in order to elaborate the cyborg's composition as a material and semiotic entity that

functions to undermine the supposed distinctiveness of traditionally dichotomous categories and which, in being mapped upon the human, work to change what it means to be, and know, the human. This will be followed by an extended argument that the human-as-cyborg constitutes an alternative form and history of the human for the modern period. Taking the contemporary figure of, and mode of thinking which is bound to, the cyborg, I look backwards and argue that humans have been provisional identities in process at least since the Renaissance. Though Haraway argues that the cyborg came into being with recent boundary breaches and ambiguities, this chapter argues that those boundary breakdowns have a history that is centuries, and not merely decades, old. In short, as I will show, exploring the borders of 'the human' with her traditional nonhuman others through history works to reveal a cyborg-like form and structure which is fundamentally protean. Formed of 'natural' parts it shares with animals and machines and located in, and formed by, its cultural contexts, the post/humanist subject of this thesis manifests as a hybrid entity at once constituted by, and differentiated from, its others in a form and identity that is both partially self-determining and determined and, significantly, in process.

Finally, on the matter of self-authorship, this chapter closes with a consideration of the cyborg's implications as a material-semiotic entity for mind and the problem of free will in a physicalist universe. Drawing variously on recent technoscientific studies of the phenomenon of 'emergence' and ways in which machines – in particular, computers – function as mirrors for humans, I close by positing a theory of mind that enables humans and their representations, characters, to be interpreted as self-determining agents and changeable products of their material contexts in a way that is politically significant and emancipatory.

## **1.2 Introduction to Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg'**

The cyborg is the pivotal trope in my post/humanist project. The cyborg not only functions, simultaneously, to foreground all three of the human subject's traditional others – machines, the supernatural, and animals – but it does so in a way that throws up fascinating problems about human status, responsibility, behaviour, mind, and agency that will prove invaluable, in due course, to considerations of dramatic character.

In posthumanist and cyborg discourses, the cyborg usually functions in similar fashion to the monster or alien in terms of comprising a distinguishing other to 'the

(liberal) human(ist)’. However, in my project, the cyborg functions to render the human, itself, manifestly other, for the cyborg is put to work as a trope to elucidate a model of subjectivity that arises out of the cyborg’s organisation as a system of natural-cultural parts.

The cyborg is an entity that was brought to critical attention by cultural critic and feminist philosopher, Haraway, in 1985, in her seminal work, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’. A hybrid, conceived as a system of organic and technological parts, Haraway’s cyborg is constitutive of human and nonhuman relations and functions as a *material-semiotic* trope. Simultaneously mythic *and* real, an object of knowledge *and* materially and historically formed, the cyborg functions to elucidate the human not only as an object of knowledge but also, crucially, as a physical entity and agent.

Notably, this conception of the cyborg intersects with posthumanisms’s genealogies as given by Cary Wolfe in his book, *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), genealogies that helpfully clarify the fields and discourses out of, and in which, the posthuman manoeuvres. The posthuman, in its form as a sign and cultural construct, takes its genealogy from ‘the 1960s and pronouncements of the sort made famous by Foucault in the closing paragraph of *The Order of Things* in which the human is given as an object of thought of recent date who is perhaps “nearing its end”’ (Wolfe xii). As an historical and physical entity, meanwhile, the posthuman is traced by Wolfe ‘to the Macy conferences on cybernetics from 1946 to 1953 and the invention of systems theory’ that offered a ‘new theoretical model for biological, mechanical, and communicational processes that removed the human and *Homo sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition’ (ibid). In short, the human becomes relativized as an object of knowledge and reconstituted as a physical system crucially connected to its environment and, as such, deprived of any privileged position as knower or observer.

In posthumanist discourse, ‘the human’ is conceived in liberal humanist terms, as a unified and stable origin of individuality and agency that is ontologically distinct from the world (she is an actor in the world but she is not determined by its physical processes) and from her nonhuman others. It is in relation to this model of subjectivity that the posthumanists posit the cyborg form. In contrast to the free, stable, and unified liberal humanist subject, the cyborg is formed of multiple parts - organic and artificial/technological - such that the human-as-cyborg is conceived as an unfree,

unstable, and decentred subjectivity, partially formed by, and tied to, his specific environments. One implication of its systemic structure and constitution of multiple parts of the cyborg is that it is no longer possible to think of the self-as-cyborg as being straightforwardly 'here' and the other as being 'over there', or, by implication, of mind as being distinct and detached from body. A second implication is that the cyborg, in its connection to its environment and its combination of 'the natural and artificial together in one system' (Chris Hables Gray 2), functions to undermine the supposed distinctiveness of each category and, in being mapped upon the human, to change what it means to be, and to know, the human. Indeed, as Haraway writes, the 'blasphemy' of the cyborg lies in its transgressive potential as a hybrid to destabilise and to foreground the 'leakiness' (Graham 202) of the categories on which Western scientific logic depends, such as 'biology' and 'technology', 'nature' or 'culture', or 'the human', for that matter. As David Bell recognises, the cyborg is a 'boundary blurring trickster figure' that works 'to undermine the dualisms that have hitherto structured how we think and live' (109).

In the figure of the cyborg, then, where the cyborg is given as denoting the human,<sup>18</sup> parameters are moved and confused - sometimes extended, sometimes internalised - to include new technological or nonhuman organic parts in the formation of 'a hybrid of cybernetic device and organism' (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 138). Crucially, such symbiosis is predicated on the assumption of a kind of equivalence with, or compatibility between, the organic (human and animal) and the mechanical, which is, itself, reliant upon seeing living forms as feedback-controlled systems that pass information through their circuitry.

The cyborg, though a strange and unfamiliar creature in many ways, is important to this thesis about the human for two reasons. Firstly, the cyborg functions critically to intervene in the process of understanding what it means to know, or to represent, the human because it works to open up the assumptions underscoring particular identities and models of being and of knowing the world and its inhabitants. Importantly, what happens when humans, animals, and some machines are conceived as being fundamentally equivalent as kinds of systems is that matters of power, agency, and 'human' rights come

---

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that the cyborg is composed of any organic and technological parts and need not include the human. However, as Parker-Starbuck has observed, in consequence of the ubiquity, valorization, and assimilation of technology into all aspects of contemporary human life, the presence of the human-techno cyborg has been more pronounced because it is thematically more seductive than its animal-techno counterpart, although the origin of the cyborg was, in fact, 'a rat connected to an osmotic pump' ('Becoming Animate' 655).

to the fore as they did in this thesis Introduction's discussion of *Frankenstein*, for example. If '[h]umanity is neither an essence nor an end, but a continuous and precarious process of becoming human, a process that entails the inescapable recognition that our humanity is on loan from others' (Tony Davies 132); and if that humanity is now understood as being fundamentally indeterminate with nonhuman others, then not only is the identification of the human being in question (its identification, as such, is rendered a political act), but so is that of animals and, even more extraordinarily, of some machines.

Secondly, the cyborg functions as an efficacious *metaphor* by which to consider the matter of individual selfhood. In the context of this thesis, the cyborg denotes a particular way of conceiving the self that is radically different to the liberal humanist subject and its derivative, technologically facilitated, transhumanist versions. The cyborg's form is protean, constituted as a system of multiple parts – organic, artificial, informational, and semiotic – that extends out, via these parts, into the environment beyond the boundaries of the skin. Thus, the cyborg's self and its sense of its borders and identities is essentially indivisible from its embodied constitution in the world; and its experience of mind is intrinsically tied to its bodied material-semiotic parts. My claim is that humans have always been so.

Such a way of rethinking the human subject is not without its problems or questions. Some questions relate to issues of agency, free will, and identity: can agency be articulated in any meaningful sense in relation to the human-as-cyborg when agency conventionally denotes a central and conscious component of subjectivity? And what happens to autonomy and free will if the posthuman is understood to be fundamentally material and thus *determined*, not *determining*?

Such questions will come under discussion in this chapter in due course. For now, it is to the matter of the conception and location of the human-as-cyborg in history that discussion will now turn as Haraway's identification of the cyborg as a *contemporary* entity is tested and found to be, in some ways, problematic. As the ensuing discussion will show, the human of modernity has a lively history of border 'play': far from being exclusively liberal humanist, where to be so entails a project to other and to exclude, the human of modernity has frequently viewed and known herself to be other; furthermore, she has changed her form and identity in line with human-nonhuman boundary breaches and blurrings, which have been, crucially, ongoing.

### 1.3 Cyborg Origins

As has already been discussed, the human has traditionally been conceived as unique and, usually, superior in his relations of difference with his nonhuman others – he is human *not* animal, *not* machine, and *not* supernatural. He is human and, depending on which of the traditional Western stories you locate the human inside, he has either been so since, for example, the creation of Adam and Eve or else for as long as evolutionary-driven processes have given him the accident of consciousness. Despite the fundamentally different ways of knowing the world and the human's position within it given by these stories, the human in each maintains a coherent distinction from animals and/or machines and/or the supernatural. The cyborg, meanwhile, in contrast to this conventionally human *qua* ontologically hygienic subject, confuses and refuses the purity of the relationships of difference that function to maintain the human's borders.

According to Haraway, the blurring of the human-as-cyborg's boundaries is a definitively recent event. The cyborg, as Haraway attests, is a product of the twentieth century and as such, has a recent history: the cyborg was given its first breath when the traditional discontinuities between the human and his nonhuman others were definitively breached by *cybernetics*. Specifically contemporary technologies and ways of thinking about the world have given form to the cyborg. However, I want to suggest that while the cyborg in its posthumanist context is, indeed, tied to recent history, my own appropriation of the trope to map and open up human identity and subjectivity leads me to find and argue that the human-as-cyborg has a history. In the following I will show the indeterminate and hybrid nature of the human and trace a brief account of her skirmishes at the borders of the machine, animal, and supernatural.

Haraway writes in her 'Cyborg Manifesto' that the cyborg finds form as 'three crucial boundar[ies]' are broken down (151), boundaries between the human and animal, the animal-human (organism) and machine, and the physical and nonphysical. She claims, variously, that that these boundaries are 'thoroughly breached' (151), 'leaky' (152), 'thoroughly ambiguous' (ibid), and 'very imprecise' (153). In short, she gives a strong sense that the human as we have traditionally known him – a distinct entity formed dichotomously in relation to animals, machines, and the immaterial realm – is contemporarily in trouble as his borders are giving way under the pressure of advancing research and technologies. However, this thesis contends that those breakdowns between



the human and the animal, the machine, and the supernatural, which are now functioning to give form to the cyborg, have been in an ongoing process of breaking down over centuries, not merely decades.

Given the significance of the cyborg to this study, I quote from Haraway's work at some length. The discussion that ensues through to the end of the chapter will explore the ideas and implications of Haraway's theory.

By the late twentieth century in the United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks – language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. [...] The second leaky distinction is between animal-human (organism) and machine. Pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine. This dualism structured the dialogue between materialism and idealism that was settled by a dialectical progeny, called spirit or history, according to taste. But basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert. [...] The third distinction is a subset of the second: the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us. [...] Modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible. Modern machinery is an irreverent upstart god, mocking the Father's ubiquity and spirituality. [...] Writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization, but miniaturization has changed our experience of mechanism. [...] Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile [...]. People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether, quintessence. (151-4)

#### **1.4 The Human-Animal Boundary**

Haraway's first boundary breakdown between the human and the animal is described as having been 'thoroughly breached' (151) in the present period. Whilst acknowledging that our particular period in history is testing traditional assumptions of the human as ontologically unique to a degree previously unparalleled (certainly in relation to the human-machine border), there is a problem with Haraway's assertion that the human-nonhuman border has been 'thoroughly breached' and that we are only now becoming

cyborgs. If the human is not a stationary, but rather a fluid, idea, then how is it possible to definitively breach her boundaries? As Haraway writes elsewhere: ‘You can’t do “human” ahistorically [...] or as if “human” were one thing. “Human” requires an extraordinary congeries of partners. Humans, wherever you track them, are products of situated relationalities with organisms, tools, much else’ (Gane 146). If the human is not ahistorical, if she lacks any stable essence, if her form is forever changing in line with changes in understandings and statuses of animals and so forth, then what may *appear* to be a breach at a particular moment in relation to a particular formation of the human cannot be accounted as being in any way definitive: a ‘thorough breaching’ is not possible. If the human being is an evolving, protean entity, materially and semiotically located in relation to her traditional others, then it follows that she has always been tenuously formed and amorphous. In short, her boundaries shift but they cannot be breached because they have never been fixed.<sup>19</sup>

This being so, this thesis proposes that while the human’s borders are currently undergoing a particular and testing period, skirmishes at the human-nonhuman borders are ongoing. Consider, for example, the ‘breaching’ of the human-animal dichotomy in 1859 with Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection as set forth in his book, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin’s theory gave all life as descending from a single ancestor by a process of descent with modification, which meant that human beings could no longer be viewed as the unique and dignified result of any intelligent design or mind. Instead, humans came to be positioned as entirely natural products of materialist laws and as sharing common ancestry with plants and beasts. This, of course, had the consequence of testing the human’s supposedly robust and distinct ontological boundaries and deprived her of essence, be that essence theologically or biologically located.

Moving further back in time than the nineteenth century, well before Darwin unleashed his radical theory upon the world, it seems that humans and animals were already on the way to being recognised in relations of equivalence as opposed to difference, as Giorgio Agamben demonstrates in *The Open* (2004). Linnaeus, in his eighteenth century formulation of the Modern scientific taxonomy, began the move away from Christian assumptions that privileged the human subject in the Great Chain of Being and, in naming ‘man’ a primate, rendered him an object. Agamben writes of Linnaeus:

---

<sup>19</sup> Of course, it is theoretically possible that the boundaries of the human could disappear altogether but in such a case, there could be no way of identifying the human form from, for example, the machine, the animal, or the divine, and that is clearly not the case for the human-as-cyborg.

In a note to the *Systema naturae* he dismisses the Cartesian theory that conceived of animals as if they were *automata mechanica* with the vexed statement: ‘surely Descartes never saw an ape.’ In a later writing bearing the title *Menniskans Cousiner*, ‘Man’s Cousins,’ he explains how difficult it is to identify the specific difference between the anthropoid apes and man from the point of view of natural science (*The Open* 23).

Although Linnaeus is able to continue to distinguish the human in terms of his special relationship to God, he ‘hardly knows a single distinguishing mark which separates man from the apes, save for the fact that the latter have an empty space between their canines and their other teeth’ (Linnaeus qtd. in Agamben 24). But does Linnaeus mark the beginning of the human-animal breakdown? Agamben answers in the negative, arguing that although Linnaeus provoked ‘polemics’ in assigning the *Homo sapiens* to the order of the *Anthropomorpha* (later to be called *Primates*), ‘in a certain sense the issue was [already] in the air’ (24). In a discussion that moves back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Agamben provides multiple examples of blurring identifying borders between humans and animals, citing such as John Locke and his reference to the Prince of Nassau’s talking parrot, and Peter Artedi with his listing of ‘sirens next to seals and sea lions’ in a study of serious scientific endeavour (*The Open* 24).

As I hope is becoming clear, the blurring of the human-animal opposition has a history that extends back at least several centuries and any apparent breaches of the boundaries have only ever been temporary. Confusions and equivalences across apparently discrete ontological borders are not unique to the present moment, although their orientations are certainly particular to the constitution of the human at any given moment in history (i.e. concentrating in tool use or language or the status of consciousness across species boundaries).

### **1.5 The Human-Machine Boundary**

The second of Haraway’s crucial boundary breakdowns is that of the organism-machine and here, in arguing for the *liveliness* of machines, she undoubtedly identifies a very particular contemporary phenomenon. Until the middle of the twentieth-century, biologists believed that the concept of ‘life’ transcended everything that was knowable about the mechanisms of specific living things. Though you might identify the workings of a particular organism, ‘life’ remained a mystery belonging only to organic creatures

and plants. Life, that animating principle or spirit of the human being that made him self-moving, self-designing, and autonomous could not, and could never be, attached to a machine. However, Sherry Turkle, professor of the social studies of science and technology at MIT, tells of how, with the rise of molecular biology, the mystery of life was claimed to have been unveiled by the rhetorician Richard Doyle: ‘Molecular biology clearly communicates that what stands behind life is not a metaphysical entity but DNA, whose code begins to be seen as life itself’ (156).

In the twentieth century, then, life became, for the first time, something programmable, in principle, at least, as the science of molecular biology first ‘prepared a language to frame the discipline of artificial life, one which equates life with “the algorithms of living systems”’(ibid). Preeminent, here, is code: DNA becomes the key constituent, not only of ‘species’ type (organic *and* inorganic) but of life itself, irrespective of the physical matter that ‘contains’ it.

Today, it is generally understood that there is, in fact, more to qualifying a nonorganic form as living than code alone. Code, by itself, is not life. The qualities that have come, more generally, to be given as qualifying artificial organisms as life forms are evolution, code, complexity, emergence, and self-organisation. These ‘life’ features began to be clarified after the 1987 First Conference on Artificial Life (AL) in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Clarifying these ‘life’ features, Turkle writes:

First, [the artificial organisms] must exhibit evolution by natural selection, the Darwinian aspect of our definition of life. Second, they must possess a genetic program, the instructions for their operation and reproduction, the DNA factor in our definition of life. Third, they must demonstrate a high level of complexity. A complex system has been defined as ‘one whose components [sic] parts interact with sufficient intricacy that they cannot be predicted by standard linear equations; so many variables are at work in the system that its overall behavior can only be understood as an emergent consequence of the myriad behavior embedded within.’ [Steven Levy] With complexity, characteristics and behaviors emerge, in a significant sense, *unbidden*. The organism can self-organize. This makes life possible. Thus, the quality of complexity would lead to the fourth necessary quality: self-organization (152).

On this model, life ceases to be mysterious in any spiritual sense and becomes the result of particular kinds of algorithms and complex systems, as capable of finding form in inorganic systems as it is in organic ones. The biologist Thomas Ray, writing about his frequently cited AL program, *Tierra*, describes how, during the earliest moments of his

system's operation, 'the life force took over' (qtd. in Turkle 151). Christopher Langton, meanwhile, the organizer of the 1987 Los Alamos conference, 'believes that it is not too soon to begin thinking about the rights of a "living process" to exist "whatever the medium in which it occurs."' (Ibid) On these conceptions, 'life' is no more distinctive of organic forms than it is, potentially, of inorganic.

Another field that gives credence to Haraway's view that modern machines are increasingly lively is robotics, where robots are programmed to learn from experience and to behave as autonomous entities within their given environments. One particularly vivid and uncanny example of the liveliness of robots may be seen in the Little Dog project conducted by Boston Dynamics Inc. at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, which uses a quadruped robot as a platform for the research of learning locomotion.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the robot, which is programmed to cross and navigate difficult terrain autonomously, is given eyes, presumably for no other reason than to make 'him' appear more animal-like. To all intents and purposes the robot appears to see and to respond with purpose and intelligence to its environment, adapting the movement and positioning of its body the better to meet the challenges of its environment, all the while learning and adapting from its experiences. The initial effect of watching this 'creature' in action is distinctly unnerving: it *appears* alive.

Given such a context of scientific research, Haraway's argument that machines are increasingly lively is a compelling one. However, I cannot help but return to the idea that 'the human' is a fluid construction, remodelling itself in its ongoing negotiation of its borders with its nonhuman others. Notably, Minsky is paraphrased by Turkle as describing artificial life as 'the discipline of building organisms and systems that would be considered alive *if found in nature* [italics added]' (151). Most interestingly, what is implied by Minsky's definition is that machines, however lively, will have life denied them, even if and when they come, to all intents and purposes, to demonstrate its qualities. The implication, here, is that machines will never be granted life; as soon as they seem to be alive, the definition of life will change to protect the purity of human and organic ontology. In effect, what it means to be human or organic will evolve to protect its distinction as such.

Indeed, given this position, AI researcher, Rodney Brooks's descriptions are telling for a number of reasons, particularly in relation to the slipperiness of the term,

---

<sup>20</sup> For film image see: Kalakrishnan et al. 'The latest version of the LittleDog Robot'.

'human'. Writing in 2008 about the challenges facing researchers in his field, Brooks specifies the 'four basic capabilities that any true AGI [artificial general intelligence] would have to possess' ('I, Rodney Brooks, Am a Robot') as being object-recognition, language capabilities, manual dexterity, and social understanding, and how each is currently only achieving results equivalent to a 2-year old child, a 4-year old, a 6-year old, and an 8-year old, respectively. He goes on to state that '[c]reating a machine capable of effectively performing the four capabilities [...] may take 10 years, or it may take 100' (ibid).

What is noteworthy about Brooks's remark is that human intelligence is, here, understood to equal 'effectively performing' general intelligence; by implication, this does not, apparently, equal the apparently *ineffective* intelligence achieved by a child. But is not a child a human being? Are not some machines achieving the AGI of a child as old as 8-years old and, therefore, that of a human being? It seems, however, that the AGI being aimed at is more specific than the supposedly universal human.

I do not presume to specify the kind of human intelligence that Brooks and his colleagues might be aiming to match or even to surpass in their work with machine intelligence (although I might hazard a guess that it is highly educated, rational, and possibly based on traditionally male qualities). What I do wish to propose is that Brooks's work, which might be identified as posthumanist in its ambitions and implications, firstly, highlights the fluidity of the boundaries of the human; secondly, it prompts a disconcerting possibility that posthumanist projects and technologies may, indirectly, be causing an ever more specialised and narrow definition of 'the (ideal) human', rendering her more and more particular as opposed to universal. One of the political ambitions of the posthumanist project is to assign human rights to entities historically deemed non, or only marginally, human. It is, therefore, ironic that in the process of clarifying the human form, posthumanist technologies may work to exclude some of the members of the human species from the category, 'human'. In defending the borders of the human against an increasingly intelligent machine, the humanist drive to remain unique runs the paradoxical risk of either refusing certain people the title human because many people simply cannot match the increasingly exclusive criteria or else of being coerced into finding other qualities on which to hang the form of the human (such as emotion).

To sum up: Haraway's argument that the boundary between the (*human*) organism and the machine is only now, in the late twentieth, early twenty-first centuries, in the

process of being breached, is probably true where the human is understood in its form as a self-determining, intelligent, and autonomous life form.<sup>21</sup> As Haraway remarks, historically, machines such as automatons *appeared* to be haunted by a ghost in the machine but they were never really self-organising or -determining: they were always, crucially, constructed and controlled by human beings. In contrast, contemporarily, machines are being designed to learn, to evolve, and to self-organise in a way that threatens traditional conceptions about human uniqueness.

Haraway's discussion fails, however, to acknowledge, or to take account of, an important effect and function of the automaton. Whether automata are *really* self-organising, -determining, and intelligent or not, they have always constituted vivid 'simulacrum of "flesh and blood"' (Bruce Mazlish 31) and, as such, have *seemed* to be so. Being located liminally at the human/animal-machine boundary, they have consistently served to 'put directly before humans the question of their difference, if any, from machines' (ibid). Mazlish explains: 'From antiquity, [...] humans, the ingenious makers, have posed to themselves the question of their identity by making "doubles": mechanical figures and puppets that seem to be animated' (32).

Today, we have lifelike humanoid robots such as Geminoid F that are currently being engineered in Japan,<sup>22</sup> which draw uncannily close to the human form in the way they refract human liveliness, voice, language use, and spontaneous and responsive behaviour in relation to the environment. However, automatons, though they may not always have been entirely mechanically self-operating, have always functioned to test the human-machine border. In the eighteenth century there was the famous example of the chess playing automaton, the Mechanical Turk. As Michael Mangan reports, the chess-playing champion Philidor played the automaton in a game of chess. Although the mechanical intelligence of the Turk was in truth illusory (this particular automaton was secretly operated by a human being hidden ingeniously in the 'body' of the automaton) Philidor did not know of the illusion and he later confessed that although he had won the game relatively easily, 'no game against a human opponent had fatigued him to the same extent' (Tom Standage qtd. in Mangan 89). Having believed that the Turk was genuine, Philidor's response, as Mangan acknowledges, is notable: 'Philidor found the automaton disturbing precisely because it took on human opponents at an exercise of rationality –

---

<sup>21</sup> To reiterate my earlier point: I do not mean to imply that this, or any other, breach is definitive.

<sup>22</sup> Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro's ultra-realistic female android Geminoid F is uncannily human in her looks and gestures and has been developed by Osaka University and ATR. For film footage of Geminoid F, and other similarly human robots, see: IEEE Spectrum. 'Female Android Geminoid F'.

and [usually] won – beating the rational animal at the very thing which made him most human’ (ibid).

Automata probe the boundaries between humans and machines in a way that may be experienced as uncomfortable and possibly uncanny, for they put a mirror up to the human form and reveal a refracted but, nonetheless, recognizable image. They make us wonder, as Mazlish observes, that ‘[i]f a machine, in the shape of an automaton, were to look and function exactly as a human, how would we know if it were one, or not?’ (32). In short, the automaton functions to put before human eyes her mechanical double and, given the automaton’s seemingly lively form (the secrets of its operations are hidden from the viewer), it poses the possibility that the human being – her action and even her thought – may be similarly mechanically constituted. Indeed, in seeing her mechanical reflection, this human being wonders if her own liveliness - her own soul or mind – is a matter of illusion, a historically conventional way of knowing the self that finds no foundation beneath the truth of her body as matter in motion. She wonders if she may, in fact, be a machine herself.

Machines, today, increasingly have the appearance, and possibly the reality, of life as well as coming to resemble the human being in terms of her physical looks, gestures, and general intelligence, such that the boundary between the human and the machine seems ‘thoroughly ambiguous’ and ‘leaky’, as Haraway attests. However, Haraway’s focus in the liveliness of machines is markedly one-sided. The history of the breakdown of the human-machine discontinuity has not been exclusively focused in the machine as being or becoming humanlike. As the automaton reveals to us in its functioning as a ‘double’ for the human form, certain machines imply not merely the potential liveliness, or humanness, of machines but that *the machine may be found in the organism or human*. Refocusing the study of the organism-machine boundary in such a way – in looking for the machine in the human – means revealing a boundary that has in fact been under pressure at least since the Enlightenment. Indeed, the scientific establishment’s response to the automaton from the eighteenth century was to view it ‘as raising genuine questions about the nature of human and artificial “intelligence”’ (Mangan 87). Humans have, for at least the last several centuries, wondered if they might not themselves be machines.

For some, René Descartes was the figure, in the seventeenth century, to breach the boundary between humans (and animals) and machines when he divided the immaterial soul from the physical body and facilitated a mechanistic worldview. Margaret Wertheim,



in her fascinating book, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet* (1999), claims that when Descartes divided a physically extended realm of matter in motion (*res extensa*) from an invisible realm of spirit, thoughts, and feelings (*res cogitans*), he ‘powerfully tilted the scales toward [materialist] monism’ (151). Although Descartes himself insisted on the reality of *res cogitans*, ‘his radical exclusion of this immaterial realm from the methods and practices of science left it highly vulnerable to claims of “unreality”’ (151) and it ‘quickly became an empty symbol’ that could be ‘annihilated from the realm of the real’ (Wertheim 152). As a thing that was not made of matter and that was therefore unavailable for study, the mental ‘space’ of soul, spirit, or mind became something to be excluded from the realm of the real. Unable to be tested by modern scientific methods, the immaterial sphere of the soul, which includes such phenomena as the conscious self, angels, magic, ghosts, and God became for many rational Moderns the stuff of fantasy, superstition, and myth. Truth and reality, for many, come to be associated exclusively with the physical realm.

Importantly, Descartes’ scientifically motivated project not only paved the way for a materially monist world picture but it inadvertently facilitated the breakdown of the human-machine boundary as it was then comprehended and rendered human ontology equally materially monist, at least according to a significant number of philosophers and scientists. Although Descartes articulated the human as being an essentially and immaterially thinking thing, his rendering of physical phenomena as the stuff of reality meant that no space was left, in a quite literal sense, for the unverifiable soul from the point of view of science.

Having posted thought to an immaterial realm, which gradually became eroded in its conception as a real substance, it was a relatively short step to propose that the human being was entirely mechanical. During the eighteenth century, little more than a century after Descartes was writing, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (temporarily) eradicated the line between humans (and animals) and machines when he removed the soul from the Man-machine. La Mettrie’s central assertion was that *Man is a machine*; he calls him an ‘enlightened machine’ (*une machine bien éclairée*); and, as Mazlish notes, ‘in the Newtonian terms of the times, [La Mettrie] also declares, “The body is but a watch.”’ (27).

For La Mettrie in the eighteenth century, the watch functioned as the mechanical model for the human being; today, the watch has been usurped by the computer. Indeed,

‘the hypothesis driving most of modern cognitive science’ is that ‘*the mind is a computer*’ (Paul Smolensky 176). It is interesting, and perhaps ironic, to note that Alan Turing, mathematical logician whose role was central in the development of the theory of computation, ‘used the term “computer” – long before there were such devices – of a human being engaged in calculation’ (Samuel Guttenplan 594). In fact, as Guttenplan informs us, ‘it was partly by thinking about such human “computers” that [Turing] came to develop the idea of Turing machines’ (ibid).<sup>23</sup>

Turkle writes extensively in some fascinating discussion on this topic of the relationship of the computer to the human being. Quoting the nineteenth-century American philosopher, essayist, and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was writing in his diary in 1832, Turkle identifies certain objects as being ‘test objects’, as operating to throw light on human nature: for Emerson, ‘[d]reams and beasts are two keys by which we are to find out the secrets of our nature ... they are our test objects.’ (Qtd. in Turkle 22) As Turkle observes, Emerson demonstrated a certain prescience, here, for later in the century, ‘Freud and his heirs would measure human rationality against the dream’ while ‘Darwin and his heirs would insist that we measure human nature against nature itself – the world of the beasts seen as our forbears and kin’ (Turkle 22). Today, meanwhile, for Turkle, the computer has come to function as the significant new test object:

Like dreams and beasts, the computer stands on the margins. It is a mind that is not yet a mind. It is inanimate yet interactive. It does not think, yet neither is it external to thought. It is an object, ultimately a mechanism, but it behaves, interacts, and seems in a certain sense to know. It confronts us with an uneasy sense of kinship. After all, we too behave, interact, and seem to know, and yet are ultimately made of matter and programmed DNA. We think we can think. But can *it* think? Could it have the capacity to feel? Could it ever be said to be alive? (Ibid)

In short, the computer makes us question our human natures and our status as living, physical, *and* conscious entities. We are constituted by code and are made of physical matter and yet we are also feeling, thinking, and self-aware creatures. Significantly, for Turkle, ‘[t]he computer takes us beyond a world of dreams and beasts because it enables us to contemplate mental life that exists apart from bodies. It enables us to contemplate

---

<sup>23</sup> Turing machines are not intended as practical computing technology but as a thought experiment representing simple, theoretical computational devices that function to explore the limits of what is computable.

dreams that do not need beasts. The computer is an evocative object that causes old boundaries to be renegotiated' (ibid).

This, of course, brings discussion resolutely to the matter of mind and, so, to Haraway's third boundary breach: that of the physical-nonphysical. With the advancing sophistication of machines, the question of mind, of whether it exists as a phenomenon in itself or else as a mental property, is brought to the fore, along with the matter of human (and character) subjectivity and agency. As modern technologies become increasingly intelligent and lively, the possibility that mind is a physically derived entity emerges, a possibility, furthermore, that thrusts the human up against the supernatural and reveals purportedly immaterial phenomena as being inextricably bound to physical 'machines' (be the machines organic – human or animal - or mechanical).

It is to such discussion that this chapter will now turn as it negotiates Haraway's third and final boundary blurring between the physical and nonphysical. It is with this boundary, I suggest, that we arrive at the heart of the question of 'the human', given that her traditional identifying qualities cohere around matters of mind: thought, reason, and intelligence. Technology, today, is working to foreground the mind as being simultaneously derived from physical parts and processes (which are not necessarily human) *and* as reinserting a possibility of an enchanting sort of excess of, or interruption to, a causally bound physical universe. How the cyborg self settles in this landscape, given its form as a material-semiotic entity and agent, is the question towards which the forthcoming discussion now tends.

### **1.6 The Physical-Nonphysical Boundary: Technology and the Re-Emergence of Mind**

The third boundary division between the physical and the nonphysical is introduced by Haraway as being a 'subset of the second' ('Cyborg Manifesto' 153), the second being the human-machine boundary. The 'leakiness' of the second boundary, brought on contemporarily, claims Haraway, by changing forms of technology, spills over into, and means a blurring of, the third and 'imprecise' boundary between mind and body, between the nonphysical realm and the physical.

Humans have long wondered if, fundamentally, they are just kinds of machines (consider La Mettrie) but now machines are becoming increasingly lively and apparently human-like in their virtually invisible operations and intelligence. With miniaturization

and digitization,<sup>24</sup> machines seem to be ‘made of sunshine’ (Haraway, ‘Cyborg Manifesto’153), ‘all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum’ (ibid). In short, though this kind of technology may operate according to the laws of physics, we cannot see its cogs or levers; we cannot see its mechanisms. So, while a camera can transport images and sounds via satellite to the other side of the world almost instantaneously; and while radiotherapy can kill cells in a body in the fight against cancer, we trust in a process that we know is founded in scientific theory but that *appears* to happen all by itself, as if by magic. We can’t see how it works. Its control and operations appear to be immaterially effected.

As contemporary machines become more intelligent, more autonomous, smaller, and more apparently light and ethereal, Haraway seems to suggest that a nonphysical realm becomes reinserted as a possibility of existence. Interestingly, this view flies in the face of one of the more enduring interpretations of the Modern age, which characterizes the rise of technology as ‘disenchanted’. According to Max Weber, early twentieth century German sociologist and political economist, a ‘disenchanted world’ is characteristic of Modern life, a Modern life that is stamped with ‘the imprint of meaninglessness’ and for which ‘there are no mysterious, incalculable forces that come into play’ for, ‘in principle, [one can] master all things by calculation’ (qtd. in Bennett 8). Mind is clearly evident in the mental ‘calculation’ that Weber refers to, but this description is suggestive of causally determined and entirely logical thought-processes, as opposed to anything more freely predicated. Given the complaint that nothing mysterious or incalculable is given room to exist in this ‘disenchanted world’, even mind, predicated on the liberal humanist subject’s model of mind, with its quality of free will, has been evacuated. There is, quite simply, no place in a universe known to be entirely causally determined for unpredictability or free will and, therefore, no place for ‘magic’.

In contrast to the ‘disenchantment’ view of Modernity, many posthumanist visions such as Haraway’s are, I suggest, not only actively foregrounding the phenomenon of mind but also positing the possibility of new, surprising, and unpredictable behaviours, forms, and experiences that are arising not in spite of, but because of, the world’s increasingly technological orientation. Certainly, for the likes of Turkle, Wertheim, and Bennett, technologies such as the computer, the Internet, genetic engineering, AI, and AL,

---

<sup>24</sup> Haraway does not specify digital technology but, given that her ‘Cyborg Manifesto’ was published in 1985, an era that preceded the digital revolution, this is unsurprising. I insert it here, however, as a contemporarily important technology.

amongst many others, are actually re-enchanting the world with imaginative, sometimes magical or mysterious possibilities that seem to defy physical laws even as they are technologically and scientifically facilitated by them. Immortality, for instance, suddenly seems like a possible dream as minds are envisioned as being uploaded into computers; and life itself, shrouded in mystery for so long, now appears to be within the reach and remit of human beings as the Introduction of this thesis suggested with its reference to JCVI-syn 1.0.

The Internet is articulated as playing a particularly significant role in conjuring such a sense of enchantment. Wertheim, whose project includes mapping the historical comprehension of space onto human ontology, argues that the creation of cyberspace posits a ubiquitous and powerful other kind of space, a new kind of *non* space that, while it fails to be unequivocally material and while it follows its own logic and geography, is nonetheless experienced as a space (228):

Although it is true that cyberspace is realized through the by-products of physical science – the optic fibers, microchips, and telecommunications satellites that make the Internet possible are themselves all made possible by our tremendous understanding of the physical world – nonetheless, cyberspace *itself* is not located within the physicalist world picture. It is a fundamentally new kind of space that is not encompassed by any physics equations. As the complexity theorists would say, cyberspace is an *emergent* phenomena whose properties transcend the sum of its component parts. Like the medieval Empyrean, cyberspace is a ‘place’ outside physical space (Wertheim 39).

Wertheim goes on to argue that the phenomenon of cyberspace and its attendant technologies are returning to the human the promise of metaphysical freedom and immortality as the conscious self is envisaged as being able, in the ever-advancing technological future, to survive the death of the body and to ‘live’ forever in or as machines. Such a vision has consequences for metaphysical assumptions that, according to Wertheim, cast us right back into the realm of medieval Christian dualism:

Once again, then, we see in the discourse about cyberspace a return to dualism, a return to a belief that man is a bipolar being consisting of a mortal material body and an immaterial ‘essence’ that is potentially immortal. This posited immortal self, this thing that can supposedly live on in the digital domain after our bodies die, this I dub the ‘cyber-soul.’ (266)

When the cyber-self travels weightlessly to meet with cyber-friends in cyberspace, and when the physical body sits grossly material, opaque, and possibly (temporarily) forgotten during the cyber-self's sojourns into the cyber-realm, so a model of the self as apparently split, formed dualistically of mind and body, is implied. The body seems only tenuously and incidentally to play host to a more essential and immaterial self, which feels as if it is free to traverse a virtual space of possibility.

Concurrent with the conjuration of the nonphysical sphere of cyberspace, then, is Wertheim's suggestion that mind, for so long relegated by Modernity's scientific project to the realm of superstition, faith, or mystery, may once again be contemplated as an immaterial entity. On Wertheim's argument, the technology of cyberspace functions to open up an account of selfhood that promises a nonphysical element of self constituted in a dualistic subjectivity.

Such a semi-mystical interpretation of the human subject's mental relation to technology, which posits a kind of 'soul' space as feasible, is certainly 'enchanted' and shares much with the transhumanist's dream of technologically facilitated immortality. However, there are problems with Wertheim's explanation. By positing cyberspace as an *emergent* phenomenon, Wertheim ties it, and, by implication, mind, to the material parts that contribute to the constitution of the whole. This being the case, Wertheim incorrectly identifies the 'soul' space as being dualistically distinct from the technologies and processes that give it form. Although the whole of the emergent phenomenon may qualitatively exceed the sum of its parts, the whole remains fundamentally connected to those parts; if you change the parts you change the whole. Accordingly, substituting organic for technological parts changes, in theory, and however minimally, the form of the emergent whole.<sup>25</sup>

Despite Wertheim's problematic identification of emergence, the enchanting relationship she draws between mind and emergence is an evocative one and certainly addresses Haraway's third boundary blurring between the physical and nonphysical. Of

---

<sup>25</sup> A more convincing argument for dualism may be found in William D. Hart's chapter, 'Dualism', in which he contends that 'scientific propaganda from materialists notwithstanding, dualism is the commonsense solution to the mind-body problem' (268). His argument, in line with Wertheim's, posits Descartes' treatment of space and matter as being a problem for mind, which is designated as a distinct immaterial entity: 'Descartes takes extension to be the essence of matter. Under extension, Descartes seems to put all geometrical properties including location. So to keep mind immaterial, he must deny it location; his view of the mind is not so much other-worldly as a-worldly' (ibid). However, Hart does not make any links to emergence and limits his claims to our contemporary conceptions of space, which permit mind the possibility of existence in or as non space: 'We post-Newtonians accept geometrical objects in regions of space innocent of matter, so for us location does not require physicality, and thus disembodied minds can be somewhere in space without being thereby embodied' (ibid).

course, from the cyborg perspective which this thesis advocates, it is impossible to forget the thickness of the body or technology in any conception of the self. So, while Wertheim posits a 'soul' space, and transhumanist discourse conceives of technology as the answer to liberal humanist fantasies, the cyborg self refuses to conceive of physical matter (biological or technological) in such incidental, prosthetic, or dualistic terms.

What does this mean for the mind of the cyborg? To a certain extent, mind remains something of a mystery and a problem in the discourse of the cyborg. Haraway writes that her notion of the material-semiotic developed out of her discussion of the physical-nonphysical boundary in 'Cyborg Manifesto', a discussion she describes as 'a kind of translation of the mind-body dualism' (Haraway qtd. in Gane 147), but she progresses no further into this metaphysical territory. However, to continue down the path that Haraway starts to map, it seems likely that, in the same way that the material is 'welded' to the semiotic (Bell 121), so the cyborg's body is welded to its mind: the cyborg, a material-semiotic entity, is composed of mind and body or, more accurately, mind-body, and I would argue it constitutes less of a translation and more of a re-working of mind-body relations. Given the hybridised organisation of the cyborg, Haraway's 'translation' of mind-body dualism in fact functions not to sustain and support it but to disrupt and collapse it.

If this is the case, however, and mind is predicated in physical terms, then the problem of self-authorship comes into view, a problem that is exacerbated, furthermore, by the fact that when Haraway writes about her human-cyborg, she does so in ways that seem to insist upon her capacity for self-determination and worlding projects. The cyborg is not merely a politicized entity but a political *agent*: the cyborg is certainly partially constructed of physical processes ('[t]he machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment' (Haraway, 'Cyborg Manifesto' 180)) but Haraway also talks in terms of 'us' - cyborg entities - being 'responsible for boundaries' (ibid) and, as such, *as being capable of intentional action*. Haraway's cyborg, then, is not a subject devoid of creative or intelligent thought or action; he is not a pre-determined, entirely physical entity. Neither is this a subject who, in poststructuralist fashion, is spoken as opposed to speaking, a product of culture as opposed to culture's author. This cyborg subject knows he is partially programmed by biology but he is a designer and manipulator of code, too; he knows he is spoken but he also speaks; he is a creation but he is, in addition, a creator;

in short, he knows he is a product of nature and culture but he is not imprisoned by their laws, processes, and codes for he is also an author, designer, and sculptor.

Such a conception of cyborg subjectivity constitutes something of a problem, though. The acts of critical thinking, decision-making, and creation to which Haraway refers the cyborg require some kind of conception of selfhood that is free and sovereign. However, in the critical post/humanist view that I adopt, *mind is not detachable from embodiment* and, this being the case, unlike the liberal humanist subject, the cyborg is not free and her mind is not dualistically formed. Self-authorship implies a centralized, antecedent status for mind as the free initiator of intentional action; the cyborg model of human subjectivity, meanwhile, refuses to detach mind from physical parts and processes and, in the process, would appear to locate mind as nothing more substantial than an epiphenomenon, lacking any causal powers of its own. Furthermore, agency is assigned to each and all parts of the system of the cyborg self such that any conception of a centralised organisation of subjectivity seems to be refused. This being the case, the question remains: how is such an embodied, decentred subject capable of the intentional, creative, and seemingly free thought and behaviour that Haraway ascribes to her? The answer, this thesis suggests, may lie with the theory of emergence and so it is to this subject that this chapter will finally turn.

### **1.7 An Emergentist Model of Mind: The Possibility of Indeterminacy in a Physical Universe**

Turkle writes: '*We have used our relationships with technology to reflect on the human*' (24) and in her book, *Life on the Screen*, she charts the development of the computer in correspondence with the development of theories of mind, interrogating the relationships and negotiations between the two.

According to Turkle, the early computer was constructed in line with 'the classical world-view [of Modernity] that has dominated Western thinking since the Enlightenment', which was founded upon 'calculation' and conceived of reality as 'being characterized by such terms as "linear," "logical," "hierarchical," and [as] having "depths" that can be plumbed and understood' (17). However, the computer, as Turkle tells the story, has evolved in the last thirty years, shifting from such characteristically linear, logical and hierarchical assumptions of modernity to quite different postmodernist



ones, which Turkle describes as no longer being founded upon ‘calculation’ but ‘simulation’:

The culture of simulation is emerging in many domains. It is affecting our understanding of our minds and our bodies. For example, fifteen years ago, the computational models of mind that dominated academic psychology were modernist in spirit: Nearly all tried to describe the mind in terms of centralized structures and programmed rules. In contrast, today’s models often embrace a postmodern aesthetic of complexity and decentering. Mainstream computer researchers no longer aspire to program intelligence into computers but expect intelligence to emerge from the interactions of small subprograms (20).<sup>26</sup>

Here, Turkle suggests that computer programming has shifted from a conception of intelligence that is front-loaded into the system and involves the writing of linear, rule based programs that are constructed to carry out predetermined operations within fixed parameters, to one that is *emergent* and entails writing a number of small subprograms that evolve via their context specific interactions with each other and with their environments.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Although Turkle posits ‘emergence’ and ‘decentering’ in relation to subjectivity as denoting postmodernist qualities, I would argue that the first of these terms is, in fact, more particularly *posthumanist*, while the second is only loosely identifiable as being postmodernist, since the decentering process of human subjectivity is commonly recognised as having started with Marx and Freud and, as such, as being more properly *modernist*. In thinking about ‘emergence’, postmodernism seems, in some ways, an awkward home for the term since it demonstrates meagre interest in the physical realm. If Fuchs is correct in describing postmodernism as denoting ‘desubstantiation’, then emergence, which has strong links to evolutionary theory and theories of mind that identify it as a qualitative phenomenon tied to physical properties, is better characterised as being posthumanist.

<sup>27</sup> Notably, it is Turkle’s differentiation between these two approaches of simulation and calculation that provides her with the tools to interrogate John Searle’s well-known thought experiment, the Chinese room, a scenario that addresses the question: if a machine can persuasively simulate intelligent communication, does it necessarily understand? (Searle’s thought experiment originally appeared in his paper, ‘Minds, Brains, and Programs’, published in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* in 1980, although my own knowledge of the thought experiment derives from his arguments against materialism in his book, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (2004).) As Turkle observes, Searle sidesteps the question of what computers can do with this thought experiment ‘to focus instead on what they *are*’ (Turkle 87). She explains: Searle’s experiment ‘assum[es] as high a degree of machine competence in a complex natural-language-processing task as the most sanguine technological optimist could imagine’ (ibid), which apparently gives him the leverage to argue that however clever a computer program may be, ‘true understanding could never be achieved [...] because any program simply follows rules and thus could never understand what it was doing’ (Turkle, 86). The Chinese Room thought experiment thus seems to point to the conclusion that: human intelligence is premised upon understanding; machine ‘intelligence’ is not premised upon understanding; therefore human and machine intelligence are qualitatively different. However, as Turkle crucially goes on to affirm, ‘[t]he machine intelligence modeled by Searle’s Chinese Room was an information-processing computer system, one that worked by following rules. In the 1980s, there was a movement within computer science to replace such centralized, logical models with decentered, biologically inspired ones. The new emphasis was not on rules but on the quality of emergence’ (124). Searle’s experiment, by implication, then, only proves that *rule based computation* does not correspond with human intelligence (which is based on understanding); it does not prove that computers are fundamentally and forever incapable of achieving this human kind of intelligence.

What is striking about the emergent approach to modelling intelligence and life is that it seems to offer a view of mind, behaviour, and being that is unpredictable and nondeterministic while remaining in the realm of the physical, recognising physical parts and processes while simultaneously allowing for indeterminacy. As such, emergence seems to circumscribe the implacable, unrelenting nature of causal determinism while sustaining a world picture that, though it is scientifically founded, permits of ‘magical’ unpredictability and enchantment. With emergence there is a sense that effects cannot be straightforwardly linked to cause: ‘Deviations’ lead to ‘unpredictable evolutions’ (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 225). As such, as Turkle observes, quoting W. Daniel Hillis, emergence ‘offers a way to believe in physical causality while simultaneously maintaining the impossibility of reductionist explanation of thought’ (134). As Hillis goes on to explain, ‘[f]or those who fear mechanistic explanations of the human mind, our ignorance of how local interactions produce emergent behavior offers a reassuring fog in which to hide the soul’ (ibid). Physical laws seem insufficient to explain how and why humans think and behave the way they do and, as such, a possibility of soul seems to remain.

However, is an emergentist model of mind merely a materialist model passing itself off as compatibilist? Is it the case, as was posited in the Introduction in relation to Frankenstein’s seeming inability to foretell the future, that the future (with humans in it) cannot be predicted because humans, though made of matter, are free agents? Or is it that humans merely lack Laplace’s ‘intellect’, the intellectual capacity or means by which to ‘compute’ the complexity of factors involved in such an equation? In his book, *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness* (2004), Philip Clayton explores such questions, as he considers whether humans have minds or merely epiphenomenal mental properties. In fact, as Clayton explains it, a third option is opened up by the theory of emergence:

Some of us are *physicalists*, holding that all things that exist are physical entities, composed out of, and thus ultimately explainable in terms of, the laws, particles, and energies of microphysics. Others are *dualists* because they believe that at least humans, and perhaps other organisms as well, consist both of these physical components and of a soul, self, or spirit that is essentially non-physical. *Emergence*, I shall argue, represents a third option in the debate (v).

For Clayton, there are problems with both the physicalist and dualist views. ‘On the one hand, the physicalist stance leaves out our experience as conscious agents in the world’ (ibid). As Clayton explains, the experience of ‘thinking’, ‘willing’, and ‘deciding’, and the apparent consequences that such actions have in the world, makes it seem as if ‘these thoughts and volitions actually *do* something’ (ibid), which physicalism is unable to account for. On the other hand, dualism ‘is undercut by the increasingly strong correlations that neuroscientists are demonstrating between states of the central nervous system and conscious states’ (Clayton vi). So, the work of the neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio, for example, appears to demonstrate that the reasoning process necessitates the involvement of (*embodied*) emotion, as he presents his studies of ‘neurological patients who had both defects of decision-making and a disorder of emotion’ (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* xvi). This is not to suggest that such scientific projects prove dualism to be false, of course, but they do suggest that consciousness is to some degree ‘derived from a particular biological system, your brain and central nervous system, in interaction with a set of physical, historical, and presumably also linguistic and cultural factors’ (Clayton vi).

Clayton’s third option, emergence, which offers the view that novel and unpredictable phenomena are naturally produced by the complex interaction of parts, is broken down by him into two categories: strong and weak emergence or, as Michael Silberstein and John McGreever write it, ontological and epistemological emergence. In the strong emergentist view, consciousness, or mind, is an ontologically distinct and emergent feature derived from, and contingent upon, complex biological systems but such that mind ‘possess[es] causal capacities not reducible to any of the intrinsic causal capacities of the parts nor to any of the (reducible) relations between the parts’ (Silberstein and McGreever qtd. in Clayton 10). In effect, mind, on this model of emergence, is characterised by the concept of downward causation, which Clayton describes as ‘*the process whereby some whole has an active non-additive causal influence on its parts*’ (49). In short, the strong emergentist model identifies mind as an ontologically distinct phenomenon, capable of thinking and initiating action in the world even though it remains contingent upon the complex material processes that give it form. On this version, the human subject is definitively physically formed but is capable of acting freely and constitutes an origin of speech and action.

In contrast, weak (Clayton) or epistemological (Silberstein and McGreever) emergence identifies properties of a system as ‘reducible to or determined by the intrinsic properties of the ultimate constituents of the object or system’ (ibid), although it may be extremely difficult for any explanation or prediction of the properties ‘to be made on the basis of the ultimate constituents. Epistemologically emergent properties are novel only at a level of description’ (ibid). On this view, mental properties are merely epiphenomenal, with human thought and action only seeming to feel and manifest in surprising and unpredictable ways; the human subject is a product; he may be intelligent and capable of decision-making and creativity but these characteristics are, in fact, effects of biology and society and only seem to offer individual freedom of thought and action. On this view, assuming that precisely the same conditions and ingredients that attach to any given situation remain the same, only one outcome or course of action is possible were the scenario to be replayed again and again. A person’s thoughts and actions are determined; the only reason they cannot be predicted is that events are too complex to permit such computation.

In a sense, whether strong or weak emergence ultimately demonstrates the more persuasive case for mind is extraneous to the interests of this thesis, significant though the question may otherwise, and more generally, be. What is important to this thesis is the demonstration of a hybrid nature of human being from the early modern period: a post/humanist model of self that is relative to, and composed by, animal and machine parts as well as godly, self-determining ones. Also important to this thesis is the acknowledgement of, and an engagement with, the paradox that is bound to the hybrid form of the post/human: his constitution as a material entity in a physical universe that is capable of behaving as an origin of history. I present the theory of emergence as one compelling answer to the problem of squaring physicalism with characteristics of mind that conventionally cohere with Cartesian dualism. However, whether or not Frankenstein feels incapable of predicting the future he has set in motion by creating the Creature and his bride because these life forms are actually unpredictable, or only seem so, is, to a certain extent, not pertinent. What is important is that Frankenstein and the Creature are represented as experiencing themselves as conscious beings who believe they are capable of self-determination as they aspire upwards towards the angels or slip downwards towards the beasts. It is the possibility of ‘mystery’ in relation to what the human might do or say, and the possibility that a choice exists for him in his performance and construction

of himself, even if it is, ultimately, a restricted or illusory choice, that are crucial to this thesis, for it is the representation and hope of such possibilities that bestow him his identity as human and not animal or machine.

In this chapter, I have set out the ways in which Haraway's cyborg maps a hybrid animal-machine-supernatural structure of identity and subjectivity upon 'the human' and, in the process, reveals him as a self-authoring figure whose identity (as 'human' or otherwise) is only ever provisionally established. In the next chapter, I take this structure of subjectivity as the underpinning structure to present an alternative account of modern subjectivity than those more conventional tales which tell of the liberal humanist subject. In the process of presenting this alternative account, the chapter re-examines humanism and works to rehabilitate it, arguing that humanism is more subtle in some of its manifestations than is generally acknowledged. In fact, as the next chapter works to show, the modern human(ist) subject may have been too quickly consigned to history and, indeed, some important reasons may exist to give encourage us to allow for a form of subjectivity that is at least partially free.

## Chapter Two

### The Subject(s) of Humanism

#### 2.1 The Concerns of the Chapter

This chapter focuses in humanist subjectivity; specifically, it presents an alternative account of modern subjectivity than is presented in more conventional stories which construct ‘the human’ as a liberal humanist subject. In the process of presenting its alternative account, the chapter will re-examine humanism and work to rehabilitate it. In a project that seeks to contribute to the rehabilitation of character in dramatic discourse, the need for a rehabilitation of humanism is evident, since the two – character and (*liberal*) humanist subjectivity - have become intrinsically linked in dramatic discourse; in order to raise character from the dead, an argument for its coherence and powers of self-determination, which are attributes linked to humanist as opposed to anti-humanist forms of subjectivity, becomes necessary.

On the way to rehabilitating humanism and clarifying what is meant by the term ‘human’ in the period of (European) modernity, I will reveal some of the problems of its treatment in posthumanist (and some materialist) discourse, which has a tendency to reduce and reify the humanist subject into an essentially fixed and free form, which is more properly denotative of *liberal* humanism. As this chapter will show, liberal humanism is a wily term, difficult to pin down in terms of its origins and meaning and, in fact, it constitutes something of a perversion both of liberalism and humanism. Certainly, humanism is more subtle in some of its manifestations than is generally acknowledged: its early modern form, for example, as this chapter will argue in due course, reveals a hybrid and indeterminate nature that is evocative of the cyborg subjectivity outlined in Chapter One. Indeed, this early modern humanist form, as I will demonstrate, has little in common with the liberal humanist subject which has come to define ‘the human’ in the narratives of some posthumanists, Cultural Materialists, feminists, and so on, who posit it as *the* model of modern subjectivity. In fact, in terms of subjectivity, one of the aims of this chapter is to show that some humanist and posthumanist forms may be closer kin than is generally acknowledged by the posthumanists themselves.

The argument driving this chapter, then, is that modern human being has been too quickly confined and reduced to ‘*the* (liberal) *human*(ist)’ in human and character

discourse and that, perhaps, we should not be so quick or eager to confine the human(ist) subject in toto to the dustbin of history. The critical manoeuvre of the anti-humanists is to identify the liberal humanist subject as an historically predicated form of modern subjectivity and identity and to critique the workings of structures of culture and power that maintain its form and position. This manoeuvre, though necessary and effective in certain political and ethical fields and debates (as I will acknowledge in detail in due course) has, however, had an effect on human representations that has not always or necessarily been helpful or accurate: in reading humanist subjectivity exclusively in liberal humanist terms, which the antihumanists rightly and roundly reject as a model, the risk arises that any notion of an emancipatory politics for humans is eradicated and with it the possibility that humans might be capable of effecting change in themselves and their worlds.

My project, then, to rehabilitate humanism is partially clarified as a politically important one. It is also important in terms of rehabilitating character as a subject of discourse. Dramatic character, as Chapter Three will show, has come to be conceived as the free and unified origin of a play's action and dialogue; in being so, it denotes what is generally understood to be a liberal humanist form of subjectivity and is, correspondingly, located at the centre of its dramatic worlds and of drama more generally. However, in 1996, character, thus identified, was described by Elinor Fuchs as having 'died', an announcement indicative not only of formal changes to the theatrical representation of humans but also of a more fundamental shift from one ontological (*human*) state to another (*post-, anti-, or in-human*). In fact, we find this dichotomous movement in many postmodernist accounts of the human dating from the 1960s and '70s onwards, such as are offered by Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, or Michel Foucault. Meanwhile, in the terrain of posthumanism there are those theorists who recognise the 'post' in 'posthuman' as signifying 'after' and, in so doing, similarly posit a transition from one order of being to another. All such accounts ultimately identify 'the human' according to binary terms: cultural not natural, agent not product, present not absent, subject not object, alive not dead, and so forth.

Such dichotomous orderings of the human are, I argue, problematic for analysis of the human and its dramatic representative, character: approached diachronically, such orderings locate the human in an historical trajectory that implies a categorical and decisive shift from human to in- or post-human, which is difficult both to identify and

defend; situated synchronically, the dichotomous structure works to reduce ‘objects’ in the world, including humans, to agents *or* products, subjects *or* objects, or natural *or* cultural and thereby fails to recognise or treat them in their full, paradoxical forms when they appear thus. Seeing humans as complex subject-objects may prove awkward for analysis – for example, one is faced with the challenge of seeing and treating the human as an agent *and* a product, as free *and* materially determined, which brings with it problems of a philosophical and logical sort – but I suggest that such a way of seeing and approaching dramatic character nonetheless constitutes a more accurate and insightful approach to its study than that offered by the narrative structured in binary terms which frames it as ‘alive’ or ‘dead’.

According to Bruno Latour, the dichotomising impulse - to purify that which is natural from that which is cultural - arises out of a project that is characteristically modern. The process of purification, which refuses to acknowledge hybridity, consigns all entities ‘to the domain of objects or to that of society’ (Latour 130). So, humans are either entirely and irreducibly free in their form as, for example, liberal humanist subjects, or they are entirely determined, the product of material processes.

In the process of offering this explanation, Latour implicitly lends weight to the narrative of the liberal humanist subject, against which this chapter positions itself. However, Latour’s book also suggests that underneath this cultural dichotomising impulse lies a more fundamental truth about ‘objects’ as he observes that the project to identify ‘objects’, including humans, as natural *or* cultural, object *or* subject, is not always easy to maintain, as Jane Bennett concisely explains in her own discussion of Latour’s thesis of modernity:

To apply the pure categories of nature and culture is to find that pretty much everything has a degree of ‘transcendence’ or resistance to human design, as well as a degree of ‘immanence’ or susceptibility to human design. The very practice of purification reveals that allegedly fixed objects – atoms, birds, trees, operas, nature, identities, culture, turbines, God – are strange and mobile complexes of the given and the made. Such hybrids [...] are products not amenable to the established categorical distinctions – as, for example, an animal that speaks a language or a machine with a mind of its own (96).

Of course humans (and characters) are no more ‘pure’ than the atoms, birds, trees, and so forth, to which Bennett refers; humans are themselves simultaneously resistant *and* susceptible to human design; they, too, are hybrids. In Latour’s view, hybrids have



always been with us; it is just that today they are achieving recognition in a world that is being re-conceptualised and re-created as a place more complexly ordered than modernity has traditionally allowed.

By such recognition of humans as hybrids, as essentially indeterminate entities in process, Latour offers a point of view that orientates my own alternative account of modern humans and, by implication, characters. Despite modernity's tendency to purify humans into subjects or objects, the form and behaviour of humans reveal, I argue, a structure that is inherently complex and paradoxical. Taking Latour's basic thesis as my starting point, then, this chapter approaches humans as hybrid and embodied natural-cultural, material-semiotic beings which change in line with transforming historical conditions (i.e. the form of subjectivity and identity illustrated in Chapter One). In figuring the human in this way, my thesis aligns itself, loosely, with posthumanist or cyborg structures of being. However, my position diverges from posthumanist discourse in the way that I locate this complex, hybrid figure in relation to humanism. There is a tendency in posthumanist discourse to position and construct its largely ethically predicated project and subject in *contrast* to humanism, and thereby, implicitly or explicitly, to identify the posthuman as a distinct form. My different claim, which will be argued in the next section of this chapter, is that posthuman subjectivity is not so easily distinguished from its humanist kin and, furthermore, that, in some ways, it is politically irresponsible to want to differentiate and detach it thus.

## **2.2 Some Posthumanist Views of Humanism**

Cary Wolfe opens his book, *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), with a description of his Google searches of 'humanism' and 'posthumanism' (xi); he reports that the first term, 'humanism', yielded 3,840,000 items; in comparison, the latter, 'posthumanism', generated a meagre 60,200. However, Wolfe goes on to report that his 'cursory glance' (ibid) appears to reveal 'much more unanimity about humanism than posthumanism', before asserting that '[m]ost definitions of humanism look something like the following one from Wikipedia' (ibid):<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> By reporting that *Wikipedia's* definition of 'humanism' is very like 'most' of the definitions evident from his Google search, is Wolfe referring to the 3,840,000 items produced by his search, or merely those encountered in the process of his 'cursory glance'? I assume the latter given that my own findings, which were gathered from academic books and articles in addition to web sources, revealed a humanism that, far from being homogeneous is, in fact, diverse.

*Humanism* is a broad category of ethical philosophies that affirm the dignity and worth of all people, based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appeal to universal human qualities – particularly rationality. It is a component of a variety of more specific philosophical systems and is incorporated into several religious schools of thought. Humanism entails a commitment to the search for truth and morality through human means in support of human interests. In focusing on the capacity for self-determination, humanism rejects the validity of transcendental justifications, such as a dependence on belief without reason, the supernatural, or texts of allegedly divine origin. Humanists endorse universal morality based on the commonality of the human condition, suggesting that solutions to human social and cultural problems cannot be parochial (qtd. xi).<sup>29</sup>

The sort of humanist subject figured in this definition implies a universal human nature, which is rationally grounded, and a capacity for self-determination and moral judgement. Humanism's rejection of the supernatural (i.e. angels, monsters, and gods; in short, any form that cannot be rationally or empirically verified) and its search for truth work to emphasise the human's capacities for reason and moral judgement as qualities that are essential, unique, and stable. Finally, with the concluding sentence, which ends by 'suggesting that solutions to human social and cultural problems cannot be parochial' (xi), it is implied that human social and cultural problems must be answered at the universal level because the subject's specific material and historical context bears no influence upon her form and action.

Wolfe presents this account of humanism apparently as more or less definitive of an outlook that is, he suggests, homogeneous; posthumanism, in contrast, he writes, 'generates different and even irreconcilable definitions' (ibid) (hence the apparent need for Wolfe's book, which seeks to bring greater clarity to the subject). Certainly, the humanist subject outlined above is a familiar one in much of the discourse of posthumanism, which depicts her as essentially free, stable, rational, autonomous (in the sense of existing separately and prior to society), and entirely self-determining. It is *against* this subject that posthumanism negotiates its position as it constructs its various feminist and ethically motivated theories and analyses, which effectively build upon the radical and important criticisms and theories of their anti-humanist predecessors: Hayles reports:

---

<sup>29</sup> Wolfe does not provide bibliographic information for the quotation, nor the date on which he accessed it, but my Google search on 18 May 2012 revealed that the definition of 'humanism' quoted by Wolfe appears under the *Wikipedia* entry, 'An Outline of Humanism'.

Feminist theorists have pointed out that [the liberal humanist subject] has historically been constructed as a white European male, presuming a universality that has worked to suppress and disenfranchise women's voices; postcolonial theorists have taken issue not only with the universality of the (white male) liberal subject but also with the very idea of a unified, consistent identity, focusing instead on hybridity; and postmodern theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have linked it with capitalism, arguing for the liberatory potential of a dispersed subjectivity distributed among diverse desiring machines they call 'body without organs' (*How We Became Posthuman* 4).

The objects of concern for the anti-humanists and, by implication, posthumanists, here, are certain assumptions and claims that are accounted as being characteristic of the liberal humanist subject: *universality*, *autonomy* and *freedom*, and *unity* and *stability*. Notably, the humanist belief in the universality of human nature has been revealed by anti-humanist theorists as being, in practice, historically specific and predicated upon hierarchical organisation, which positions the white, Western, educated man as the (ideal) 'universal' form; *autonomy* and *freedom*, meanwhile, which are connected to a conception of mind as immaterial (and therefore self-determining and free), are objected to by the anti-humanists not only because they have become untenable in a contemporary world which generally understands mind in the physical terms set by, for example, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, and computer science, but also because mind's autonomy means that historically and materially specific experiences of embodied being are overlooked; finally, the purported *unity* and *stability* of the human(ist) form, where the anti-humanists understand identity in humanist terms to be something essential and unchangeable, are deemed as being politically problematic for the way they are resistant to change.

In comparison to such a free, universal, unified, and consistent humanist subject, the posthumanist's hybridity of form stands in promising relief for, with its provisional, materially embedded borders, objects – humans and otherwise – are positioned in a landscape that is less anthropocentric and hierarchical, and more horizontal, democratic, and provisional. In such a landscape, as Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingstone report, the posthuman body ceases to belong to the humanist 'family of man' and instead joins 'a zoo of posthumanities' (3). This is a manifestly different order of being and relating than the humanist models represented by posthumanists. For Halberstam and Livingstone, posthumanism promotes kinship as opposed to division between human beings and their traditional others: instead of ordering the world according to differences and divisions

that defend and prize purity of form and species over hybridity and disorder, they find value in those or that which are liminal or external to conventional coherent orderings. For these and many other posthumanist theorists, hybrid entities (including humans) function to challenge Enlightenment claims to coherence and clarity, which have worked to ignore, oppress, enslave, or hurt those ‘individuals’ who happen to be the wrong colour, nationality, religion, gender, sexuality, physical form, age, or species.

Jennifer Parker-Starbuck’s ‘cyborg subject’ is just such a hybrid, provisional form which, in her ethical and feminist project, works to foreground “‘real life’ bodies’ that are otherwise, in the liberal humanist order of things, ‘threaten[ed] to “be disappeared”” (*Cyborg Theatre* 191). Parker-Starbuck’s cyborg subject, composed of the parts of the abject, object, and subject, is a specifically embodied hybrid that is ‘open to the processes of transformation around it’ (*Cyborg Theatre* 143); in being so, the cyborg subject is specifically juxtaposed with the liberal humanist subject (ibid 42) and thereby works both to counter the latter’s ‘fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality’ (2) and to render visible those that are otherwise ‘disappeared’: ‘the outsider, the rejected, the disappeared, or the disabled other’ (ibid 42).

The propensity of the liberal humanist subject to rationalise some humans into non or marginalised human status as he sets about his own ambition to achieve vainglorious power and immortality is enabled by a philosophical model of mind that Parker-Starbuck correctly identifies as comprising a ‘mind-body split’ (ibid 15). In this split, it is mind that comes to characterise the human. As Hayles elucidates, it is ‘[o]nly because the body is not identified with the self’ that it is ‘possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality’ (*How We Became Posthuman* 4), a self whose very essence ‘depends on erasing markers of bodily difference, including sex, race, and ethnicity’ (ibid 4-5). According to Neil Badmington, this mind-body split is more precisely *Cartesian*. In fact, Badmington identifies René Descartes as one of ‘the principal architects of humanism’ (*Posthumanism* 3). (Here Badmington, like Wolfe earlier, does not distinguish between liberal humanism and humanism more generally but conflates the two). He explains:

[I]n the seventeenth century, [Descartes] arrived at a new and remarkably influential account of what it means to be human. At the very beginning of the *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes proposes that reason is ‘the only thing that makes us men [sic] and distinguishes us from the beasts ...’ This innate ‘power of judging well and distinguishing the true from the false ... is naturally equal in all men’ (*Posthumanism* 3).

For the posthumanists, however, ‘we’ are not all the same: humans are not a homogeneous group of essentially rational, immaterially constituted, and free subjects, and differences between humans and animals/machines are neither so stable nor so pronounced as the liberal humanist is represented as having accounted them to be. So, what model of subjectivity is posited in place of the humanist or liberal humanist model to combat the latter’s treacherous ‘fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality’ (Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre 2*)? For critical posthumanists such as appear in the discussion of this chapter, it is a decentred subjectivity (i.e. one that refuses the (liberal humanist) conception of self as primary, unified, and free), which depends upon the body and history, more generally, for its constitution and workings. Badmington, for example, suggests that Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud opened the way for posthumanism (ibid 5): the work of Marx posited subjectivity as an effect as opposed to a cause ‘of an individual’s material conditions of existence’ (ibid); and Freud ‘problematized the Cartesian model’ (ibid) by proposing that ‘human activity is governed in part by unconscious motives’ (ibid). For Hayles, meanwhile, the posthuman subject is composed of a number of autonomous, materially constituted cognitive parts (some physiological, some technological) and is “post” not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will’ (*How We Became Posthuman 4*). In comparison with the so-called liberal humanist ‘presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self’ which is to be ‘clearly distinguished from the “wills of others”’ (Hayles 3), the posthuman’s ‘collective heterogeneous quality’ (*How We Became Posthuman 3*) makes the attributes of individual agency, desire, or will perilously complex and uncertain.

I want to highlight, at this point, the fact that Hayles’s proposition for posthumanist subjectivity, though it finds form in critical relation to liberal humanist subjectivity, does not do so in diametrical opposition to it. The possibilities of agency, desire, and will importantly remain; they are merely no longer attributes assumed to attach to an essentially coherent and free self with an immaterial mind. Elsewhere, a corresponding but more explicitly political and subtle recognition of the existence and importance of ‘individual’ agency is afforded by Haraway, whose ‘material-semiotic actor’ is intended to ‘highlight the object of knowledge as an active, meaning-generating axis of the apparatus of bodily production, without *ever* implying immediate presence of

such objects' (Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges' 200). In short, when Haraway calls for a 'no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness' (ibid 187), she is not calling for the death of the humanist subject, per se, nor is she denying the potential for humans to generate meaning; she is calling for a recognition that when he acts and speaks, this human does so as an embodied subject-object whose form is not autonomous or stable but hybrid and changing because his boundaries '*materialize in social interaction* [my italics]' (ibid 200-1). In short, the human, material-semiotic actor finds his (changing) form and (changing) meaning *in society*, in ongoing interaction with the world and all its objects.

For Haraway, at least, humanism remains, in some of its facets and in a modified form, a valuable and politically important part of the picture of cyborg being, even as she usefully and extensively historicises and critiques its discriminatory, oppressive, and destructive applications. The humanist attributes of agency and freedom remain important human-cyborg qualities, albeit of sorts that are modified by a cyborg structure that decentres subjectivity and refuses any understanding of autonomy in absolute terms. However, I wonder how far this so-called liberal humanist subject has in fact considered himself autonomous and free in any case? Who is this figure and what are his origins? The posthumanists demonise him for his arrogant and preposterous belief in himself as existing prior to society and for his impossible dreams of disembodied immortality, and they posit their posthumanist subject and project in opposition to his form and fantasies. In fact, they are not alone in pursuing this rhetorical strategy: in the general discourse of subjectivity (and character) which takes as its subject the modern period, liberal humanism has dominated and reified into something of an orthodoxy and, explicitly or implicitly, it is against this model of subjectivity that any new narrative of self negotiates itself. Whether the liberal humanist subject is identified as true in a historical sense or critically positioned as a mere ideological construction of history, it persists as a kind of rhetorical loadstone against which the discourses of self and character clarify themselves. My question is, is this particular choice and 'loadstone' of modern selfhood accurate? What *is* the liberal humanist subject and what are his origins?

## **2.3 A Post/Humanist Tale of Subjectivity**

### **2.2.1 The Liberal Humanist Subject: An Historical Product**

According to Catherine Belsey, who has written extensively and influentially upon modern subjectivity and dramatic character, '[t]he human subject, the self, is the central figure in the drama which is liberal humanism, the consensual orthodoxy of the west' (*Subject of Tragedy* ix) with liberal humanism denoting 'the ruling assumptions, values and meanings of the modern epoch' (*Subject of Tragedy* 7). Notably, the liberal humanist 'drama' positions the human subject centre stage as a god-like figure of self-determining and creative powers. Belsey offers a definition of liberal humanism and its subject that is clear, unequivocal, and emblematic:

The common feature of liberal humanism, justifying the use of the single phrase, is a commitment to *man*, whose essence is *freedom*. Liberal humanism proposes that the subject is the free, unconstrained author of meaning and action, the origin of history (*Subject of Tragedy* 8).

Importantly, the liberal humanist subject is also given as considering himself a coherent individual, comprised of a unique and essential personality that persists through time. This perspective, and evidence of its historical veracity, is exemplified and encapsulated by Belsey's presentation of Richard Braithwait's view, dated to 1630, which she describes as asserting a particularly ahistorical quality and identity of the human character:

People may seem to change, [Braithwait] insists, but this is simply a matter of appearances, like clouds covering the sun. In time people's true dispositions emerge and these are unalterable, 'being so inherent in the subject, as they may be moved, but not removed'. They are not affected by circumstances. External conditions have no influence on the nature of the individual. 'Shouldst thou change aire, and soile, and all, it were not in thy power to change thy self' (*Subject of Tragedy* 34).

The liberal humanist subject, then, is the origin of speech and behaviour, and she is, by implication, autonomous and unique; in short, she is an individual and has always been so; history does not change her for she is always and essentially thus.

Belsey, significantly, does not allow this liberal humanist subject to persist in his essentialist and common sense assumptions of himself. Deconstructing him in her book, *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985), she demonstrates this subject as being produced by, and

located in, history. Tracing the emergence of this liberal humanist individual to a specific epoch – the period from the Renaissance through to the seventeenth century – and class – the bourgeoisie (9) – Belsey repositions him as a construction of historically constituted cultural and material conditions, discourses, and ideologies and as finally consolidating himself in the ‘the victory of constitutionalism in the consecutive English revolutions of the 1640s and 1688’ (Belsey 8).

I would like to add another layer of historicization to Belsey’s account of the liberal humanist subject by observing that the term, ‘humanism’, is, in fact, an anachronism of the nineteenth century. ‘Humanism’ was not coined until 1808 by the German educationalist, F. I. Niethammer, in a debate about the place of the classics in secondary education. Meanwhile, the set of assumptions and ideals that is conventionally comprehended as characterising (*liberal*) humanism was not applied to the Renaissance until 1859 by George Voigt and then again, a year later, by Jacob Burckhardt, whose book, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, brought the term ‘humanism’ into common usage. Willson H. Coates et al maintain that it was Burckhardt who ‘established the canon on the subject [of liberal humanism] in 1860’ (3) (although it is important to note that Burckhardt did not, himself, use the term ‘liberal humanism’, which was not coined until much later). For Burckhardt, the Middle Ages were viewed as having been characterized by a kind of obfuscating veil of ignorance that prevented humans from seeing the truth about themselves and the world. In contrast, his influential description of Renaissance ‘man’ comprehends him as having lately become conscious of himself as a subject, a spiritual *individual*, one that is newly able to see and to treat ‘the state and of all the things of this world’ *objectively* (Burckhardt 98). In short, the modern subject was born, given form by the recognition of a gap between himself and the objective world. Of society, meanwhile, Burckhardt ‘drew a picture of [Italian Renaissance humanist] society as self-assertive, competitive, bent upon achievement and avid for glory and immortality’ (Alan Bullock 27), although such a picture, perhaps, reveals more about mid-nineteenth century Europe than of the early modern period. In short, it is courtesy of Voigt and, in particular, Burckhardt, that humanism has, since the nineteenth century, coalesced into a given set of attitudes and beliefs that centre themselves in a particular and characteristically modern liberal model of ‘man’ as a free and unified essence. Orthodox renderings of the modern human subject and of its surrogate, dramatic character, then, offer him as an autonomous and stable individual who, though he may only have come to



recognise himself thus in relatively recent times, believes he has, in fact, been so through all time. These attitudes and beliefs are particular to, and apparently denotative of, the modern era, and yet, markedly, they did not find coherent framing as such until approximately 150 years ago.

As for the term ‘liberal humanism’, though its set of ideas may have started to cohere with Burckhardt, its coining as a term did not occur, it would appear, until the twentieth century and, indeed, even today its status as such seems somewhat provisional. Tellingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not cite liberal humanism as a discrete entry. Instead, it includes it under the broad term, ‘liberalism’, and specifically under the heading, ‘Special uses: forming adjectives with the sense ‘liberal and –’’. The date of its first cited use is 1936 in an entry by the poet C. Day Lewis,<sup>30</sup> which, if approximately accurate, means that the term did not manifest in common discourse until well into the twentieth century. ‘Liberal humanism’ is an amalgamation, then, of two sets of ideas: liberalism and humanism. As Robert E. Gahringer observes in his article, ‘Liberalism and Humanism’, ‘[I]liberalism appears to be a general political or social view’ whereas ‘humanism appears to be a metaphysical or moral view’ (38). However, what the two views share is an ‘essentially non-naturalistic metaphysics’ (37), which equates to the model of liberal humanist subjectivity identified and critiqued by Belsey. Positing liberalism in contrast to naturalism, Gahringer explains: ‘liberalism asserts the ontological irreducibility of autonomous action, i.e. Freedom; and humanism asserts the ontological irreducibility of what both defines and is defined through action: the Individual’ (ibid). In short, the two terms combined give us the metaphysical absolute of a *free individual*, which, according to Gahringer, underpins and constitutes the principal or possibly only ‘content’ of both liberalism and humanism (ibid).

This idea of a free individual, conceived as an ontological absolute, is highlighted in exemplary fashion in a quote cited by Will Kymlicka, which originates with Alison Jaggar. Speaking of liberal feminists, Jaggar writes:

[I]mplicit in their language of sex-roles, was a strong belief in the possibility and desirability of individual freedom of choice. Sex-role language suggests the abstract individualist belief that human beings exist as actors logically, if not temporally, prior to their entry onto the social stage. When they enter this stage,

---

<sup>30</sup> C. Day Lewis’s entry reads: ‘But for the last 100 years this background has been disintegrating, till now nothing remains of it but a few faded tatters stitched together with every variety of pseudo-scientific, mystico-emotional, liberal-humanist material’.

individuals assume a role that seems appropriate for the time being but that may be discarded at some future date. On this conception of human nature, human beings are not necessarily constituted by society but instead are capable, in principle, of withdrawing from society to redefine their own identity. Thus, an individual is able to throw off the identity imposed by society and can consciously choose her or his own future destiny (14-5).

I have quoted Jaggar at length because her description of liberal feminists demonstrates, in detail, the assumption, which is elaborated by Belsey and seems widespread, that individuals conceived in the liberal tradition are capable not only of questioning and revising their roles and identities in society (an assumption that is perfectly reasonable and in accord with the liberal tradition), but of doing so – and this part is more problematic – *without recourse to society*. As ontologically autonomous and unified agents, Gahringer, Jaggar, and Belsey assert that liberal selves are distinct from, and owe nothing to, society.

It is at the point when the liberal individual is painted by his critics thus, in entirely essentialist and autonomous terms - as ‘owing nothing to society’ and being essentially ‘*free[] from the wills of others*’ (C. B. Macpherson qtd. in Hayles 3) - that these critics’ claims about the liberal individual, the purported orthodox subject of the modern period, take on a less credible hue. Even a relatively light probing of the origins of ‘liberal humanism’, ‘liberalism’, and ‘humanism’ work to reveal different forms and assumptions of human selfhood than are consonant with such claims as are conventionally made for it, i.e. its absolute freedom in the terms of dualistic metaphysics. Let us consider the human form represented in the work of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), for example, who is often cited as one of the founding figures of liberal thought. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles identifies the liberal humanist subject as specifically originating in arguments constructed by Hobbes (and Locke) ‘about humans in a “state of nature” before market relations arose’ (Hayles 3), the implication being that Hobbes (and Locke) conceive of humans as essentially free and existing prior to society. According to Hayles, Macpherson’s analysis of possessive individualism, which she identifies as ‘definitive’ in its characterisation of the liberal humanist subject (ibid), works to reveal that such a liberal self does not exist as such, however; in contrast, the liberal humanist subject is ‘*produced* by market relations and does not in fact predate them’ (ibid). However, it would appear that there is a problem with Hayles’s claim for Hobbes’s conception of humans as such. In fact, when Macpherson shows us Hobbes’s formulation

of the 'state of nature' via his analysis of *Leviathan* (1651), Macpherson does not reveal the common conception of an individual that is essentially free and detached from society (which Hayles suggests), but that such a conception is a *misunderstanding* of Hobbes's work. In fact, Macpherson's 'definitive text characterizing the liberal humanist subject' (Hayles 3), far from undercutting the free individual that Hobbes purportedly presents, works to undercut the narratives that articulate him as such. Macpherson's argument is that Hobbes's conception of the nature of 'man' was never meant to indicate a subject who exists prior to, and detached from, society and its market conditions because, as Macpherson writes, Hobbes' 'nature of man is [...] got primarily from observation of contemporary society' (27). According to Macpherson, Hobbes's human is an object that is civilized: 'Hobbes's state of nature is a description neither of the necessary behaviour of primitive men [...] nor of the necessary behaviour of the human animal stripped of all his socially acquired appetites. The state of nature is a deduction from the appetites and other faculties not of man as such but of civilized men' (29).

In fact, so far is this Hobbesian individual from being an essentially free and autonomous individual that Macpherson, in a fascinating and close discussion of Hobbes's opening chapters of *Leviathan*, identifies him as 'very like an automated machine' (31), constructed of 'equipment' which includes the senses, the imagination or memory, language, and reason (31-2). This is a kind of machine, furthermore, that has built into it 'the general direction or goal' of 'motion', where 'motion' equates to appetites or desires ('motion towards') and aversions ('motion away from') (Macpherson 32). Crucially, Macpherson recounts that these appetites and aversions are both naturally *and* socially predicated: 'A few of the appetites and aversions, as for food, are built in to the machine, but most are acquired by "Experience, and traill of their effects upon themselves, or other men"' (ibid). Finally, Macpherson goes on to elaborate the way in which such appetites and aversions in the constitutions of individual machines result in individuals who are, by their very 'nature', different to each other: 'The acquired appetites and aversions are not always for the same things: they differ as between different machines (because they have different experiences), and within one machine at different times (because each one "is in continuall mutation")' (ibid). What we have, here, then, is an individual whose fundamental form and purpose develops out of the interaction of its (natural) parts and (social) experiences. In being described so, this self comes into view as a self in process. On this picture of a 'liberal individual', self-

determination remains a feature - this 'machine' of a 'man' is 'not only self-moving but self-directing' (Macpherson 31) - but this is not self-direction understood in any essentially free or fixed sense. Hobbes's individual, according to Macpherson, is self-directing in the context of specific material conditions and historical contexts of which he is also, partially, a product. In short, according to Macpherson, Hobbes's 'natural' 'man' was never accounted free in any absolute sense – certainly not by Hobbes himself – and he looked nothing like the liberal humanist subject figured by Belsey, Jaggar, Hayles, Badmington, Parker-Starbuck, or any of the other theorists who take recourse to his form in order, rhetorically, to clarify their more protean and embodied models of subjectivity and/or character.

Indeed, even if we bring the nineteenth century liberal view of J. S. Mill into this discussion, where Mill is accounted one of the most influential liberal political philosophers as well as being the author of the classic text of liberal philosophy, *On Liberty* (1859), we are no more certain of discovering a liberal humanist subject conceived in terms of absolute freedom. According to Kymlicka, Mill understood society as an important factor in the constitution of individual character, certainly not as a thing detached, and in being so as constituting a matter of concern since 'social interaction modifies our character, and we need to know the way this occurs in order to question and regulate [...] processes in accordance with our essential interest in leading a good life' (Kymlicka 15).

For Kymlicka, the widely held assumption of liberalism, or liberal humanism, as denoting individuals existing prior to society who 'somehow can escape being subject to social influence over the formation of their character' is both ludicrous and gratuitous (ibid):

Even in its least satisfactory forms, liberalism has always included some account of our essential dependence on our social context, some account of the forms of human community and culture which provide the context for individual development, and which shape our goals and our capacity to pursue them (253).

Indeed, even the work of Burckhardt, whose nineteenth century text has already been identified as key to the identification of the form and figure of the liberal individual (Coates et al), upon close study, reveals a subject less definitively autonomous and fixed than anti- and post-humanists frequently allow. In point of fact, although Burckhardt's picture of the Renaissance 'man' as a fundamentally self-conscious and spiritual

individual was influential in fixing him thus, even Burckhardt, as a reading of his book demonstrates, articulates this liberal humanist subject as being significantly *malleable* (via education) and as being at least partially the product of his environment.<sup>31</sup>

So why does the concept of the liberal humanist subject as an autonomous and fixed individual who is the origin of history persist when liberalism's architects and advocates seem to insist upon human nature's social and protean qualities? One reason, perhaps, is the metaphysics attaching to the notion of the individual as free: philosophically, as Gahringer recognises, freedom and the individual have depended upon the non-naturalistic conception of the 'ontological irreducibility' (37) of both. The capacity to make decisions and take intentional actions that are freely decided by the bodied individual has been most persuasively answered by Cartesian metaphysics and its presumption of the mind as immaterial. However, today, emerging scientific theories – complexity, for example – and related theories of mind, such as emergentism, are opening up new, compatibilist solutions to the problem of free will in a physical universe. Today, at least, it is starting to become conceivable that humans might be conceived as natural creatures who are capable of self-determination.<sup>32</sup>

In this section, I have shown that the liberal individual, then, is not necessarily the stable and autonomous figure it is often assumed to be in some materialist and

---

<sup>31</sup> Burckhardt writes that Renaissance Man's [sic] ability to treat the state and the world objectively, while at the same time asserting his own subjectivity and recognizing himself as a spiritual individual, was the result of the political circumstances of Italy (98). Later, Burckhardt goes on to ask, '[w]hy did the Italians of the Renaissance do nothing above the second rank in tragedy? That was the field on which to display human character, intellect and passion in the thousand forms of their growth, their struggles and their decline. In other words: why did Italy produce no Shakespeare?' (204). The answer, for Burckhardt, lies in the historically and politically specific nature of national events and contexts; so, for example, in the case of Italy's failure to produce their own Shakespeare, Burckhardt blames the Spanish rule of Italy, which functioned to adversely affect the Italians' dramatic production. Thus, environment is given as an influence of culture and, more specifically, of people and subjectivity itself. For that reason, the whole idea of the new modern man as being self-determining and in possession of a strong and reasonable will is not so unproblematically conceived as it would perhaps superficially appear to be. On Burckhardt's view, at least, men and women are at least partially products of environments that facilitate or deny their potential as individuals.

<sup>32</sup> In fact, the theory of *emergence* has a provenance that extends much further back than is generally acknowledged by the likes of Hayles or Turkle, for example, who explore the model in its recent contexts: in particular, the computer sciences of AL and AI. The theory of emergence extends back to the nineteenth century (although for some, i.e. Peter Corning, the notion of 'wholes' exceeding 'parts' may be traced back to Aristotle) where it is bound to matters of mind. George Henry Lewes's psychological discourse, *Problems of Life and Mind*, is conventionally attributed as denoting the birth of emergence. In an era and a discourse that is post-Darwinian, Lewes attempts to approach and identify mind as both an objective *and* subjective entity, claiming that it is an expression of, and a negotiation between, biology and society (*Problems of Life and Mind* 3). Lewes refuses a dualistic explanation of mind and instead argues that 'certain phenomena in nature produce what he call[s] "qualitative novelty" – material changes that cannot be expressed in simple quantitative terms; they are emergents rather than resultants' (Corning 19). Mind, thus posited as an emergent phenomenon, is theorised by Lewes as being constituted by physical parts but as being qualitatively different from those parts and, crucially, as being capable of causation.

poststructuralist discourse. In fact, in a number of quarters it is evident that he betrays a fundamental *instability* of form. It is to this subject's instability that discussion will next turn in relation to his *humanist* forms, since humanism comprises the other element of 'liberal humanist' subjectivity. Earlier in this chapter, I quoted Wolfe describing humanism in homogeneous terms and brought attention to his reductive conflation of humanism and liberal humanism. It is this sort of idiomatic, but nonetheless problematic, simplification and reification of humanist subjectivity as an irreducibly free and fixed individual that I wish, next, to put under scrutiny. Aligning myself with Bullock's view of humanism as set forth in his book, *The Humanist Tradition in the West* (1985), my claim, in opposition to Wolfe, is that humanism comprises a heterogeneous entity and outlook: 'humanism, humanist, humanistic and the humanities are words that no one has ever succeeded in defining to anyone else's satisfaction, protean words which mean very different things to different people' (Bullock 8). So, while acknowledging both that liberal humanism's meaning has hardened into a certain quality of being for Wolfe and his posthumanist colleagues *and* that its form as such exerts widespread influence in the modern history of the European human, my aim is to show that humanist subjectivity does not start and end with the liberal humanist form; indeed, if we consider the humanist subject of the early modern period, we discover a form of subjectivity and human identity that looks quite different.

The next section will focus upon humanism of the Renaissance, in particular, its conception of subjectivity. Perez Zagorin writes that '[o]f all the major versions of humanism' (88), Renaissance humanism has been the 'most influential' (*ibid*), its 'essential premises' comprising '[h]uman dignity, the value of the active life in the world, and man's possession of free will to do good or evil' (*ibid*). Indeed, human potential is, I argue, key to the outlook of humanism as well as to the dramatic characters in my case studies. The case studies that follow in Chapters Four, Five, and Six are informed by questions such as, 'What is the potential of the individual to act differently, to change, and in changing herself, to change her environment?' The answers to these questions are not merely philosophically grounded; they are politically important, too; the potential of the individual to change herself and the world by her powers of self-determination prepares the ground for a politics that is emancipatory and hopeful, in theory, at least although, as Donald R. Kelley observes, such potential works *both* for good *and* evil: 'There was of course a dark side to Renaissance anthropology. Man's "dignity" or rank in

the scale of creation was a complex one, involving consideration of human sin and misfortune as well as human happiness and glory' (45).

The 'factors of freedom, learning, and especially Promethean creativity' (ibid) may be traced to the Renaissance philosophers of 'man' Ficino and Pico who found wonder in the potential of 'man' "to become in a sense all things, and even to become a god" (Ficino qtd. in Kelley ibid). It is to such Renaissance views that discussion will now turn as it contemplates the humanist subject as a creative and indeterminate individual.

### **2.2.2 The Early Modern Humanist: A Hybrid and Indeterminate Individual**

A new, human-centred outlook is evident from the early modern period onwards, characterised by an interest in, and formation of, a subjectivity denoting a self-determining individual and agent in the world. However, it is a mistake to assume that this notion of self necessarily and always sees itself as autonomous, stable, and detached from environmental factors (including, by implication, the body). Despite the charge made by Belsey against the Renaissance humanist subject as starting to believe herself stable and isolated from all other worldly, and other-worldly, forms and influences, such a picture of an essential and idealised self in fact 'distorts Renaissance habits of thought' (Kent Cartwright 10). Education was fundamentally important to the new humanistic movement and it carried with it implications for *character change*. Although humanist educators contemplated some form of human essence, it was one that, Cartwright argues, was 'inchoate, corruptible or improveable, [and] requiring a kind of performance to be fully realized' (ibid). In short, the Renaissance human essence was 'an essentialism with permeable boundaries' (ibid).

The humanist view, as it is described by Cartwright, is that nurture, specifically, education, can improve upon nature.<sup>33</sup> The implication of this view is, of course, post/humanist, since such a way of thinking comprehends the human as a *natural-cultural* being: what makes her special in the Great Chain of Being in comparison to plants, animals, and angels is her capacity to mould her essential state by culturally located means and talents.

---

<sup>33</sup> This point is supported by Bullock who, in considering the significance of education to humanists, identifies it 'as the process by which man [might be] lifted out of his natural condition to discover his *humanitas*' (35). Education functions to improve upon the human being's natural form and so, crucially, to render it more particularly, and distinctly, human.

In fact, this capacity for self-transformation, which is premised upon Cartwright's aptly described permeable essence of self, is quite radical and necessitates a rethink of the status of nature and, by implication, self. In anti-humanist discourse, that which is essential is conventionally accounted as being *naturally* fixed and pre-determined. Cartwright's essentialism with permeable boundaries implies, contrarily, that the origin of selfhood, the subject's antecedent core, is porous, its form negotiable in its relationship with that which is purportedly external to it. As Cartwright astutely concludes, '[e]ssential human identity occurs here not as something fixed, static, or rigid but as a potential, an immanence, a possibility [...]. Essentialism, as the materialists have used it, fails to account for the permeability of the humanist self and the indeterminate unfolding of its possibilities' (11).

This picture of the early modern humanist subject as being amorphous and full of indeterminate potential is borne out by the writing of celebrated early humanist Italian philosopher, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.<sup>34</sup> In his *Oration of the Dignity of Man* (1486), one of the key texts of Renaissance humanism, Pico describes God's making of 'man': having already created all other forms of angelic, plant, and animal life, God found he had no remaining prototypes in the chain of being from which to fashion a new life form: 'Everything was filled up; all things had been laid out in the highest, the lowest, and the middle orders' (4). Accordingly, with nothing to give 'man' that could be his alone, God decided that in 'composite fashion, whatsoever had belonged individually to each and every thing' should be given to 'man': 'Therefore He took up man, a work of indeterminate form and, placing him at the midpoint of the world, He spoke to him' (ibid). He said:

We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and *thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself* [my italics]. I have placed thee at the center of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee. Thou [...] art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou

---

<sup>34</sup> Pico's work appears to have been particularly significant for the British tradition of humanism, having influenced the British Renaissance humanist, John Colet, and his later younger associates, Thomas More and Erasmus.



dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine (Pico 4-5).

In this way, 'man', product of no distinct image, indeterminate in form, crafted as a kind of hybrid being from pre-existing forms, is rendered special and unique by the Creator by means of his liberation from natural laws and from a specific slot in the chain of being. By such action, God enables Adam to 'sculpt' his own form and nature and, in the process, removes Himself from an active role in the fates of men and women. What is most wondrous about 'man', according to Pico, is that, a 'chameleon' (5), he can freely fix his own limits of nature: 'It is given him to have that which he chooses and to that which he wills' (5) for, as Pico confirms and clarifies, '[a]t man's birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him' (ibid).

Pico's humanistic description of 'man' as comprising a fundamentally indeterminate form and nature that may be cultivated according to his will, closely accords with Cartwright's presentation of the humanist subject as an 'immanence' and a 'possibility', an essence with permeable boundaries. In basic terms, the human subject, according to Pico, is given the seeds of a self (in recent times these 'seeds' may be accounted as signifying innate biological properties or, in more particularly contemporary terms, DNA) as well as the free will and creative faculties to mould and make of himself anything he chooses, thus rendering the self that effects the moulding a permeable and mutable essence, a sculptor whose artwork comprises himself. Importantly, this instability of form is profoundly post/humanist in nature. Conceived as a material-semiotic, natural-cultural being, the post/humanist subject is a form in flux; an agent in the world but not autonomous; natural but not fixed; culturally formed but made of physical matter, too.

There are other ways, too, in which Pico and Cartwright's humanistic accounts of the human correspond precisely with post/humanist assumptions. Pico's 'man' is manifestly a hybrid being, explicitly postulated as a uniquely constituted identity from every element of heaven and earth; he is cognisant of his central position and comprehends in the world and in 'himself' 'a system of parts which constitute a unity' (Miller xxvii); Pico's Adam is given the intellectual capacity to exceed his mortal and natural limits by any means at his disposal; and he is 'confined by no bounds', able to fix

limits of nature for himself (Pico 5). In short, there is a plasticity to this being, an innate malleability that posits change as inherent.

Furthermore, although Pico's Oration is framed in fundamentally religious terms in its focus of what man might make of himself, Pico's rational human subject is also presented as a student or philosopher of nature, an embryonic kind of scientist (though science in its modern form is generally understood not to have come into being until the seventeenth century with Sir Francis Bacon). This 'scientist' examines and comes to know, empirically, by means of his or her eyes and hands, 'the causes of things, the ways of nature, the reason of the universe, the counsels of God, the mysteries of heaven and earth' (Pico 17).

It is in this ability of the human subject to study, to know, and ultimately to recreate himself and the world, added to his chameleon form, that the post/humanist subject becomes visible as a form of permeable 'self' that is in ongoing construction with its environment. In short, Pico's Renaissance 'man' is discovered to be fundamentally cyborg-like in its form, a material-semiotic creature made of mind *and* body, nature *and* culture, such that its traditional ahistoricity is refused.

In the gift of self-authorship, the post/humanist is given the intellectual tools to explore and plumb nature's resources, to imagine, and to create new forms, including, importantly, technological ones, in order that, in time, he might overcome himself and actually exceed his mortal and natural limits by any means at his disposal. As an author of his own construction and transformations he will take, just as he has already taken, throughout history, different shapes, his fundamental form being irresolute and changeable: 'man fashions, fabricates, transforms himself into the shape of all flesh, into the character of every creature' (Pico 6). The Promethean ambitions of 'man' are to be hindered only, it seems, by the limits of his imagination. Indeed, he is human for the very reason that 'man is not any inborn image of himself, but many images coming in from the outside' (ibid).

Who or what 'man' makes himself, then, according to this post/humanist story of human being, is facilitated by his essential indeterminacy of form in negotiation with a mind that is distinctly rational, imaginative, freely self-determining while being responsive to, and formed by, its body and the empirical world with its 'many images' (ibid). As Cartwright puts it, this is a permeable kind of humanistic essentialism and it is indicative of a decidedly natural-cultural way of being: the human being imagines new

forms for herself but these are particular and responsive to the world she experiences and knows, a world that is, furthermore, made by *and* productive of her.

In this chapter, I have approached modern human(ist) subjects as paradoxical, hybrid entities. By allowing for such a conception of humans and by reviewing the work of some of the architects of the liberal and humanist traditions, this chapter has opened up the possibility that, in some of her manifestations and representations, at least, the modern individual has been a creative and changeable subject-object. The post- and anti-humanists' formulation of the humanist subject as a particular sort of irreducibly free individual certainly comprises one version of modern subjectivity; however, it is one version only and its purported orthodoxy of form and status for the modern period has, possibly, been overstated.

Pico's 'most remarkable contribution' to the philosophy of human nature was his notion that 'man is the maker of his own nature' (Miller xiv): 'man' gives himself, or sculpts, his own nature, in the same way that 'a sculptor gives form to a statue' (ibid xv). However, as Miller observes, '[t]his celebrated idea is often misunderstood by later critics' who anachronistically and misleadingly 'interpret Pico in accord with modern philosophies of absolute mind or will' (ibid). Pico's human, one of the precursors to the liberal humanist subject, was not, however, formulated as an absolute creator of himself: as Miller elucidates, 'the making activity of man operates upon potencies which are already given. God has granted to man every kind of seed. They grow as man cultivates them' (ibid). So, though this particular early modern human certainly does create, her creation is not entirely original and it is not without limits for she must work with the partly determining 'seeds' of her self and within a particular world which is also partly productive of her. The 'essential' nature or character of this Renaissance notion of the human, then, is *to a certain degree* universal, autonomous, free, stable, and unified (in the sense of constituting a coherent individual, at least). However, these qualities, as Miller advises, cannot be understood in absolute terms for the early modern humanist subject from which the liberal humanist subject descends is her own natural-cultural creator-creation.

The posthumanists, along with the feminists, are right to be suspicious and critical of the idea of the 'dignity' of *man* where such a notion has worked to privilege certain kinds of humans over others and facilitated the idea of boundless subject-centred liberty,

which is permissive of violent or oppressive behaviour, for example. As Zagorin writes: ‘After the Holocaust and the more recent atrocities in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, many among us find it intolerable to hear mention of the dignity or nobility of man’ (90). However, the historical failures of humanism to live up to the ideals of its emancipatory politics should not be cause for humanism’s obsolescence in toto. As Pico’s *Oration* reveals, the humanist potential of ‘man’ does not necessarily work in an upwards direction; and, as Bullock reminds us, a ‘more realistic humanist view’ is, in fact, evident in humanism’s long tradition, one that accepts ‘the limitations and weaknesses of men and women, [and] puts its faith, not in their natural goodness – any more than their natural wickedness – but in their *potential creativity and what that latent power can accomplish once awakened* [my italics]’ (179). Bullock observes that the early humanists of the Renaissance who first celebrated the creative powers of the human ‘knew as well as anyone the evil, the misery, the poverty of spirit’ to be found in their streets and cities (107). However, despite the potential of humans to inflict ‘sin and misfortune as well as human happiness and glory’ (Kelley 45) upon themselves, others, and the world, these early humanists believed ‘that men could rise above their circumstances, could overcome Fortune’ and that ‘recogniz[ing] this was the first step towards doing so’ (Bullock 107). Of course these humanists were formed of an elite set of men. Given this, I think Zagorin is correct when he observes that ‘[i]f a renewed humanism is to be possible, we cannot doubt that it has to be genuinely universal’ (91); that is, if humanism and its related models of subjectivity are to survive, ‘the human’ has to signify more than an idealised form of a privileged ‘elite’: it must extend its borders and meaning to all ‘humans’ of all shapes, colours, sizes, abilities, and even, possibly, species everywhere.

I want to suggest that the early modern humanist form of subjectivity figured by Pico is of a sort that potentially enables, as does Haraway’s metaphorical structure of the cyborg, a ‘universal’ yet embodied and particular account of human being, since this complex, hybrid human describes people as self-determining at the same time as insisting upon their specific worldly forms and contexts. These are identities and characters that are embodied and lived at the same time as they are tenuous and changeable. Finally, politically, I want to emphasise the hope and the drama inherent in the humanist belief that people are capable of making themselves and their world otherwise. It is to the status of character in such drama that this thesis now turns.

## Chapter Three

### Beyond Character

#### 3.1 An Argument for Character

##### **3.1.1 The Problem with Character**

Notwithstanding one notable exception,<sup>35</sup> relatively little has been written about dramatic character in recent years. I suggest there are a number of reasons for this. The first is that character, as a term, lacks precision: as one writer bemoans, character seems ‘like a loose term with an uncertain pedigree’ (Jonathan Crewe 37). Character’s representation in classical theatre, Shakespearean drama, Naturalist Theatre, and postmodern performance, for example, manifests widely various forms, which are indicative of quite different accounts of being and knowing. Such ‘looseness’ can make character difficult to pin down.

Another problem attaching to dramatic character is its slippery negotiation with other dramaturgical elements, such as action, dialogue, and theme, which makes it difficult for theorists to locate character as a distinct entity. It is telling, for example, that David Edgar’s recent book, *How Plays Work* (2009), positions character as a function of plot under the chapter heading ‘Actions’ as well as locating it as a separate chapter and entity in its own right. Notable, too, is the related fact that character is, in Edgar and others’ work, more clearly theorized in its status as a functional element of action (a location, however, that, in effect, refuses character any clear boundaries for itself and renders it indistinguishable) than as a distinct dramatic entity for, and of, itself.

Then there is the problem of character’s late twentieth century death or disavowal, which was roundly and convincingly argued by the likes of Elinor Fuchs and such Cultural Materialists as Belsey and Barker and denied character all claims to substance and form. From such theoretical onslaughts, character has yet, write Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights, to ‘fully recover[] [its] prominence or vitality within Shakespeare studies’ (4) or within, I would add, dramatic discourse more generally.

Despite these problems, character, nonetheless, persists as an important term and idea in the discourse of theatre. Actors continue to develop and perform characterisations

---

<sup>35</sup> The notable exception in question is Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights’ edited anthology, *Shakespeare and Character* (2009), a work and project that will be discussed in due course in this chapter.

of their roles in productions; dramatists still write plays with characters in them; and critics and academics continue to write about dramatic characters, albeit in ways that are frequently vague, contradictory, and, as Crewe has written it, 'loose'.

Character, then, remains a fundamental idea and aspect of theatre today even though its looseness as a term and weakening by poststructuralist thinkers have rendered it, in some ways, an unsatisfactory object in dramatic discourse. This chapter sets out to argue for character's continued importance, to define and locate it within a history of modern dramatic character, and, finally, to present a post/humanist approach to, and analysis of, character, which, this thesis claims, answers many of character's problems.

### **3.1.2 What is Character?**

Any cursory examination of discussions of character of the last twenty years finds character commonly identified as a fictional 'real' person or, to put it differently, a realistic representation of a person in the world, who somehow exceeds the borders of her dramatic play. Such a conception of character identifies it as distinctly *modern*. Elinor Fuchs, David Edgar, Crewe, Bert O. States, Yachnin and Slights, and, most notably, from early in the twentieth century, A. C. Bradley (of the humanist tradition of character criticism), posit this archetypically modern character as free-standing, unified, self-determining, and psychologically coherent. According to Fuchs, the principle of modern character constitutes 'the motor or agency of dramatic structure' (22) and character articulates a 'seeing, self-knowing, inwardly subjective' being (26). Belsey, meanwhile, observes (with a great deal of critical detachment) that '[i]nsight into character and psychological processes is declared to be one of the marks of serious literature' and, quoting Robert Langbaum, she adds that 'it is largely the victory of character over action that distinguishes the high literature of modern times' (*Critical Practice* 73). This view is shared by Edgar, who declares that the best kinds of characters are those that in some ways exceed the structures and conventions of drama and that present themselves as psychologically coherent and free agents. Referring to George Bernard Shaw's play, *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893), Edgar explains that Vivie Warren does not turn into a character until she exceeds her role (57) and, in the process, defies our expectations of her. For Edgar,

[I]n great drama, the most memorable and indeed the most meaningful moment is when the character departs from and even challenges his or her role; when the old

man is brave, the lackey eloquent [...]. It is the character – unpredictable, irrepressible – who declares unilateral independence from the tyranny of the preordained (58).

What Edgar is suggesting is that the form of character, when it is at its best, exceeds the limitations of pre-existing conventional structures by revealing its autonomy and individuality. The character of great drama, for Edgar, represents a free and self-determining agent in the world – by implication, *a liberal humanist subject* - that behaves not according to her social position but according to some truth of her authentic self that is somehow antecedent to her role and actions.

States confirms such an ascription of character as representing a distinct self and personality when he identifies character as denoting an essential and persisting, though intangible, cluster of traits. States's argument is that if Hamlet as a character did not exist as just such a cluster of traits or, as he puts it elsewhere, a 'Hamlet-gestalt' (*Hamlet and the Concept of Character* 10), the actor would be unable to play him, critics would be unable to discuss him, and it would be impossible to recognize that while 'certain traits and forms of behaviour' answer to the Hamlet-gestalt, it will, 'under no imaginable circumstances, admit others' (ibid). In the sense that character answers to something coherent, States comprehends character as a 'vertical' phenomenon, which 'manifests itself as a repetition or as a self-continuation rather than as a change' (*Hamlet* 8). Character, for States, does not change or develop with, or like, the horizontal phenomenon of plot: in a world of change, character offers something stable and detached. Its precise ontology, however, remains at least somewhat mysterious in his account. Positioned as an individual personality, States comprehends character as seeming to bleed - a kind of inimitable life-force - beyond the structural framework of the play: 'I suggest that the eidos of the character phenomenon is Life, or more finely expressed, Vitality' (States, *Hamlet* 20), by which he means to infer that 'at the base of character we "apprehend" the vigor (and rigor) of a unique individual being itself at a level beneath all stratagems, designs, and changes in situation' (ibid).

Such an ascription of character as equating, somehow, with the phenomenon of life or vitality is a striking one that seems to function, according to States's description of it, to confer a good deal of mystery upon character. This, of course, is problematic for, thus defined, dramatic character is at least partially located beyond the realm of the play and, therefore, beyond quantifiable analysis. Character is rendered an intangible quality,

conjured by the words of the text but understood to mysteriously exceed those words, manifesting an animated fictional individual beyond words, acquiring form in the gaps between features of plot, dramatic conventions, dialogue, and actions. It is in the spaces between a character's role and dialogue or actions, then, that she is interpreted as finding her psychologically coherent form (i.e. when she behaves in a way that is somehow consistent with her individual quality of selfhood but excessive of cultural expectations of her role) and is understood, at least partially, as constituting the origin of her words and actions.

Such presentiments of character - as comprising her form in the gaps between the tangible elements of the text - render any 'scientific, or even analytical' discussion of character difficult or impossible (States, *Hamlet* 4). In effect, assumed to be analogous with the liberal humanist subject, character slips beyond physical laws in ontological and methodological terms; this modern character cannot be precisely measured, or fully accounted for, because it cannot be seen, heard, touched, smelt, or tasted. Consequently, character lacks rigour and stability in its theorisation, or lack thereof, and instead becomes, as States observes, a 'soft or romantic concept that might appeal to people who are interested in motives, "human nature," and in reading fictions as if they were about real people' (ibid).

Dramatic character is problematic in theoretical terms for a host of reasons but these problems, I suggest, ultimately boil down to its slightly mysterious constitution as an entity that somehow exceeds the structures and bounds of the drama in, and of, which it is formed. Perhaps, however, this should not surprise us. Character is a representation of a *person* and the human subject is conventionally accounted, in the modern period, at least, as being a psychologically coherent but intangible 'essence', fundamentally constituted of a mind and, as such, as slipping the material, measurable bonds of his body and the world around him. Indeed, who or what the human being *is* continues to be a question to tease and trouble us. Where character is mimetically related to people, so modern character's fundamental nature is similarly, though frequently vaguely, understood to lie in immaterial mind, soul, and/or personality. Also, I suggest that, in similar fashion to the human being, a sense prevails that character is excessive of its parts (language, actions, body, social role, and so forth) and that reducing it to those parts fails to precisely account for, or capture, its form and nature. Character, then, just like the individual personality or consciousness that it represents, in post/humanist terms seems to



be something of an *emergent* phenomenon, one that is tied to its material parts but is qualitatively excessive of and distinct from them, too.

In effect, when character is identified as a distinct dramaturgical element it is positioned, to some degree, beyond concrete analysis and the premise of tangible causes and effects. As such, character not only denies itself a methodologically reputable position in literary discourse but casts doubt on its very existence. Can character be accounted to exist given that it is comprehended, in its modern, conventional form as connoting a free and coherent individual agent who is configured, significantly (if not entirely), of mind, where mind is a seemingly intangible and unquantifiable substance? This is a question to which discussion shall return in due course.

Character's alternative location as a function of plot and theme initially seems to answer the problem of character's viability as a coherent object of analysis. However, structuralist attempts to bring clarity to the identity and theory of character, formulating character as a function of plot or of language, ironically work to refuse character a distinct form of its own as it becomes subsumed by, and indeterminate with, narrative or language. In effect, with such an approach, character, deprived of its borders, becomes indistinguishable from language and action and is rendered distinctly inhuman.

Either way - as a distinct dramatic element or as a function or product of plot or text - character seems to be in real trouble.

### **3.1.3 'The Death of Character': A Problematic Tale**

A. C. Bradley's hugely influential book, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), treated Shakespearean plays 'as case histories of real people' (Elaine Aston and George Savona 48) and, as such, found itself mocked and vilified by those writing out of such schools of thought as New Criticism and, later, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, materialist feminism, and postcolonialism. Indeed, a consideration of the discourse on dramatic character of the last thirty or more years reveals that it has focused, by and large, in denying character's plausibility and existence as a distinct dramatic entity, focusing, instead, on plays' themes, language, and form. Correspondingly, during this period, character has generally fallen out of favour as an object of literary and dramatic discourse.<sup>36</sup> Where character has been discussed, comprehended in its form as

---

<sup>36</sup> Notably, character, in recent years, seems to be making something of a resurgence in Shakespeare studies, if not in dramatic discourse more generally: States argues for character as deserving recognition as a distinct dramatic element in his discussion of *Hamlet's* characters (1992); Crewe argues for character's

representing a well-specified individual and as being tangibly and coherently present in its fictional domain, it has been scorned, disproved, and rendered faintly ridiculous.

The story of dramatic character's death or decline has become a familiar tale. As has already been reported in the Introduction to this thesis, Fuchs's *The Death of Character* (1996) offers perhaps the most substantial and influential thesis on character – or, more accurately, on character's obsolescence – outside of Shakespeare studies in recent years. In the book, character is discussed in terms of its demise and, with the arrival of postmodernist theatre, its eventual death. Character, having been comprehended, at its height, as indicating a subjective entity with an inner life and as constituting the motor or agency of dramatic structure, is comprehended by Fuchs as having metamorphosed through the course of the twentieth century into 'de-ontologized representations' (29). In short, character, according to Fuchs, became dehumanised, refused any kind of unified form in its rendering as pure text.

Another important voice in the realm of theatre and performance studies, which has argued against any notion of an essential, or essentially gendered, self, has been that of Judith Butler, poststructuralist philosopher and gender theorist. Although her theory has not been explicitly treated in relation to dramatic character, it carries clear implications for modern character, where character is understood in realistic terms to be lifelike. In her influential essay, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', Butler argues: 'self is not only irretrievably "outside," constituted in social discourse, but [...] the ascription of interiority is itself a publically regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication' (195). Butler's self is 'outside', entirely culturally formed. Categorically dividing nature from culture, Butler casts the human subject as being fundamentally composed of the latter sphere. The problem with this is that by casting the human body as a kind of material bearer of meaning, 'a style of being' (Butler 189), the body, and with it the self, are refused any kind of reality or agency. While the subject has a body, and though she 'does' her body,

---

longevity and the strength of its influence as evidenced in journalistic theatre reviews and performance practices (2006); and the Shakespeare and Performance Research Team of McGill University, Concordia University, Dawson College, Université Montréal, and Université Québec à Montréal, led by Paul Yachnin, conducted an investigation of Shakespearean character (2003-2006), a research project that culminated in the 2009 book, *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, and in which the editors, Yachnin and Slights argue that character has come back into fashion: 'Character has made a comeback. Having all but disappeared from Shakespeare criticism as an analytic category in the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of character has now begun to reemerge as an important – perhaps even an essential – way of thinking about the political, ethical, historical, literary, and performative aspects of early modern theater. The present volume recognizes the development in Shakespeare studies of what might best be termed a "new character criticism"' (1).

there is no real sense of who or what is doing the doing apart from some nebulous idea that the subject derives from social discourse. As Elizabeth Hart observes, Butler's view, which builds on the theories of Foucault, Derrida, and Althusser,

[P]osits a body that has no inherent agency, no basis for self-assertion prior to its interpellation into subjectivity. Indeed, sometimes [Butler's] writings hesitatingly and obliquely suggest that the body may possess no [...] biological materiality prior to its discursive, i.e., linguistic, constitution (30).

So, although Butler emphasises the materiality of the identity that is performed – a body that is enacted or performed in its stylized repetition of acts – ‘the body’s realization of a material identity through the discourses of culture, is arguably but a thinly veiled version of the very semiotics that phenomenology contradicts’ (ibid). To all intents and purposes, Butler’s human subject is bodied only insofar as the body is a bearer of meaning. Who or what does the doing in the act of gendered performance is far from being clear.

Now, the signifying power of the body is undoubtedly of considerable consequence in the construction of subjectivity. However, the human being’s deontologization, as Fuchs puts it, in poststructuralist theory, means that any idea of the human subject as being naturally constituted is displaced as the self is understood as being entirely constitutive of text and discourse. For Mark Peter Jones, this marks poststructuralism as antihumanistic since it posits selfhood as historically constructed as opposed to universal or essential, which means, furthermore, that it refuses ‘to address the question of “human nature”’ (293).

Not only is such an account of human being woefully partial<sup>37</sup> in that it ignores the role that seems to be played by physiological processes in the personality and behaviour of the human person (for example, research in neuroscience and neuropharmacology appears to demonstrate a compelling connection between biology and individual personalities, moods, and mental activity); it is also problematic in terms of seeming to

---

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the translation of the human into the entirely cultural realm seems as partial and inadequate an account of the human subject as is that of some evolutionary psychologists who are positioned at the other end of the nature-nurture debate. These psychologists are criticized for having ‘recently gone too far in [their] epistemological agenda [...] to uncover *the brain “mechanisms” that constitute “human nature”* [my italics]’ (Jaak Panksepp and Jules B. Panksepp 108) and thus of failing to consider the role of culture and the ‘remarkable degree of neocortical plasticity within the human brain, especially during development’ (ibid). Cultural structures are, as we now know by virtue of poststructuralist theory, fundamentally affective and constitutive of the human subject and his relationship with the world. In short, any account of, or approach to, human subjectivity that ignores either the natural or cultural parts and forces, which are constitutive of the human self’s constitution, must be less than satisfactory because they are less than comprehensive.

divest the human subject of personal agency. This is politically significant. While the poststructuralist model of self may be politically efficacious in terms of opening up a structurally indeterminate and protean model of the self that allows for the possibility of change for particular kinds of people (particularly those that have historically been socially disenfranchised), the postmodern eradication of human nature via the desubstantiation of human beings into text means that there is no longer anything special or unique about them. As such, I would argue that a reduction in the valuation of human rights becomes a risk since humanity has been evacuated of any substance or inherent meaning or nature.

Adopting the kinds of culturally relative accounts of human subjectivity offered by Fuchs or Butler, then, means that the human subject being represented is reduced to an insubstantial sign apparently lacking in agency, corporeality, and psychologically constituted individuality. As such, it seems to have little to do with *dramatic* (or, even, possibly, *postdramatic*) representation of the human per se. Fuchs makes an important link between character and real-world subjectivity in her book, one that this thesis also assumes. Fuchs asserts, quite categorically, that “‘character’ as a term of dramatic art can never be independent of contemporary constructions of subjectivity’ (8). I think she is correct in this view. If drama is, according to its Aristotelian provenance, *mimêtic*, then so is dramatic character; character represents, or ‘stands in’ for, the human being in the world: the one is tied, implicitly or explicitly, to the other. As such, it is with the representation of an embodied individual, one that is conceived as living, loving, and dying in the world, that a reader or audience member relates or empathises. If, however, there is ‘nothing’ and ‘no one’ at home in the ‘interior space known as “the subject”’ (Fuchs 3), then there can be no sense of urgency or tension in a reader or audience member’s response to a story, for they (who are themselves apparently flattened social constructions or markers in language) have no stake in the decisions or actions of characters as neither they nor the characters in question have anything of *substance* to lose. Furthermore, as I shall argue in due course, drama – the (embodied) enactment of a story – actually arises from, and finds its *raison d’être*, in a subjective experience of being in the world, in the imperative to make sense of what it feels like to live in a changing world. However, as Jones observes, ‘[p]oststructuralism offers no resources for conceptualizing material phenomena as they take on form and substance’ (294) and, as such, I argue, it is unsuited as an approach to character, which seems to demand a

response to character as a representation of a flesh and blood human being located in physically comprehended reality.

Fuchs almost exclusively and wisely confines her own poststructuralist project of character analysis to the theatrical realm of the symbolic and postmodern. In this terrain, her analyses and conclusions are intellectually and creatively stimulating as they negotiate theatre aesthetics. However, her study is trapped in this context, stultifying in postmodern cul-de-sacs that leave subjectivity and character with nowhere to go, refused any comprehension of coherent selfhood in experiential, subjective, or imaginative terms, having de-ontologized. On Fuchs's postmodern and desubstantiated account (one that bears more than a passing resemblance to Butler's theory of subjectivity), the natural human being is no more. At best, she is a culturally inscribed and enacted performance that only illusorily points to a self; at worst, she is apparently deprived of embodiment entirely and is found to be nothing more substantial than a linguistic marker.

There is yet another problem, however, attaching to a poststructuralist view of, and approach to, character, where 'character' is designated as a desubstantiated textual 'figure' or 'subject', and this has to do with how we experience characters on stage or via the act of reading. It is my contention that these postmodern textual entities refuse to be confined as antihumanistic, vacuous, and purely semiotic constructions, even in the most postmodernist or postdramatic of texts. I suggest that the experience of the audience member or of the reader in her encounter with drama automatically transforms the textual 'figure' or 'subject' into a distinctly human (or human-like) character.

If we consider, first, the performed theatrical event, audience members are faced with distinct and determinate entities performed by actors, puppets, or manipulated objects that stand in for real (fictional) people. These theatrical entities are no mere desubstantiated products of text but are experienced as tangible, coherent objects. The theatrical event works, in short, to oppose the desubstantiating impulse that Fuchs recognizes in postmodern theatre. We cannot conceive these 'figures' as text because we see human, or human-like, embodied performers on the stage before us. I would like to go further, however, and propose that even *readers* of a play text, and even of such a play text as Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), with its eminently postmodern kinds of 'characters', translate the dialogue, during the act of reading, into imagined

individuals, bodies, scenarios, and settings that are commensurate with real world people and scenarios, though these may in all likelihood be blurry and indeterminate in form.<sup>38</sup>

In Crimp's play, speakers are not identified by names and generally they are denied any descriptive personal details. Often we do not know who is speaking, we are given few stage directions, the reader remains unsure where the 'characters' are, and so on. The 'characters', thus, are actively foregrounded by Crimp as being constituted, almost entirely, as textual entities, linguistic constructions of 'individuality', in ways that actively function to encourage the reader to query mundane metaphysical assumptions of selfhood, which propose individual subjectivity as the source of meaning and agency. Even so, I want to suggest that, adept as we are at reading certain types of people and characters from certain types and styles of vocabulary and phrasing, the reader cannot stop herself from imagining lifelike people from Crimp's dialogue, even though the aim of the play's formal construction seems to be to deny us coherent, self-present being and character.

In an analogous discussion, James Elkins, art historian and critic, contemplates the question, 'What is a face?' and suggests that the imaginative conjuration of a face from the act of reading words – in his example the 'face' under discussion is that of Moses – is an unstoppable process tied to the reader's project to make sense of the biblical story: 'I have to form some rudimentary concept of [Moses's] appearance in order to make sense of the biblical account, and it is nearly impossible to stop the flood of kitsch Moses from supplying the required face' (165). From mere words, Elkins, as reader, supplies the imagined face of Moses, which derives from all the faces of people he has experienced and associated with Moses.

Given that the logic of representation underpins mimetic drama, a logic in which words are the conceptual 'stand-ins' for objects, concepts, and events in the real world, in the same way that the actor is a stand-in for the character, and the character a stand-in for a real person, and so on, so the reader's mental oscillation between material and semiotic realms should perhaps be unsurprising. Although the word is only arbitrarily attached to its object of reference, and although it may only derive meaning from its play of difference with other words, the word nonetheless operates as a symbol *for* something, which we, as embodied, communicating, and social subjects in the world, conceptualize

---

<sup>38</sup> I refer the reader to Dan Rebellato's article, 'When We Talk of Horses: Or, What Do We See When We See a Play?' (2009) for an extended and fascinating discussion on the topic of the relationship between the imagination, perception, and dramatic representation.

or imagine. Crimp's postmodern play seems to demonstrate, simultaneously, then, that although the 'individual' may be, as the likes of Fuchs and Butler argue, a product of language, this does not comprise the entirety of selfhood or of character: attached to words are embodied experiences of being in the physical and cultural world and a (human) capacity to imagine other worlds: words and the world, in effect, to use Haraway's terminology, come as a material-semiotic package.

In short, dramatic character is conjured in the systemic negotiation of its parts, both fictional and factual. Dramatic character is undoubtedly a fictional entity constructed by words and informed by conventions but it is also 'vital', to borrow from States's terminology, and is made so by real-world actors, readers, and environments. Furthermore, if David Herman is right when he proposes that the defining quality of 'narrative' is its foregrounding of human experience (3), then character's desubstantiation into mere product of textual structures is rendered, abruptly, irrelevant and character is pushed to the foreground of dramatic narrative as it extends its significance to facilitating an understanding of what it means to be a human being who is attempting to make sense of himself and the world.

### **3.1.4 Putting Character Back into Drama: The Importance of Subjective Being and the Role of the Imagination**

David Mamet, in an interview given in December 1992, and in characteristically provocative manner, maintains a functional view of character: story, he claims, constitutes the length and breadth of character and, in fact, character does not exist for it is merely words on a page. Character, in Mamet's view, operates in the service of the story and has no life or face beyond its constitution in text.

But is this all that character really is, a function of the plot? In his *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that 'plot is the origin and as it were the soul of tragedy, and the characters are secondary' (9). Drama, on Mamet's view, is reducible to pure action, which is given to comprehend not merely its 'soul' but all its body parts, too, for the reader or audience's interest is given as lying singularly in what happens next as opposed to extending to the human beings who stand behind the actions. However, as States observes, it is since, and by virtue of, Aristotle's writing that character has 'deserved to be called by a name of its own' (*Hamlet* xiii). Thus, Mamet's purported view of drama as

outlined above extends Aristotle's prioritization of plot to the n<sup>th</sup> degree but, in the process, manages to distort his theory.<sup>39</sup>

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle describes tragedy (for which I read 'drama' more generally for the purposes of this discussion) as an 'animal' (Aristotle 10) that is 'constructed from some [parts]' (ibid), and these parts he identifies as including story and character but also intellectual argument, language, song, and visuals (David Wiles 94). In alternative translations, tragedy is described more broadly as a biological 'organism' (Wiles 92) and, according to Wiles, for Aristotle, 'the way to study an organism is to see how its different bodily parts interrelate' (ibid). For Aristotle, the relationship of the parts may be hierarchical, with story constituting the primary element, but each of the parts is interrelated and essential.<sup>40</sup>

Although story is privileged by Aristotle and Edgar, the crucial notion originating from the use of the metaphor of the organism, over and above any contestation of the particular merits of its parts, is that for the organism to flourish, all organs are indispensable to the living system. While each organ may be studied as an object in its own right, its own proper functioning – and here a posthumanist way of thinking about the subject is interjected – is dependent upon the form and functioning of all the parts of the system, individually and as each part relates to the system and to the environment in which the system is located.

Plot, then, is integrated with character and the two parts are mutually affective: some kind of agent must exist for action to occur and the action that is taken provides a demonstration of character, just as the kind of action that the character takes is dependent upon temporal and situational contexts, and so on and so forth. As Henry James puts it, 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' (qtd. in States, *Hamlet* 5).

Interestingly, Herman, in his discussion of narrative, implies an alternative and more fundamental placement for character in its connection to story. According to Herman, the defining characteristic of story is its implicit foregrounding of human experience; without storyworld participants, and without the human impulse to represent subjective experiences, narrative simply cannot be identified, and nor does it exist, as such. Herman writes:

---

<sup>39</sup> It must be noted that even Mamet has been known (notably within the aforementioned interview) to contradict the placement of character in its role as formally indistinct function.

<sup>40</sup> As a point of interest, Edgar refers to plot as the play's 'skeleton' (5) and character as its 'face' (ibid).



[S]tories are accounts of what happened to particular people – and of what it was like for them to experience what happened – in particular circumstances and with specific consequences. Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change (3).

Herman goes on, by way of clarification, to contrast scientific modes of explanation to narrative ones, contending, for example, that while ‘[s]cience explains how in general water freezes when [...] its temperature reaches zero degrees centigrade [...] it takes a story to convey what it was like to lose one’s footing on slippery ice one late afternoon in December 2004, under a steel-grey sky’ (ibid). In short, as Herman describes it, for narrative to work, not only is a temporal sequence of events required to slot together in a specific way (*plot*), and not only must some kind of disruption or disequilibrium occur at some point in this sequence of events (the equivalent of Aristotle’s *peripeteia*), but there must also be ‘a foregrounding of human experientiality’ (11), an expression of ‘what it’s like to live through that disruption, that is, the “qualia” (or felt, subjective awareness) of real or imagined consciousness undergoing the disruptive experience’ (9). Herman explains:

Narrative prototypically roots itself in the lived, felt experience of human or human-like agents interacting in an ongoing way with their cohorts and surrounding environment. To put the same point another way, unless a text or a discourse encodes the pressure of events on an experiencing human or at least human-like consciousness, it will not be a central instance of the narrative text type (11).

Fascinatingly, according to Herman’s definition of narrative, human consciousness or ‘qualia’ is one of its unavoidable and fundamental components. *What it is like* for a human-like agent to experience something is the essence of the story and comprises its grounds for being. One of the reasons that this is so interesting is that it locates story as a definitively subjective enterprise: though the story may express itself, its people, events, and world in apparently *objective* and third person terms, it is itself an object that has been written (or devised), enacted, read, and/or seen by conscious human subjects. Another reason that Herman’s definition of narrative is so interesting is that, in a project to define the constituent parts, and the essence, of narrative, Herman inadvertently tells us something about the relationship between character and people and, in the process, positions both quite firmly as being conceived, albeit in their different contexts

(the fictional play world and the real world), as conscious, experiencing, and, by implication, embodied beings in the world.

One of the problems for character, as I have already suggested, is that in standing in for human persons who are significantly conceptualised in terms that connect them to the mental realm, character seems to exceed that which can be quantified. For many people, indeed, it is character's excesses beyond the realm of the reductively physical and into that of consciousness that render character an altogether doubtful thing.

The denial of the mental realm has been a characteristic and disenchanting feature of the modern, positivist world, as Chapter One described. Physical matter is known to offer certainty, fact, and, very importantly, a world picture that is causally related and determined; by contrast, the mind, including the imagination, is either conceived as an unknowable and insubstantial thing (which is, however, somehow and seemingly affective in the physical realm) or else as a causally impotent epiphenomenon of a materially monist world: on this latter model we may think but thought, in the physical universe, is comprehended as having no tangible effects.

It is just such a resistance to the existence of the mental realm that prompts W. J. Harvey to say that

It is ridiculous to isolate characters from a novel [and presumably a play] and discuss them as totally autonomous entities; the novel itself is nothing but a complicated structure of artificially formed contexts parallel to those within which we experience real people (qtd. in States, *Hamlet* 24)

Of course, viewed in materially literal terms, Harvey is correct: fictional characters do not exist in the way that the writer or the actor or reader of a play exists. Characters are figments of a writer's (or writers') imagination(s) and, if we consider their construction purely in terms of the play, they are structurally indeterminate with, and inseparable from, the text and, as such, lack their own ontology. However, is character to be denied because it is a fictional, imaginatively conceived object? Harvey's literal interpretation of character seems needlessly reductive and fails to account for the affective role of the imagination and the habit, tradition, and inclination of readers to imagine a person in and from a dramatic text. The imaginings of readers, for example, while they may be prompted by the physical details of the text, also reach beyond them. When we encounter the characters of Hamlet, Faust, Nora, or Jimmy Porter in their respective plays, what comes to mind manifestly extends beyond a series of words: an

individual character is conjured, some impression, however blurry the image or thoughts may be, of a 'real' person. Furthermore, drama is intended for performance, which reinforces the notion of character as denoting an entity in itself. When we go to the theatre, for example, and see characters being enacted in a realistic drama, the experience that we are watching characters who are fictional stand-ins for people as they are in the world, is compounded and character is self-evidently rendered more than pure text.

States contributes to such a point of view when he writes that '[h]owever text-bound character may be, it is a phenomenon that loses its fictionality because it is designed to evoke impressions like those evoked by real people, for whom we can also imagine un-lived, or fictional, scenes' (*Hamlet* 24). In effect, although the reading of characters on the page and on the stage is perhaps more concentrated than it is in real life,<sup>41</sup> in both cases this reading is based on the reader's subjective experiences and on 'the laws of behavioural probability as given by experience and culture' (ibid). Thus, although the clues we glean, particularly in relation to the play text, are severely limited insofar as these relate to an individual character,<sup>42</sup> we are nonetheless able to construct a sense of a human-like and coherent subject from these details. From a character's behaviour and dialogue in response to a given situation; from the vocabulary he uses, the length of his phrases, and his silences; from what other characters say about him or how they behave in relation to him, and so on, readers construct an image of what kind of a character this character is. Although the information may come piecemeal, be contradictory, and derive, in the case of a play text, from words on a page, a reader may infer a character from the most limited of information accumulated from meaningful dialogue, an allusion to a coherent speaker, and some suggestion of context.<sup>43</sup> Our minds seem to be programmed, in effect, to fill in the blanks.

---

<sup>41</sup> In claiming a more concentrated experience of reading characters in drama than in real life I mean to imply that every word and every action in a play text or a dramatic production is conventionally understood to be meaningful in the context of the play, whereas in real life, meaning is generally constructed in a much less concentrated and careful, and much more ad hoc and idiosyncratic, manner.

<sup>42</sup> Even the characters of Naturalist theatre, which are provided with ample stage directions giving details of their appearance, qualities of personality, gestures and movements, and so forth, and are created to effect an illusion of their reality as 'real', psychologically coherent individuals may only ever be partially revealed through the language and a restricted series of situations and events.

<sup>43</sup> My aim, here, is not to attempt to identify the fundamental components of character. Such a project would be fascinating but is beyond the scope of the present study. My identification of character as constituting an 'idea' of an individual that is textually to be conjured by, for example, the basic elements of dialogue, intelligent (meaningful) communication, the linguistic allusion to a coherent speaker (the assignment of a character name), and some reference to, or idea of, context, develops out of consideration (though by no means exhaustive) of such 'minimal' representations of character as may be found in works

Indeed, the degree to which people are capable of filling in the blanks – of imagining a character from words, memories, knowledge of conventions, and so forth – may be usefully contemplated by reference to a parallel discussion offered by the art historian and critic E.H. Gombrich that is concerned with people’s propensity to discover ‘images’ in the ‘signs’ they see (Gombrich xviii). Referring to the ‘Rorschach test’, Gombrich writes:

What we read into these accidental shapes [formed by the blottings of the test] depends on our capacity to recognize in them things or images we find stored in our minds. To interpret such a blot as, say, a bat or a butterfly means some act of perceptual classification – in the filing system of my mind. I pigeonhole it with butterflies I have seen or dreamed of (155).

According to Gombrich, who turns to psychology in his exploration of the process of ‘reading’ illusionistic art, in order for people to understand signs, they must apply different ‘mental sets’ (xviii), which manifest ‘a form of selective attention, [...] described in ordinary parlance as the difference between looking and seeing, listening and hearing’ (ibid). Elsewhere, drawing on work by the Greek sophist, Philostratus, about his hero Apollonius of Tyana, Gombrich remarks that

‘[T]hose who look at works of painting and drawing must have the imitative faculty’ and that ‘no one could understand the painted horse or bull unless he knew what such creatures are like’. All representation relies to some extent on what we have called ‘guided projection’. When we say that the blots and brushstrokes of the impressionist landscapes ‘suddenly come to life’, we mean we have been led to project a landscape into these dabs of pigment. (170)

It seems likely that such a process of ‘guided projection’ is active in the phenomenon described by Elkins of finding a face in inorganic and arbitrary arrangements of marks on, for example, a wall. Identifying the face as a kind of machine (176), Elkins remarks that ‘[a] geometric diagram with black spots for points and intersecting lines can function as a face: the spots can be holes or apertures cutting into the white page, and the lines can show how the whole thing works, how the spots are related to the sheet’ (179).

---

such as, to name but a few, Caryl Churchill’s *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You* (2006), Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), and Sarah Kane’s *Crave* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (1999/2000).

Significantly, behind the words on the page and the signs on stage are minds and consciousnesses that, as Sartre argues in *The Imaginary*, take us beyond the empirical present (187). Indeed, mind is key in the creation of character. Firstly, the author, a *mind*, is the human creator of the play and it is her imagination, knowledge, and experience of her own embodied life that has accommodated and facilitated the construction of an entirely new world and set of fictional beings. People, other characters, other plays, and the author's own rational and creative mental and physical industry stand behind the words on the page. Secondly, after and out of the words on the page come the physical enactments of character, multiple and unique characterisations of, for example, Hamlet, which are the products of actors', directors', and a host of others' combined conscious (and unconscious) experiences, thoughts, and efforts. Thirdly, there are the readers and the audience members who imagine and interpret characters into being, conceiving them as human individuals assumed to be in possession of a mind.

In contrast to the position taken by some Cultural Materialists, I argue that dramatic character finds meaning and lifelike form in its extension beyond the borders of ideology. Beyond the textual, functional skeleton of character are many words, minds, bodies, and sometimes, performances that serve to fill it out and give it life and colour. However, Fuchs and, in particular, the Cultural Materialists were responding legitimately to a conception of modern character that is undoubtedly problematic in that, in its conception as the 'motor' of the drama – as existing prior to text and action – it denotes, as the likes of Belsey and Dollimore so effectively show, a liberal humanist subjectivity that thinks of itself as existing prior to history whereas it is, in fact, history's product.

As the next section will show, this conception of character originated in the seventeenth century and, importantly but anachronistically, came to be linked to Shakespearean drama and, so, to modern drama. In fact, the rise of modern character is tied to Shakespeare's characters but the psychologically coherent and autonomous quality of character that is conventionally accounted as identifying it today was not always recognised precisely thus. The following section outlines a summary of some important features of the history and rise of modern dramatic character, since doing so emphasises the historical and provisional form of a modern character that has developed through time, at the same time as enabling character to come into view as an entity that is quite as protean as the human with whom she is so closely tied.

## **3.2 Modern Dramatic Character**

### **3.2.1 The Search for Hamlet and the Rise of Modern Dramatic Character**

Modern character is often identified in relation to Shakespeare's characters and, in particular, to Hamlet. Fuchs, in identifying modern character, does so by referring to Shakespeare's dramatic persons in terms that distinguish them from their Aristotelian kin: the actions of 'the great Greek tragic roles [...] do not appear directly to be anchored in the recognizable contexts of psychological and material life', whereas Shakespeare's characters, by contrast, 'seem to the reader/spectator to exist not only within but outside the dramatic narrative that gives them life' (24). Shakespeare's characters, Fuchs implies, are psychologically lifelike and autonomous, so much so that they can be imagined as existing beyond the borders and details of the world of the play. Also, Fuchs writes that for the theorists from the eighteenth century onwards, Shakespeare's characters implied an 'inwardness for character' (Fuchs 25) that, in fact, established the measure for modern character.

For John Lee, it is specifically Hamlet who clarifies the standard of modern character, with the Prince becoming, by the start of the nineteenth century, 'the prime exemplar of what "character" meant' (2). The reason for Hamlet being cast as the key figure in the growing criticism of Shakespeare and, by implication, of modern character more generally, is persuasively accounted for by Margreta de Grazia in her book, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (2007). For this writer, the debate about character locates against the wider cultural battle to defend the idea of 'the modern' against the classical. In such a milieu, de Grazia positions Shakespeare, and Hamlet more particularly, within a dialogue that sought to identify what it meant to be English and to be modern at a time when value was conventionally aligned with all things classical. So, whereas Aristotle's aesthetics dominated dramatic thinking with its affirmation of the importance of plot, Shakespeare's drama soon came to be acknowledged and defended for the excellence of its characters. De Grazia writes that the project of the defenders of the modern and of Shakespeare was to define each in terms of difference with the classical view, with the effect that alternative criteria for modern drama started to emerge, such that, for example, '[t]he ascendant criterion of emotive appeal clearly tips the critical scale in Hamlet's direction' (12). While a classical character such as Orestes is 'a mere instrument of plot, Hamlet is a character – indeed a person in his own right – and readers and spectators respond accordingly, with affection' (de Grazia 12). The reader and audience's interest starts to shift from the

significance of events to how those events are perceived and experienced by lifelike characters who are, it is implied, increasingly finding forms as self-determining (humanist) individuals.

It is to an individual formed of a distinct interiority or personality that critics generally refer when they identify modern character as such. So, for example, the character of Hamlet, the archetype of modern character, has, for centuries, stood as the elusive treasure at the end of the rainbow of character criticism. ‘Who is Hamlet?’ is a question that has been asked and answered, directly and indirectly, by thousands of academics, critics, actors, and directors through the centuries and across the world. Importantly, the question assumes that Hamlet is a particular kind of individual who is answerable to certain qualities and traits. It is assumed that there is something it is like to *be* Hamlet.

The search for Hamlet, and the interrogation of Shakespearean character as a distinctly modern phenomenon, is widely referred to as having started with Margaret Cavendish. In 1664, Cavendish published her collection of mainly fictional letters, which included an epistolary essay in defence of Shakespeare, in which ‘she anticipated what would later become the focus of much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criticism by arguing that Shakespeare’s “persons” are what make his plays praiseworthy’ (Yachnin and Slights 1). Indeed, this assumption that it should be desirable and possible for drama to “express [persons] to the Life” continued to dominate responses to Shakespeare in England and continental Europe for the next 250 years’ (ibid).

It is the contention of Yachnin and Slights, that wherever you find a defence of Shakespearean character, so you find an assumption that Shakespeare’s characters are ‘best understood as mimetic representations of imagined persons’ (2). It is Shakespeare’s ability or inability to create character – ‘dramatic persons with a sense of interiority or inner life’ (Lee 1) – that ‘is seen to be central to the valuation of his achievement as a whole’ (ibid).

Lee’s is another voice that narrates the history of the critical discourse of modern character and ties it to Shakespearean and, specifically, *Hamlet* criticism, attesting that it was Shakespeare’s characters that were most effectively to be distinguished from the work of other dramatists. Lee adds to this discussion the notion that human nature and personality are bound to the contest waged in the defence of Shakespearean or neoclassical character. For the neoclassicists, character must be consistent, coherent, and

socially archetypal in terms of identity. The group arguing such a case for character was composed of the detractors of Shakespeare who preferred the work of, for example, Ben Jonson. Thomas Rymer was one such early formal advocate of the neoclassical model of character. In work that was published in 1677, Rymer, who Lee writes gave the ‘neo-classical detractor [...] a more formal voice’ (104), comprehended character as being something that lacked individuality and that defined only a class: as such it must be easily recognisable (‘kings must clearly be heroes, that is their inalienable right’ (Lee 104)); be ‘true to tradition and true to type; ‘all crown’d heads’ share this character’ (Lee 104-5); and finally, ‘it must be consistent’ (Lee 105). As Lee observes, underlying this conception of character ‘is another of the central assumptions of neo-classicism [...]: that human nature is constant’ (ibid). (Importantly, Lee observes that such a view is not one generally held in the Renaissance or its drama, whatever the New Historicists and Cultural Materialists may assert (ibid).) Rymer, answering those who claim that ‘Athens’ is different from ‘London’, argues that ‘[c]ertain it is, that *Nature* is the same, and *Man* is the same; he *loves, grieves, hates, envies*, has the same *affections* and *passions* in both places, and the same *springs* that give them *motion*’ (Rymer qtd. in Lee 105). Notably, here, Rymer locates ‘Man’ as a universal and natural creature, couching him in materialist, mechanical terms. The passions and affections (feelings) of ‘Man’ arise, apparently, from the machine of his ‘springs’, which, it is to be construed, construct the human character on principles of cause and effect. In the sense that this neoclassical human character is possessed of a mechanical constitution, so he is envisioned as being formed by a materially constituted mould. The effect of this is that his geographically and culturally specific location is of no material matter because the mechanics of the system of ‘Man’ is naturally and universally constituted. Conspicuously, there seems to be little room, on this model, for inconsistency, surprise, or free will.

An opposing set of voices – Shakespeare’s defenders – by contrast postulate a version of human being that they argue is more true-to-life and idiosyncratic and may best be seen in the character of Hamlet, Shakespeare’s most ‘individual’ of creations. John Dryden, for example, ‘on the blank leaves at the beginning and end of the copy of *The Tragedies of the Last Age* which Rymer had sent him, made preparatory notes for a defence’ (Lee 105). In these notes, Dryden argues that other areas than plot must be given weight in the evaluation of plays, which he finds to include the representation of dramatic persons: ‘For the Characters, they are neither so many nor so various in *Sophocles* and



*Euripedes*, as in *Shakespeare and Fletcher*' (Dryden qtd. in Lee 105). For Dryden, as for Cavendish, 'character' offered the measure by which 'to begin a defence of Shakespeare, an area in which Shakespeare and Fletcher outshone the ancients' (Lee 105).

For Dryden, character is misunderstood by Rymer: 'A character, or that which distinguishes one man from all others, cannot be suppos'd to consist of one particular Virtue, or Vice, or passion only; but 'tis a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the same person: thus the same man may be liberal and valiant, but not liberal and covetous' (Dryden qtd. in Lee 106).

A more individual (*unique*) and complex person is, here, implied, as Dryden distinguishes his account of character from Rymer's neoclassical one. However, according to the evidence laid forth by Lee, it appears that at the outset of the character debate, the assumption of human nature underpinning critical discourse was that it was coherent. Even Shakespeare's lifelike persons, which differed from classically formed characters in their denotation of a unique combination of the common elements of virtues, vices, and passions, remained couched in neoclassical bounds in dramatic discourse. Although Shakespearean character was, from the very start, being linked to living persons, fictional and real, and, at least from Dryden, formulated as consisting of multiple qualities and parts (vices, virtues, and passions), these parts were accounted as being grouped into constellations that were more or less harmonious.

This amounted to a problem, however, because Hamlet, the figure at the heart of this character debate, is not coherent: his parts are far from being logically consistent or predictable. If the play text is attended to, it is difficult to find otherwise than that Hamlet is cruel *and* loving, a cold-hearted killer *and* a loyal friend, rational *and* mad, cautious *and* reckless, brave *and* cowardly, and so forth. In fact, according to Lee's history of Shakespearean character discourse, a charge of contradiction and inconsistency had been levelled against Shakespeare's characters and, in particular, against Hamlet, from the inception of the Shakespearean critical tradition and remained unanswered, beyond the repeated assertion that such inconsistency was lifelike, until the eighteenth century. It was at this point, Lee remarks, with critics such as William Guthrie, Samuel Johnson, Henry Mackenzie, William Richardson, Thomas Robertson, and Maurice Morgann, that Hamlet's inconsistencies began to be accounted for by a model of human selfhood that is psychologically formulated and as denoting someone with an autonomous interiority (and, in being so, as being indicative of a kind of liberal humanist subject). This is a character in

possession of his own soul and interior individuality, a character that starts to be deemed complex and as standing antecedent to the plot, dramatic conventions, and the dramatic text.

This is not to suggest that Hamlet's interiority was not discovered until this period. As de Grazia writes, 'Hamlet always possessed an area within, hidden from the other characters, and has good reason for keeping it to himself' (164). Indeed, Elizabeth Hanson offers an argument that Renaissance England, which she describes as uniquely and freshly concerned with secular, strategic, and political matters, as opposed to spiritual ones (as in the Medieval period), produced a particular sense of interiority that was driven by the 'usually fearful, even paranoid recognition that interiority can give the subject leverage against the world' (16). Such an 'alliance between inwardness and agency in the service of self-interest' is something that she claims 'haunts' many 'Renaissance discovery scenarios' (17). In relation to *Hamlet*, Hanson writes:

When Hamlet rails that Guildenstern, formerly a school friend, now a spy recruited by the king, 'would pluck out the heart of my mystery' (3.2.356-7), he assumes a position, as the resistant object of another man's scrutiny, within a scenario that recurs insistently in the discourses of Renaissance England. The struggle to discover the secrets in another's heart, or to resist being the object of such discovery, is rehearsed not only in the drama but in the records of the Privy Council and state trials, and in correspondence, philosophical writing, conduct books, and literature of social description of the period (1).

The sense of interiority, then, according to Hanson, may be located and identified, in a quite specific context and form, in early modern England.<sup>44</sup> However, the idea that Lee's presentation of character discourse highlights is that character interiority came to be attached to a conception of character as a true, stable, and autonomous quality of subjective being and agency. This being so, character became something of a prize for the dramatic critic, a distinct character *to be known*.

Lee names the critical project to identify character as a stable and coherent quality of psychologically constituted selfhood, 'the gap technique' (132). He writes that for the first time, the charge of inconsistency directed against Shakespeare's soliloquies is answered by Samuel Johnson with an argument that moves towards identifying a

---

<sup>44</sup> In fact, it seems likely that the sense of interiority should be traced further back to the medieval period, as has been authoritatively argued by David Aers who writes in the field of medieval studies and contends the absurdity of conceiving of pre-Renaissance Europe as having been without an experience of inwardness. He insists that the importance of the Augustinian tradition to medieval beliefs be taken into account, a tradition that 'makes the heart its own place and the site of self-reflexive knowledge' (qtd. in Hanson 16).

mysterious inner quality of self which has, since, permitted so many different views of Hamlet to proliferate. Johnson defends Shakespeare's soliloquy as being 'connected rather in the speaker's mind than on his tongue' (qtd. in Lee 115). As Lee observes, this is, however, a 'dangerous argument' (115) because, in the argument's search for evidence of consistency, it 'goes behind or beyond the language of the soliloquy' (ibid) and ultimately grounds its evidence in nothing more tangible than the critic's own interpretation. Lee writes:

Johnson creates a narrative, extrapolated from the rest of the play and from his belief in his knowledge of human nature, into which he fits Hamlet's soliloquy. [...] Johnson thus uses the interior domain as a gap on which to write his own explanatory reading of the play in order to refute the charge of inconsistency. (Ibid)

In short, character gaps (or excesses) are filled out and smoothed over by the critic's own historically situated and idiosyncratic beliefs of drama and human nature. Behind his reading of Hamlet lie the critic's own assumptions of what it means, or should mean, to be a certain kind of human being. In consequence, Hamlet starts to become The Critic's Hamlet, an imagined entity given substance and form by the text and, increasingly, by the critic and reader's world view and interpretation of him.

For the next one hundred and fifty years, the gap technique came to dominate critical approaches to dramatic character. In a tradition that importantly takes in such names as Samuel Coleridge and A. C. Bradley, 'that Within' Hamlet becomes the Holy Grail of Shakespearean criticism and of modern character criticism more broadly. Indeed, the details of the text or of plot increasingly seem to fade into the background as the likes of Mackenzie, Richardson, and Robertson argue that what is interesting in Shakespeare's drama is character as opposed to plot. Thus, Mackenzie, turning to classical drama to locate his debate, writes that

The *Orestes* of the Greek ... interests us for the accomplishment of his purpose; but of him we think only as the instrument of that justice which we wish to overtake the murderers of Agamemnon ... but when *Horatio* exclaims on the death of his friend, 'Now crack'd [sic] a noble heart' we forget the murder of the King, the villainy of *Claudius*, the guilt of *Gertrude*; our recollection dwells only on the memory of the 'sweet prince' (qtd. in de Grazia 12).

Notably, in this quote, Orestes is implicated as being a kind of puppet of the gods and a vehicle for the telling of a moral tale. He is not important in himself. Hamlet, meanwhile, is given as an agent in possession of a heart that beats palpably in the chest of a feeling and thinking entity until his death. Hamlet is no mere tool of convention or of plot but has come to comprehend something apparently more distinctly human than the more mechanical, puppet-like, and pre-determined form of neoclassical character.

Hamlet, situated, finally, as a recognisably modern character, is distinguished by his individual interiority, which is increasingly becoming detached, conceptually, from the play that contains but ceases to bind or to construct him. Richardson, for example, dismisses *Hamlet*'s plot as of 'slight importance', maintaining that interest in the play 'exclusively spring[s] from our attachment to the person of Hamlet' (ibid); while Robertson takes to imagining that in the process of writing his play, Shakespeare became so engrossed by his character that he left 'Hamlet, in his sole person, predominating over, and almost eclipsing the whole action of the drama' (ibid).

De Grazia is pithy in her summation of the state of *Hamlet* criticism in this period: 'By the time of Coleridge's lectures in 1811, there is no need for Robertson's qualifying "almost": Hamlet *does* eclipse the plot' (ibid) and Hamlet as a modern character can fully and finally be revealed.

### 3.2.2 A Very Modern Hamlet: Problems of 'The Gap Technique'

It is with Coleridge that Hamlet finally takes his place as a fully modern character, having now become 'plot-resistant' (de Grazia 13), detached from the play in which he happens to be located. It is at this point, writes de Grazia, when Hamlet is deemed 'in possession of interiority or subjectivity, whether imagined in terms of Coleridge's psychology<sup>45</sup> or Hegel's consciousness' (18), that he assumes the form of the modern character that we recognise today, a form that, furthermore, is assumed as not only being antecedent to the plot but as having existed even before history was able to recognise him as an interior, autonomous self. De Grazia confirms: 'Accounts of the play's reception have assumed that an interiorized Hamlet had been in the wings for two centuries, waiting to be

---

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, de Grazia observes in relation to Coleridge's identification of Shakespeare's method as being *psychological* that the word, at the time, was unfamiliar to his readership, as is revealed by his apologetic footnote: 'We beg pardon for the use of this *insolens verbum*: but it is one of which our language stands in great need. We have no single term to express the Philosophy of the Human Mind.' As de Grazia attests, '[w]hile the first use of *psychological* recorded by the *OED* is from 1812, Coleridge had been using the term in his lectures since 1800 to refer to Shakespeare's singular insight into character: his power to discern 'the habits of the mind' (15).

discovered, postponing his debut until around 1800 when the right audience came along' (18).

In like manner with Lee, de Grazia recognises modern dramatic character as being defined by a gap; in her account, the gap constitutes a separation of character's intentions from his actions. She observes that in the ancient drama, the gap does not exist: characters *are* what they will and do. But for modern Shakespearean character, which explicitly denotes 'the absence of ancient principles of order, decorum, and unity' (de Grazia 14), the space exists for contradictory views and behaviour in character, a space to be filled, ultimately, by the knowing critic. Quoting Hegel from his *Aesthetics*, de Grazia remarks of modern character that 'he may swither irresolutely from this to that and let caprice decide. From this swithering the Greek plastic figures are exempt; for them the bond between the subject and what he wills as his object remains indissoluble' (Hegel qtd. in de Grazia 17). The very possibility of 'the swithering of reflection', then, is opened up by, and in, the distance between modern character's interior self - his intention/knowledge - and his action. However, ironically, in a tradition of criticism that, Lee suggests, depends upon a Cartesian view of 'self-mastery and self-knowledge', which are 'linked to an instrumental, cause and effect view of identity' (Lee 198), any apparently irresolute or random possibilities are conceived as problems to be resolved. The archetypally modern human character Hamlet, who is markedly inconsistent and puzzling, is thus transformed by the gap technique into a coherent personality and agent in a process that assumes he is an object to be decoded and known. On this view, character can and will be known, even where irresolute or random elements proliferate in the text.

In fact, de Grazia observes that Coleridge scarcely mentions plot, which is fully consistent with the particularly modern view of subjectivity that is by this point in place, a kind of interiority that might be described as being liberal humanist and Cartesian in nature in that it comprehends the quality or personality of a mind as autonomous and as something to be known, with character constituted as the product of self-mastery. De Grazia writes that on Coleridge's view

What happens in the play has no bearing on Hamlet's character. His penchant for thought predates the play's action. Indeed, for Coleridge, it is congenital, having issued from the 'germ' of his character. Programmed by that inborn germ to do what he does (or does not), he is entirely self-determining. What need for a plot 'among such as have a world within themselves'? (13)

Several things are notable in de Grazia's explanation of Coleridge's treatment of character. The first item of note is its elaboration of the distinctively and contemporarily Romantic conception of subjectivity, which renders character something spiritual, individual, self-determining, and entirely detached from the world. This is a Hamlet in no need of a plot because he is a world in himself.

However, Coleridge's identification of the 'germ' of character is a second and more intriguing item, combined, as it is, with de Grazia's articulation of Coleridge's character as a code or programme of selfhood. On de Grazia's view of Coleridge's Hamlet, the character is reframed as a programme, and it is the germ of this programme that makes the character do what he does do and fail to do what he knows he should do. His germ of character, in short, *causes* Hamlet to behave and speak in certain ways. Despite character's detachment from plot and its transformation into an entirely autonomous and spiritual entity under Coleridge's auspices, character, in the very consistency of its form, remains in some ways a neoclassically *coherent* entity on Coleridge's view, a logically consistent one, albeit one that is reducible to a single idea or germ of character as opposed to being reducible to plot and/or convention. The implication of Coleridge's approach seems to be, if you can crack the code or programme of character then both character and play fall into place according, apparently, to deterministic principles: Hamlet is a certain kind and stable quality of individual and, as such, he can only behave in certain kinds of ways. The promise of sweeping away inconsistencies seems to assure such a view.

There is some irony here attaching to de Grazia's argument. It is de Grazia's view that 'the emergence of [Hamlet's] interiority' is bound to the problem of 'clear[ing] a critical space for Shakespeare' in relation to classical drama (18). With charges of *unruliness* and *wildness* levelled against Shakespeare's characters, Shakespeare's defenders sought arms in the *psychological* quality of his characters, in particular, of Hamlet (*ibid*). However, it seems that at the very moment that modern dramatic character is given to have attained its characteristically psychological form as an individual, it simultaneously ceases to demonstrate the contrary and inconsistent lifelikeness that distinguishes it. Hamlet is transformed via the gap technique into a coherent and predictable creature, which partially identifies the sort of constancy of character that is associated with classical drama's character and view of human nature, although it is against such a model that Hamlet purportedly finds his distinctively modern form.

So, at the very moment that Hamlet and dramatic character more generally attain the heights of the modern form of character – as autonomous, subjectively individuated, and self-determining people – they are deprived of humanistic *freedom* in the sense that they are deemed incapable of behaving in any other way than is permitted by the programme of their characters. In effect, they are deprived of their free will – since they are limited by their respective ‘germs’ of personality – and they are reified into something coherent and unchanging. In some ways, in spite of their subjective and autonomous spiritual qualities, they become as mechanistically inhuman as their neoclassical counterparts.

There are problems with this model of, and approach to, modern character. Reading an eighteenth and nineteenth century model of human selfhood backwards into such an early modern character as Hamlet means that the possibility of character change, which Renaissance humanism clearly foregrounds as a measure of modern ‘man’, is eradicated. Renaissance humanism and its theories of ‘man’, articulated by such as Pico della Mirandola, foreground the self as inherently indeterminate and as a self-determining entity in process. By contrast, the liberal humanist view, although it assumes a self-determining agent, insists upon an essentially stable and consistent quality of self. The liberal humanist account seems particularly unsatisfactory when the archetypally modern character of Hamlet is considered, because Hamlet is so entirely *inconsistent*. The problem is, such an insistence upon identifying a coherent character does not correspond with the facts of Hamlet. Coleridge may maintain an ideal principle of Hamlet but making it fit every part of the play is not viable. Coleridge claims, writes Lee, that ‘all Young Hamlet’s inconsistencies can be explained away’ (133) by the germ of Hamlet, which provides ‘access to the true meaning which lies beyond the Prince’s words and actions’ (Lee 132). So, for example, what has since come to be known as ‘the Romantic Hamlet’ is Coleridge’s conception of Hamlet as ‘[a] man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine, but [whose] great purpose of life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve’ (qtd. in Lee 131). As Lee points out, this germ of Hamlet in fact fails to resolve all aspects of the play and it is telling that when the germ and the words come into conflict, as they invariably do, it is the text that is jettisoned: ‘when the Prince’s words do not fit the ideal principle, as when

he watches Claudius at prayer then it is the words which are to be discounted and not the ideal principle' (ibid).<sup>46</sup>

This modern Hamlet, who now exists without *Hamlet*, has been rendered by, and in, the gap between his (inconsistent) thoughts/intentions and his (inconsistent) actions in the play, and it has been the humanist critic's job to fill the gaps. Such a project of the humanist critic is dependent upon a conception of character as a sovereign subject whose thoughts are accessible, true, and the subject's own. Belsey, in *Critical Practice*, distinguishes humanistic criticism as being founded upon an *empiricist-idealist* interpretation of the world: 'man' is the origin and source of meaning, action, and history; he constructs concepts and knowledge empirically but this experience is 'preceded and interpreted by the mind, reason or thought, the property of a transcendent human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual (*idealism*)' (7). According to Belsey, these propositions constitute the basis of an orthodox mode of reading 'which assumes, whether explicitly or implicitly, the theory of expressive realism' (ibid), which she describes as the theory that 'literature reflects the *reality* of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who *expresses* it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true' (ibid). Assuming such an empiricist-idealist model for the character of Hamlet, his averment of his delay while Claudius is at prayer is interpreted as something to be believed.

However, from around the early years of the nineteenth century, de Grazia writes of how a whole new hermeneutic interpretation of Hamlet and of character began to be opened up by the possibility that the mind does not have access to its own processes (164). Characters cease to be purely self-knowing people who are able to reveal or conceal 'that Within' at will, and they start, for the first time, to possess an interior area of consciousness that is not even knowable to the self.

It is no longer a cogitating Cartesian mind observing its own workings: Descartes' thoughts, as he sits alone in his study doubting the reality of wax on his desk, are entirely accessible to Descartes. In the *cogito*, his very existence depends upon their accessibility, as do his transcriptions of those thoughts or *The Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) (de Grazia 164-5).

---

<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that when Coleridge was writing, there was not yet any idea of an unconscious to explain away inconsistencies. For the present, Hamlet's mind is deemed a cogitating Cartesian mind capable of observing its own workings.



However, by the turn of the century, as de Grazia writes, we have moved into a Kantian world, in which ‘the immediate and certain have given way to the framed and hypothetical. There are recesses of the mind that consciousness cannot tap, even the mind of the character known for his introspective powers’ (de Grazia 165).

With the arrival of Freud and his disciple, Ernest Jones, of course, Hamlet’s delay starts to be explained away with theories of the unconscious; the ‘introspective Hamlet’ becomes the hero who exposes the limits of conscious self-examination, dramatising ‘powers of self-deception in the human mind to which a limit has yet to be found’ (Ernest Jones qtd. in de Grazia 164).

In effect, the liberal humanist account of Hamlet starts to come apart as he, and dramatic character more generally, are tied to their bodies (instincts, drives) and material contexts, to be dissected into parts and rendered products (of the unconscious, economic structures, language, and so forth).

This thesis argues that the modern character of Hamlet, the Hamlet without *Hamlet* that is ‘distinguished by an inner being so transcendent that it barely comes into contact with the play from which it emerges’ (de Grazia 1), does not exist except in the individual minds and humanistic searches that have been, and continue, to be made to identify him. The definitive Hamlet is a mirage and he does not figure in my own *Hamlet* analysis, which follows in the next chapter. Any and all humanistic searches to find the character of Hamlet merely offer idiosyncratic versions of a certain kind of man who finds new form every time a reader or actor re-members him from the language, structures, assumptions, and conventions that go to making him.

Of course, given the convention of reading modern character as standing in for real people, the question of who Hamlet is will continue to inform reading and, in particular, perhaps, theatrical approaches to character, if not always critical ones. So, although the humanistic character approach is critiqued, in many ways, correctly, by the Cultural Materialists and the likes of de Grazia and Lee, for being blind to the evidence of the text and its historical conditions, it nonetheless presents a way of comprehending character that is informed by conventional ways of ‘reading’ and knowing the human person: the reader or audience member expects to find an individual agent (today, this continues to mean a psychologically informed and complex one) and so this is what she imagines and/or judges the representation of dramatic character against. Although the post/humanist

approach of this thesis does not seek out the definitive Hamlet or any other character, for that matter, the assumption that Hamlet, as a human character (perhaps an archetypal human character?), has a mind remains important to its understanding of, and approach to, character.

Through the modern period, to be human has meant to have a mind, to be a language speaker and creator in the world (notwithstanding the increasingly challenging task of differentiating the human being from her traditional nonhuman others). As I showed in Chapter Two, the physical-nonphysical border comprises the ontological key to the question of what it has meant to be human through the modern period because it gestures towards the godly. Even today, in a largely positivist universe that has disenchanted reality of soul or magic, mind persists as a phenomenon in its own right to be examined; indeed, mind is foregrounded as a human concern in our contemporary period by such test objects as the computer and Internet, which encourage mind to be considered as an emergent property or phenomenon arising out of physical processes and parts. In short, identifying the ‘inner’ self of a person and her dramatic stand-in, character, in a play text or on the stage, remains a fundamental mode of reading and writing human, or human-like, people. My point is, simply, that it should not be detached from the material text or conditions of writing, reading, or production, and that it should not be accounted as constituting a single, stable, and persisting quality of selfhood.

The failure of humanist critics has less to do, I suggest, with assuming that a ‘real’ person underpins character than that they fail to account for her materially embedded nature, systemic organisation, and indeterminate and protean quality. Meanwhile, the Cultural Materialists’ approach falls down because of its failure to account for character’s tangible qualities: though character is composed of text, she is not limited to or by it and, in fact, she extends beyond its boundaries into the physical, and physically imagined, world.

It is the view of this thesis that character’s re-memberment is negotiated between all its parts: the reader/audience (their expectations, experiences, and idiosyncratic mental constructions of the world); culturally normative assumptions and knowledges (about dramatic conventions, subjectivity, ‘the human’, language, and so forth); and the particularities of the text itself (dialogue, stage directions, theatrical production choices, etcetera), which includes, importantly, the agency of the character. In the negotiation of

these parts, the character of Hamlet appears, a material-semiotic, imaginative and real entity in the minds of readers.

### **3.3 New Character Criticism**

As I have noted elsewhere, relatively little has been written about character in drama since Fuchs observed its death in her influential 1996 book. However, dramatic character as a subject of discourse is faring better in Shakespeare studies and it is from research in this area that dramatic discourse more generally might identify new grounds and arguments for character's discussion and analysis.

Yachnin and Slights, editors of *Shakespeare and Character* (2009), write that '[c]haracter has made a comeback' (1). The onslaught of the materialist critique of the last twenty or thirty years of the twentieth century, which 'de-realized' Shakespearean characters and 'severely diminished' their influence (Yachnin and Slights 4), has more recently lost ground 'in the face of work on the historical embeddedness of early modern personhood by scholars such as Katharine Maus, Theodore Leinwand, Wes Folkerth, and others' (ibid). However, as Yachnin and Slights note, Shakespearean characters – and, in fact, their observation can be extended to dramatic characters more generally – 'have not fully recovered their prominence or vitality' (ibid) in dramatic discourse. They suggest that the reason for this is that 'Shakespeare criticism [...] has been rendered tongue-tied by the absence of a coherent account of what Trevor Ponech [...] calls "real fictive characters."' (Ibid)

Having highlighted the debilitating influence of the materialist critique, Yachnin and Slights identify the emergence of a 'new character criticism' (1) in Shakespeare studies that is situating character in a more 'realistic' light: Trevor Ponesch, in a paper that argues 'for the existence of "fictional character"' (Ponesch 41) makes a case for 'realism' as 'an ontological thesis' for character (ibid), employing '[a] concept ontology' to argue that 'cognitive states that are mere thoughts or imaginings, be they narratively- or self-generated, give rise to genuine, garden-variety emotions' (Ponesch 50); Michael Bristol approaches Shakespearean character in terms of human nature and explores the notion of self by reference to Marvin Minsky's theory of the society of mind, where the mind functions as 'a kind of "society" consisting of "mental agents"' (26); while William Dodd posits character as a dynamic identity, a 'person-effect' that is productive of interactional phenomena such as verbal communication comprehended in pragmatic (doing) and

semantic (meaning) terms (62-3). In short, what these and other critics are doing is putting an embodied aspect back into character, which was for so long reduced to a signifying subject divided from the material, embodied world. Yachnin and Slights identify this loosely knit, methodologically eclectic group, as constituting the ‘new character criticism’, which is characterised by a shared project to answer the question, ‘What is character?’

For Yachnin and Slights, ‘character is the principle bridge over which the emotional, cognitive, and political transactions of theater and literature pass between actors and playgoers or between written texts and readers’ (6). This point is, I think, well made: characters are the principle conduit by which the reader and spectator come to conceptualise, feel, and imagine what it is like to be someone and somewhere else. Characters make the dramatic subject matter personal to their human readers and onlookers.

Yachnin and Slights also argue that character is ‘the organizing principle of Shakespeare’s plays – it organizes both the formal and ideological dimension of the drama and is not organized by them’ (ibid). To the extent that Hamlet is the focal point of a reader and audience’s interest, character, in Shakespeare’s play, is certainly more organising than organised as a dramatic principle. I think Yachnin and Slights are correct when they observe, for example, that in Shakespeare’s work,

[C]haracter displaces plot as the center of interest in ways that determine the kinds of elements we find in the plays and how those elements are organized. [...] [W]e are far more interested, say, in how the action of revenge seems to Hamlet than we are in the working out of the revenge plot (7).

However, while I concur with the view that character remains a significant organising principle of Shakespeare’s plays, the ostensible disavowal that character is organised by drama’s formal and ideological dimensions is contestable. Indeed, such a position implies a *detachment* for character from other dramatic elements, which seems markedly humanist in its assumptions and hardly denotative of a ‘new’ character criticism.

Elsewhere, though, Yachnin and Slights persuasively argue what is a compatibilist model of character in relation to the new character criticism – that character is a product *and* a producer – and, accordingly, it would appear that their aforementioned denial of the constitutive agency of dramaturgical and ideological elements in relation to character is nothing more than a slip. For example, their reference to ‘how the characters gather into themselves the competing ideological positions that circulate in the play worlds’ (8) while

remaining agents themselves, capable of interrupting these prevailing ideologies, is an important observation. Agency is a fundamental issue of human being and dramatic character and is, possibly, *the* problem attaching to any purely postmodernist approach. Whether agency is premised upon models of free will, determinism, or compatibilism, that people do and say things means that it is difficult to entertain them as merely desubstantiated products of cultural structures. As Bruno Latour writes in response to poststructuralist (anti)metaphysics, ‘nothing is sufficiently inhuman to dissolve human beings in it and announce their death. Their will, their actions, their words are too abundant’ (137). Furthermore, as has already been remarked upon, Yachnin and Slights, rightly, I think, find Shakespeare’s ability to draw characters that are capable of putting ‘in question the ideological conditions of possibility of their own creation’ (9) as one of the ‘most significant’ of the playwright’s achievements. Hamlet’s own interrogation of what it means to be human sits very importantly, for example, within and against the ideological assumptions that themselves situate and partially construct him. Hamlet and, I suggest, many other modern dramatic characters, construct themselves, in some senses, at the same time as they are themselves constructed, as I hope to show in relation to Hamlet, Julie and Jean (in *Miss Julie*), and Cate and Ian (in *Blasted*) in due course.

Elaborating upon the meaning of ‘character’ in its sense as denoting an *agent*, Yachnin and Slights draw into their discussion André G. Bourassa’s chapter, ‘*Personnage*: History, Philology, Performance’, which ‘asks us to consider the etymological history of the French term “personnage” for what it can teach us about the relationship between people and *dramatis personae* now’ (Yachnin and Slights 14). In his study, Bourassa conducts a diachronic analysis of character via the use of certain French terms including, importantly, *personnage*. He writes of how this term derived from *personam agere*, which meant to act or to manage a mask, to play a role, and ‘designate[d] a personality, a distinguished person; that is, someone who played a noteworthy role in a milieu’ (84). As Yachnin and Slights highlight, this term simultaneously draws attention to masked acting in relation to ‘character’ but, secondly and significantly, to its *management* by the agent or actor (8): the role and the agent are equally implicated in the term. I would add, too, that the reference to the ‘milieu’, though unexplored by Yachnin, Slights, or Bourassa, is important, attesting, as it does, to the specific context, which not only locates the ‘designated personality’ but is actively constitutive of it.

Arising out of this discussion are the notions that the mask pre-exists the individual performance (by the actor/agent) who is performing her part/self in a particular milieu. This structure of parts – mask (role), actor (agent), and context – is, I suggest, firstly, important to any approach to character. Any character's role, performance (real or imagined), and contexts (the worlds of the character and reader/actor) are contributory elements of her form. Secondly, such a structure of parts communicates intriguing possibilities in relation to mind, which are significant for the post/humanist point of view of this thesis. The role or mask of character functions to limit her possibilities for action and dialogue (the conventions of the role are, to an extent, productive of the performance), while leaving open the possibility of individual choice and expression for any particular performer or performance of any given mask, a performance that is, furthermore, influenced by its contexts. As Bourassa's exploration of the etymology of *personnage* implies, there are, in essence, three 'actors' contributing to the meaning and production of character: the role/mask, the actor (imagined or real), and the environment.

As I hope is becoming clear, underpinning the conceptions of character that qualify contemporary character criticism as 'new' is an apparent shift in assumptions of models of mind with a movement taking place towards a decidedly compatibilist model. Significantly, this movement is conducive to the post/humanist methodological approach of this thesis, which conceives of selfhood in terms that are systemic and materially and semiotically constituted.

In addition to this new, more 'realistic' model of character identified by Yachnin and Slights are other features, also important, such as the interest that is being shown in the field of Shakespeare studies beyond the purely literary or psychological: in performance and dramatic issues and conventions. This interest is important to my discussion, first of all, because it reinserts *conventions* into the question of the representation of dramatic selfhood. Despite modern character's relationship to realism (where realism denotes the lifelike representation of people in the world), dramatic character is not real personhood; although a model of real personhood stands behind it, character also has conventions, dramatic and otherwise, weaved into its hybrid form to render it, first and foremost, a distinctly artistic and imaginative entity. As such, it is a mistake to deny the potential importance of dramaturgical and theatrical influences on the ontology and production of any given character. Taking such an interest in performance contexts and conditions is, of course, also important for highlighting given historical

conditions and contexts in the representation of certain kinds of people. The performance of a play reminds us that behind character stand people in the world, in possession of historically, geographically, and ideologically specific identities that reveal something of what it has meant to be a particular kind of human in particular kinds of worlds.

A final striking and related feature of this so-called new character criticism is the evident need for a new methodological approach to dramatic character. Out of the interrogations of what character *is* derive corresponding questions about, and searches for, approaches more appropriate to the compatibilist ontology of character that seems to be being subscribed to (albeit usually implicitly) by the likes of Yachnin and Slight, de Grazia, and Lee, to name but a few of the new character critics. It is apparent that the psychological interior of the self is no longer traditionally conceived as a sovereign entity detached from the world. ‘Character’ is being reconceived as a particular nexus of identities, assumptions, agencies, conventions, environments, and relations, which cannot be accounted as being antecedent to, or detached from, the real or dramatic worlds. Character is an inextricable part of these worlds, albeit one that is in some ways greater than the sum of his parts (which gesture towards an emergentist model of mind and an imaginative quality of being). The conventional approaches adopted by the humanists and poststructuralists do not correlate with a character conceived as an agent *and* product; they cannot deal with the compatibilist nature of this model of selfhood. However, a post/humanist account of selfhood offers one way of responding to, and analytically approaching, character as it is conceived by this new character criticism. Simultaneously material and semiotic, a hybrid of natural and cultural parts, the cyborg offers a way of comprehending character as a system of elements which are not contained within the borders of the skin or text but extend outwards in connecting, as well as differentiating, relationships with human and nonhuman others.

The question is: what does such a post/humanist approach to character look like?

### **3.3.1 A Post/humanist Approach to Character**

The post/humanist structure of modern dramatic character advocated by this thesis has been repeatedly laid down in this chapter as well as in previous ones, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, often in discussions that have critiqued some of the most important conventional approaches to dramatic character. To be brief, therefore, the remainder of this chapter offers a concise summary of a post/humanist way of

approaching dramatic character before it pinpoints the orientation of the character explorations which follow in Chapters Four through to Six.

Dramatic character is conceived by this thesis as being constructed of material and semiotic, factual and fictional, parts that comprise the system of a model of selfhood that is figured by the cyborg. These parts may include personal names, places and contexts, historically specific theatre conventions, actions, words (dialogue and stage directions (details of appearance, personality, identity, gestures, habits, and so forth)), performance, bodies and biology, ‘others’ (particularly, in relation to this thesis, machines, supernatural entities, and animals), and specific readers (their knowledge, understanding, and experience of plays, theatre, and characters)). Character is a protean entity and is, as such, predicated in horizontal terms, which assume ‘character change’ as possible or, even, likely, over the course of a play. Since character’s form is negotiated between and by the interaction of its parts, it follows that if you change any of the parts of this system, you change the whole (however subtly).

Given the complexity of the constitution of this character, the post/humanist approach accepts contradictions, inconsistencies, and change in its lifelike dramatic human stand-in. Knowing the self and character to be indeterminate and dynamic systems of parts that lack autonomous, fixed, or centralised subjectivities, ambiguities are not ignored or smoothed over but accepted (within limits)<sup>47</sup> as lifelike; no original, stable, or definitive character is sought because no such entity is understood to exist. This contrasts, of course, with the humanist method identified by Lee in his identification of the ‘gap technique’, which, in seeking a definitive answer to such a question as, ‘Who is Hamlet?’, smooths over inconsistencies in its assumption of a natural and autonomous essentialism of character. This is not to suggest that a post/humanist method of approaching character

---

<sup>47</sup> Inconsistencies and contradictions are important elements of modern character and are bound to her very conception and identification as lifelike in the work of Shakespeare. However, it seems requisite to acknowledge that there must be limits to such qualities. Hamlet may demonstrate himself kind *and* cruel, rational *and* mad, and cautious *and* reckless but if contradictions in his character were to lead to total incoherency, such that it became impossible to identify Hamlet as a single individual, then character would become undone. The balance of coherency of character with its inconsistency is a delicate one. As well as being important to the reader or spectator’s recognition of an individual character, coherency is, of course, valued in dramaturgical terms. David Lane, in considering the dramaturg’s role following, in recent years, the ‘broadening definitions of “playwright” and “new writing”’ (127), suggests the adoption of ‘increasingly flexible definitions in the terminology of the craft [...] regarding what makes a *coherent* performance text [my italics]’ (ibid). In the process of changing the borders for the meaning of ‘character’, then, Lane very reasonably assumes as fundamental the requirement of *coherence*. While the balance between coherence and the need for greater flexibility of character form (where such flexibility may derive from character change and inconsistencies, for example, such as are posited in this thesis) is an interesting question, particularly in relation to the location of its tipping point – at what point of inconsistency does character become incoherent? – the question is not an object of inquiry in this thesis.



refutes any possibility that character is in possession of an interiority: just that such a formulation of self is not autonomous or definitive. According to the post/humanist method, character, in emergentist fashion, arises complexly and dynamically out of the interaction of its many parts, which extend across text and world to include the mind of the reader (and spectator) and the performance of the actor. No singular, true, or autonomous character by the name of Hamlet is thought to be finally or ultimately identifiable; all Hamlets are particular and partial: Hamlet may be a product of coherent folio and quarto versions of the play, *Hamlet*, but it is in his re-memberment in the specific minds of readers and critics, and in specific performance contexts, that Hamlet and, by extension, dramatic character, finds his particular forms.

Modern character, identified as originating in Shakespeare's drama, is conceived by this thesis as denoting a realistic and, in that sense, lifelike (human, or human-like) storyworld participant. As such, modern dramatic character denotes an embodied, experiencing, living (*physical*) being in possession of a mind; this lifelike human representation represents a conscious agent capable of taking intentional action in the world. In line with the New Character Criticism set forth by Yachnin and Slights, dramatic character is approached, thus, in this study, as a physical product of the material world and as a realistic and coherent entity with whom readers and spectators identify. Significantly, as such, character is interpreted, at least partially, as a creator of dialogue and action. This being so, the conventional (humanist) question of dramatic character discourse, 'Who is Hamlet?' remains, to an extent, a legitimate one although it might be more accurately and usefully re-written as, 'Who is *this* Hamlet?', which works to relocate Hamlet as an object of a particular study, framed by a particular performance, context, or set of objectives.

However, on the cyborg view, the 'individual' can no longer view herself as an immaterial island (indeed, if she ever could). She is now located in a larger cognitive system that incorporates various technologies, which extend both outwards from the body and inwards from the environment in complex loops that feed back information through the system of self. Character, judged in cyborg terms, still makes decisions, speaks, has objectives, and takes action in the world; this being so, a term such as 'motivation' persists in dramatic discussion, which assumes a coherent individual agency and mind that is active in character speech and action. However, within the system of character, the

sovereign, conscious element must now be understood as being at least partially bound and constituted by interacting processes of unconscious and even nonhuman parts.

Given that the cyborg's interior cannot be detached from its material-semiotic parts, and given that the cyborg is also a critical trope concerned with the construction of particular kinds of humans, a shift in characterological focus seems to be required away from traditional concerns about *who* Hamlet is, to *what* he *is*. Just as Hamlet asks, 'What is a man' (4.4.32) and not, 'Who is a man?', so this study asks, 'What is Hamlet?', as it seeks answers to his humanity at his identifying borders. So, while the 'who' question, which has constituted the motor of Hamlet, and humanist character, criticism through most of the period of Shakespearian scholarship, is directed by an investment in an idea of Hamlet as a unified, autonomous, and psychological individual, the 'what' question, locating in the material-semiotic construction of a certain kind of human character, moves towards identifying a qualitative form of selfhood without locating the analytic focus in apparently psychologically constituted gaps.

For a project that seeks to elaborate the kinds of humans that are represented in modern theatre, this refocusing of character analysis from the question of 'who' to 'what' is particularly significant. Concentrating on modern, lifelike characters, I analyse: the identifying borders of the human as he finds form in relation to his purportedly nonhuman others; the ways in which such identities manifest specific metaphysics and epistemologies; and the interaction of these elements with the form and structure of the play (in order to establish the modes of reality and ideological structures within and against which character is constructed and acts). From the negotiation of all these parts and levels, particular kinds of human beings emerge, representations that tell us something of who and what we have been in terms that are politically significant. As partially self-determining and supposedly intelligent human creators-creations, who or what we make of ourselves and our fictional-factual worlds are matters of political concern, which are becoming increasingly important as the god-like powers of the creation of life pass into post/humanist hands, which are systemically coupled to advances in science and technology.

We are already, in a certain sense, cyborgs. Being so, we need not view ourselves as being on the cusp of transforming from human to *posthuman*, from organic to mechanical entity: no such ontological jump or apocalyptic ending is (necessarily) nigh because we are already natural and cultural hybrids. We were never purely natural to start

with. However, in being creators and creations of specific, and specifically modern, worlds, the question of agency and responsibility come into view as being particularly significant to human being. We, and the characters that represent us, are authors of the worlds that we create just as we are partial products of them, too. Stories are not just stories and characters are not just characters; the 'real' world of humans is not detachable from stories or characters. Dramatic character, as she is identified within the post/humanist frame of this thesis, is textual, imagined, embodied (by the actor and in the imagination of the reader), and to some extent, lived. In being so, she locates beyond the borders of modern character as she has conventionally been conceived - as the free origin of dialogue and action - at the same time as she denies and rebuts accounts of her poststructuralist death. The fictional-factual stories that the post/human tells, the actions that she takes, the objects, entities, and people with which/whom she connects herself, and the ways in which she represents herself, constitute products of writers' imaginations and experiences of writers but they are productive of ways of knowing the human self and the world for the reader or spectator, too.

What follows in the remaining three chapters are post/humanist analyses of the characters of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, and Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. The questions that guide the character studies are, how are specific human characters formulated and what do they signify?

## Chapter Four

### Post/humanist Hamlet: A Protean Performer

#### 4.1 Hamlet: A Protean Actor

Through the course of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we discover that before his father's death, the eponymous hero had been a different sort of character. Attended by Hamlet's childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Claudius speaks '[o]f Hamlet's transformation - so call it / Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man / Resembles that it was' (2.2.4-7) and Ophelia later remarks how Hamlet had once been an ideal sort of Renaissance prince of 'noble and most sovereign reason' (3.1.156) (the implication being that he is no longer thus). She describes Hamlet as formerly having been

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,  
Th'expectation and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
Th'observed of all observers (3.1.149-52).<sup>48</sup>

The Hamlet that is revealed in the pages of the play does not precisely answer to such an harmoniously balanced form as is here described; the Hamlet we see and hear is a much more complex and changeable character and is one, furthermore, whose exhibition of unpredictable behaviour puzzles critics, readers, and dramatic characters alike.

That Hamlet changes is, perhaps, unsurprising, given the changes in circumstances, relationships, and roles that are foisted upon him. With his father's death, the character of Hamlet is dispossessed of the throne and cast in a very different landscape with characters that, though they are familiar to him, suddenly appear in strange and unfamiliar roles: King Hamlet now takes the unsettling form of a ghost and Hamlet's uncle, having married Hamlet's mother and become King, is now Hamlet's 'uncle-father' just as Gertrude is his 'aunt-mother' (2.2.372). Hamlet's world has become a place of uncertainty, with the identities of its cast of characters and the roles they

---

<sup>48</sup> All quotations from, and references to, *Hamlet* derive from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor's Arden edition unless otherwise stated. My selection of this edition is based upon a number of reasons, including the following. The Arden Shakespeare is internationally recognised, respected, and acknowledged as the pre-eminent Shakespeare series and, for my purposes, importantly, it includes full annotation. This volume of *Hamlet* contains an edited annotated text of the 1604-05 (Second Quarto) printed version of the play, with passages that are only found in the 1623 text (First Folio) printed as an Appendix.

perform in relation to each other sliding ‘out of joint’ (2.1.186). Hamlet, formerly the loved son and heir to Denmark, finds himself displaced: having suddenly been rendered a son in mourning, he soon becomes, also, the stepson to an uncle who has married his mother on the path to the throne, a shift in situation that requires Hamlet to share in Claudius’s ‘mirth in funeral’ (1.2.12). More dramatic as a role change is the one that accompanies the appearance of the Ghost whose account of King Hamlet’s murder by Claudius casts Hamlet as the avenging, malcontent son. With the Ghost’s instructions, Hamlet is deposited unwillingly<sup>49</sup> into the world of a revenge tragedy.

Hamlet’s delay of the inevitable act of revenge, which is demanded of him by his new role in a revenge tragedy, is significant for it serves to reveal Hamlet as a *character*. In the long space between the Ghost’s first appearance and the killing of Claudius, Hamlet comes into view, a quality of individual selfhood that seems to be excessive of plot, dialogue, and play. Hamlet exhibits a will that is resistant to the pressures of the conventions that locate, construct, and constrain him. Certainly, his abundance of words, uttered in conversations and as private thoughts in his soliloquies, which contemplate the nature of his form and existence, work to foreground Hamlet as a thinking human individual who does not exactly correspond to the roles he is required to play.

By virtue of such self-awareness of his changing situations and the significance of appearance in relation to particular others, Hamlet implies a form of selfhood that is self-consciously theatrical. Catherine Belsey highlights the metatheatrical quality of the play when she observes: ‘It is generally agreed that when Hamlet, speaking in the Globe, defines the earth as a promontory beneath the canopy of the o’erhanging firmament [2.2.264-9], he is invoking the familiar metaphor of the world as a theatre’ (*Subject of Tragedy* 27). Certainly there is evidence in the play of the metatheatrical view that posits Hamlet as a self-aware performer; it is amply to be found: Hamlet determines to ‘put an antic disposition on’ (1.5.170); he asserts that he has ‘that within’, which does not precisely coincide with his appearance (1.2.85-6); he conceives of a plot ‘to catch the conscience of the King’ (2.2.540), which comprises the performance of a particular play – *The Mousetrap* (3.2.231) – for which Hamlet himself writes some additional lines while he also directs the players; he commands his mother to pretend to perform in certain ways around Claudius (Act 3 Scene 4), and so on. Knowing himself to be a character thrust into particular roles and situations – roles that are products of conventions and situations that

---

<sup>49</sup> Hamlet moans: ‘O cursed spite / That ever I was ever born to set it right!’ (2.1.186-7).

are culturally or, possibly, providentially prescribed - Hamlet self-consciously casts himself and others as performers with the ability to change their appearance through the course of the play.

One of the concerns of this chapter is to interrogate Hamlet's form as a character and as a 'man' by locating him as a performer. As Chapter Three established, much critical discourse on the subject of character understands character in essentialist terms that denote it and, by implication, self as something fixed, autonomous, and as persisting through time. An actor's performance of a character, accordingly, implies nothing more than the manipulation of the body by a mind and self that is essentially unchanging and unchangeable. The actor does not 'transform' into her character in any fundamental sense. This assumption is born out by Harold Bloom's observation that '[o]ne of our many perplexities with Hamlet is that we never can be sure when he is acting Hamlet, with or without an antic disposition' (402). Bloom's remark usefully reveals the assumption of a relation of self and mask that is dichotomous (i.e. Hamlet is truly himself *or* he is feigning a part) at the same time as it illuminates the difficulties the critical tradition has had in identifying the 'true' Hamlet. But what if no such original, stable, and permanent quality of Hamlet exists? And what if the dichotomously related self and other, actor and character, are brought into more complex relations, enabled by a post/humanist model of self that establishes essentialism in *permeable* terms?

Bloom writes that '[p]laying a role is for Hamlet anything but a metaphor; it is hardly *second* nature, but indeed is Hamlet's original endowment' (742).<sup>50</sup> It strikes me that if Hamlet's nature is to perform, then the question of the nature of performance – of the relationship of actor to mask – becomes particularly important, as does the underpinning conception of subjectivity and form for human and character alike. It is the contention of this chapter that, in the process of performing himself differently, Hamlet changes himself. Far from being autonomous, free, and detached from the world or from the roles he is compelled to play, Hamlet the actor, as an agent-product, is changed by his part in the act of performing it. This bears implications for the way in which character is approached in analysis, for if Hamlet is transformed in the process of performing his roles

---

<sup>50</sup> Bloom's argument is that Hamlet, aware of his earlier and cruder manifestation in the *Ur-Hamlet* (which is the name given to an earlier *Hamlet* play that may or may not have been written by Shakespeare) 'lives' to re-perform himself, to over-write his previous character (402), which Bloom argues was also created by Shakespeare. Unfortunately, Bloom does not explore the intricacies of this paradox, which intriguingly posits Hamlet as an autonomous and self-conscious product, one that, Bloom asserts, would have been capable of writing *Hamlet* had he not died at the end of the play (402-3).

in particular material situations, then Hamlet cannot and should not be detached from the play and the roles that he enacts; the identities to which Hamlet likens himself in the process of performance become bound to Hamlet's character, although they may start out as distinguishable 'others'. If Hamlet, as a post/human self, is conceived as a protean subject then in his performance of an-other, Hamlet becomes, partially, other himself and in the process changes both self (actor) and other (mask), such that neither can be accounted irrevocably distinct or stable.

The conception of character as changeable is consistent with early modern modes of thinking about 'man' as a self-determining 'chameleon' (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola 5).<sup>51</sup> The notion that the human *is* an actor is also consistent with contemporary views, as the fable of the early modern humanist Juan Luis Vives – *Fabula de homine* (after 1518) – demonstrates. In the following pages, Vives's fable shall be explored, as will Hamlet's theatricality in relation to subjectivity and, in due course, his 'human' identity. One of the objectives of this chapter, in short, is to discover some of the implications of thinking about the human self as an actor and to consider this proposition in relation to the character of Hamlet specifically, as well as to the nature of acting more generally.

This is a chapter that focuses on *Hamlet's* treatment of human identity and the relationship of subjectivity with theatricality. Specifically, the chapter explores the notion that character (human and dramatic) is creatively constructed in terms that are self-performative and –transformative. This being so, discussion opens by establishing Proteus as a familiar and important figure of the early modern period who functioned, particularly in relation to Shakespeare, to identify the nature of the human as a creative agent with a fluctuating form. An examination of the idea of the human as an actor then follows with

---

<sup>51</sup> Pico's tract on the position and form of 'man' was analysed at some length in Chapter Two. E. M. W. Tillyard offers a different but precisely corresponding view of 'man' from the period when he quotes a passage from Annibale Romei's *Courtier's Academy* (1586), a short section of which reads as follows: '[T]his divine workman [God], having before the creation of man dispensed proportionably of his treasures to all creatures and every kind of living thing, prescribing unto them infallible laws, as to plants nourishment to living creatures sense and to angels understanding, and doubting with what manner of life he should adorn this his new heir, this divine artificer in the end determined to make him, unto whom he could not assign anything in proper, partaker of all that which the others enjoyed but in particular. Whereupon, calling unto him he said: Live, O Adam, in what life pleased thee best and take unto thyself those gifts which thou esteemest most dear. From this so liberal a grant had our free will its original, so that it is in our power to lie like a plant, living creature, like a man, and lastly like an angel; for if a man addict himself only to feeding and nourishment he becometh a plant, if to things sensual he is a brute beast, if to things reasonable and civil he groweth a celestial creature; but if he exalt the beautiful gift of his mind to things invisible and divine he transformeth himself into an angel and, to conclude, becometh the son of God' (75).

an analysis of Vives's *Fabula de homine*, which casts the human as an actor upon a stage. Such an identification of the human as protean actor goes on to be explored against conventional assumptions underpinning mimetic theatre and realistic acting in a discussion that interrogates the relationship between (factual) performance and (fictional) dramatic play. This chapter proposes that theatre may, in fact, serve to highlight the human – and Hamlet – as a hybrid natural-artificial entity who fundamentally blurs the binaries of reality and representation, fact and fiction, self and other. This being so, finally, this chapter extends the idea that the actor and character are indivisible and frames *Hamlet's* cast of characters in post/humanist terms such that their *metaphorical* identification as animals, machines, or divine entities in the play are reinterpreted in more literal terms as being, or as becoming, animal, machine, and divine.

#### **4.2 The Protean Character of 'Man'**

John Lee, in his book, *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self* (2000), identifies Proteus as the god of Shakespeare. Lee notes that even at the outset of Shakespearean discourse, Proteus was the popular choice of the literary critic to explain the playwright's ability to represent lifelike people: 'to Express to the Life', as Margaret Cavendish put it (qtd. in Lee 102). Lee explains: 'Most commonly, Shakespeare was Proteus, the shape-changing god who knew the answer to everything' (127) and constituted the Renaissance's symbol 'both of man's nature – his ability to learn and shape himself, to rise and fall – and of language's creative and expressive powers' (Lee 102). So, as critics struggled to explain how Shakespeare managed to create dramatic persons that all stood apart from each other and from him, it was to the mythical figure of Proteus that they turned for explanation. And in this figurative process of answering for Shakespeare's ability to depict lifelike, as opposed to more archetypal and conventional neo-classical, characters, he came to be rendered less one of 'Nature's journeymen'<sup>52</sup> (*Hamlet* 3.2.33) and more a 'wondrous, god-like, and divine' creator of worlds and people himself (Lee 103).

In Greek mythology, Proteus was a sea-god who served Poseidon and had the ability to foretell the future and the power to change his shape. As Lee observes, Proteus gained in importance in the Renaissance as he came to symbolise a defining aspect of the

---

<sup>52</sup> As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor write in explanation of 'Nature's journeymen' in their Arden edition of *Hamlet*, the term implies 'not Nature herself but some of her hired workers. A *journeyman* was one who had completed his apprenticeship at a trade but had not yet become a master at it' (298).



nature of 'Man' (221): namely, his *indeterminacy*. Intriguingly, this quality of humankind, which is connected to Pico's celebrated and influential *On the Dignity of Man* (1486), is directly drawn and elaborated upon in a striking reformulation of the story of Proteus by the Spanish humanist, Vives, called *Fabula de homine*, a fable that, in elaborating the chameleon skills of the human as performer to transform herself, invites comment.

In Vives's story, 'man' is identified as being a fable, a play, but most importantly, an *actor* (Vives 387) who is set on the stage of the world to perform for the gods. In the fable, Jupiter is cast as 'man's creator and director for the performance and is described as 'prescrib[ing] to the company of actors the entire arrangement and sequence of the plays, from which not even by the breadth of a finger, as they say, should they depart' (Vives 388). The life of the person becomes, by analogy, of course, a script, something pre-determined and apparently permitting of no free will. The gods, in observing the performance, are particularly impressed by 'man's performance above that of any other creature, since it is 'man' that is so particularly skilful in the performance of all his parts: 'He would change himself so as to appear under the mask of a plant, acting a simple life without any power of sensation. Soon after, he withdrew and returned on the stage as [...] a thousand wild beasts' before returning as 'a man' (Vives 389). So skillful is 'man' in performing the masks of his nonhuman others (and, notably, even of 'himself'), that he is even capable of performing the part of gods and Jupiter himself and it is his performance here that captures the audience of gods' admiration and prompts them to call 'man' 'that multiform Proteus, the son of the Ocean' (Vives 389). As Nancy Lenkeith writes, '[t]he ability to become another is the highest sign of divinity which could be bestowed upon man' (386).

According to Lee, Vives's casting of 'man' as Proteus in this fable works 'to recognize the power of ['man's] free choice; he may choose what he wishes to be' (222). This is not strictly true. Vives is very particular about informing us that Jupiter has scripted and directed the performances of 'man', having insisted upon his parts, action, and, presumably, all the production elements, too, such as blocking, gesture, and so forth. (The performers are not permitted to alter their performances 'even by the breadth of a finger' (Vives 388), which indicates that meticulous physical direction has been exercised.) In short, there appears to be little freedom of choice for the actors. However, while acknowledging this prescription of performance, I do not mean to discount entirely

the possibility of freedom in relation to the constitution of 'man'. The ability of 'man' to transform himself, we are told, astonishes and delights the gods; his performance evidently exceeds their expectations, causing wonderment, even in Jupiter himself, who is 'man's very creator and would, as divine being, therefore, be in a position to know 'man's character and predict his action. The very demonstration of such godly astonishment implies, in short, that there exists some room for individual improvisation or interpretation of any given role, in just the way that every actor to perform Hamlet – though his dialogue is fixed and his performance directed – enjoys the privilege of flexibility in his ongoing performances of the role.

In the gods' wonderment at the talent of 'man' in this skill of self-transformation and –performance, then, may be detected an element of potential and surprise and therein the existence of some limited form of individual freedom as to the manner in which a role may be played and to what degree of success. The parts and actions of 'man' may be pre-scripted and pre-directed, but even so, the gods' astonishment at her skill implies something unexpected in her, something in excess of the fable and play that construct and determine her.

Thus, the world of drama and performance starts to take on the role of a kind of metatext for the human being herself: developing beyond the bounds of the Elizabethan view that all the world's a stage – a picture that foregrounds the performative nature of the self in real life – Vives casts 'man' as an actor who is essentially indeterminate, moving from role to role, and thus functioning to foreground the idea that identity and subjectivity are protean. I propose that in Vives's *Fabula de homine*, it is the casting of 'man' as *an actor* capable of performing apparently infinitely various roles, which are drawn from across all the physical and mythic creatures of creation, rising up to the very gods themselves, that identifies his true wonder: it is 'man's near-divine ability to imagine, to transform, and to perform himself differently, capacities that are inseparable from his inherent indeterminacy, which mark 'man' as wonderful.

However, in casting 'man' as an actor, Vives's fable not only implies some important possibilities for identity and subjectivity but for theatre, too, specifically, for the actor and character. In Vives's fable, the performed transformations of 'man', particularly when he plays the part of a god, is so convincing that even the gods mistake him as being one of their own, doubting which is the original (Jupiter) and which the impersonator ('man'). As such, the border between copy ('man' as actor) and original

(object of representation) is blurred and that which is conventionally comprehended in terms of the metaphor or the simile – an actor *is* his part or else he performs *as if* he is a beast or *like* a god – starts to take on the appearance of sameness in a process that renders the actor an essentially and creatively indeterminate being at the same time as the traditionally coherent terms of self and other are rendered difficult to distinguish.

‘Man’, in generic and individual terms alike, is not to be fixed, then, but is a creative agent drawing his form from the worlds of myth and matter. In his remembering and re-performance of those roles, ‘man’ partakes in a creative, social, and political process of material-semiotic ‘worlding’, as Donna Haraway puts it. As Pico has written, each individual human possesses the seeds of all natures and can make herself, in both the imaginative and material senses, into others that in any case already constitute parts of herself. What this might mean in terms of the ontologies of the actor and character, conventionally accounted distinct (as real and fictional, respectively), is explored in the discussion that follows, which makes the claim that an actor, in performing Hamlet, in some ways is indivisible from his character.

### **4.3 David Tennant *is* Hamlet: A Post/Humanist Interpretation of Actor and Character**

According to the theatrical principle of realism, dramatic characters are representations of people in the world who are deemed psychologically complex and self-determining individuals and agents. It is Belsey’s contention that ‘[c]lassic realism tends to offer as the “obvious” basis of its intelligibility the assumption that character, unified and coherent, is the source of action’ (*Critical Practice* 73). This view accords perfectly with Fuchs’ assertion that dramatic character is ‘the motor or agency of dramatic structure’ (22) and Edgar’s contention that ‘great’ characters, exceeding their roles, are capable of behaving in surprising ways.

Belsey identifies the subjectivity that stands behind realism’s character as being liberal humanist and, as Chapter Three has already observed, as being ‘based upon an *empiricist-idealist* interpretation of the world (*Critical Practice* 7), by which she means that ‘man’ is accounted as being ‘the origin and source of meaning, action, and of history (*humanism*)’ (ibid). In such a model, the physical world is interpreted as comprising reality, which provides the subject with experiences, but behind and before this reality

and these experiences stands a coherent mind, where mind is understood to confer upon the subject its individuality, stability, intelligence, and agency.

Realist theatre, then, as Belsey persuasively argues, involves and represents psychologically constituted and individual (liberal humanist) agents in the form of actors and characters, respectively. However, it is precisely in this classic realistic form of theatre that actors are comprehended, in an approach that is traditionally informed by Stanislavskian principles, as ‘transforming’ themselves into their characters via a rehearsal process that requires them to bring parts of themselves to the creative act of metamorphosis. But how could this work? If Belsey is correct that realism assumes a liberal humanist conception of selfhood as a fundamentally unique, coherent, and free agent, then what is it that is transformed in the actor’s performance of her character? Surely the transformation must be limited to the body, the essential mind’s puppet, for the possibility that the actor ‘becomes’ his character is unthinkable in any literal sense given that the entity of the self is known to be something free and coherent that persists through time.

In fact, such questions of the nature of the actor’s transformation take us to the heart of character and human ontology, allowing us to start to unravel some of the common sense assumptions that underpin them and to reveal some of their paradoxes and problems, as the following discussion reveals.

I want to start by considering the ordinary theatrical idiom, ‘David Tennant *is* Hamlet’.<sup>53</sup> According to Dan Rebellato, the meaning of ‘is’, in such a case, is not to be interpreted as denoting an equivalence of identity for David Tennant and Hamlet: ‘It’s clear that David Tennant is not Hamlet’ in the sense that, for example, ‘water is H<sub>2</sub>O’ (24). By implication and for example, David Tennant is a real man and a twenty-first century Scottish actor who has famously played the role of Doctor Who; Hamlet is a fictional character that was dramatically conceived as a prince of Denmark about four hundred years ago. One of them is real, the other, in empirical terms, does not exist. These are not subjects with too much in common.

Rebellato identifies the relationship between the stage representation (i.e. David Tennant playing Hamlet) and that which is represented (i.e. Hamlet) as a problematic one, which has yet to be satisfactorily accounted for in theatrical or philosophical discourse. In answer to the problem of this relationship between reality and illusion, Rebellato offers

---

<sup>53</sup> This particular phrase derives from Dan Rebellato’s paper, ‘When We Talk About Horses’ (2009).

his own persuasive theory that conceives of the relationship in *metaphorical* terms, such that ‘David Tennant is Hamlet’ is given to operate in the same way as ‘love is a battlefield and all the world’s a stage’ (25). In a discussion that interacts with my own inquiry into the nature of theatrical transformation as it pertains to the relationship of the actor with his character, Rebellato argues that stage representations are not to be taken literally but function to facilitate thought about the fictional world in a new and vivid way. He explains:

In metaphor, we are invited to see (or think about) one thing in terms of another thing. [...] We know the two objects are quite separate, but we think of one in terms of the other. My suggestion is that this is precisely (not metaphorically) what happens in theatrical representation: when we see a piece of theatre we are invited to think of the fictional world through this particular representation. Theatrical representation is metaphorical (ibid).

This is a fascinating and compelling proposition, one that maintains the divisions between actor and character, reality and fiction. Indeed, metaphor depends upon such a gap to function as such. Rebellato goes on to explain that ‘performances can be metaphors for a number of things: the fictional world, the world itself [...], or sometimes simply the play – a new production of *Hamlet* is usually asking us to see *Hamlet* itself [and Hamlet *himself*], as well as the fictional events it describes, differently’ (ibid). Comprehended, thus, as a metaphor, David Tennant playing Hamlet allows us to think about Hamlet without requiring any claims that he has really transformed into Hamlet. Furthermore, it precludes the need for any mental gymnastics in answering questions as to how audiences navigate the territory of, and between, reality and illusion and perception and imagination. In Rebellato’s account, each domain remains distinct: David Tennant enacts the dialogue and actions of a character called Hamlet and in the process he remains fundamentally himself, while his performance allows the audience to think of Hamlet in new ways.

Rebellato’s thesis is persuasive, offering a way of ‘reading’ theatre that circumvents the widespread and problematic conception of ‘illusion’ in dramatic presentation, which, as Rebellato points out, is ‘untrue’ (18): ‘In illusions we have *mistaken beliefs* about what we are seeing’ (ibid) whereas when we are at the theatre watching a play, ‘[w]e know we are watching people representing something else’ (ibid). In brief, Rebellato’s thesis of theatre as metaphor allows us to maintain a kind of bifocal

vision that perceives a staged world, underpinned by the logic of representation, which cleaves signifier from signified while holding both simultaneously in view. The actor stands before us on stage and he, and convention, tell us that he is Hamlet, and we allow this proposition to be so as we oscillate between fact and fiction, material and semiotic 'realities': the actor is a stand in for the character and the character is a stand in for a real person in the same way as words are the conceptual 'stand-ins' for tangible objects. We are used to seeing with such bifocal vision: reading an object for its semiotic import or imagining a physical object or scenario via the suggestion of words or a particular convention.

However, my own post/humanist approach to subjectivity and character means that another perspective on the matter of the relationships between stage and fiction and actor and character is opened up. To borrow an idiom from Stanislavsky, 'what if' we are not liberal humanist subjects? What if we are, instead, unstable, protean, *post/humanist* systems of selfhood? Furthermore, what if character is refused the autonomous status it seems, conventionally, to be accorded in Rebellato's discussion and is reconceived as a dynamic and protean system of parts bound to context-specific, imaginative, and embodied conjurations?

Pico's analogy of the human being as a cultivator of seeds in the garden of the self has already allowed me, in Chapter Two, to articulate the post/humanist subject as a kind of protean subject with a permeable essence. Remarkably, the analogy of the human self as a cultivator of seeds in the garden of the self is picked up and explored four hundred years later by Constantin Stanislavsky, a figure most commonly associated with a realistic form of theatre that, by implication, designates character, as Belsey identifies, as a well-rounded, psychologically stable, coherent, and *liberal humanistic* kind of fictional 'real' person.

In *An Actor Prepares* (first published in 1936), Stanislavsky explains how one actor is capable of performing two widely contrasting personalities:

To begin with the actor *is* not one or the other [personality]. He has, in his own person, either a vividly or indistinctly developed inner and outer individuality. He may not have in his nature either the villainy of one character or the nobility of another. But the seed of those qualities will be there, because we have in us the elements of all human characteristics, good and bad. An actor should use his art and his technique to discover, by natural means, those elements which it is

necessary for him to develop for his part. In this way the soul of the person he portrays will be a combination of the living elements of his own being (178).

Stanislavsky's process of character development and rehearsal requires actors to distinguish between, and to thoughtfully develop, particular qualities of self in new and unique combinations in the construction and representation of the fictional dramatic entity that constitutes their part and influences their specific character transformation. Significantly, this process implies a fundamentally irresolute quality to selfhood. Individual personality or soul is not, it seems to be suggested, fixed or essential, but something that is developed to various degrees of vividness by each individual actor (and, by implication, by each human being) from the seeds of human nature to be found in each and every person. A dramatic character, similarly, is no more than a combination of particular characteristics that have been *developed* (cultivated, grown, fed, and pruned) to cohere thus. This picture of selfhood that is thus painted is of an inherently indeterminate kind. And indeed, Stanislavsky confirms as much when he goes on to assert that actors' daily lives, during the period in which they develop their characters, are 'influenced' by their characters in their turn (313).

This process of character development signals more than a superficial and temporary 'transformation' of identity for the actor. This is a transformation of self that would appear to extend beyond the performative dimension of the play in production. By implication, the actor, when she strips off her costume, does not necessarily strip off her character, too. The reason such an influence of dramatic characters on the subjectivity and lives of actors is possible is that the characters that actors develop are not considered to be distinct and detached from them. The actor and the character, the real person and the fictional character, far from being conceived as being stable, distinct, and autonomous individual subjects, are comprehended as amorphous entities that are *mutually* and productively under construction.

It is just such a proposition – that character and self are unstable - that worries Plato and gives rise to his objections to the principle of *mimesis* in visual art. Plato perceives a certain degree of danger as attaching to the act of impersonation, warning against it, especially the playing of 'people who are morally inferior' because such an act necessitates a 'depart[ure] from [the performers'] own characters' and 'will influence their characters in the wrong way' (Janko xi). For Plato, the types of characters that

performers play matter because these characters have the capability of changing the performers, potentially in ways that are morally adverse.

It is my contention that *if* a post/humanist view of subjectivity is adopted and *if* character is refused existence as an autonomous form, a more literal reading in identity terms of the proposition, 'David Tennant *is* Hamlet', becomes possible. Assuming the more amorphous and provisional post/humanist view of selfhood, and assuming Stanislavsky's system for character development as I have just outlined it, I venture that it becomes possible to write that 'David Tennant *is* Hamlet' and have the proposition stand in something approaching an equivalent identifying sense. If Tennant is understood as being in possession of the seeds of all humanity and, in the act of developing and playing Hamlet, as resculpting himself by drawing upon his own experiences, qualities, memories, ideas, knowledge, imagination, will, and concentration, then the man David Tennant cannot be divided from the character, Hamlet. In some ways, David Tennant really has, for the period of time encompassing the rehearsal process and production, 'become' Hamlet and Hamlet *is*, for this brief period, David Tennant (although it is important to remember that this equation is predicated upon the notion that neither the actor nor the role are distinct and stable to start with.) The experience of the rehearsal process – the bringing together of embodied experience and imaginative fiction - has changed David Tennant. David Tennant has, to put it in post/humanist terms, become 'David Tennant-Hamlet', a new and unstable, but nonetheless, material and semiotic (as opposed to material *or* semiotic), hybridised identity. David Tennant and Hamlet are both subjects in process in a world that is uncertainly composed of physical reality *and* imaginative fiction.

Before leaving this discussion, I wish to close it with a proviso. Such a protean view of character and of selfhood should not, I suggest, displace Rebellato's premise that theatre is metaphorical. David Tennant is an empirically real man and actor and he can, and must, be distinguished from Shakespeare's fictional character, Hamlet; I say 'must' because to *eradicate* the differences between reality and fiction would be to articulate a psychotic view of the world. The act of locating concepts and objects upon a scale of differential relationships (such as is demonstrated by locating 'man' with animals, plants, and angels in the Great Chain of Being) as opposed to in binary either/or relationships, means that fact and fiction may be viewed as being different in comparative terms. Accordingly, the actor-character relationship may be viewed as consisting of distinct



identities (which allows metaphorical readings to persist) and yet also as forms that are mutually and dynamically connected and constituted. David Tennant is not Hamlet; David Tennant plays the part of a character called Hamlet. However, in the process of playing Hamlet, Tennant gives Hamlet form and is himself transformed by the character in a system of interacting parts that, cyborg-like, refuses absolute divisions.

#### **4.4 Human Borders and *Hamlet's* Ghost**

The refusal of absolute divisions between entities is a characteristic of posthumanist thinking and it is also a characteristic of Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*. The question of what 'man' is, which perplexes Hamlet as he strives to be and act like a 'man', is prompted and problematised by a play that foregrounds the relationships of human characters with nonhumans (animals, gods, monsters, machines, and so forth), while positing these in terms of difference *and* similarity. One recurring and iconic image of the character places Hamlet's brooding figure eye to eyesocket with Yorrick's skull and, in doing so, exemplifies the play's treatment of borders. This image epitomises the uneasy relationship of animate, conscious, and speaking man with dusty, inanimate skull, simultaneously identifying 'man's difference from the skull and his composition *as* skull.

Hamlet is located in a world that Shakespeare's play pictures, from the very outset, as being in the throes of shoring up territorial and ontological borders. The play opens in the thick of night on the battlements of a royal castle guarded by sentries. The sentries, Barnardo, Francisco, and Marcellus are given form and identity as such in their function to protect Denmark against the threat of 'others' who may wish to cross the border to usurp the throne. Margrete de Grazia argues that the play is fundamentally framed by such territorial struggle, with 'one contest over land after another' being staged (2) by Fortinbras, King Hamlet, Claudius, Gonzago and Lucianus, Norway and Poland, the Crown and the Church, as well as Laertes and Hamlet (over Ophelia's grave).

In fact, the 'atmosphere of unease' (Thompson and Taylor 147) and uncertainty, which characterises the opening of the play and arises from the threats to the world of *Hamlet's* physical borders, carries over not only into the rest of the play in the guise of multiple territorial struggles, as de Grazia observes, but also into the character of Hamlet: his form and his contemplation of 'man'. Hamlet's unease is exacerbated by the appearance of the Ghost. This figure teaches him that the other does not only threaten from without; it is also resident or threatening from within. While the castle's sentries

work to defend its physical borders, another sort of ‘stranger’ (1.5.164) manifests within its walls, one against which the sentries are powerless to defend. Taking on the appearance of Hamlet’s father, the Ghost marks the uncanny liminal ground occupied by simile in that it is very like the former (living) king at the same time as it fails to be precisely equivalent with him. Marcellus asks, ‘Is it not like the King?’ and Horatio replies, ‘As thou art to thyself’ (1.1.57-8). The Ghost has all the *appearance* of the former king but cannot be him, for King Hamlet is dead, his body buried in the ground and turning to dust. Is this Ghost, then, the spiritual essence or residue of King Hamlet or something else, something demonic but which, in being so, is nonetheless indicative of an immaterial quality of human being and of otherworldly space?

As a ghost, this entity is neither alive nor dead, material nor immaterial. Apparently vital, it possesses the mysterious ability to appear and disappear at will (Marcellus refers to it as having ‘faded’ (1.1.156)), thus obviating the physically rooted logic of cause and effect,<sup>54</sup> while at the same time looking, physically, to be King Hamlet: its appearance, comportment, action, memory, voice, and speech seem to demonstrate it as such. In its troubling of the alive/dead and physical/immaterial borders, the Ghost implies an identity that is at once more and less than human. In its immateriality and defiance of physical, natural laws, it is god-like; in its insubstantiality it is, literally, less than human. The ghost functions, then, to throw the solidity of ‘man’ into relief *and* to foreground the idea of soul as a supernatural quality inherent to him.

For Hamlet, the Ghost opens up the indeterminate nature of human identity, which is predicated upon relationships with machines, plants, animals, and the supernatural. The shakiness of the human’s borders with her purported others manifests a good deal of anxiety and existential brooding in him. For Hamlet, ‘man’ is a ‘piece of work’ (2.2.269) that finds form in these relations. The question is, what sort of ‘piece of work’ might that be?

#### 4.5 ‘What a piece of work is a man’

What a piece of work is a man  
- how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form  
and moving; how express and admirable in action; how

---

<sup>54</sup> Though the Ghost is free from earthly physical laws, interestingly, it/he is subject to time, which appears to be bound to the laws of its/his spiritual realm: at the sound of ‘[t]he cock that is the trumpet to the morn’ (1.1.149), Horatio reports that ‘[t]h’extravagant and erring spirit hies / To his confine’ (1.1.153-4).

like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the  
beauty of the world; the paragon of animals. And yet to  
me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not  
me – nor woman neither, though by your smiling you  
seem to say so (2.2.269-76).<sup>55 56</sup>

Hamlet's account of 'man', here, locates him in the Great Chain of Being, a classical Christian and Western medieval metaphor for a divinely inspired universal hierarchy that ranks all forms of higher and lower life. In this order, 'man' is located and distinguished in kind from every other earthly and other-worldly entity in the cosmos, from plants to angels.

The problem arising out of this speech of Hamlet's is that the attempt to distinguish the human's superiority of form, moving, faculty, action, and apprehension in relation to other entities can only be achieved via simile and metaphor. Indeed, these rhetorical devices feature prominently in *Hamlet*; throughout the play characters are identified in terms that render them as being *like*, or as *being*, any or all of the following: animals (a serpent, dogs, carrion, the pigeon, an ass, a stallion, insects, a chameleon, a capon, a pig, a mouse, a pelican, a bird, etcetera), gods, angels, demons, monsters, machines, plants, earth, stones, flowers, a mermaid, and so on. The consequence of this is that in attempting to identify the distinct form of 'man', Hamlet paradoxically renders him continuous with these other entities. In being located on a scale with such entities, 'man' finds distinction only in terms of degree, not kind. Furthermore, according to

---

<sup>55</sup> Hamlet's speech as it is given here largely derives from the Second Quarto as opposed to the Folio, the difference locating in the punctuation. In George Ryland's Oxford edition of the play, the punctuation of F is adhered to and the speech appears thus: Hamlet: 'What a piece / of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! / in action how like an angel! in apprehension how / like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of / animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of / dust? man delights not me; no, nor woman neither, / though, by your smiling, you seem to say so' (2.2.303-10). The advantage of the punctuation in the Q2 version, which is quoted in the body of this chapter and comprises the object of my analysis, is accounted by Rylands as lying in the fact that it 'brings together "angel" and apprehension. Apprehension is the faculty peculiar to angels, who dispense with sense perception and have immediate intuition and understanding' (206). Thompson and Taylor, meanwhile, describe Q2's advantages as lying in its punctuation, which Dover Wilson has defended 'as conveying "the brooding Hamlet" through its semicolons and commas, as compared with the more declamatory style implied by the exclamations and question marks in F' (257). As for my own particular analysis, which is interested in the form of 'man' in systemic and general terms, the nuanced differences between, for example, the particular qualities attributed to the angel (i.e. apprehension or action) by F and Q2 variously are not of interest. (Of course, if my object was to pin down Hamlet's conception of 'man' in precise terms at this particular moment in the play, then the preference of one source over another would become significant.)

<sup>56</sup> I am grateful to my supervisor, Dan Rebellato, for bringing this speech to my attention and for first proposing, and engaging with, the 'fuzziness' that corresponds with such a location of 'man' in the Great Chain of Being.

Pico's re-working of the medieval metaphor, 'man' is made up, himself, of animal, plant, and angel 'seeds', which, depending upon their cultivation, mutate in size and strength within any given character to render individual form already other and fundamentally protean.

The difficulty of resolutely identifying the nature of the human, which arises from her location in the Great Chain of Being, has ontological ramifications. In such a landscape, 'man' is positioned, uniquely, as straddling both the world of physical creation and of spiritual beings in his composition as a kind of spiritual-physical hybrid. He is a possessor of a soul but it is a soul that is yet knotted to the physical body, which renders him subject to the body's passions and sensations. He is neither one thing nor the other, neither straightforwardly immaterial and immortal or bodied, mortal, and animal. Despite Hamlet's professed assertion in this speech that 'man' is but a quintessence of dust, an ontology that de Grazia insists comprises Hamlet's fundamental form,<sup>57</sup> in fact Hamlet's many and varied references through the course of the play as to what makes a 'man' would seem to argue that he is in fact deeply troubled by the question. On the one hand, it is true that Hamlet asserts 'man' is a machine. In a letter to Ophelia, Hamlet signs himself: 'Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this *machine* is to him, Hamlet [my italics]' (2.2.122-3). Elsewhere, Hamlet refers to the mind and memory as a 'table' (1.5.99), which Thompson and Taylor explain denotes a 'wax writing tablet on which items can be inscribed or erased' (219), and the mind as a 'book and volume' (1.5.104).<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> De Grazia argues that Hamlet, as a character and as a certain kind of human being, is formed of the world. Such an argument for a materialist metaphysics for Hamlet is not, however, born out by Hamlet's contemplations of the nature of existence or by the play's figuration of the Ghost. That said, de Grazia's condensation of 'human' and 'humus' (earth) into a singular 'semantic setting' (de Grazia 34) offers a compelling proposition in that it brings together human and character form and identity, where the human and character are equally conceived in materialist, worldly terms, such that de Grazia is able to argue, for example, that 'ambition for land is a form of self-aggrandizement. The body extends itself through the acquisition of territory' (ibid). I find de Grazia's arguments and methodology interesting because they 'knit[] Hamlet into the fabric of the play' (de Grazia 2) and offer an alternative hermeneutic to the study of Hamlet than conventionally restricts itself to the subjective and psychological. De Grazia also considers dramaturgical, textual, and historical factors in her analysis of character and, in consequence, allows Hamlet's contradictions to persist. Indeed, viewed from de Grazia's perspective, Hamlet is a kind of patchwork product of parts that includes the psychological but without this aspect being allowed to dominate. So, de Grazia focuses her analysis in 'land' and finds it knitted into the plot, language, theme, and character such that the elements cannot be clearly disarticulated. Hamlet says and does what he does and may be identified as a certain kind of man by de Grazia by virtue of the material and semiotic implications of land, of which Hamlet, de Grazia argues, is ultimately formed. This materialist approach to character literally renders the human being and Hamlet *of the earth* while never losing sight of character's agency, psychology, or semiotic location in language.

<sup>58</sup> Memory and the brain are figured, here, according to the terms of the particular 'technologies' of the table and the book, just as today the mind or, more specifically, the brain, is figured in terms of the computer. Significantly, the markings made on the 'tablet' – memories – are not conceived as indelible;

Then there are Hamlet's references in the graveyard scene (Act 5 Scene 1) to great men ending up as dust or else as food for maggots or fish. On the other hand, however, Hamlet makes reference to the soul and afterlife: a moment before breaking away from Horatio to speak to the Ghost for the first time, Hamlet, in considering the possible dangers to himself, says: 'And for my soul – what can it do to that, / Being a thing immortal as itself?' (1.4.66-7). Hamlet, then, swings between conceiving the self as a machine and as an immortal, immaterial soul. He is, quite simply, unsure and his uncertainty is encapsulated in his 'To be, or not to be' (3.1.55) speech, which contemplates death both in materialist terms as signifying sleep ('No more' (3.1.60)) and in spiritual ones, as opening the door to 'dreams' (3.1.65), the nature and form of which cannot be known in advance. In truth, Hamlet's metaphysical contemplation in this, his most famous speech, seems bound to the very indeterminacy of the human form as posited in the Great Chain of Being, where 'man' is neither angel nor animal but something else, something other, something inherently hybridised, uncertain, and partially self-constituting.

This uncertainty of form is evidently troubling to Hamlet and not without some cause: if the human person can make of himself whatever he chooses - take upon himself any mask to perform and, by performing it, possibly, to become it - then the human individual is to be at least partially defined by the choices that she makes. By implication, to be human means not merely to be essentially indeterminate, as Pico and Vives attest, but also to exercise agency and reason in the pursuit of performing and sculpting the self. Shakespeare's play refuses to treat Hamlet as a pawn or cog in the 'machine' of a revenge tragedy. Hamlet, in contrast, is drawn in more 'lifelike' terms, which means he is depicted as a protean actor who, though he may be partially contained and constructed by his role, also exceeds it by his demonstration of self-conscious self-performance.

Dramatic convention means that certain plotting parameters are pre-set in this play: we know that from the moment of Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost, certain events will take place, including Hamlet's own death.<sup>59</sup> However, just as the human performer in

---

however, Hamlet's experience seems to suggest that memory is otherwise. One of Hamlet's problems is that he *cannot* forget and his inability to reset his memories, which constitute his mental framing and construction of himself in relation to the world, imply that he is more than the 'machine' or technology of the 'table' or 'book'. This is not to say that the self, or Hamlet, is incapable of change; just that change takes time and that the erasure of memory is neither the work of a moment nor the result of a simple act of will.

<sup>59</sup> The structure of the revenge tragedy, popular to Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences, was modelled upon Seneca's plays with plotting that was, to a degree, fixed: the revenge tragedy would include a secret murder, a ghostly visitation, a period of plotting, intrigue, and disguise, a descent into madness, and a final outbreak of violence leading to many deaths, including that of the avenger.

Vives's fable exceeds the expectations of the gods in a performance that has been prescribed for him, so Hamlet exceeds the expectations attaching to the role of the avenging son, which is conferred upon him by his creators, Shakespeare and his father, King Hamlet, variously. In the space between the pre-plotted actions, Hamlet's thoughts find voice as they articulate, self-consciously, his predicament and the choice he must face: should he kill Claudius? It is this reflection and pause, perhaps, that most lucidly clarify Hamlet as a human and as this particular kind of human, for in the extended 'dramatic pause' between his instruction to revenge and the revenge itself, Hamlet's potential to act and to be otherwise is revealed: literally, the character of Hamlet locates and finds form in the contemplation of his question, 'To be, or not to be'. Although these ambiguous words are frequently interpreted as positing a choice between continuing to live or committing suicide, they are also sometimes interpreted as elucidating a choice as to 'whether [Hamlet] should act against the King' (Thompson and Taylor 284); or, to put it more explicitly in terms that resonate with the current discussion, of whether or not Hamlet should take on the role of avenging son and, by doing so, be or become it. For Hamlet, a lifelike character who exceeds the role of avenger, a choice must be made, a choice made more difficult, perhaps, by Hamlet's awareness that in playing another, he risks becoming other.

#### **4.6 Nature and its Mirror**

As the discourse of dramatic character liberally acknowledges, 'character', in etymological terms, originally denoted 'stamp', as in the stamping of a coin. Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'character' in its literal senses as: 'A distinctive mark impressed, engraved, or otherwise formed; a brand, stamp' ('character'), and dates its first such reference as c1315. The more figurative sense of 'character', as indicating the 'feature, trait, [or] characteristic' of something, is first recorded as appearing in 1502. It is not until 1664, in a reference by Dryden, that the *OED* records the word in its more recent meaning as identifying '[a] personality invested with distinctive attributes and qualities, by a novelist or dramatist' and 'the personality or "part" assumed by an actor on the stage'.

The word, 'character', then, was once intimately bound to a brand or stamp. Hamlet, while he is with his mother, Gertrude, in her closet, instructs her to change her patterns of behaviour with the King. He says:

Assume a virtue if you have it not.  
That monster Custom, who all sense doth eat  
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,  
That to the use of actions fair and good  
He likewise gives a frock or livery  
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight  
And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
To the next abstinence, the next more easy.  
For use almost can change the *stamp of nature* [my italics] (3.4.158-66).

‘Stamp’, here, though it evidently volunteers a sense of ‘branding’ or ‘engraving’, refers to a particular nature – the *Queen’s* nature – and, as such, moves into the realm of character, indicating a certain kind or quality of personality that is accounted natural. In these lines, Hamlet is urging his mother to perform as if she is virtuous, to ‘put on the garb of’ virtue (Jenkins qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 348) even if her ‘nature’ is otherwise. Hamlet’s meaning is that habit, or custom, can prove beneficial when its performance is of good actions, for each performance works to make subsequent ones easier, more ‘natural’, in a process that, Hamlet suggests, ‘almost’ changes ‘the stamp of nature’. The implication of Hamlet’s instructions, clearly, is that Gertrude’s natural stamp (her *character*) might conceivably be changed in the process of performing herself differently, of re-stamping herself, as it were, by recourse to culturally inscribed experience. A post/humanist irresolution is evident here in the relation of culture with nature as it bears upon character: cultural habits are ‘almost’ capable of changing the very nature of a person.

How far, then, is nature changeable? It is in the area of performance that some clues may be gleaned as to the extent of a character’s malleability, clues that establish cultural tools and customs as coupled to the ‘natural’ aspect of a person who is accounted as being dynamically in process. First, it is necessary to acknowledge that on the subject of performance, as on the nature of existence, Hamlet offers contrasting views. Towards the start of the play, responding to his mother’s query as to why he seems to be taking his father’s death so gloomily, Hamlet declares: “‘Seems”, madam – nay it is, I know not “seems”” (1.2.76). Asserting that the performance of grief cannot ‘denote [him] truly’ (1.2.83), Hamlet goes on to state that expressions and gestures ‘indeed “seem”, / For they are actions that a man might play, / But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe’ (1.2.83-86). While these lines have proved themselves

as ambiguous as any in Shakespeare's play, with critics finding in them evidence of various models of subjectivity, what Hamlet seems to be saying at its simplest is that there is a difference between the *performance* of the customary gestures and expressions of mourning, and its *feeling*, which, in Hamlet's case, he asserts, 'surpasses' (Thompson and Taylor 172) all outward appearances and accoutrements.

Hamlet's assertion is, of course, disparaging, in this instance, of the inauthentic and duplicitous potential of performance. Such a view was reflected in anti-theatrical arguments evident in Shakespeare's period, which Henry S. Turner reports as having 'object[ed] to the unnaturalness of the *ars* or artifice implied by acting on stage' (204). Culture or artifice, set against nature and, by implication, truth, is denigrated in the comparison. Hamlet, in similar vein, sets up a distinction between feeling and its artificial show and in the process privileges feeling (although in his case, feeling and show fail to correspond merely in terms of degree i.e. Hamlet's feeling exceeds, rather than contradicts, its outward expression).

In fact, though, elsewhere in the realm of performance as set forth by Hamlet, the distinctions between feeling and show and nature and culture are much more difficult to discern. Having conversed with the newly arrived players and observed them perform, Hamlet, finding himself alone, berates himself as follows:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
That from her working all the visage wanned  
- Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his inner conceit – and all for nothing –  
For Hecuba? (2.2.485-93)

In these lines, Hamlet compares his own passionless inability to act - to wreak vengeance for his father's death - to the tears and distraction of the actor, whose passionate performance arises from the internal workings of his imaginative engagement with nothing more substantial than the fiction of Hecuba. The actor lacks the motivation of real-life events and yet his expression of 'distraction' is authentic and natural insofar as he cries real tears. Hamlet suggests that the player's ability to manipulate his 'soul' to a particular conception of a fictional part renders him 'monstrous' because it is *unnatural* (Thompson and Taylor 274) in the sense of failing to be prompted by real-life events.



However, by implication, this is no more unnatural than Hamlet's own 'performance', which, motivated by real-life circumstances, fails to inspire or show the passion with which it ought, 'naturally', to correspond. In either case, that which is 'natural' is divested of that which is real and factual; and that which is culturally mediated and mere fiction is conflated, *unnaturally*, with 'natural' feeling and physical expression. In short, nature and culture start to come loose from their traditional and distinct moorings and to demonstrate a connection and interaction in the figure of the performing human whose will is inserted as a key ingredient in the unification of feeling and seeming.

Later in the play, but again in the company of the players, Hamlet holds performance up as a 'technology' for people to see themselves. Having taken on the role of director to the group of players, Hamlet identifies performance as a mirror for showing the audience a reflection of the world and itself; in holding 'the mirror up to Nature' (3.2.22), Hamlet suggests that performance brings humanity into view as it 'naturally' is. Of course, the problems of such a notion have been thoroughly rehearsed in the debate about the objectivist ambitions of Naturalist Theatre, which seeks to represent 'truth' – the physical world as it is – on the stage: to hold 'the mirror up to Nature'. However, as Christopher Innes recognises, 'The whole notion of "objectivity" in literature is questionable' (4), implying an 'impersonal, therefore generally valid, and factual' (*ibid*) representation of the world when art is always 'individual' (*ibid*), always a product of particular assumptions of reality. Performance is always artificial and, however close to a reality it may seem to come, it can never show nature itself, only ever a diffracted view of it. Such an argument positions art, or artifice, and nature as distinct terms: the former is culturally and artificially constructed, the latter is natural, essential, physical, and true. So, when Hamlet asserts that the purpose of performance is to show the world itself, is he being naïve in assuming such a thing is possible? Is he so unsubtle in his thinking that he misrecognises the role of performance in its mediation and translation of nature? Or does he, perhaps, understand nature as not necessarily being so distinct from culture as modern thinking, which is characterised by the purification of terms from each other (Bruno Latour), would have us believe?

Hamlet understands the players as taking their models from 'nature', from real life, and instructs them to '[s]uit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance – that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature' (3.2.17-9). He warns against performance that is 'overdone, or come tardy off' (3.2.24-5) and speaks critically

of those ‘players that I have seen [...] that neither having th’accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan nor man have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature’s journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably’ (3.2.28-34). The player’s purpose, then, according to Hamlet, is to show humanity itself in all its many ‘*natural*’ guises,<sup>60</sup> and, thereby, to avoid the mistakes of players who perform ‘man’ in ways that may be culturally valued in some quarters but are ‘abominabl[e]’ (3.2.34) as imitations of ‘nature’.<sup>61</sup> However, a tension is revealed here. When Hamlet says that, in relation to these other, poorer kinds of players, it is as if ‘Nature’s journeymen had made men’, a kind of slippage occurs between actor and ‘man’: ‘Nature’s journeymen’ simultaneously identifies the player (the man) and ‘man’ (for whom the player stands in). The player – be he merely ‘Nature’s journeyman’ or the accomplished master of his craft – is the creator (of nature) and his own product (nature itself) and, in being so, though he is human himself, he is revealed as being capable of failing to perform the human ‘naturally’, to be a ‘natural’ ‘man’. In short, the player-‘man’ is demonstrated as being more than merely ‘natural’, as being capable, via his performance, of making himself and ‘man’ other. In the very fact that he is able to perform ‘man’ in manifold forms, so the human is clarified as a protean form that is anything but fixed or purely ‘natural’.

Hamlet’s instructions to the players offers a kind of manifesto for performance: the ‘purpose of playing [...], both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ’twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure’ (3.2.20-4). Performance, in effect, is required to show the audience itself so that it can recognise itself as such. This is an intriguing proposition: the cultural ‘technology’ of performance is required to show Nature her true features so that, it is implied, she can recognise and know herself. This idea is repeated in Hamlet’s instructions to his mother in the closet scene when he elaborates upon the idea that nature and culture (or artifice) and the inner and outer self, are not necessarily presented in oppositional terms, but are intimately coupled. When Hamlet forbids his mother to leave, he tells her: ‘You go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the

---

<sup>60</sup> Thompson and Taylor write that the categories of human listed by Hamlet – ‘Christian, pagan [...] man’ – ‘are presumably intended to cover all kinds of human beings’ (298).

<sup>61</sup> Hamlet speaks of how he has heard players ‘praised – and that highly’ (3.2.29) for their imitations of humanity, which he describes as ‘abominabl[e]’ (3.2.34). Thompson and Taylor write that this word adopts a spelling that ‘allows for a play on *ab homine*’ and thereby implies imitations that are ‘from or contrary to man [sic]’ (298).

inmost part of you' (3.4.18-9). These words, of course, assume that Gertrude and, presumably, people generally possess an 'inmost part', a part distinct from the outward show of self. Such a view is conventional in its suggestion that this interiority comprises a true or original essence. What is less straightforward is why Hamlet thinks Gertrude should need a mirror – be this a literal mirror or a metaphorical one (i.e. language or performance) - to discover her 'inmost part'. The implication, however, is an interesting one: that the self needs tools (performance, language, mirrors - technologies that are culturally inscribed and contained) in order to know the nature of itself. The self cannot know itself without seeing its reflection, which is, and must always be, a remediated translation, a culturally constituted other. If Hamlet's words are to be believed, it is only via such cultural mediation that the 'inmost' and, by implication, 'natural' self can see, know, and go on to perform itself with self-awareness and self-determination in a spiralling process that continually reconstructs the form and identity of the human performer as natural-cultural creator-product.

There is a sense, then, that the self is constructed as a circuit or system of parts, which incorporates mind and body, fact and fiction, natural elements and cultural technologies. In order to know itself the self must see, imagine, locate, and perform itself in specific landscapes, roles, and relationships, which differentiate it from its others at the same time as these others partially compose it. Through most of the play, Hamlet, the reluctant performer of the role of avenger, procrastinates in the part that was dramatically thrust upon him. His reluctance to play the role of avenger, a role for which Hamlet is suited neither by 'nature' nor experience, unsurprisingly manifests in an unconvincing and patchy performance, the reason being that in order to perform his part with conviction Hamlet must, in like manner with the player he refers to in Act 2 Scene 2, unify his soul 'to his conceit' (*imagination*), will, and body (2.2.485-93).

Does Hamlet, ultimately, 'become' the avenger in the concluding scene when he finally brings himself to kill Claudius? In some ways, certainly, there is a sense in which Hamlet has at last come to terms with the role, has acceded to the pressures imposed upon him by the pre-scripted tragedy, which at least partially contains and constructs him. His will is no longer represented as battling against the circumstances of the play in which he has been cast: there is a sense that Hamlet's soul, conceit, will, and body have now come into alignment. It is, perhaps, for this reason that the Hamlet of Act 5 is sometimes referred to as a mature Hamlet, as Bloom implies when he identifies 'the mysterious

movement from Act IV to Act V' as constituting 'a farewell' to both Hamlet's and Shakespeare's youths (390). Belsey, too, observes a change in Hamlet but in her view it is caused by Shakespeare's inability to produce 'closure' for a form of subjectivity that was only just emerging: 'in 1601', liberal humanist subjectivity 'does not yet fully exist' (*Subject of Tragedy* 42):

Act V presents a second Hamlet who no longer struggles towards identity and agency. This Hamlet utters no soliloquies, makes no further efforts to define the nobler course, ceases to struggle with and between reason and revenge, readily surrenders to providence and the 'divinity that shapes our ends', and in these terms is able to act (ibid).

Belsey's identification of Hamlet as one kind of subjectivity pre-Act 5, and as another sort in Act 5,<sup>62</sup> is bound to an interesting and, in many ways, persuasive thesis, which locates models of subjectivity as historically constituted and developing concepts. However, by identifying Hamlet as constructed of two sorts of subjectivity in the play, Belsey's argument glosses over Hamlet's complexity of identity as a character. It is true that Hamlet is not precisely the same kind of man at the end of the play as he was at the beginning, but was Hamlet ever 'himself'? Hamlet is a complex and contradictory character. Henry Mackenzie, in an observation that is as relevant today as it was in 1780, writes: 'No author, perhaps, ever existed of whom opinion has been so various as *Shakespeare* ... Of all the characters of *Shakespeare* that of *Hamlet* has been generally thought the most difficult to be reduced to any fixed or settled principle' (qtd. in Lee 95).

As I have argued in this chapter, the reason that Hamlet - conceived as a 'fixed or settled principle' - cannot be agreed upon is that he does not exist. Hamlet is, and ever has been, a chameleon. Aaron Hill, writing in the *Prompter* in 1735, notices the Prince's changeability: 'The Poet has adorn'd him with a succession of the most *opposite* Beauties, which are *varied*, like *Colours* on the *Chameleon*, according to the *different Lights* in which we behold him' (qtd. in Lee 111). Hamlet's 'colours' vary, like those of the chameleon, according to the 'different lights' in which the reader casts him. As Hazlitt later puts it, readers read themselves into Hamlet in an act that imaginatively re-members him: 'Hamlet is a name: his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the

---

<sup>62</sup> Belsey's argument is that in Act 5, the Hamlet we see 'is an inhabitant of a much older cosmos, no more than the consenting instrument of God, received into heaven at his death by flights of angels' (*Subject of Tragedy* 42).

reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet' (*Characters* 80). Hamlet is but a word and yet, constructed of words that are simultaneously semiotically and materially constituted, the character of Hamlet - an idea of a person composed of many parts (language, story, convention, action, and so forth) - takes form in the imagination of a real reader who finds herself in him and him in her.

By William Hazlitt's account, we are all Hamlet or, at least, parts of him. It is for this reason, partially, that Hamlet cannot be identified. The character of Hamlet does not exist apart from his/its form as a nexus of parts that at the least incorporates the reader's self/mind and the words of the play text. The openness of Hamlet's form is exacerbated, too, by the generalised nature of his soliloquies. So, for example, in his 'To be, or not to be' speech, the personal pronouns, 'I' and 'me' are never uttered with the result, as Hazlitt observes, that '[w]hatever happens to [Hamlet], we apply to ourselves, because he applies it to himself as a means of general reasoning' (*Characters* 81).

Of course, the other reason that Hamlet cannot be identified as a fixed and settled character is that when he puts on his antic disposition, he does not merely put on the appearance of madness but partially and fundamentally becomes mad. Hamlet draws from cultural experiences and models in the realms of myth and matter to inform his performance and in the process of performing a role Hamlet cultivates the 'seeds' of himself to reconstitute himself into new forms and constellations of character. Being composed, partially, of plant, animal, and angel, he is capable of demonstrating himself, variously, dull,<sup>63</sup> mild in manner,<sup>64</sup> and, most important of all, god-like in his powers of reasoning. According to Bloom, Hamlet 'is the most aware and knowing figure ever conceived' (404). Where consciousness (or mind) identifies the human, then Hamlet comes into view as the archetypal modern character and human. Furthermore, conceived simultaneously as the most human of characters and as having a nature that is inherently theatrical, theatre, too, finds form not merely as a metaphor for thinking about the nature of selfhood but as being equivalent with selfhood. The human *is* a self-aware actor. He is,

---

<sup>63</sup> The Ghost says to Hamlet: 'And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf / Wouldst thou not stir in this' (1.5.31-3). Any potential inaction on Hamlet's part would render him, according to the Ghost, less than human and even less than animal: he would be no better than a kind of bloated or torpid (Thomson and Taylor 213) plant situated upon a river of forgetfulness and drowsiness.

<sup>64</sup> Hamlet says, 'But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall' (2.2.512). Hamlet fears his physical, *natural* constitution is similar to that of a pigeon's: 'Pigeons were thought to be mild and gentle because their livers lacked *gall* or bile, the supposed source of anger' (Thompson and Tayler, 276).

in an essential sense, a protean, developing actor and is lifelike in being so: a creative agent and a determined product, Hamlet is formed by his role but also exceeds it in the process of his ongoing self-performances.

## Chapter Five

### A Question of Human Character: August Strindberg's Natural Actors

#### 5.1 Introduction

The last chapter revealed Hamlet as a post/humanist character, a complex, indeterminate 'man' whose performances of himself in pre-scripted roles fundamentally influence and reformulate that self. The post/humanist character is also evident in the Naturalist Theatre of the late nineteenth century, as this chapter will show. However, the post/humanist character's location in Naturalist theatre is not so straightforward as it is in Shakespeare's play. The early modern writing of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Juan Luis Vives reveals an account of selfhood that is essentially permeable, which enables a view of human character as being at once naturally and culturally constituted, protean, and self-determining. Such an account of human selfhood was both contemporary and consistent with Shakespeare's drawing of character. However, the Naturalist playwrights wrote out of a philosophy that is markedly *naturalistic* and, being so, does not allow for the operation of any other laws than natural ones. Characters are, thus, bound to an unerring and fixed causal sequence, which does not permit of free will or self-determination: since the universe is physically formed, so must be humans and, by implication, characters. The psychology of character, in short, is bound to physiology and, in being so, according to materialist philosophy, must be supervenient upon physical states and lacking any causal effects of its own.

This constitutes a problem, of course, for the interpretation of Naturalist Theatre's characters because at the same time as Naturalist writers are recognised as representing dramatic characters as entirely physical creatures, so these characters are concurrently accounted psychologically complex and lifelike individuals who *precede* dialogue and action. But how are we to marry such a divided conception of dramatic character: as being philosophically bound to materialist ontology and, therein, rendered a determined product *and* as being formally implicated as the origin of speech and action, which presupposes a very different metaphysical account? How can mind (or soul) be deemed, in materialist terms, 'machinery' (Zola, 'Naturalism in the Theatre' 367), the effect of the physical world, *and* at the same moment be understood as the coherent and free origin of thought, language, and intentional action? In fact, such a paradox – the human formulated

as both physicalist product *and* self-determining actor – is answered by the compatibilist nature of post/humanist ontology. The ways in which such a model of human being assists in the problem of unravelling this paradox and of opening up character identity will be the subject of the discussion that follows.

Later, the chapter will go on to explore August Strindberg's naturalist play, *Miss Julie* (1888) and specifically its treatment of 'human' identity and character. I once heard this play described as being about a 'fuck'. Crude though this observation is, in many ways it is pithily accurate. When it comes down to it, the play *is* about the 'animal' attraction and intercourse that takes place between a young woman and a charming young man. However, this is not all this play is about. It is also concerned with the fallout of such a *culturally* inappropriate copulation, which involves an aristocrat, Julie, and a servant, Jean.

Naturalist theatre's characters are 'social animals'. One of the questions that concerns this chapter is how far the cultural aspect of being and living as a social animal in the world impacts upon human identity and subjectivity. Are the cultural values that permeate human society a veneer, finding form as masks to be put on and off at will by a self that is deemed to be authentic and true, because natural, or are they constitutive of 'natural' selfhood in a more fundamental sense? In short, what does it mean to identify the human character in a Naturalist play such as *Miss Julie* and how does human identity interact with character's formal construction in the drama?

## **5.2 Casting Modern Character in a Physical Universe: A Clash of Perspectives**

The Naturalist dramatists aimed to represent lifelike people in their staged representations of the world in a form that contrasted with the 'marionettes' (Émile Zola, 'Naturalism in the Theatre' 359) and 'stage monsters' (George Bernard Shaw, 'A Dramatic Realist to His Critics' 179) of nineteenth century theatre. As lifelike entities, the characters of the Naturalist Theatre movement are locatable in the modern genealogy of dramatic character that has been traced by this thesis to Shakespeare. In this genealogy, character is foregrounded and rendered the primary dramatic element in a way that contrasts with the Classical model, which accords plot the principal role. Modern characters are generally considered psychologically complex and contradictory creatures. They are representative of real people and, being distinctively *human*, refuse to be sublimated by plot. Indeed, Julian Murphet writes that the human character and plot have been located in dialectical



struggle since Aristotle (106): ‘the one allegoriz[es] the theological horizon of predestination and Totality, the other stand[s] in for subjective particularity and the gesture of free will’ (106). Modern characters, in contrast to their neoclassical counterparts, are identified as being distinct from the narrative and as capable of surprising their audience and of exceeding their roles because as human beings, it is believed, they are fundamentally free.

In fact, this dialectic of pre-determined plot and human free will is particularly awkward in the drama of the Naturalists. The Naturalistic movement was premised upon a conception of reality that was positivist, which refuses metaphysics any place in its universe, with ‘powerful forces govern[ing] human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control’ (J. L. Styan 6). On this world picture, notions of human soul or immaterial mind and, as such, any possibility of free will, are refused since nothing can escape the laws of cause and effect. However, the Naturalist Theatre movement, which ‘paved the way for a [...] “laboratory” of humanity through theatre’ (Maggie B. Gale xviii), also posited the human character as the drama’s primary element, depicting it as being distinctively individual, realistic, and psychologically complex. Christopher Innes confirms the primacy of character as being ‘one of the defining aspects of Naturalism. From the initial concept to the focus of the audience, naturalistic drama centres on highly individualized and completely realized people’ (13). Plot, having enjoyed favoured status through much of the nineteenth century with melodrama and the well-made play, is described by Innes as giving way to character and characterisation with the advent of Naturalist drama (ibid). But there is a problem evident here. How is such primacy and autonomy possible for these mimetic dramatic characters when the Naturalists conceive of human being in terms that are, by all accounts, entirely physicalist and therefore causally determined?

Related to this problem of squaring the philosophy of the Naturalists with their representation of character is that of how to distinguish the human from animals and machines. With Darwin’s theory of natural selection, the threat to the human’s borders, which had already been presenting itself with the rise of science and positivism, became acute. With Darwin, humans become located as kin with animals and, by extension, with machines and so the borders between them become blurred. Deprived of theistically constituted uniqueness, humans are given to derive from the same physical origin as all organic entities, finding form via a process that is natural, complex, and evolving and that

seems to deny the human any special self-determining role in the history of the natural world. Accordingly, to the problem of human autonomy and self-determination is added that of species differentiation. Indeed, for Ronald Gaskell, the question that science and, I would more particularly add, Darwin, makes urgent is: 'is man no more than "a poor, bare, forked animal"?' (21).

For the father of the Naturalist dramatic movement, Émile Zola, the human is a predictable creature (in theory, at least) because he is an animal, physiologically constituted. Indeed, character, as Zola writes about it, is entirely constituted of situation and biology: the human character is a kind of machine, her mind a mechanism governed by cause and effect, and the human soul is a fanciful characteristic of an earlier developmental stage of the human. By the later years of the nineteenth century, 'metaphysical man is dead, [and] our whole field of enquiry is transformed by physiological man' (Zola qtd. in Rothwell xvi). With Naturalism, the abstraction of the ideal human form comes, argues Zola, to be replaced by the natural and bodied human being.

Tied to, and constructed by, a particular historical period that located truth in a physical world that is knowable and testable via empirical and scientific processes, Zola focused in demystifying the human character. Romantic drama had offered character abstractions - perfect and perfectly coherent types - which accorded with idealist aesthetics and belief in the unity of truth, beauty, and goodness. Zola observes that in the tragic drama that conjured such a metaphysical man,

The body did not count; the soul was regarded as the only interesting piece of human machinery; drama took place in the air, in pure mind. Consequently, what use was the tangible world? Why worry about the place where the action was located? ('Naturalism in the Theatre' 367)

Zola's reference to metaphysical man's soul as 'machinery' is a striking misnomer, for soul in the idealist's worldview is detached from all notions of physical and mechanical processes. For Zola, however, soul or mind *is* 'machinery' just as much as the human body is machinery, in the sense that it is bound to physiological processes. Furthermore, by implication, it is the body, as opposed to the mind, that now constitutes the object of interest, and a body that is located in a specific and tangible environment. In Naturalist drama, mind becomes something to be approached from a physiological perspective as the drama relocates from the immaterial realm of thought and soul to the

physical world of cause and effect. Zola's aim is to reveal those parts that are empirically observable as being formative of human figures: 'to portray individuals existing under the sovereign dominion of their nerves and their blood, devoid of free will and drawn into every act of their lives by the inescapable promptings of their flesh' (Zola 'Preface' 1).

Zola was influenced by Claude Bernard, a French physiologist whose work, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, published in 1865, led Zola to advocate the field of investigation as being 'the human body in its cerebral and sensual functions, both healthy and morbid' (Zola qtd. in Andrew Rothwell xiii) with all human behaviour, even the most complex, being governed by simple rules of cause and effect. Rothwell observes that Zola took 'Claude Bernard's definitions of physiology as literally applicable, directly transferable, to the domain of the human mind' (xiv) and, as such, aimed to demystify mental phenomena, which 'became in theory predictable and testable [...] as any other observation about the physical world' (ibid). On such a view, there is no room for characters to surprise. As Rothwell goes on to observe of *Thérèse Raquin* the novel:

[A]ll the characters' feelings and reactions are so directly dictated by their initial temperament, seen in purely physical terms, that they have almost no freedom either to choose how they act, or to develop as people; from start to finish they are what they are, and their actions unfold, in Zola's eyes, with absolute inevitability (xvii – xviii).

Indeed, the novel and play versions of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* stand as a kind of dramatic thesis that man *is* an animal (and machine) and in his 'Preface' to the novel, Zola refers to the characters of Lauren and Thérèse as 'human beasts, nothing more' (1-2). He explains: 'I set out to study, not characters, but temperaments' ('Preface' 1): Lauren and Thérèse are not human but 'animal machine[s] acting under the influence of heredity and environment' (Zola's paraphrase of Claude Bernard qtd. in Rothwell xix) and, as such, they are as bound by 'fate' as their Greek forebears, just according to a different set of metaphysics.

But are all Naturalist Theatre's characters so dehumanised, in the sense of being essentially indeterminate with animal-machines? Are the characters really entirely confined by 'the chains of causality' (Chris Megson ix) and incapable of deliberate and free action? According to Ronald Gaskell, the world picture for the Naturalist dramatists

is not necessarily so indomitably materialist as Zola's account of Naturalism characterises it. Gaskell writes:

In general, as one might expect, the dramatists reject anything like a strict determinism. For if man can be explained by the laws of physics, chemistry and biology, what gives human action its significance? And if human action has no significance, why put it on the stage at all? (18)

The problem that the Naturalists were faced with was that in adopting the materialist view that found 'man', animals, and machines to be equivalently physically and deterministically formed, any intrinsic meaning or value as attaching specifically to human life becomes evacuated. Life, and the drama, become a series of naturally predicated processes that lack any fundamental meaning. Thérèse and Lauren's murder of Camille ceases, by implication, to be identifiable as an evil act and is rendered the natural product of simple physical causes located in biology and environment. Accordingly, suggests Gaskell, while '[m]odern naturalistic drama stands squarely on the assumptions and achievements of science, [...] the greater dramatists of the naturalistic theatre' recognised 'that their vision of man implied values irrelevant in science' (Gaskell 21). Whereas science probes how things work, drama must also probe what things mean and, as Gaskell argues it, for many of the Naturalist dramatists, to be human means something more than, or at least something different to, being pure animal.

In line with Gaskell, I would suggest that if we look beyond Zola's drama we find characters that are in some ways 'excessive' of a naturalistic world view, which conceives of all life forms, including human beings, as being intractably deterministic in their possibilities. Certainly, the significance of the environment, which is importantly social as well as natural in its constitution, is a crucial influence of human behaviour in the work of Strindberg and Ibsen. When Zola wrote that 'we can now return to man and nature' ('Naturalism in the Theatre' 361) he was outlining only part of the world picture that was opened up by the Naturalist dramatists. Dan Rebellato importantly reorientates the focus when he recognises the Naturalists' work as demonstrating a 'sociological imagination', which he describes as a 'shared belief in bringing the principles of scientific method to the study of *society* [my italics]' ('Naturalism and Symbolism' 9).

Importantly implicated in sociological study is the enduring ontological debate between structure and agency: is a person a product of structures or is he a freely acting agent? Any consideration of how society works demands deliberation of how the human

being is formed. Is she but an animal, which casts society in Social Darwinist terms as an inherently meaningless and ruthless competition for survival - as may be seen, to an extent, in the case of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* - or is the human capable of free action with society manifested as a product of her will, creation, and actions? In fact, such an either/or structure of questioning betrays a familiar but unsatisfactory set of assumptions about the human and character that insists upon simplifying or 'purifying' him into product or agent. I argue, contrarily, that it is a mistake to approach the characters of the Naturalist playwrights Strindberg and Ibsen thus. Although the dichotomising impulse is, according to Bruno Latour, a characteristic of modernity, its denial of the coexistence of transcendent and immanent forces within a person means that the human is viewed in less than lifelike terms. Despite the influence of physicalist philosophy on the Naturalist playwrights, Strindberg and Ibsen's complex characters resist the purifying treatment of modernity,<sup>65</sup> which accounts them transcendent *or* immanent entities. Though these characters are modern in the sense that they represent people as lifelike, they are resistant to modernity's impulse to render them creators *or* creations. In Strindberg and Ibsen's Naturalist plays, human beings are conceived in complex and oxymoronic terms as *social animals* (although in Ibsen, the emphasis lies with the social side of the equation) cast in a physical universe. Indeed, in such drama, as well as in some theories of mind and of acting, too, which permeated wider European culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a conception of the human as a hybrid natural-cultural agent is evident.

Strindberg described and discussed character in his 'Preface' to his Naturalist play, *Miss Julie*, and this text continues to stand as one of the most well known on character in the history of dramatic character discourse. It is to this 'Preface' that discussion now turns as it starts to examine Naturalistic characters that look suspiciously post/humanist in form.

---

<sup>65</sup> The term and identification of the process of 'purification' originates with Latour who refers to it as a process bound to the rise of science and to the new critical tool of the laws of nature, which refused the hybrid forms of pre-modernity. Latour writes that the first Enlightenment thinkers, in applying this new critical tool, 'no longer saw anything in the hybrids of old but illegitimate mixtures that they had to purify by separating natural mechanisms from human passions, interests or ignorance. [...] The obscurity of the olden days, which illegitimately blended together social needs and natural reality, meanings and mechanisms, signs and things, gave way to a luminous dawn that cleanly separated material causality from human fantasy' (35).

### 5.3 Strindberg's Human Character: More than an Automaton, More than an Animal?

Over the years the word 'character' has taken on many meanings. Originally it no doubt meant the dominant trait in a person's soul-complex, and was confused with temperament. Later it became the middle-class expression for an automaton, so that an individual whose nature had once and for all set firm or adapted to a certain role in life, who had stopped growing, in short, was called a character, whereas someone who goes on developing, the skilful navigator on the river of life who does not sail with cleated sheets but tacks with every change in the wind in order to luff again, was called characterless. In a derogatory sense, of course, because he was so hard to catch, classify, and keep track of. This bourgeois concept of the immobility of the soul was transferred to the stage, which has always been dominated by the bourgeoisie. There a character became a man who was fixed and set, who invariably appeared drunk or comical or sad; and all that was needed to characterize him was to give him a physical defect, a club-foot, a wooden leg, a red nose, or some continually repeated phrase such as 'That's capital' or 'Barkis is willin', etc. [...] So I do not believe in simple stage characters, and the summary judgements that authors pass on people – this one is stupid, that one brutal, this one jealous, that one mean – ought to be challenged by naturalists, who know how richly complicated the soul is, and who are aware that 'vice' has a reverse side, which is very much like virtue (Strindberg, 'Preface' to *Miss Julie* 58-9).<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Throughout the following discussion of the 'Preface' to, and the play, *Miss Julie*, I have worked from Michael Robinson's translation of the texts. This is for two reasons: firstly, Robinson works, wherever possible, from '[Strindberg's] original manuscript augmented by changes to the first edition only where these may safely be ascribed to Strindberg himself' (Robinson xxxvii). What this means in practice in relation to Robinson's translation of *Miss Julie* is that he has restored passages to the text, which are evident in Strindberg's manuscript, that were excluded from its first printing by the publisher, Joseph Seligmann, unless such omissions and alterations are confidently attributable to Strindberg himself. In so doing, Robinson provides the fullest translation of Strindberg's 'Preface' and play in English. So, for example, in the 'Preface' to *Miss Julie*, Robinson has reinserted a section of a paragraph that, having been left out of the first printing of the play, has subsequently been left out of all other translations (including those by Elizabeth Sprigge, Walter Johnson, Harry G. Carlson, and Gregory Motton). These other translators, where they offer a note on their translation at all, either fail to specify the source of their translation and/or they name their goals as being to render the text more 'playable' in performance: Carlson, for instance, writes that his foremost objectives are 'attempt[ing] to render [Strindberg's] images into English with something approximating the impact they have (or had) in Swedish, even if it meant totally recasting certain metaphors to make them more meaningful to an audience[...] and to render his dialogue as playable as possible' (14). Given that my own focus is in analysing Strindberg's identification and construction of the human and of dramatic character, it has been important to work with a translation that is close to Strindberg's original text, and it is not clear that other translators have done so. My second reason for preferring Robinson's translation is that he offers detailed notes explaining his translation decisions in his 'Note on the Text' and 'Explanatory Notes' (the latter of which is not included in any systematic sense by the other translators), including notes on unfamiliar terms, choice of vocabulary and punctuation, and so forth. Despite my clear preference for Robinson's text, you will find, in the following pages that wherever Strindberg's choice of vocabulary or expression is particularly important to my analysis and argument, I provide a selection of alternative translations in footnotes, so that the veracity and persuasiveness of the evidence in relation to my argument may be ascertained.

In connecting wider cultural denotations for 'character' to its specifically dramatic one, Strindberg confirms a relationship of conceptions of real people with their theatrical representations. According to Strindberg, the traditional definition of character in the general cultural sense denoted a single, dominant trait and, as such, unsatisfactorily and *unrealistically* simplified the person's 'soul-complex'. The later middle-class conception of character, which he likens to an automaton, is similarly critiqued for its identification of an individual whose growth has been stunted and whose form has become fixed. Such a figure becomes evident on the bourgeois stage, writes Strindberg, in the shape of character types whose simple qualities neatly connect to their roles and to their appearances, all of which artificially cohere in a unity that is conventionally determined and easily recognisable. Such traditional unification of role, function, and appearance, by implication, locates character in a subordinate position to dramatic convention and to plot, which are rendered the determining factors of character's precise form and behaviour.

Such a simple, pre-programmed, and pre-determined automaton of the bourgeois stage has little to do with the complicated souls of the Naturalists, claims Strindberg, who locates his characters in opposition to, and in reaction against, them. What he means by this is that the characters of Naturalism, in the rich complexity of their characters or souls, exceed the simplistic conventions of genre and plot and, by implication, are capable of surprising each other and the audience; in short, they are more properly lifelike and human. However, to claim a clear opposition between the automaton and Strindberg's 'richly complicated [...] soul[s]'<sup>67</sup> is not, in fact, necessarily a straightforward matter, nor is it necessarily true. The Naturalist theatre of Zola and Strindberg, including Strindberg's play, *Miss Julie*, conceives of the human as a physical entity. The dramatic character, then, may have ceased to be represented as a simple, fixed, and predictable automaton of cultural convention with Strindberg and the Naturalists, but in being reconceived in natural terms as kin with animals, it becomes another kind of causally bound and (theoretically) predictable entity, such as is conceived by Zola.

In the universe of the Naturalist playwrights, the beast is not an other; the beast is, to some extent, within the human, a part of her and her nature, as Strindberg confirms by

---

<sup>67</sup> Motton also refers to the 'soul' as such (89) (although Motton's translation makes less of the soul's complexity). Sprigge, however, translates this section of the text as 'richness of the soul-complex' (64), which, in identifying the soul as a 'complex' – as an interconnected whole with many parts – confers upon it a systemic structure that corresponds, perhaps, more closely with Strindberg's discussion of character as a 'conglomerate' of natural and cultural parts than does the more simple and conventional term of 'soul'. (Johnson also prefers the term 'soul-complex' (76).)

his repeated references to his character, Miss Julie, as an animal. But if the human - if *Julie* - carries the beast within, then in what ways is she different to the animal? Given that the animal is conceived, in kind with the machine, as a determined entity, then are not Strindberg's characters equally as bound to the unyielding constraints and logic of determining forces as the simple automata of the bourgeois stage? In which ways do Strindberg's characters distinguish themselves as human and, thence, as identifiably lifelike modern characters?

The answer to the question, 'Are Julie and Jean animals or machines akin to the automata?' is 'yes'. However, a difference persists: Strindberg's characters are richly complicated and protean souls and, in being so, they are excessive of simple structures, including Zola's animal-machines. Whereas Zola's characters *are* beasts in the sense that the beast denotes physically determined and limited forms, Strindberg's characters, though they persist as being physically contingent, differentiate themselves by their inherent complexity, hybrid and systemic structure, and fundamental formlessness and 'characterless' quality ('Preface' 59).

Notably, the permeable and protean quality of Strindberg's characters is partially bound to Darwin's conception of nature, which unfixes natural, essential being from notions of stasis and permanence. It is, therefore, to Strindberg's view of the human that this chapter will now turn, which, by virtue of its Darwinist influences, conceives of character as locating on an evolving scale of humanness.

#### **5.4 Strindberg's Scale of Humanness**

Particularly important to the Naturalist's world picture was Darwin's theory of natural selection. In Darwin's narrative, the human being is cast in evolutionary terms, which deny him theistic interpretations of form and meaning. This universe is a materialistic one, which locates the human being as a higher primate, as kin with animals, and as causally predicated. Importantly, this narrative does not formulate a static conception of nature but an inherently dynamic one. Jane R. Goodall observes that 'Darwin's account of the origin of species restored drama to the natural order by shifting the focus from lifeless specimens' to an idea of species founded upon differences that are 'relative and unstable, so that organic forms were always in a process of becoming' (112). This position perhaps slightly overstates the case for change in the Darwinist universe; after all, as Gillian Beer notes, Darwinist theory is not merely concerned with process but also with stabilisation or



*preservation* (xix-xx).<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, stability is different to ‘lifeless’ fixity, and it is stability in combination with a dynamic of change that underpins Darwin’s theory of natural selection.

It is from such scientifically premised progressive or developmental models of human being (consider, also, the influential work of Auguste Comte, for example) that the Naturalists locate their critique of the depictions of ‘lifeless specimens’ of humanity on the nineteenth century stage: Zola condemns such lifeless specimens in their form as abstractions of Romantic drama; Strindberg, meanwhile, disparages the bourgeois stage’s automatons and replaces them, in *Miss Julie*, with more complex and, by definition, more lively and realistic figures. Following Darwin, ‘species’ is no longer accountable as something essentially fixed; indeed, the very notion of ‘species’ itself is put in doubt, which had the effect in the nineteenth century, writes Goodall, of ‘transferring attention from species to variety, and from there to the very point of difference that might lead to divergence. [...] [Darwin’s] curiosity was drawn less to forms in themselves than to their slippage and diversification’ (ibid).

Such an interest in variation can be identified in Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, with several interesting implications for human identity arising out of the play’s themes and treatment of character. To start with, the playwright chooses a theme for his play that he claims as being of ‘lasting interest’ (‘Preface’ 57): namely, the ‘problem of rising or falling on the social ladder, of higher or lower, better or worse, man or woman’ (ibid). Strindberg’s thesis is that people are in flux, situated in a social landscape that is formulated out of Darwinist ideas. For the character of Jean, the natural and ‘true’ force of Darwinism<sup>69</sup> has replaced the old order of the aristocracy, which he deems mere ‘[s]uperstition, prejudices, dinned into us from childhood’ (87). In the place of the traditional aristocracy, a new kind of naturally predicated social order is hailed, one tied to evolutionary narratives and founded upon ‘natural’ merit. Jean, says:

I wasn’t born to bow and scrape, there’s something to me, I’ve got character, just let me get hold of that first branch, and you’ll soon see me climb! I may be a servant today, but next year I’ll have my own place, and in ten years I’ll be a

---

<sup>68</sup> Consider the full title of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, for example, where the subtitle reads: *the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

<sup>69</sup> Strindberg observes in his ‘Preface’: ‘the fact of the matter is, ‘Darwinism’ has existed in every age [...]: it is just that we have discovered and formulated it now!’ (59-60). (Note: This section of the ‘Preface’ is missing from Sprigge, Johnson, and Motton although it is included in Carlson.)

landed gentleman. Then I'll go to Romania and get myself a decoration; why I might – only *might*, mind you – end up a count! (87-8)

The metaphor of tree climbing, here, which conjures Jean's rise through the social ranks, denotes strength of character, where such strength is implicitly indicative of Jean's powers of self-determination. In this quote, Jean is expressing his desire to climb the natural-social order by re-creating himself into new identities. Given the Naturalists' general tendency 'to see animal behaviour in the patterns of human society' (Rebellato, 'Naturalism and Symbolism' 11), which is manifestly evident in *Miss Julie*, Jean's metaphorical reference to the tree also conjures Darwin's tree of life and so implies that Jean's social rise is naturally predicated and significant in human evolutionary terms. In short, Jean's transformation from servant to, possibly, count, points not merely to personal and social progression but to evolutionary progression, too: as Jean rises he renders himself, by implication and in the process, *more ideally human*: for example, more rational, ruthless, adaptive, and successful. Indeed, Jean is positioned by Strindberg as constituting the future of the human species: 'The servant Jean is the type who founds a species' having 'now brought himself up to be a future nobleman' ('Preface' 61). At the very least, Strindberg suggests (albeit with considerable irony), he 'will probably end up the proprietor of a hotel; and even if *he* does not become a Romanian count, his son will probably go to university and possibly become a government official' ('Preface' 62). Julie, in contrast, will fall, hampered by the aristocratic but now irrelevant belief in a code of honour (ibid) and her natural and cultural degeneracy ('Preface' 60), since not only is she merely a woman but, educated, she is but a 'half-woman'.

In short, Strindberg's play is founded on a Darwinist-inspired dynamic of change and evolutionary principles of competition, struggle, survival, and extinction. 'Reality' is conceived as something fundamentally *naturally* ordered but it is valued according to a culturally constructed hierarchical scale stretching between dichotomous relations, with value accorded to one of the poles (i.e. rising, higher, better, man). Accordingly, for Strindberg, some characters are deemed more human than others and such inequality, though it is culturally ascribed, is considered 'natural'. Such a scale or order of species and sub-species is authorised for Strindberg by Darwin's evolutionary narrative, which is interpreted as an inevitably 'brutal, cynical, [and] heartless drama' ('Preface' 57).

So it is that the characters that are most human for Strindberg are those that are most capable of rising, via strength of character and self-determined acts, through a

branching and proliferating tree of (natural-social) life. On this tree, Kristin is located at the bottom of the scale as ‘a female slave’ and as being ‘like an animal’<sup>70</sup> (Strindberg, ‘Preface’ 63); in short, she is a lesser kind of human. Jean, meanwhile, is positioned as a ‘lord of creation’ (*Miss Julie* 98), a self-determining man. The implication is that the human can be anything – like Kristin, a slave or animal, incapable of free thought or action, a purely determined creature; or he can be a ‘lord of creation’ (‘Preface’ 60) like Jean, god-like, manifesting new worlds and forms by the power of his will and mind, setting the laws of creation as opposed to living by them and, as such, rendering himself free.

The notion of self-determination is an important one as it relates to the identity of the human in Strindberg’s dramatic universe and it is one to which discussion shall return shortly. In the meantime, another question presses for attention, which is, what kind of human is Julie? Kristin is a lesser human; Jean is a higher entity and posited, by Strindberg, as pointing the way towards the future of the species. But where is Julie to be positioned? She is, after all, the eponymous ‘heroine’. But the answer to this question is not easy to negotiate. In some ways, she is harder ‘to catch, classify, and keep track of’ (‘Preface’ 59) than the other characters: conjured, variously, as an aristocratic lady, an animal, and a conglomeration of cultural experiences, she repeatedly slips between categories.

### **5.5 Miss Julie: Breaching the Borders of ‘The Human’**

One of Strindberg’s objectives in *Miss Julie* seems to be to distinguish his characters as varieties of human located on a hierarchical scale: Jean is identified as the ‘lord of creation’ and, in being so, is positioned foremost on the scale; and the women – Julie and Kristin – are deemed inferior as kinds of ‘animal’. The play’s opening line, uttered by Jean, is ‘Miss Julie’s quite crazy again tonight; absolutely crazy!’ (71). Although the association of the Swedish word for ‘crazy’ – *galen* - is lost in translation, Robinson informs us that it implies ‘that Julie is on heat, like an animal’<sup>71</sup> (294). As such, Miss Julie’s human status is immediately foregrounded as at issue as Strindberg locates her as a

---

<sup>70</sup> Sprigge, Johnson, Carlson, and Motton all refer to Kristin as ‘a female slave’ although none refer to her as an animal, and Robinson gives no explanation as to why he identifies Kristin as such, although his use of the word in reference to her ‘hypocrisy’, which he describes as being ‘unconscious’ (63), gestures towards a failure to achieve the intelligent and ‘human’ self-awareness of Julie or Jean.

<sup>71</sup> Robinson is the only translator to supply a note on the original Swedish word. Sprigge and Johnson also use ‘crazy’; Motton prefers ‘mad’ (101).

sexualised animal, ruled by her animal passions and instincts as opposed to being characterised in more human terms as being, by implication, self-controlled and self-determining. This is an animal conceived in naturalistic terms with the self located as causally bound and fixed.

Towards the end of the play Julie is again located as a determined creature, devoid of powers of self-direction. As Julie starts to recognise the consequences of having slept with Jean and to suffer the tiredness of having been up all night, she says to Jean: 'I can't go on. I can't stay. Help me! I'm so tired, so dreadfully tired! Order me! Just set me in motion – I can't think on my own any more, I can't act!' (98). To this, Jean replies, 'Now you see what a pathetic creature you are! Why do you puff yourselves up so, and stick your noses in the air as if you were the lords of creation?' (ibid). Here, the suggestion is that Julie has behaved or performed snobbishly and conceitedly as if she is a kind of god - a performance that is bound to, and prescribed by, her aristocratic mask. Jean's words suggest that, in fact, underneath it all she is but a 'pathetic creature', an animal, incapable of thinking for herself. In this sense and in this case, Strindberg means to distinguish between self (actor) and role (mask), the former constituting that which is natural, authentic, and fundamental, the latter that which is culturally constituted and superficially performed. In Jean's view, Julie's aristocratic role equates to nothing more substantial than 'superstition, prejudices, dinned into us from childhood' (87).

It is in contrast to Julie, 'the animal', that Jean comes into view as 'the human': it is Jean who, exercising a kind of hypnotic power over Julie when he instructs her that her only way out is to kill herself, takes on the identity of intelligent and creative programmer to Julie's animal-automaton form.<sup>72</sup> Certainly he is more manifestly and actively creative and self-determining than any other character in the play: it is Jean's creativity, his will, and his mind that direct the course of the play: it is his intentional actions that most explicitly initiate the plot: for example, it is Jean's manipulation of Julie into bed, which instigates Julie's immediate crisis and, of course, it is Jean who directs her to take her own life at the end of the play.

Strindberg stresses in his 'Preface' that the position of women generally is inferior to men, naturally locating between men and children: 'woman, this stunted form of

---

<sup>72</sup> In fact, the uncertain identity of Julie as an animal-automaton is highlighted if the translations of *Miss Julie* are compared. Robinson's translation, 'Just set me in motion' (98), carries mechanical connotations. Sprigge, Johnson, and Motton, meanwhile, write Julie's instruction to Jean as an order to command her 'like a dog'.

human being [...] stands between man, the lord of creation, the creator of culture, [and the child]’ (60). Strindberg clearly means to distinguish Julie as being distinct from the ideal human figure of Jean. But is Julie really a stunted form of human being, a kind of animal that is moving inexorably towards extinction, which is implied by Strindberg’s insistence upon Julie’s suicide at the end of the play?<sup>73</sup> There is some difficulty in positioning her so. Strindberg’s attempt to identify his lifelike characters by recourse to human-nonhuman identifying strategies is problematic. Firstly, Strindberg undoes his misogynistic assertion of women’s natural, secondary, and, by implication, fixed position in the ordering of the human by locating them in a Darwinian landscape, which opens up Julie, as well as Jean, to the possibility of variation and change. Strindberg’s Naturalistic characters are social animals formulated by, and located in, a natural-social world premised upon the metaphor of the tree of life, which conceives species (including the human) as breaking down into endlessly branching and proliferating varieties such as the half-woman, Julie, and the ambitious count-to-be, Jean. Humanity, premised on such a scale, is accounted indeterminate and changeable. Indeed, Julie’s very deviancy of form as a hybrid ‘man-hating half-woman’ (‘Preface’ 61) is evidence of the slippage and diversification that is perceived as possible in nature and that clarifies natural identities as being dynamically in flux. Secondly, by locating Julie on a *scale* of humanness, which incorporates animal and god parts (Jean is ‘the lord of creation’ whereas the child is, presumably, simple and animal-like in its form), Strindberg identifies her as being kin with animals *and* gods, which means that any attempt to formulate absolute and permanent distinctions between kinds is undermined.

In fact, an intriguing ontological problem arises out of such identification of Julie as locating between self-determining (god-like) *human*, on the one hand, and non-self-determining (animal- and machine-like) nonhuman child, on the other. As a woman – or, more particularly, as a woman-man – is Julie conceived as possessing self-determination and, thereby, as being human, or is she comprehended as a child, which, by implication, is accounted a determined product?<sup>74</sup> Certainly, Julie is foregrounded as being complexly

---

<sup>73</sup> In fact, as Margaretha Fahlgren observes in relation to the prevailing conventions of the day, there was no necessity ‘for a woman in the nobility like Julie to commit suicide after having slept with a servant’ (28). Consequently, Julie’s action stands out as being odd for it breaches Naturalist dramaturgy’s tight causal logic: Fahlgren discerns that with this act the playwright goes ‘far beyond the naturalistic struggle between the sexes that Strindberg wanted to portray’ (ibid).

<sup>74</sup> It is worth noting that even with the child we are in awkward territory since the male child grows up to be a man and so the question of when the switch from determined child to self-determining man occurs remains open.

formed and motivated by natural and cultural parts that construct and constrain her. The question is, does she have any freedom of self-determination? Inserting Julie in between the two poles of an ontological dichotomy, which locates the human with (god-like) 'man' and the not-human with the (animal-like) child, Strindberg transforms a binary of distinct kinds into a comparative scale. Repositioned on this scale, men and children are identified as having qualities and parts in common, which include the capacity to act as self-aware agents and creators of culture and to be determined products or automata composed of parts. In the process, Strindberg undoes his ideal formulation of the human, which clearly locates him with the self-determining (male) creator, Jean, who is envisaged as 'found[ing] a species' ('Preface' 61). When Strindberg characterises Julie as a woman-man hybrid who inhabits the middle ground between the identities of creator and creation, he opens up the human – and, by implication, *all* humans – to compatibilist ontology and to the potential of self-directed transformation. Furthermore, situating his characters as evolving creatures in a physical universe, Strindberg clarifies mind as a material matter and consciousness a late evolutionary add-on. Certainly, Strindberg understands mind in material terms. In relating his formulation of dialogue, Strindberg writes that he 'allowed [his] characters' brains to work irregularly as they do in real life, where no subject is ever entirely exhausted before one mind discovers by chance in another mind a *cog* in which to engage [my italics]' ('Preface' 63). Elsewhere, he writes that the mind is conceived as a product of physical processes, as opposed to a mysterious thing distinct from, and precedent to, the body: of 'the psychological process' ('Preface' 64), Strindberg writes that '[w]e want to see the strings, look at the machinery, examine the double-bottomed box, try the magic ring to find the seam, and examine the cards to discover how they are marked' (ibid). In short, mind and will, conceived in physical terms, become equally as attributable to women and children as they are to men, and may even be attributable to animals and machines as well.

In fact, Strindberg allows for the possibility that Julie has a mind. In describing her motivations for her suicide he cites his psychological, as well as physiological, treatment of her (ibid), although he is quick to describe her mind as being of a sort that is weak or 'simple' ('Preface' 58). But the significant fact is that Julie does and must have a mind, which is physiologically constituted and, this being the case, she is just as capable, in principle, of determining and performing herself as is Jean. In short, Julie functions to breach the borders of Strindberg's ideal 'human' in *Miss Julie* and in the process

foregrounds a post/humanist model of identity and subjectivity that points the way towards future natural-cultural ‘becomings’ that might be at least partially self-navigated.

### **5.6 Self-Navigating Cyborgs: Strindberg’s Characterless Characters**

In his play, *Miss Julie*, Strindberg is not working in the realm of metaphysical speculation but purportedly scientific inquiry. The playwright may talk in terms of ‘soul’, describing it as ‘richly complicated’, but his characters are motivated by ‘an abundance of circumstances’ (Strindberg, ‘Preface’ 58), which constitute a ‘multiplicity of motives’ (ibid) that are causally predicated. It is an elegant observation of Chris Megson’s that identifies Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* as ‘remain[ing] unrivalled in Naturalism for its concentrated distillation of determinist causality’ (‘Introduction’ xiv), with its focused demonstration of ‘the chains of causality – that is, the material, psychological, even physiological, determinants of the action’ (Megson, ‘Introduction’ ix). Certainly, Strindberg’s condensed treatment of Julie as the conglomeration of a ‘multiplicity of motives’ (Strindberg, ‘Preface’ 58) elaborates a complex causal web, constituted of many, and often conflicting, culturally and naturally constituted parts. Julie, for example, as an aristocrat, knows she should behave in a certain manner in relation to the servants; as an ‘animal’, however, she appears to be overwhelmed by her desire for Jean. In fact, as Rebellato observes in relation to the character, Strindberg lists no less than ‘thirteen different reasons to explain Julie’s action, from the “festive atmosphere of Midsummer Night” to the fact that she is menstruating during the action of the play’ (‘Naturalism and Symbolism’ 14). There is a strong sense in this that Strindberg’s character, and the mind of the character, do not precede the circumstances or natural and cultural parts that go into making her but are, in fact, equivalent with them. The fact is that no single, simple motivation is attributable to Julie and, in consequence, she is ‘hard to catch, classify, and keep track of’ (Strindberg, ‘Preface’ 59), despite the fact that each constituent part of her is causally bound.

Strindberg’s characters, including or, perhaps, particularly, Julie, are described by the playwright as being characterless, by which he implies a model of selfhood that is ever developing, ever growing, conforming to a natural state of becoming. This state of becoming is, as I have suggested, intrinsically tied to Darwin’s evolutionary narrative. However, it is also bound to Strindberg’s conception of the human as a cultural being. Strindberg’s characters are complex natural-cultural hybrids: neither pure products of

biological or physical processes nor entirely culturally formulated, the characters' borders are blurred with the automaton and the animal at the same time that they constitute complex 'conglomerates'<sup>75</sup> of past and present stages of culture, bits out of books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, torn shreds of once fine clothing now turned to rags, exactly as the human soul is patched together' (Strindberg, 'Preface' 60).

The character Julie's characterlessness is something of which she herself is perfectly aware. In a moment of acute self-consciousness, Julie identifies her character or soul as a product, a conglomerate, as opposed to anything approaching a stable and autonomous idealist-empiricist subjectivity. Asking who is to blame for 'all this' - for her form as a 'half-woman and half-man' (Strindberg, *Miss Julie* 108) - Julie wonders, is it

My father, my mother, myself? Myself? But I have no self of my own? I haven't a thought I didn't get from my father, not an emotion I didn't get from my mother, and this last idea - that everyone's equal - I got from him, my fiancé - which is why I called him a swine! How can it be my own fault, then? Shift all the blame on to Jesus, as Kristin did? - No, I'm too proud for that, and too intelligent - thanks to my father's teachings (ibid).

For Julie, no coherent or original self exists. As Strindberg explains, 'I have not attributed everything to what [Julie] inherited from her mother nor put the whole blame on her period, nor just settled for "immorality" nor merely preached morality' ('Preface' 58). Julie knows herself to be a patchwork construction of elements that derive from her environment and from people and ideas that are external to her and yet that constitute the person that she is, with the implication being that every new person she meets, and every new idea that she is exposed to, potentially produces different thoughts in, and actions from, her.

Such a conception of selfhood is post/humanist in nature. Indeed, when Strindberg identifies realistic 'souls' as characterless in the part of the 'Preface' that was quoted at length earlier in this chapter, he draws upon the metaphor of the 'skilful navigator on the river of life' (59). This navigator is a figure he articulates as being adaptive, as one who 'tacks with every change in the wind', and as being, by implication, *indeterminate*.

---

<sup>75</sup> Only Carlson also uses the term 'conglomerates' (67). Sprigge and Johnson prefer the term 'conglomerations' and Motton chooses 'agglomerations' (89), although this section of the text is otherwise commensurate across all the translations in its choice of vocabulary and meaning. In fact, there is little to distinguish between the terms, with each one generally denoting a collection or cluster of things formed as a coherent mass, although 'conglomerate' (*OED*), in its geological associations, indicates a composition of pre-existing fragments of rocks, which seems to correspond figuratively with Strindberg's description of 'souls' (characters).



Strikingly, the analogy of character (understood as the representation of human people) as a navigator of a boat on the river of life equates to that of the early model of system feedback as set out by Norbert Wiener, the pioneer of the new science, cybernetics, which explains the study of control and communications in machines, animals, and humans. In identifying the etymology of the term, *cyberneticus*, Wiener observes the significance of the notion of the ‘steersman’ to systems. Allison Muri recounts:

In 1948, when Norbert Wiener coined the term [...], he based it upon an analogy of steering ships or machine governors: ‘We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the name *cyberneticus*, which we form from [the Greek word for] *steersman*. In choosing this term, we wish to recognize that the first significant paper on feedback mechanisms is an article on governors, which was published by Clerk Maxwell in 1868, and that *governor* is derived from a Latin corruption of [the Greek word for *steersman*]. We also wish to refer to the fact that the steering engines of a ship are indeed one of the earliest and best developed forms of feedback mechanisms’ (Muri and Wiener qtd. in Muri 141-2).

The idea of feedback mechanisms and, in particular, of the *governor* (a device such as an engine, which regulates the speed of a machine) is, then, traceable to the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Strindberg’s particular use of the analogy is congruent with ‘three-hundred-year-old metaphors for human consciousness or identity as pilot, steersman, or monarch in the brain communicating via material mechanisms with body systems and external environment’ (Muri 142). Muri argues that the image of a dominant mechanism such as a steersman, pilot, sovereign, or governor as controlling the body of an individual who is conceptualised in mechanical terms, is, in fact, ‘reminiscent of early modern tropes for the human-machine’ (142).

Strindberg’s metaphor of the self as a ship’s navigator, then, where the self is imaged as tacking ‘with every change in the wind’, posits the self as connected to shifting conditions in a way that is implicitly systemic in form and articulates the self as protean and in process. Importantly, it also casts the self or, more specifically, the mind, in sovereign terms. Characters, in short, are predicated as natural and cultural, as being explicitly responsive to the environment in which they find themselves, and as being *self-aware*: Julie, a product of multiple, complexly interacting parts improvises her ‘performance’ according to changing conditions because she is able to observe herself and chart her position and course in relation to her environment. When Julie observes herself

as a product of influences deriving from her father, mother, and fiancé, she splits herself in two as an ‘observer’ of self and as an object of ‘observation’.

How it is possible for characters to be both a product of natural-cultural forces and a self-conscious, self-navigating subjects is unclear. However, it is possible that Strindberg’s philosophical and dramaturgical treatment of character gestures towards an emergentist model of mind for the human being represented. In Strindberg’s ‘Preface’ he identifies mind as a phenomenon or state tied to natural parts, processes, and causally bound laws; in an equivalent manner he writes that characters, forever tacking with the changing winds of circumstance, are to be discovered in their ‘strings’ and ‘machinery’ (Strindberg, ‘Preface’ 64). To find character, we must ‘examine the double-bottomed box’ (ibid): character’s mystery, its magic, lies in the machinery of moving parts. In a corresponding manner, emergentism posits mind as an ‘effect’ of material parts and processes. Notably, too, it identifies *complexity* as the condition that is requisite for mind’s materialization as a qualitatively distinct phenomenon which, in being distinct, proffers the possibilities of self-consciousness and even free will.<sup>76</sup>

Strindberg’s characters represent, of course, complex conglomerates and self-aware ‘cyborgs’ of individuality and are presented as attempting to navigate themselves through the natural-social world. Jean, in particular, is represented as an ideal and self-making man of the future who means to move up in the world. The way in which Strindberg represents him as doing so intriguingly brings us back to the notion of the human self as a performer, as will be explored in the next and last section.

### **5.7 ‘Theatricality and Authenticity’: Strindberg’s Natural Actors**

Surprised by Jean’s eloquence of language and use of French, Julie is prompted to ask him, ‘Where did you learn to speak like that? You’ve spent a lot of time at the theatre, is that it?’ (77). From here, Julie goes on to demand that Jean play the part of a gentleman for her, asking him to drink her health and to kneel and kiss her shoe. Jean complies with all of this, performing his part of gentleman in apparently exemplary fashion: Miss Julie applauds him: ‘Excellent! You should have been an actor’ (78).

---

<sup>76</sup> For an explanation of how emergence may be interpreted as elaborating the appearance, or the fact, of free will and free actions, I refer the reader to Chapter Two’s section on An Emergentist Model of Mind and, in particular, to the discussion that relates to Philip Clayton’s distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ emergence.

It is my suggestion that Jean *is* an actor by nature. He has not been trained in the skills of imitation, but this does not mean that he is without skill. Jean says, 'I've read lots of novels and been to the theatre. Besides, I've heard posh people talk. That's what's taught me most' (84). Jean, then, demonstrates a 'natural' aptitude and self-determined will to imitate, to *become* something other than he 'naturally' is. This talent of imitation renders him fundamentally a natural and cultural being. By reading other people's stories, woven by endlessly creative and flexible words; by watching other people's performances in, one may assume, mainly conventional theatrical representations of the world and of character; and by listening to 'posh people talk', Jean has learnt to perform himself otherwise.

Driven by an ambition to rise in a competitive social landscape, Jean turns to performance to achieve his ends. In this sense, Jean is an actor but by actor I do not mean to evoke a distinction between actor and role such as was elucidated earlier in relation to Strindberg's splitting of Julie into natural, animal actor and artificial, aristocratic role. In that instance, Strindberg seemed to be insisting that in enacting the performance of one sort of culturally composed character, Julie remained discretely another authentic and natural sort (*herself*). In referring to Jean as an actor *here*, I mean to say that Jean is a 'natural actor' who is, or becomes, indivisible from the parts he plays. In playing the role of gentleman Jean is, or very soon will be, so. Certainly, it is difficult to distinguish in this play between moments of truth and performance with Jean, between that which is unthinkingly and feelingly done, and that which is intentionally enacted in order to manipulate Julie. Jean seems always to be conscious of himself as a performer in the eyes of others, conscious of his place, identity, and abilities, and of what he might become. In short, he is an observer of himself. And thus it is that Strindberg's play implies that that which is most human in people who are otherwise merely kinds of animals existing in an evolutionary narrative of competition and struggle, is their self-awareness and their powers of self-creation, which are linked to their ability to perform.

This natural propensity for self-performance is, of course, an idea that was explored in Chapter Four's discussion of Juan Luis Vives's fable that marks the wonder of 'man' as lying in his talent to seem, or to be/become, otherwise. This idea was taken up in relation to Shakespeare's character, Hamlet, whose manifesto on acting shares correspondances with Constantin Stanislavky's theory of the actor as a garden *and* gardener of the 'seeds' of the self, such that subjectivity unites mind and body and nature

and culture into mutually refining relationships. In Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, we find a corresponding model of protean selfhood, which comprises a systemically organised self-sculpting, self-performing natural-cultural hybrid. The natural-cultural cyborg actor, in playing an-other, becomes an-other.

This conception of acting chimes closely with George Henry Lewes's advocacy of 'natural acting' (*On Actors and the Art of Acting* 105). Lewes has already been referred to in this thesis as the acknowledged originator of the emergentist model of mind.<sup>77</sup> In approaching mind, Lewes insists upon subjective and objective methodological approaches and views the human as a natural and social creature. He writes that human psychology is tied to biology and the social medium, the latter of which, he insists, 'is not simply an addition' but is 'a factor which permeates the whole composition of the mind' (*Problems of Life and Mind* 32). Lewes continues:

In relation to Nature, man is animal; in relation to Culture, he is social. As the ideal world rises above and transforms the sensible world, so Culture transforms Nature physically and morally, fashioning the forest and the swamp into garden and meadow-lands, the selfish savage into the sympathetic citizen. The organism adjusts itself to the external medium; it creates, and is in turn modified by, the social medium for Society is the product of human feelings, and its existence is [...] developed with the feelings which in turn it modifies and enlarges at each stage (*Problems of Life and Mind* 32).

In short, nature is inextricable from culture and vice versa. Nature and culture are intimately coupled in the form of the social animal of the human, her formation of mind, and the society that simultaneously forms and is formed by her.

Lewes, in his insistence upon a dual approach to the human as a social animal formed of subjective experience and objective physical processes, blurs the categories of nature and culture in relation to the self. This carries over into his conception of the 'natural actor'. Writing of the French comedian Bouffé, Lewes states that he admires the actor because 'he represents the nature of the character; the "stuff" of human nature is plastic in his hands and out of it he carves images which all the world can recognize as true' (qtd. in Lynn M. Voskuil 46). The actor, in effect, sculpts the nature of himself, a nature that is conceived in distinctly malleable terms.

---

<sup>77</sup> Although I am not aware that Strindberg was explicitly familiar with Lewes's scientific work, Joseph R. Roach, Jr. asserts that Lewes 'enjoyed wider recognition from his contemporaries than is generally appreciated today' (312) and informs us that by 1877, 'his scientific works had been translated into French, German, Italian, Hungarian, Polish, and Russian' (ibid). In short, the influence of Lewes's theories had extended into Europe by the later years of the nineteenth century.

In fact, Lewes's advocacy of natural acting, as Voskuil rightly remarks, extends its implications beyond the relatively narrow confine of theatre to comprise 'an organizing typology for understanding the self and society' (22). According to Voskuil, Victorian theatricality involves some of the themes and motifs that continue to be familiar today, including, for example, the ideas of masking and unmasking, spectacle, and self-display; Victorian authenticity, meanwhile, likewise encompasses many familiar ideas, including notions of interiority, nature, sincerity, truthfulness, and coherent selfhood. However, Voskuil's observation is that 'in many Victorian contexts, the meanings of these clustered terms were not irretrievably opposed' (12) as they have become in late twentieth century theory. She writes:

'Theatricality' and 'authenticity' [...] are perhaps known best as ontological descriptors, terms that capture the concern with subjectivity that has dominated our theory in recent years. By now, at this late stage in the development of postmodern and poststructuralist theory, the Destabilized Subject is no less familiar than ... well, than the Sincere Victorian (4).

Voskuil's observation is that the tale that is commonly told of the 'Sincere Victorian' (i.e. authentic, natural, and true) is inaccurate and unhelpful, as inaccurate and unhelpful, I argue (and as I argued in Chapter Three), as poststructuralism's decentred subject, which threatened the death of character in the late twentieth century. Voskuil's argument is that in nineteenth century England, views of acting and, by implication, of selfhood were more sophisticated, and less naïvely simple, than are often assumed: 'theatricality and authenticity often functioned dynamically together to construct the symbolic typologies by which the English knew themselves as individuals, as a public, and as a nation' (2).

Lewes's subtle configuration of nature and culture in the practice of the actor has implications for notions of selfhood. Lewes remarks that the actor 'is a spectator of his own tumult; and though moved by it, can yet so master it as to select from it only these elements which suit his purpose' ('Actors on Acting' 351). Elsewhere, contemplating the actor's art, Lewes quotes the French nineteenth century actor, François-Joseph Talma who, in reflecting upon his own process, recalls how he found himself 'involuntarily turning [his] gaze inwards, and found that the actor was unconsciously studying the man, and catching nature in the act' (qtd. in Lewes, 'On the Art of Acting' 351). When Lewes elaborates upon the art of the actor – his cultivation of the garden or seeds of himself in the development of his part – he means also to elaborate upon the construction of the

human self. Lewes observes that with the actor and the human self's theatricalised self-awareness and knowledge, they each have the ability to be performer and audience at the same moment and to immediately metamorphose natural feeling into artifice: 'We are all spectators of ourselves' (Lewes, *ibid*). Though the natural and artificial parts of the actor/self are considered separately, they function as a unit, 'the various selves cooperating as a coherent whole that feels, acts, and watches simultaneously' (Voskuil 53).

Lewes's descriptions of the human self and actor posit her as authentically theatrical or, to put it differently, naturally artificial. Strindberg's human characters are also formulated thus: Julie and Jean are both psychologically dense conglomerates of natural and cultural parts who demonstrate self-awareness and a capacity to sculpt themselves differently, partially via performance. It is by means of his performances of himself that Jean re-makes himself, integrating cultural structures and forms such as are derived from other people, novels, and plays into his constitution in order to render himself other. Julie, although she is presented as being too weak at the end of the play to do anything other than what she is told, re-creates herself and is re-created as a 'spectacle of a desperate struggle against nature' ('Preface' 61) via her particular cultural experiences and, in the process, transforms into a 'man-hating half-woman' ('Preface' 60). Particular cultural influences and experiences have re-made her as a 'creature[] of uncertain sex' ('Preface' 60-1): culture, in short, has changed Julie's very nature. Importantly, via such self-performances, Strindberg appears to undo any orthodox modern notions that an original self – be this self naturally or metaphysically constituted – exists, and the human is instead portrayed as a creator and creation in a form of character that is distinct from, and exceeds, the play's action and dialogue at the same time as it continues, inescapably, to constitute the play's product.

But what of the quality of free will that this chapter held up in its earlier discussion to be characteristic of modern (*human*) character? Do Strindberg's Naturalistic characters Jean and Julie ever really demonstrate the free will that Murphet identifies as being bound to modern dramatic character's constitution as such? It is possible to argue that they are ultimately no more than causally determined natural-cultural 'animal-machines' or cyborgs who, though they achieve human status via their qualities of self-awareness and consciousness, lack that other ostensibly 'human' identifying ingredient, free will. Jean and Julie are decentred subjects in the sense that they are pushed and

pulled by multiple parts and forces, refused anything like an ordinary and autonomous self. However, unlike Zola's conception of animals and machines, which deems them inescapably determined and thereby more-or-less fixed entities, Strindberg's natural actors, though materially constituted, are *complex* souls and, as such, seem to demonstrate some limited freedom to self-evolve. These characters' very complexity of interacting parts – natural and cultural – and their location in a complex natural-cultural world render them ambiguous creatures and inserts the possibility of free will. It is feasible, of course, that the 'excessive' and self-directed nature of such a modern character as Julie is illusory, merely the effect of a system of selfhood so complex that behaviour only *seems* unpredictable; Rebellato seems to suggest as much when he recognises Julie's 'multiplicity of motives' ('Naturalism and Symbolism' 14) as creating 'rich ambiguities in the play' (ibid). However, Rebellato also, intriguingly, links the play's 'psychological density' to the question, 'Is Julie's fate truly inevitable?' (ibid), and in so doing, hints at the possibility that the characters demonstrate free will. Whether they do or not, the play does not answer but in the sense that the possibility exists that they behave otherwise – that Julie may exit the stage to commit suicide but she may change her mind – so Jean and Julie stand as modern, lifelike, and 'human' characters who manage to maintain their naturally artificial, subjective and objective forms.

## Chapter Six

### Sarah Kane's Dramatic Worlds: Moving Beyond Character

#### 6.1 Sarah Kane's Characters: The Story So Far

In the Introduction to Sarah Kane's *Complete Works*, David Greig observes: 'The struggle of the self to remain intact has moved from civil war, into the family, into the couple, into the individual and finally into the theatre of psychosis: the mind itself' (xvi). With Kane's last play, *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), it appears that this struggle of the self to remain intact is finally lost as the mind, which is 'the subject of these bewildered fragments' (*4.48* 210), comes apart, deprived of all worldly borders.<sup>78</sup>

Greig's observation of the apparently unerring narrowing of focus that is evident in Kane's presentation of character - from the macrocosmic context of socially constituted identity down to the microcosmic mind of an individual consciousness - is an important one and it has been taken up, with enthusiasm, in various forms, by a host of academics writing on the subject of character and subjectivity. For these critics, importantly, the changing focus is bound to a change in character form. Accordingly, while individual commentaries offer particular slants and theories, they each cohere around the notion that Kane's first play, *Blasted* (1995), presents us with recognisable characters and unified subjectivities, whereas her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, posits character and subjectivity as having died.

Graham Saunders, arguably the voice most authoritatively and comprehensively connected to the discourse of Kane, routinely observes that '[t]he opening scene of *Blasted* is firmly grounded in the theatrical traditions of Naturalism and psychological realism' (*Love Me or Kill Me* 41). By asserting such, Saunders is indirectly gesturing towards a certain way of understanding and locating the human being. He does not, himself, clarify the model of selfhood that attaches to the character of Naturalism. However, given his observation elsewhere that 'one of Kane's main intentions from *Blasted* onwards was to break down traditional forms of characterisation based on the conventions of realism and naturalism' (*About Kane* 2-3), he would appear to connect 'traditional forms of characterisation' with realistic and naturalistic conventions. Thus, by

---

<sup>78</sup> All quotes taken from, and references made to, Sarah Kane's plays derive from her *Complete Plays*. London: Methuen, 2001.



implication, he connects a psychologically coherent and constituted individual, from whom plot and dialogue apparently derive, to the Ibsenite form<sup>79</sup> and to the opening scene of Kane's play, *Blasted*.

Such psychological coherence and autonomy for character, which maintains character as an individual speaker and agent, and its identification in Kane's early plays, seems to be confirmed by Ehren Fordyce when he identifies character's dramaturgical treatment in Kane's last two plays as marking its 'death', 'to use Elinor Fuchs's phrase' (108). In commentary that functions to confirm Saunders's view of character, Fordyce writes:

In aesthetic terms, the dramatic technique of character falls apart in Kane's plays. Kane begins writing plays with characters who display recognisable psychology. Eventually her characters crumble into the empty spaces of interpersonal speech and lose boundaries between selves, to resemble nebulous residue of language as system. Finally, she resorts to a dramaturgy of disembodied voices, where dialogue occurs between juxtaposed fragments of what the Austrian playwright Elfriede Jelinek has called '*Sprachfläche*', or 'language surfaces' (104).

In effect, through the course of Kane's plays, psychology becomes replaced by language as character's principal ingredient, a language that, in its ostensible autonomy, renders character a *spoken*, as opposed to speaking, subject. Thus reduced to a kind of conglomeration of fragmentary language forms, character and self are rendered permeable entities in flux and both, effectively, are dissolved.

Julie Waddington recognises just such a phenomenon when she describes the 'dissolution' of character in Kane's last two plays, *Crave* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis*. In a chapter entitled 'Posthumanist identities in Sarah Kane', Waddington identifies the movement from character to subject as correlating with a movement from a Cartesian view of subjectivity, which she distinguishes as being (liberal) humanist, to a postmodern denial that any such subjectivity exists. In the first three plays – *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* (1996), and *Cleansed* (1998) – Waddington observes character as a formal category under experimentation, and as shifting through the course of the plays from idealist to materialist forms of subjectivity (145). In the first three plays, character is deemed to survive, albeit in a dramaturgy that is set upon challenging it. So, for example, the character of Ian, in *Blasted*, is identified as starting the play as an 'I'-centred subject who

---

<sup>79</sup> The reference to Ibsen here is not adhoc. As Saunders helpfully explains, 'Kane said in interview that "the first section was influenced by Ibsen"' (*Love Me or Kill Me* 41).

is in charge and, as such, demonstrates a Cartesian subjectivity: 'Ian is presented at the outset of the play as the main protagonist who, as evidenced by his manipulation of both dialogue and action, is master of the situation he finds himself in and of those he finds himself with' (Waddington 143). However, the montage of images in scene five finally locate him as a materially reduced, and constituted, human being. Waddington observes:

The increasing fragmentation from scene three onwards emphasises the split between consciousness and physical being by foregrounding the human body and bodily practices to such an extent that the hierarchical ordering of consciousness and being is theatrically overturned. Instead of the action being motivated by Ian's consciousness, it is Ian's body that begins to direct proceedings (ibid).

This being so, Ian is rendered distinctly *inhuman*.

With Kane's last two plays, Waddington argues that character's dissolution becomes complete and, as such, 'signals a challenge to humanist principles of subjectivity by destabilising the idea of the 'I'-centred subject' (145).

Karoline Gritzner's view is roughly commensurate with Waddington's and Ehren's as she writes of how, in *4.48 Psychosis*, 'one is confronted with the challenging proposition that the self is no longer a direct agent of, or vessel for, meaning, but is constituted as an effect of language, space and movement' (336). Gritzner goes on to describe the familiar assertion that character has died in the sense that the representation of the human person can no longer be accounted an autonomous agent in the world and has instead been rendered a product of linguistic fragments.

My survey of the discourse of the theatre of Kane suggests that the views outlined above offer an accurate, though generalized, reflection and consensus of the story of character in Kane's short oeuvre. The common thread that runs through all these commentaries on character is that a movement occurs through the course of the plays in terms of Kane's representation of the human. Starting out as a character that assumes a humanist form as an autonomous, coherent, and psychologically constituted agent, character ends, with *4.48*, with its own death, having been reduced to a subject in the Cultural Materialist sense of the word. In short, the human has been rendered a determined, inhuman product of language and thus assumes a vacant subject position.<sup>80</sup>

Or so the story goes.

---

<sup>80</sup> It must be emphasised that David Greig should not be included amongst those that maintain such a view.

## 6.2 Some Problems with the Story of the Death of Kane's Characters

The story of the decline of character through the plays of Kane, where character is tied to subjectivity, is a fascinating one, which is intelligently grounded in theory, and corresponds neatly with certain features of the plays. However, it is less certain that the story is true.

There is no doubt that the fragmented subjectivity of *4.48 Psychosis*, which critics recognise as being an inhuman product formed of material forces, bears little resemblance, dramaturgically, to *Blasted*'s Ian or Cate. The sometimes bewildering array of linguistic forms and parts that compose Kane's last play, which Ken Urban describes as 'the equivalent of a textual collage' - with its 'passages of poetic language juxtaposed with moments of naturalistic dialogue, intercut with lists of numbers of unknown significance, all placed in specific ways on the page to indicate possible delivery and meaning' (44) - makes the story of the death of character in relation to this play sound a perfectly legitimate one. However, as Urban himself goes on to observe, his response to the play is that its 'multiplicity [...] creates the uncanny sensation that the text is deeply monologic, the product of a singular, albeit divided, self' (ibid), an impression that is rendered yet more profound by Kane's own joke that it is the play that 'killed her to write', which makes 'it hard to read [...] outside of biography' (ibid). Accordingly, if the play is interpreted as the subjective account of the writer/character's 'mind', which is lent further validity by the line, '*my mind is the subject of these bewildered fragments [my italics]*' (4.48 210; my italics), then character and subjectivity cannot be accounted as being dead; they may very well be problematised, deprived, as they are, of particular bodies, names, explicit relationships, and contexts, but they may not be accounted as having died. Crucially, a *subjectivity* remains. *4.48 Psychosis* presents an unseen, unidentified, but nonetheless recognisable 'individual' consciousness, which is in the process of contemplating its own suicide.

At the same time as I hesitate to accept the narrative that locates Kane's character as situated in a fatal decline, so I pause at Saunders's popular account that Kane's dramaturgy starts out with a conventional treatment of character. In fact, as I will show, even in scene one of *Blasted*, Kane undercuts the dramaturgical model of human being that situates him as a socially and psychologically coherent speaker and agent.

I have already observed how Saunders connects psychologically coherent character with Naturalism, the form that Kane is clearly taking to task in her own

dramaturgy. This conventional character's actions originate, ostensibly, from his personality, which constitutes the source of all action and meaning. However, Saunders's identification of such a character as Naturalistic, though it may appear superficially reasonable, is, in fact, doubtful, as my previous chapter on the character of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* has already attempted to show. Although it must be acknowledged that Kane identifies Ibsen and not Strindberg as her influence for the first part of *Blasted* (where Strindberg's Naturalism is quite distinct from Ibsen's), nonetheless Ibsen's construction of character resists uncomplicated appropriation to the traditional model of character, which locates it as the origin of the drama.

The characters of Naturalist drama are certainly psychologically constituted individuals who do and say things that denote a certain kind of person; we see this in the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg alike. However, these characters are also, crucially, *materially constituted entities* constructed as, and of, physical and cultural parts and structures. As such, they are bound to their environments and to an unbroken web of causal determinism. This being so, they must be denied any dichotomously founded claims to coherent and autonomous selfhood, for how can such characters be identified as constituting the origin of meaning and action if they are themselves the product of past actions and meanings?

To clarify my point: in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora's dramatic exit *may* signify a free act of the will and, as such, it may situate her as a self-determining human being who is capable of performing herself differently and, accordingly, of changing herself. The origin of her action *may* reside in a spontaneous and unpredictable mental decision. In fact, this possibility is persuasive if one considers the shock and disgust that greeted the play's early productions. Nora's exit seems to have been an unpleasant surprise for many audiences, something they simply weren't expecting. A similar sort of assumption that people's behaviour is, or should be, predictable is implied in Krogstad's response to Nora's suggestion that she will kill herself: 'People don't do that sort of thing, Mrs. Helmer' (54). Indeed, it is likely that Nora will not and, in fact, she does not kill herself as she threatens.

However, the psychological coherency of Ibsen's naturalistic characters, in fact, only serves to emphasise that their actions are the product of personalities, actions, and motivations that find their sources *in the past*. Nora is a self-acknowledged doll or, even better, *automaton*, as Toril Moi identifies her (235), a constructed product of her father

and of Torvald. Certainly, she seems to be conferred the possibility of self-determination when she attains self-awareness at the end of the play, but given the complexity of factors the play demonstrates as feeding into and constituting Nora's 'machinery' of selfhood – i.e. the idea and ideal of womanhood and motherhood, the model of Mrs. Linde's self-sufficiency, Nora's fear about her influence over her children, Torvald's treatment of Nora as his little squirrel or bird, Nora's sexualised objectification by her husband, Nora's experience of secretly working to pay off her debt to Krogstad, Nora's shock at the gap that exists between her idealized vision of her husband and the mundane, ugly reality of him, and so forth – so it becomes possible to interpret Nora's apparently shocking exit as a predicatable event, even if only in hindsight.

In short, to identify traditional dramatic character as Naturalistic, when what is being identified by the term is a psychologically constituted and *autonomous agent* – a kind of liberal humanist subject – is a misnomer, marrying, as it does, oxymoronic terms to form a distinctly uncomfortable alliance. By definition, traditional character, though psychologically founded, is not Naturalistic, for to identify it thus is to deprive character of its autonomy and agency, where agency implies free will.

Waddington is probably correct in identifying the liberal humanist subject as articulating a model of being of which Kane is critical. However, I refute the more general claim that Kane's characters start out as Naturalistic, when the term erroneously implies liberal humanist subjectivity. Ironically, it is my contention that Kane's characters are, in fact, Naturalistic, but such a designation is adopted so as to imply their 'conglomerate' form (Strindberg's term), their hybridised structure, which is comprised of multiple parts that cohere within the system of selfhood such that self and character are simultaneously rendered products and agents. Of her characters in *Blasted*, Kane writes that 'the Soldier is the way he is because of the situation – but the situation exists because of what Ian has created in that room' (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 100). For Kane, at least, the characters are sometimes products, sometimes agents, and I think this general sentiment keys into the sort of naturalistically complex and compatibilist account of post/humanist being that this thesis is articulating.

Since character never, precisely, exists as such, so character cannot be said to die. Furthermore, not only does this narrative of Kane's character's death, which hangs on to the coat tails of Fuchs's *Death of Character*, fail to maintain its cogency when put under scrutiny, but neither is it, I venture to argue, particularly fruitful as a way of approaching

Kane's work. The story of character that confines character to the form of the autonomous agent while casting the postmodernist subject as an inhuman non-character, persists with conventional approaches such as humanist and Cultural Materialist criticism, which view the work through a lens that splits reality and people according to binary structures of mind or body, self or other, here or there, character or subject, subject or object, agent or product, nature or culture, naturalism or symbolism, and so forth. To adopt such an approach is to persist with objectivist knowledge forms that Kane's work is, I propose, actively moving beyond. This playwright's work refuses binary oppositions from the very start of her very first play. So, while such dichotomies certainly haunt the work, Kane does not organise her dramaturgy thus. Kane's dramaturgy and her formulation of character is, in fact, far more subtle.

The view that character dies in the plays of Sarah Kane is premised upon a binary form of knowing: there is character or there is not-character; there is agent or there is product; there is human or there is inhuman. I contend that the work of Sarah Kane articulates a reality much more complex than such dichotomous orderings allow. From her representation of human experience to individual identities and roles, Kane's characters and their situations are constructed as being difficult, ambiguous, and, frequently, paradoxical. Accordingly, to approach them, as is customary, from a traditional humanist or anti-humanist approach, which locate characters as liberal humanist subjects or as materialist products, as entirely free agents or as determined 'machines', is to enforce a way of seeing people and characters that simply does not correspond with Kane's dramatic creations. More fitting and instructive is the post/humanist model, one that, as I have figured it, comes out of the self-determined, protean, and hybridized subject of Renaissance humanism and that later finds a contemporary form in posthumanism's cyborg, a figure that privileges connections and complexity over unity and reductionism. With its compatibilist model of mind, this figure is, importantly, inherently enabling of Kane's politics.

Both the problem for, and wonder of, Kane's characters is one of borders. Socially conventional identities attaching to personhood, social context, and dramatic form, are disregarded or rendered doubtful or confusing by borders that are on the move. Thus, characters, typically viewed as being coherent and conventionally identifiable, are posited 'in scenarios of crisis, [which] place identity, often terrifyingly, on shifting sands' (Chris Megson, 'Sarah Kane and the Politics of Identity'), casting all in doubt.

In the next section, I shall explore how Kane's confusion of conventional borders and forms in *Blasted* creates a play that was, originally, condemned as a kind of disgusting monstrosity. Disregarding traditional binaries, the play operates to disturb conventional identities and ways of representing and knowing the world and, in doing so, brings the terrifying 'other' and 'elsewhere' into the self and the here.

Needless to say, the critics didn't like it.

### 6.3 The Importance of Borders

The discourse that coheres around the drama of Sarah Kane frequently concerns itself with her plays' disturbance of borders, be these borders physical, geographical, ontological, epistemological, dramaturgical, or theatrical. For some, particularly the theatre critics of her early work and most notably of *Blasted*, Kane's border crossings were deemed tasteless, juvenile, and unintelligent, amongst other things.<sup>81</sup> Elaine Aston has observed, in highly derisive terms, the difficulty that 'Literary Oxford man' had with Kane's play, *Blasted* (1995), when it was first performed, which 'he' condemned as being nothing more than a deranged 'feast of filth', unable, as he was, to negotiate his way through a play that he considered to be 'half-realistic, half-symbolic' (Peter qd. in Aston, 'Fabric of *Blasted*' 20) and, as such, unidentifiable. He was simply unable to make sense of a work that refused to operate within the borders of conventional forms. As Kane herself noted of that original critical reception her play received, 'if [the critics] don't have a clear framework within which to locate the play then they can't talk about it' (Kane, 'Brief Encounter') and, having, as she puts it, 'create[d] a new form that hadn't happened before [...] no one knew what to say' (ibid).

Even some academics remain doubtful of Kane's merits as a playwright, notably Mary Luckhurst and Helen Iball, the latter of whom offers a discussion that is particularly probing and intelligent and names *Blasted* as a 'mutant phenomenon' (320), a kind of aberration, a hybridised, naturalistic-symbolic monster of a play. Iball, thus, roughly aligns herself with Aston's 'Literary Oxford man' (although she offers an analysis that is more astute and reflective than the reviews offered by those first theatre critics) and judges that *Blasted*'s border crossings and its attempts to locate 'authenticity' in brutal metaphor – to give its audiences the experience of the confusions of war, of being

---

<sup>81</sup> Mary Luckhurst offers an informative account of *Blasted*'s original reception, which, as she notes, was filtered through personal prejudices that related to 'Kane's youth, talent, intelligence, sanity [...] and morality' (109).

simultaneously here (in the theatre and in a hotel bedroom) and there (in a war zone) - ultimately fail because they give the play a 'disordered personality [that] sends practitioners and commentators running for the neat cover of binary opposition' (328).

Indeed, for the majority of reviewers of Kane's first three plays in production, and for some academics, *Blasted*'s disregard for traditional lines of demarcation renders the play problematic or incomprehensible. Such a view, unfashionable as it may have become in recent years, is in fact far from groundless, for binary oppositions underpin the modern period's ways of knowing, mapping the world and its objects, including drama and theatre, into objectively ordered and coherent identities that enable effective communication.

However, for the majority of critics and academics who have written on Sarah Kane's plays in recent years, her treatment of borders has become a serious focus of inquiry as their voices have vied to answer the questions of where, how, why, and with what success Kane disturbs and plays with borders and binaries. Kane's work, it seems, has ceased to be dominated by *Blasted*'s infamous critical reception in 1995 and the playwright's suicide four years later, which had, for so long, constituted the dominant frames of her work.<sup>82</sup> No longer confined by her identity as 'the bad girl of our stage' (Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage* 77) with a penchant for shock, nor as the playwright who committed suicide, Kane's identity in the eyes of British academics, practitioners, and theatre critics has shifted and she is now viewed as a playwright with something important to say about what it means to live in the world today, particularly in terms that engage with matters of *subjectivity* and *politics*,<sup>83</sup> the two parts into which Laurens de Vos and Graham Saunders' recent anthology, *Sarah Kane in Context* (2010), structures itself.

The discussion that follows is interested in both these matters. While any study of either subjectivity or politics may be, and often is, fascinating in relation to Kane's work, this chapter argues that the two subject areas are best treated in combination in relation to Kane's plays. The focus, here, is Kane's account of the human – in particular, human identity and models of selfhood - which is explored by way of her treatment of character in a theatrical form that is experiential and, as such, that blurs and moves beyond binaries.

---

<sup>82</sup> For an interesting outline of, and discussion about, some of the commentary that linked Kane's suicide to *4.48 Psychosis* and, latterly, her plays more generally – where her suicide operated as a kind of lens to view her work – see Alicia Tycer's "'Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander": Melancholic Witnessing of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*' 24-25.

<sup>83</sup> Of course, Kane had long been accepted in Europe as being a serious playwright.



Kane's first play, *Blasted*, is well documented as having been, partially but significantly, a response to the Yugoslav wars and acts of genocide. According to Kane, it was the literal act of this war being brought into her living room – a mundane but significant collapse of the border between here and there effected by the technology of television - that prompted her to re-think her play, which, to that point, had been planned as a domestic drama in a hotel room. She recounts the distressing experience of watching 'a very old woman's face, a woman of Srebrenica, just weeping and weeping and looking into the camera, and saying: 'Please, please, help me, help me. [...] We need someone to do something' (Kane, 'Brief Encounter'). Kane also explains how, while sitting there, watching, she knew that no one would answer the call, a realisation that spurred her own response. This act of watching, and of being moved by, the anguish of a stranger – just 'another old woman crying from another town in Bosnia under siege' (ibid) - apparently functions, in Kane's telling of the story, as a sufficiently powerful impetus to prompt the playwright to decide to construct her play differently and to write, by implication, something political.

The following chapter offers an account of Kane's representation of the human and of how this interacts with issues of dramatic character, models of subjectivity, ways of being and knowing, and, ultimately, ways of behaving as a human being in a world where borders and binaries are conceived as merely provisional and, thereby, as changeable. A hope exists, small as it may be, that the self and the world might be re-done anew.

In the section that follows, the politics attaching to modes of storytelling and their corresponding forms of character are explored by way of Elaine Aston's account of Kane's dramaturgy and politics, which offers a fascinating route into the subject.

#### **6.4 The Politics of Storytelling and of Character**

Elaine Aston, in her chapter, 'Reviewing the Fabric of *Blasted*', locates modes of storytelling as being politically significant. How a story is told, and how people are identified along with the roles that they are given to perform, are presented as having specific effects on readers and audiences that change their relationships to particular kinds of people and events.

Aston's focus in the chapter starts out as arguing that *Blasted*'s original critical reception, in re-packaging and re-framing the play as a 'feast of filth', effectively

sensationalised it and, as such, refused it its affective power. Turning to David Walker's identification of *fait divers* newspaper reporting – a mode of reporting that translates the odd or bizarre into the ordinary (Aston 16) - Aston argues that the reviews by *Blasted's* first critics employed just such a storytelling tactic to transform an experiential play, which put the audience *there*, in the thick of the bewildering, visceral atrocity, into something safe, predictable, and, importantly, distant.

Of course, this move precisely mirrors the *fait divers* reporting of the character of Ian in the play itself. Having quoted Ian's story of the serial killing in New Zealand of the 'bubbly nineteen year old from Leeds', Aston goes on to observe:

The local and national interest whipped up in an international news story is instantly recognisable as a media tactic designed to sensationalise, as are the character (stereo)types in the drama: the young and beautiful female victim; the heartbroken mother; and the foreign, murdering maniac. The horror of a violent, unexpected death is sensationalised, made monstrous, in a way that makes it at once familiar and yet distant; it is likely to elicit expressions of sympathy, outrage, or horror, but not the feeling of being touched by, or moved by, these violent events (15).

Usefully, this quote highlights the role that characterisation has as a politically significant tool in modes of storytelling. Although Aston does not exemplify her observation, she makes it clear that the formulaic representation of people formulaically as simplified clichés or stereotypes, which are reductively tied to particular social identities and roles, functions to render the terrifying violence of real-life events at once familiar, other, and kept 'at a safe remove from the centre of society' (Walker qtd. in Aston 16). The 'bubbly nineteen year old' (*Blasted* 12) is predictably cast and characterised as the young and tragic female victim who, we are told, was 'beautiful' (she dreamed of being a model) (ibid) and she was apparently intelligent, too, having finished 'her A levels last year' (13). Meanwhile, the 'serial killer' who 'slaughtered' Samantha is a *foreign*, cold-blooded 'maniac' (12) and 'lunatic' (13). He (or she?) is an inhuman monster, apparently devoid of all human feeling since he seems to have 'stayed to cook a meal' (12) after having stabbed his victims. Cast and characterised thus, he is removed from 'us', located in a safely distant elsewhere. In effect, the killer is represented as a monster but it is a monster that, to all intents and purposes, has had its claws removed because the reader's only access to it/him is via cliché - the simplified characterisation of a monster - and, being so, the figure is made to seem familiar (and thus forgettable) and

distant because it/he looks nothing like ‘we’ do. Samantha, too, although she is given a name and some biographical details, is simplified to the point of caricature and accordingly distanced. Her experience, by implication, is not, and cannot be, ours. Aston is right, then, to observe that although such a story is ‘likely to elicit expressions of sympathy, outrage, or horror’ (15), it is unlikely to touch or move us.

Kane is evidently critical of Ian’s *fait divers* mode of reporting. By implication, she is also critical of the kind of theatre that identifies people as being certain kinds of human beings and thus simplifies and conventionalises them: a monster, a pretty female victim, an abuser, and so forth, all identities that are identified with certain kinds of roles, which are themselves located in familiar narratives.

Kane opens *Blasted* with Ian and Cate, a middle-aged alcoholic and hack reporter who is cast in an ostensibly romantic liaison with a young and naïve woman in a hotel bedroom. Person and event are simplified and located in a recognisably moral universe (i.e. Cate, the victim, is good; Ian, the abusive monster, is bad), which renders them predictable, like machines. Although I am, in fact, simplifying what Kane is doing in this first section of the play (a point I shall return to shortly), broadly speaking, the opening, then, is formulaic. It is hardly a surprise when Ian reaches for another drink or forgets to order sandwiches that vegetarian Cate can eat; and Ian’s between-scenes rape of naïve and trusting Cate can hardly come as a surprise to the audience.

Of course, the representation of such stereotypical characters, roles, and narrative importantly tames a confusing, possibly horrifying, world into something safe, tidied up and divided, as it is, by distinct, identifying borders. But then Kane then blows it all up – the scene, the ‘romantic’ narrative that is located with these two characters, the form – and everything, including the characters and roles, changes.

In contrast to the *fait divers* mode of newspaper reporting, Kane’s ‘experiential’ (Aston 19) mode of dramatic representation – the mode exploded onto the stage by the bomb - functions to ‘make us see and to feel the affects of violence not as a world outside of ourselves, othered and neutralised, but as inside our lives, value systems, choices and behaviours’ (ibid). Kane does not tell us about the horror of war but, rather, works to impress upon her audiences a virtual experience of being there, of feeling, along with the characters, corresponding bewilderment, ambiguity, and dislocation. In effect, Kane abandons the more traditional dramatic approach of ‘political editorialising’ (Rebellato, ‘Sarah Kane Before *Blasted*’ 42) after her second monologue, *What She Said* (1991), ‘in

order to explore politics through form while persisting with [her] focus on the ambivalent and complex experience of the characters to the scenarios, to the violence' (ibid). In short, Kane reveals human character and experience as complex – deprived, as the characters are, of any moral compass by the extreme and uncivilised nature of their contexts (the normal rules do not apply) – and, by putting the audience *there* by means of her dramaturgy, makes the audience experience the complexity and ambivalence, too.

For Aston, the political significance of Kane's play, from her feminist standpoint, lies, firstly, in just this casting of the audience in a more experiential, as opposed to objectively detached, role; and secondly, by the play's refusal to release the abuser from the scene of the crime – Ian is given no elsewhere to escape to. Hope, then, claims Aston, is found in the 'dis-ease of a diseased masculine' (25).

Aston's recognition of the significance of Kane's refusal to release Ian from the scene of his crime is an interesting point and one to which I shall return towards the end of this chapter. It is, I think, important to the politics of Kane's plays and, in fact, is intimately tied to matters of Kane's play with borders and her negotiation of morality and being. For my own part, however, the hope lies elsewhere than with the 'dis-ease of a diseased masculine', important as this is from a feminist orientation; the hope lies, instead, with politics which are humanist in their perspective, and is located in the possibility of change and in the connections that humans can make with each other. Certainly, Kane appears to make such a view explicit when she states that 'in some ways all of my characters are me. I write about human beings, and since I am one, the ways in which all human beings operate is feasibly within my understanding' (Stephenson and Langridge 133). In identifying herself in, and with, her characters, and in her conjecture that she understands how all human beings work, Kane highlights an assumption that human beings share essential properties: underneath it all, we are the same.

The idea of humanism, for many, conventionally and loosely signals a kind of liberal humanism, which identifies all people as being universally free and formed of reason and conscience. Such a view of humanism is certainly taken by Cultural Materialists such as Jonathan Dollimore and Catherine Belsey, as Chapter Two demonstrated.

For myself, as this thesis has worked to clarify, such a view is insufficiently attentive to the *permeable* potential of the human's form, a permeability that offers post/humanist possibilities. Accordingly, although Kane talks, above, in terms of the

equivalencies and connections that she sees as being evident between human beings, I will argue that such a view does not necessarily correspond with an orthodox humanist view but instead gestures towards a post/humanist hope that humans are capable of changing and of acting otherwise, while being fundamentally made of the same material or ‘seeds’.

However, before elaborating on this view and embarking on analysis of Kane’s treatment of character in *Blasted*, we will take a short detour through Julie Waddington’s view of Kane’s elaboration of identity and subjectivity, which is identified as posthumanist.

### **6.5 ‘Posthumanist Identities in Sarah Kane’**

Julie Waddington, in her chapter, ‘Posthumanist identities in Sarah Kane’, offers a coherent discussion for a certain kind of posthumanist interrogation of human identity, which the writer argues is evident in the work of Sarah Kane.

The first thing that Waddington does in her chapter is to locate posthumanist identity as a problematisation of liberal humanist subjectivity (as opposed to signifying its end), where liberal humanist subjectivity is identified in Cartesian terms as a splitting of the essential, thinking self from the body (and, by implication, from the world). In taking this position, Waddington acknowledges her indebtedness to Neil Badmington (2000). (Waddington doesn’t accede the fact but, in maintaining this position, she also, importantly, aligns herself with N. Katherine Hayles’ discussion in *How We Became Posthuman*). Waddington argues that this Cartesian model of subjectivity, which universalises reason and conscience as distinctively human qualities, underpins human rights and is, ‘to some extent, a precondition of social transformation’ (Waddington 139) given that all human beings, being endowed with such qualities, are recognised as being equally deserving of dignity, freedom, and rights. Waddington recognises, in line with Badmington’s discussion of posthumanism, that the problem of such a status for the human is that ‘it assumes that human reason is given prior to, or outside, history, politics and social relations and thereby negates the significance of the social environment in the formation of reason’ (Waddington 140).

Taking her cue from the Cultural Materialist, Jonathan Dollimore, Waddington finds that ‘this fundamental hypothesis of humanism’ (140) denotes an ‘unalterable essence which is what makes “him” human, which is the source and essential determinant

of 'his' culture and its priority over conditions of existence' (Dollimore qtd. in Waddington 140). Waddington identifies some of the critical challenges to this hypothesis of the human as deriving from 'such divergent fields as feminism, Marxism and psychoanalysis' (140) and as being 'anti-humanist' in the sense that 'they insist on challenging the humanist assumption that the subject is given *a priori*' (ibid). However, as Waddington nicely and rightly observes – and again, she reflects Badmington's view and approach here – 'a complete break away from [humanism] remains impossible' (140) for as Derrida has recognised, writing the end of Man in anything other than the language of Man is impossible (because Western philosophy is steeped in humanist assumptions). Accordingly, posthumanism does not mark an attempt to leave humanist assumptions behind but to interrogate them, to 'announce[] something more like a crisis in humanism [...] a critical flaw at the very heart of humanism' (141). Adopting such a posthumanist standpoint, Waddington observes, is appropriate for Kane's plays since they 'articulate[] the tension between a humanist and anti-humanist approach to identity' (141).

Waddington maintains that Kane's plays explore the mind-body split in their treatment of characters. With *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, and *Cleansed*, Waddington contends that the characters start out, in the early scenes of the plays, as being conceived in a (liberal) humanist mould of subjectivity, revealing people formed essentially of mind, which is distinct from the physical body. However, by the ends of these plays, Waddington identifies the humanist form of character as having been usurped by an anti-humanist, materially constituted subject. This tension between character and subject, human and inhuman, is facilitated, argues Waddington, by Cartesian dualism:

The question of a split between consciousness [mind] and being [body] is a critical point upon which a line of demarcation is often established between humanism and anti-humanism. In the case of the former, Descartes's inauguration of modern subjectivity – which is often taken to represent the inauguration of humanism – institutes the split between mind and being. Descartes's deduction 'I think, therefore I am' (*cogito ergo sum*) effects this split by separating the act of an 'I' thinking (*cogito*) from its being (*sum*) (142).

Aside from Waddington's highly debatable claim that the 'inauguration' of humanism is bound to the inception of Cartesian dualism, her identification of humanism (if it is deemed to denote a *liberal* humanist subject position) with Cartesian dualism is valid in its denotation, as Waddington puts it, of an 'I'-centred subjectivity and character.

According to Waddington, it is not until we come to *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* that Kane finally gives up on character conceived in liberal humanist terms, and moves us into the realm of anti-humanism, with its ‘dissolution’ or death of character. This dissolution of character, by implication, issues, claims Waddington, a challenge to liberal humanist subjectivity. Citing Dollimore’s 2004 edition of *Radical Tragedy*, Waddington identifies character as ‘the most apparently reassuring category of the humanist aesthetic’ (qtd. in Waddington 145) and its demise in Kane’s final two plays, argues Waddington, ‘destabilis[es] the idea of the ‘I’-centred subject’ (145).

According to Waddington, *Crave* does not, however, straightforwardly move from ‘an idealist conception of subjectivity’ to ‘a materialist one’ (ibid) but, instead, it emphasises the problems of such a shift and it is at this point that the playwright may be identified as starting to move into posthumanist territory. Although, with *Crave*, Waddington suggests that we have come to a point at which ‘the body has become the new object of criticism, the marker of identity so to speak’, she also observes that Kane simultaneously refuses ‘to provide any directions as to bodily specificities’, which has the effect of undercutting materialistic formulations of subjectivity and reveals, argues Waddington, Kane’s efforts ‘to escape such determinations’ (145). With *4.48 Psychosis*, meanwhile, Waddington writes that we come to an isolated mind’s retreat from the world but also to a simultaneous emphasis of its ‘interrelatedness to the world’ (146) in the play’s inclusion of the interweaving discourses, which, according to Waddington, once more operates to proffer a materialist model of being at the same time as refusing it form on its usual terms.

In short, with the last two plays, Waddington seems to suggest that Kane is finally problematising the either/or position of humanism or anti-humanism, of idealism or materialism, of free will or determinism. Waddington writes:

By maintaining a strong sense of the inhuman [a determined entity], and by undermining the oppositional logic which would insist on a strict division between the human and inhuman, Kane’s work opens up a space in which posthumanist identities can be imagined and in which thinking the human can become a radically ethical process (148).

This is Waddington’s concluding discussion. Although it is disappointingly brief, it is here that she finally comes to her posthumanist point, which is that Kane articulates, in her work (although, for Waddington, this is limited to her final two plays), a vision of

human form that starts to confound dichotomously structured models of mind and critical approaches, articulating, instead, posthumanist ways of being that are, by implication, more difficult but also more radical in their ethical possibilities.

For Waddington, Kane's posthumanist identities are, by implication, located in paradoxes and illogical connections. Unfortunately, however, she herself does not really overcome the problem of thinking beyond binaries. She makes no mention of compatibilist models of mind or of posthumanist tropes and structures such as hybridity, the cyborg, or systems theory, any or all of which might have offered ways of identifying the ambiguous posthumanist identities to which she loosely alludes but fails, ultimately, to name with any kind of specificity. For Waddington, Kane's posthumanist identities lie a little vaguely in the tense structure set up by the binary of mind and body, but Waddington's own failure to see any other way of being than idealism or materialism means her approach has limited value in relation to an analysis of Kane's plays. Waddington can point us in the region of Kane's 'play' across the borders of binaries but, while she persists with the dualistic frame, Waddington deprives herself of a conceptual framework and vocabulary by which she might talk effectively about the plays.

More than this, perhaps, I find myself left with an uncomfortable sense that Waddington's imposition of Cartesian dualism upon the dramaturgy of Kane's first three plays enforces a dichotomous structure upon the work that, in fact, perpetuates the kind of epistemological violence of which Kane's plays are themselves so critical. That this imposition apparently derives from a (mis)recognition that the characters in Kane's first three plays start out as conventionally (liberal) humanist subjects, only functions to compound the problem. In fact, entirely conventional as Waddington's position is in this – as I have already observed, the orthodox story of character recognises *Blasted's* Ian and Cate as being unproblematic characters in the liberal humanist sense of the word - I suggest that Kane's characters are never straightforwardly autonomous, 'I'-centred, sovereign agents in the world, fully in charge of themselves and objects in their environments; nor are they ever constructed as pure product composed entirely of forces (biological or cultural) over which they have no control whatsoever. While I do not doubt that Kane is critical of the traditional, 'I'-centred character, the focus of my argument lies in undercutting the story that Kane's characters shift from being agents to being products. Such a story only serves to extend the project of modernity, as set out by Bruno Latour, to render all objects purified into discrete identities, at the same time as refusing to entertain



the possibility of hybridity, ambiguity, and a more democratic kind of assignment of agency across humans and objects. In fact, I argue, from the very first page of her very first play, Kane is working to undercut the conventional form of human being and of dramatic character, refusing him his usual sovereign status. Instead, Kane posits him, simultaneously, as an agent and a product in a compabilist, hybridised form that may be logically paradoxical and problematic but that, nonetheless, corresponds more truthfully to the sometimes bewildering experience of being in the world.

### **6.6 *Blasted*'s Ian and Cate: Never Really Naturalist Characters**

*Blasted*'s opening stage directions, which refer to the characters, read as follows:

*IAN is 45, Welsh born but lived in Leeds much of his life and picked up the accent. CATE is 21, a lower-middle class Southerner with a south London accent and a stutter when under pressure (3).*

Saunders writes that '[i]n keeping with [the play's] naturalistic beginning, the opening stage directions include brief but specific outlines about age, class, birthplace, accent and speech patterns of its two characters' (*Love Me or Kill Me* 42).

At first glance, these stage directions undoubtedly appear naturalistic. Kane's provision of the characters' ages is informative of character appearance and is probably a constitutive factor in the particular power-play that is evident between Ian and Cate. The Leeds and south London accents may carry some cultural associations that are intended to tell us something about the characters, although it is far from certain what these might be. Cate's stutter offers a coherent physical clue as to when she is nervous. But what of the fact that Ian is Welsh born but has lived in Leeds for most of his life? I cannot help but doubt how far this information elucidates his character such that it is intended to comprehend a motivating factor, for example, for his rape of Cate, or for his eating of the dead baby. And what about Cate's lower-middle class status and south London accent? How might these details of her character be understood as informing her decision to prostitute herself for food at the end of the play, or thereafter to share it with Ian?

Naturalistic stage directions – the stage directions of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890), for instance – when they pertain to character, identify pertinent and determining details about the person, where character is envisaged as comprising the representation of an individual who is psychologically realistic and complex. Frequently,

they implicitly conjure a form of character that is structured as a kind of patchwork entity, given that the clues of character are supplied piecemeal and include social and cultural identities and roles, physical appearances and characteristic gestures, memories, experiences, ideas, feelings, natural and irrational impulses, actions, and so forth. The fact that Hedda, for example, is described upon her first appearance in scene one as being 29 years of age (175) is probably intended to be instructive of the fact that, newly married to Tesman, she made the decision to marry him aware that her prospects for marriage were reducing as she got older; the description of ‘*her face and figure [as being] aristocratic and elegant in their proportions*’ (ibid) would appear to convey something of her social status where this, it turns out, is significantly informative of Hedda’s view of herself in relation to others; and the description given of her eyes as being ‘*steel grey, and cold, clear, and dispassionate*’ (ibid) is presumably intended to imply a hardness and emotional coolness to her character, and so forth.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to such a character description, which is intended as being revelatory of Hedda’s character, I would suggest that Kane’s descriptions of Cate and Ian are laden with irony. In their very specificity – the naming of Ian’s birthplace, for instance – Kane parodies the convention and disputes the significance of such identifying detail for the character. (How would an actor convey Ian’s Welshness at the same time as giving him a Leeds accent?). Furthermore, the stage directions tell us nothing of significance about Cate or Ian in terms of the play’s politics and, in fact, if we consider that *Blasted* sets out to eradicate the borders between there and here, Bosnia and Leeds, or, for that matter, *Wales and Leeds*, then it seems unlikely that they should be interpreted entirely literally.

Identity in *Blasted*, in short, is foregrounded as a theme in the play’s opening stage directions but, as these directions indicate, Kane’s characters should probably not be read uncritically against the purportedly naturalistic framework, where such a framework implies an essential fixity to individual personality and posits cultural identity as

---

<sup>84</sup> It is interesting that, by contrast, Ibsen supplies relatively few stage directions for Nora and that those that are specified describe Nora’s actions and gestures as opposed to her appearance or qualities of personality. I cannot help but wonder if this has to do with the fact that Nora, in comparison with Hedda, undergoes considerable character development through the course of the play, in the sense that the person she seems to be at the end of the play is very different to the kind of person she was at its start. In short, whereas Ibsen’s Hedda demonstrates certain qualities throughout the course of the play – indeed, Toril Moi implies, in her reading of the play, that it is Hedda’s unbending idealism, her refusal to adapt herself to the mundanity of material circumstance, that is influential of her decision to end her own life (319) - Nora’s content and style of dialogue, and her actions, imply different qualities of character through the course of the play. Nora, therefore, on superficial study, certainly appears to demonstrate a post/humanist structure of selfhood, with a sense of coherent personhood that is, nonetheless, bound to its changing environments and, as such, developing in an ongoing process of becoming, whereas Hedda elaborates a model of character that appears to be more conventionally constructed as a coherent and fixed quality of personhood.

fundamentally determining. What matters in Kane's plays is not what sort of personality Cate or Ian may be accounted as being. More important to Kane is the question of what sort of human beings her characters are: what makes them, what connects them, and what roles they are capable of performing.

### **6.7 Kane's Human Characters**

Kane, then, is critical of the simplification of people into fixed, and culturally stereotypical, sorts of characters and roles, as has already been observed. Aston's articulation of Ian's story about Samantha Scrace helps to shed light on the ideological implications of such constructions of people: Samantha is characterised and located by Ian as a particular sort of person who fulfils, by the nature of her character (identified as young, bubbly, attractive young woman), a certain sort of role (victim), just as the murderer is characterised, sensationalised, and tamed by his designation as an inhuman sort of monster. As Aston observes, such treatments function to safely distance people and events from us in their renderings as 'other'. Kane's aim, by contrast, is always to put the audience *there*, with the monster and in the frightening chaos, to remind us that the other and the elsewhere are, to a certain extent, merely conventional fantasies we tell ourselves to make the world seem more manageable and safe. In fact, as Kane tells it, the monster and the victim are within.

Kane's characters in *Blasted* – Ian, Cate, and the Soldier – are surprising, contradictory characters. Cate is a naïve 21 year-old thumb-sucker who stutters when she is nervous; however, Cate demonstrates strength of character when she repeatedly attempts to stand up to Ian, and strategic intelligence when she manipulates him into a seduction that culminates with her biting down on his penis very hard indeed. The Soldier, who is clearly, initially, identified as a kind of animal by Kane when he is presented as urinating on the pillows and then as raping Ian, reveals his capacity for love, relationship, and suffering when he talks about his dead girlfriend, Col, and via his depiction as 'smelling Ian's hair' and 'crying his heart out' (49) during the act of the rape itself. Ian, meanwhile, who is probably the most clichéd of the three characters – he is a bigoted, alcoholic, middle-aged divorcee and reporter whose self-centred and selfish arrogance is evident from his very first line: 'I've shat in better places than this' (3) – is nonetheless characterised as being capable of occasional and surprising glimpses of care and compassion towards Cate, even as he repeatedly abuses her.

More important, though, in terms of the politics of this play and its dramaturgy of character is the fact that these characters are plastic and adapt with their environments, which push them into new roles and relationships. By such means, Kane shows, of course, that identities do not fix people and are culturally constituted; accordingly, if you change the context, you also change people's identities, roles, and values. The status of identity is foregrounded, of course, by the extra-ordinary nature of the play's environment, which, in being extra-ordinary, places greater demands upon the characters forms, as they struggle, as Greig observes, to maintain their selves, their habitual characteristics, relationships, and roles. So, for example, *Blasted* rushes us from the familiar hotel bedroom into a confusing and frightening war zone, which changes relationships, roles, and values.<sup>85</sup> This is a highly testing environment, which exercises determining influences upon Ian and Cate, who start *Blasted* in a culturally familiar scenario and conventional roles - as would-be lover and reluctant love-object, before graduating to rapist and victim, respectively - but end the play as quite different sorts of identities and roles. Ian, having played the abuser role with Cate in the first part of the play is forced into the role of unwilling victim when he is raped by the Soldier, who now takes on Ian's earlier role as abuser. Ian dies but then, somehow, continues 'living' and, confusingly, maintains a tangible, bodied presence onstage that functions to recast the location of the bedroom that became a war zone into, possibly, a metaphysically composed hell. Even more ambiguously, though he is apparently located in 'hell' and has been rendered helpless by his blinding, he is fed by Cate<sup>86</sup> who, in doing so, demonstrates a touching and hopeful act of altruism. Cate, herself, meanwhile, who was the unwilling victim of Ian's sexual advances and then rape in the first two scenes of the play, has now cast *herself* as victim in order to obtain food from the soldiers, and concurrently takes on the roles of brave and resilient survivor and generous benefactor to the reduced Ian.

I would propose, then, that what makes these characters human for Kane is their capacity to adapt to their environments and, in the process, to become different kinds of people playing different kinds of roles. People and characters are not fixed: eye colour or

---

<sup>85</sup> Kane's plays *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis* offer locations no less extra-ordinary. *Cleansed* situates its characters in a university that is also a site for torture, experimentation, sexual titillation, and medical treatment; and *4.48 Psychosis* 'locates' the play and its audience 'in' an immaterial mind that is apparently deprived of a body, a name, and a form.

<sup>86</sup> Adding yet more ambiguity to the location and nature of the reality in which we now find ourselves, Ian's feeding by Cate, though he is purportedly in hell, simultaneously conjures and yet inverts the allegory of the long spoons, which is a parable that identifies the difference between hell and heaven by showing how the diners in hell starve whereas those in heaven eat well since they use the long spoons to feed each other.

accent or place of birth do not tell us anything fundamentally significant about individuals who, being intimately bound to their changing environments, are bound to change, too. But does such a capacity to adapt mean that, far from being liberal humanist subjects, these characters are, in fact, constituted as being, essentially, materialist products, as certain kinds of animals? For a number of critics, such as Waddington, Iball, and Ken Urban, this seems, indeed, to be the case.

Let us now turn to such an argument and consider it in relation to Kane's play.

### **6.8 Kane's Characters: Underneath It All, Just Animals?**

Ian, by the end of the play, is commonly identified as having become an animal (consider the work of Urban and Iball) or else as having been reduced to a materially constituted product, a postmodernist (vacant) subject (consider the essays of Waddington and Gritzner). Either way, the human Ian – a psychologically constituted sovereign agent – is interpreted as having been reduced, like Lear on the moor, to his basic form and thus, according to these accounts, to a status that is sub- or inhuman.

Is this what Kane is doing via her treatment of Ian, though? Has Kane transformed Ian from being a socially identifiable individual agent to a natural kind of animal? Such is the case according to Waddington, as discussion has already shown. Waddington writes:

The stage directions towards the end of the final scene gradually take precedence over dialogue and centre increasingly on bodily functions: 'masturbating'; 'strangling himself with his bare hands'; 'shitting'; laughing hysterically'; 'having a nightmare' (143).

This listing of the stage directions to demonstrate Ian's bestial status has become, over the years, something of a familiar refrain. These are striking visual images – shocking and distasteful, moving and bleakly funny – all showing Ian performing basic bodily functions and actions. The implication of this series of visual snapshots, which cast Ian in the rubble of a bomb blast at the end of a play that opened in an expensive hotel bedroom, is that the 'wall between the safety and civilisation of peacetime Britain and the chaotic violence of civil war' is 'paper-thin' and 'can be torn down at any time, without warning' (Kane in Stephenson and Langridge 130). Beneath this idea, of course, is the more fundamental one that the wall separating the civilised, social individual and the natural, atavistic human-animal is equally paper-thin. The cultural aspect of the human is

identified, in such a narrative, as nothing but a kind of covering for people who are, essentially, mere animals underneath it all.

Certainly, such a view is implied by Iball's sophisticated discussion, which takes a phenomenological approach to the play, and quotes from *King Lear* to articulate Ian's essentially natural form: 'Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, fork'd animal as thou art' (232). Iball maintains that at the end of the play, it is the undignified, uncivilized body of Ian that has finally taken centre stage. In addition to this, Iball also argues that this bodied nature of the character of Ian is evident from the very start of the play, and in formulating such an argument, she indirectly queries the conventional account of character change from sovereign character to natural, determined product. We need only attend, for example, to Ian's very first action in the play, which is to pour himself, and gulp down, a gin, to observe the veracity of Iball's claim; Ian's second line of dialogue is, 'I stink' (3), and we are scarcely into the second page of the text before the stage directions describe him as '*coughing terribly in the bathroom*' (4). In short, Ian's body and his physical nature are rendered features even at the very opening of the play. Of course, by the end of the play, his physical form and bodily degradation are no longer features permitted to lurk as background elements of his character, pushed offstage and confined to the unseen ensuite bathroom; by the end of the play, Ian's physical form is actively foregrounded as 'his naked body is exposed to scrutiny, violent penetration and visible mutilation' (Iball 236). Iball reveals, then, that any expectation that the bodied nature of human being be ignored or pushed offstage, which is signified, in fact, by *Blasted's* en-suite bathroom – a place where bodily evacuations and cleansings are implied throughout the early scenes of the play but are importantly located in a place out of sight – is exposed, as the play finally puts the abject body front and centre.

In effect, Iball's discussion implies that Ian is, by the end, reduced to the 'poor, bare, fork'd animal' that he always and essentially was in any case. So, while Jack Tinker refers to the 'bestiality' of the characters' behaviour (*Daily Mail*), Iball suggests, in her own fascinating, phenomenological study, the essentially natural form of the human being.

The series of images to which Iball, Urban, and Waddington refer when they identify Ian as an animal, are those listed in scene five, very near the end of the play, which present him in a reduced state and context, deprived of company, food, comfort,

and any other trappings of the human being. They picture: Ian blind and helpless; masturbating; trying, but failing, to strangle himself; shitting; crying; laughing; having a nightmare; seeking comfort; eating a baby; and dying. The images are visual and wordless, presenting the purportedly basic human states, drives, and emotions of an embodied human being who has been stripped of all cultural crutches, comforts, and tools. But is Ian rightly, therefore, identified as a ‘poor, bare, fork’d animal’? Is this really the picture Kane means to leave us with?

We only need to consider a few of the directions to observe that matters are not so straightforward as they are, I believe, universally accounted as being in Kane discourse. Certainly, Ian defecates; but the stage direction that immediately follows this reads: ‘*And then trying to clean it up with newspaper*’ (59). Ian is also presented as laughing ‘*hysterically*’ (ibid). Ian’s laughter, lacking explicit provocation, would seem likely to find its cause in a certain, possibly ironic, self-consciousness of his situation, which may be combined with a state of mind that is despairing or exhausted or angry, for example. In brief, Ian laughs despite, because of, or through his despair, which is indicative of an ability to view himself objectively. We are also told that Ian tries to commit suicide by strangling himself with his bare hands, which, as well as being blackly comic, once again, demonstrates a highly self-conscious and apparently self-directed act. Finally, there is that oft cited act of gross barbarity: the eating of the dead baby (60). What is less frequently reported, however, is the direction that immediately follows it: ‘*He puts the remains back in the baby’s blanket and puts the bundle back in the hole*’ (ibid). Having been reduced, presumably, as low as it is possible for a person to go (the next stage direction reads, ‘*He dies with relief*’ (ibid) – and even this final, natural act, is conceived in highly self-conscious terms) – Ian re-wraps the baby in the blanket and re-buries it and thereby signals a capacity for compassion. Though it is a small, and easily overlooked, act of solicitude, it is not incidental or unimportant. Ian’s motivation in re-wrapping the baby in its blanket and re-burying it is somewhat obscure but it likely locates in guilt and/or some feeling of empathy and, as such, implies that culturally inscribed values have become, or are, embedded in his character, in his system of being and behaving. And, in fact, if we consider the final words of the play, we find support for the view that Kane’s characters, Ian and Cate, elaborate an idea of the human that is complexly cultural *and* natural. Whereas Ian’s first words in the play drew attention to the basic natural functions of the body: ‘I’ve shat in better places than this’ (3), his last are ‘Thank you’ (61), words bound

to a cultural code of civilised conduct and which acknowledge the kindness and generosity that Cate has chosen to show him.

### 6.9 Metaphysics and Hope in Kane's Creation of Character and Place

As all these directions reveal when read closely and in full, at no point does Kane deliver us Ian reduced to unconscious, atavistic, natural status. Ian is demonstrably not, at the close of the play, merely an animal, where to be animal conventionally denotes an organic life form, materially consisting of biological processes and drives, and devoid of self-awareness. Neither, however, are he, Cate, or the Soldier ever articulated straightforwardly as autonomous, 'I'-centred characters predicated on a liberal humanist model of subjectivity. Certainly, if we consider the final stage directions in the series of visual images that come after '*He dies with relief*', it becomes impossible to persist in reading Ian as such an organic and animate kind of natural machine:

*It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof.  
Eventually.*

**Ian** Shit (ibid).

If we are intended to read the preceding direction of '*he dies*' literally, then Ian's 'resurrection' finds him awakening into some form of metaphysical afterlife that is, in characteristic Kane fashion, uncharacteristically and confusingly physical. Refusing hell its spiritually immaterial attributions – Ian is, when dead, just as manifestly corporeal as he was when alive – Kane leaves the reader and, potentially, the audience (depending on the specific directorial and design choices of any given production) unsure if they are now in a hell that happens to look like the real world, or in a real world that simply feels like hell. Such confusion, of course, ironically extends the earlier discussion between Cate and Ian about the nature and meaning of life:

**Cate** God wouldn't like it.

**Ian** There isn't one.

**Cate** How do you know?

**Ian** No God. No Father Christmas. No fairies. No Narnia. No fucking nothing.

**Cate** Got to be something.

**Ian** Why?

**Cate** Doesn't make sense otherwise.

**Ian** Don't be fucking stupid, doesn't make sense anyway. No reason for there to be a God just because it would be better if there was.



[...]

**Ian** I've seen dead people. They're dead. They're not somewhere else, they're dead.

**Cate** What about people who've seen ghosts?

**Ian** What about them? Imagining it. Or making it up or wishing the person was still alive.

**Cate** People who've died and come back say they've seen tunnels and lights –

**Ian** Can't die and come back. That's not dying, it's fainting. When you die, it's the end.

**Cate** I believe in God.

**Ian** Everything's got a scientific explanation.

**Cate** No. (55-6)

So, is Ian a ghost? Is that what Kane is presenting the reader and audience with? If that is the case, then, according to Ian's view, which insists that ghosts don't exist and anyone who claims to see one is '[i]magining it', the audience and Cate are experiencing a form of mass hallucination. Or perhaps Ian's resurrection is meant to signify a return to consciousness after a fainting fit, which also comprises one of his suggestions to Cate. Or perhaps this scene is a manifestation of one of Cate's fits?

The fact is Kane leaves us unsure. Like Ian with the Soldier in scene three, when he complains that he doesn't know 'what the sides are here. Don't know where... Think I might be drunk' (40), so the reader is not quite sure where this is, with the unpredictable movement of borders and juxtaposition of unlikely characters and action.

One thing that does seem certain, however, is that Ian's claim that everything has a scientific explanation is not one with which Kane agrees, connected, as such a view is, to the positivistic and scientific pretensions of Naturalism, which Kane demonstrably rejects in favour of an experiential form of theatre that foregrounds individual consciousness. Reality, for Kane, is manifestly not merely composed of the objectively knowable world that can be empirically proven to exist. As Rebellato insightfully observes of the playwrights of the 1990s generally, but as pertaining particularly strikingly to Kane, they were 'always insisting, even metaphysically insisting, that this world is not all that is possible' ('Sarah Kane Before *Blasted*' 42). In short, for a playwright such as Kane, there is more than the natural, material world out there and people are made of more than the parts and processes of physical matter; they are more than machines.

*Possibility* is an important concept in this play: the possibility that there might be a hell; the possibility that people can change, can choose to behave differently. Such

choice, of course, raises the question of free will and the correlative possibility that Kane's characters, while they are manifestly not dualistically formed in Cartesian terms as 'I'-centred subjects, may be accounted characters in the sense that they (sometimes) constitute the origin of speech and action.

Certainly, Kane's characters are products. Though Jack Tinker complains of *Blasted* that 'Ms Kane [...] offers her audience scarcely a clue as to why her characters should behave as they do' (qtd. in Saunders, '*Love me or kill me*' 11), clues are, of course, evident, which comprise causal factors in Ian's rape of Cate, for example: Ian and Cate had a relationship in the past and, given the youth of Cate, a question mark as to the healthiness of this relationship, and of Ian's motives for the relationship, is implied; Ian's bigotted attitude to anyone who isn't white, British, male, and heterosexual implies a capacity to disregard the human status and rights of others; Ian and Cate's relative ages are suggestive of an unequal power-dynamic in their relationship; Ian's alcoholism gestures towards a lack of self-control; Ian's efforts to woo Cate with flowers and champagne in an expensive hotel bedroom and her repeated rebuttals of his advances generate a context for Ian's mounting frustration; and so forth. The act of the rape, then, is psychologically and causally accounted for; it might even be said to be predictable. Kane herself attests that '[i]n a sense [Ian is] acted upon by his own nature – it's this thing rotting him from the inside which he feeds' (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 56). But was his rape of Cate *inevitable*? Did Ian have a choice: to rape or not to rape? When Kane asserts that 'he's acted upon as much as he acts upon Cate' (ibid), she seems to imply that some degree of personal agency was manifest. But if so, how 'free' was this agency?

It is not possible to answer this question with any certainty. What is clear is that Ian's act of rape sets off a chain reaction of increasingly frightening and grotesque events. Though Sierz may doubt the veracity and usefulness of Kane's identification of a connection between a rape in a domestic setting and atrocities perpetrated during war (in Saunders, *About Kane* 129), in fact, I argue that the juxtaposition of these events, alongside Ian's movement from perpetrator to victim, are significantly bound to Kane's politics. Building upon a post/humanist view that people are, at base, equally capable of kindness or cruelty (since they are essentially constituted of the same complex patchwork of parts), Kane links human action, complexly, to specific environments, cultural attitudes (i.e. sexism, racism), and individual choice. She also implies, with her presentation of Ian's unleashing of ever-increasing destructive forces into the world of the play, that a

single act has consequences in the world, possibly in a karmic sense given that her dramatic world, and the characters within it, are represented as being connected, their borders permeable and shifting.

So, while it may be difficult or impossible to answer the question of whether or not Ian's rape of Cate was a freely taken act, particularly given that it occurred offstage, what does seem likely is that Kane requires characters to take *some* responsibility for their actions. They are not pure products and thereby absolvable of any and all personal responsibility. In dramaturgical terms, the action of the play derives from the character of Ian, though Ian himself is constructed as an embodied, natural-cultural entity, part product, part agent.

In contrast to my own position, Robert I. Lublin identifies Kane's characters as desiring machines. This is certainly a fascinating interpretation. According to Lublin, character motivations are to be found 'in the overwhelming and amoral "desire" that compels their actions' (115). Developing his discussion out of the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Lublin writes:

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the human, as a complete entity, does not exist: 'We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers'. Consequently, people exist as collections of loosely connected 'machines'. Machines are here understood to be the innumeral sources of desire that can result from one's physical, social or psychological construction. According to this definition, Ian's penis could be seen as a desiring machine that works to produce the means of its sexual satisfaction (117).

It is possible, of course, that Ian's penis is a desiring machine working autonomously to produce the means of its satisfaction. However, by focusing in single units and ignoring the complexity of the interaction of any system's parts, Lublin's approach seems needlessly reductive.

On Lublin's view, for example, Cate's decision to come back to the hotel room and to Ian after he has raped her is motivated by her desire for him (116). Such an interpretation seems absurd (notwithstanding its misogynistic implications). The problem with Lublin's position is that, in reducing the characters to machines, to entirely determined entities and causally closed types, he denies them their complexity and he also, significantly, denies the play the politics with which it is shot through. By reducing Ian, Cate, and the Soldier to machines who take action in the world only because they are programmed to do so, which, thereby, renders them incapable of behaving any way other

than as is prompted by their determining desires, so Lublin evacuates all hope from the play, any notion that things might be different and that people have at least some agency in creating themselves and the world in which they live. If Kane's human characters are, indeed, merely perceived and represented as kinds of machines, then Ian never had a choice as to whether or not to rape Cate, and Cate's decision to return to Ian in the hotel is based on no other or better motivation than desire for him, as Lublin writes. However, to view Kane's characters thus is to deprive the play of its meaning. Just as Cate says to Ian that there must be a God or 'something' because 'Doesn't make sense otherwise' (55), so the possibility of free will and self-determination must exist for Kane's play to mean something. At the end of *Blasted* Cate, having bartered violent sexual favours for food and drink, shares her hard-won wares with Ian, sucks her thumb, and keeps him company because he asks her to. Although it is possible that Cate's return to the room is programmed, as Lublin writes, by desire, or alternatively (and more plausibly, I would suggest), by a realisation that she has nowhere else to go, I think it is significant in terms of Kane's politics that Cate's return be interpreted as a freely made act of kindness as opposed to an effect of programming.

In an interview with Saunders in 1995, Kane states, as she reflects upon the source of violence she once observed in a child:

I don't want to believe that a child was born like that, but I don't know where it comes from, unless he's being abused himself. Who knows? In a way I think maybe it doesn't matter where it comes from. What matters is dealing with it. [...] So I suppose [violence] comes from the situation we've created for ourselves. Whose fault is that? It's a chicken and egg. In order to create a situation there must be some kind of violent intent (*About Kane* 101).

What is interesting about this quote is Kane's recognition that violent action in human beings originates somewhere other than from the autonomous individual, be its origin natural and/or cultural and born of experience. She acknowledges that people are capable of becoming violent because of the scenarios they find themselves faced with, such as happens with the Soldier. Of the atrocity that the Soldier perpetrates against Ian, Kane asserts: 'He knows he isn't like this. He hasn't always been like this – but in order to survive the war he has to live like this' (ibid). Thus, Kane articulates people as being products of their biology, cultural structures, and surroundings and, being so, as being fundamentally protean. The key observation that Kane makes in this quote, however, is

that what matters is how people (choose to) deal with situations. By implication, the possibility of ‘sculpting’ the self differently and of changing the situations in which the self is located, is accounted feasible: ‘I believe that people can change and that it is possible for us as a species to change our future. It’s for this that I write what I write’ (Kane qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 82).

During the course of *Blasted*, character transformations occur. Familiar cultural identities, which are conventionally and predictably conflated with certain roles (i.e. naïve young Cate, a woman, is a rape victim), are quickly cast off to reveal far more complex ‘conglomerates’ of character forms, to borrow from August Strindberg’s vocabulary (*Preface to Miss Julie*, 60). In a process that seems, ironically, to extend the Naturalists’ project of demonstrating characters as causally determined products of their environments, Kane casts her characters – in their actions and their roles – as protean and provisional, as containing the potential to be a monster, a god, or an animal. Identity (i.e. gender, age, nationality) is detached from role (i.e. victim, perpetrator, bystander) and simplistic and unrealistic stereotypes – the sorts that populate Ian’s news stories – are left behind. Kane’s characters, by contrast, are capable of doing many things and taking on many different roles. In consequence, the humanist approach to character, which asks the question, ‘*who* are these characters?’ is refused prominent status, for character is no longer conceived as the autonomous origin of action and dialogue (although psychology remains a factor in the reader and audience’s interpretation and construction of character). In this way, Kane humanises the monster and makes him not just like us, but a potential within us, pending apposite changes in circumstance.

Although we are partially products, I contend that Kane reveals humans as also being self-sculpting creators. Kane’s humans are not machines and, in being capable of self-determination, they are (partially) responsible for the kinds of people they become and the environments they construct and are constructed by. It seems to me that Kane is suggesting, with the ending to *Blasted*, that although our behaviour and forms are significantly influenced and limited by environments, we continue to construct ourselves by the choices we make: we can choose to be altruistic or violent. And in that choice, a gap of possibility opens up (how god-like can we be?) and we glimpse the fundamentally post/humanist form beneath, the indeterminate shape that is both made and makes itself.

Kane's movement away from naturalism, which conceives of reality in scientifically objective terms, is bound, of course, to the playwright's aim to create an experiential theatre. Describing her own distressing experience of watching *Mad* at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Kane observes how the production 'took [her] to hell' and decided her upon the sort of theatre she wanted to make: 'experiential' (qtd. in Saunders, *About Kane* 47).

Accordingly, the playwright's treatment of character must be understood as being at least partially bound to this aim. In order to substitute the experiential for the objective theatrical representation, Kane's focus shifts from the socially and physically constituted reality of the bedroom and war zone, which she violently explodes, to the private and subjective realities of individuals struggling to live in a world that simultaneously confines them, makes them, undoes them, supports them, and yet is also a product of their making. Thus, the shift from representing the world as an objectively constituted reality that can be seen and acted upon, to one that is experientially and subjectively experienced and constructed (as well as observed and known; the physical world persists in Kane's theatrical construction, at least insofar as we consider *Blasted*), necessitates a corresponding movement in the form and location both of character and of audience. The audience, for example, shifts from being located, primarily, as an observer of character behaviour that preserves its own distinct subject position, which is separate from the world, to being projected somewhat into the experience of character.

It is not, then, that character dies in Kane's play or, even, that the playwright is necessarily challenging the 'I'-centred liberal humanist subject to whom Waddington refers; it is that Kane's work relocates character from its objectified position on the stage and in the world where it is bestowed simplistically reductive but coherent borders and identities, to a hybrid subject-object position, which conveys a more ambiguous, challenging, painful, but, arguably and importantly, more *realistic* mode of being human in the world. As I have written elsewhere,

What Kane does [...] is to radically reconceive the relationship between us and the world, in a way quite distinct from the traditional Western dualism of mind and body. No longer can the world be known from one privileged and fixed perspective (LePage, 'Posthuman Sarah Kane' 402).

Kane's character changes form as the playwright attempts to construct a more subjective and experiential, as opposed to objective and rational, point of view. Her aim in doing so, of course, is to effect a cathartic change in the audience: through suffering to change how

they think and, thereby, to change how they behave in the world. By going to hell virtually, the audience is, so the theory goes, prevented from going there in reality.

This experiential theatre is also tied to Kane's politics. According to Aston, Kane's politics are linked to the fact that Ian, the perpetrator, ends the play unable to escape the hell that he has unleashed on the world by raping Cate. Aston's point is that Kane, in effect, imprisons Ian in the location of abuse that he has both inflicted and, later, had inflicted upon himself. She is, of course, right, but this imprisonment is more fundamentally bound to Kane's formulation of character, human being, and experience, than Aston allows. Casting her characters in and across expressionism and naturalism, subjectivity and objectivity, Kane provides no outside to a 'reality' in which every individual's action has a causally bound reaction in the dramatic world. Where this world, which is articulated by Kane as a system of connected people, places, and parts, presents no possibility for escape – there is no outside (even hell is refused as an 'other' space) – so characters are trapped in a world of their own, composite, making.

Importantly, then, I propose that Kane's politics are tied to her construction of character and her assumptions about, and interest in, what makes human beings behave the way they do. Kane believes that plays have the capacity to change people and, thereby, society and the world. Via her cathartic view of theatre, theatre is located, in its affective and emotional power, to cause change in the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of any individual who, being a part of society, thereby opens society up to change, too. Kane herself was changed, she claimed, by the experience of watching Jeremy Weller's *Mad*. In an interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, she states: '[*Mad*] changed my life because it changed me – the way I think, the way I behave, or try to behave. If theatre can change lives, then by implication it can change society, since we're all part of it' (133).

Plays are accounted as having political agency, then, potentially, at least, because people possess a certain degree of agency and plasticity of form. Kane's aim seems to have been to open audiences up to uncomfortable truths and experiences and, through suffering, to change them and their behaviour in the world. On the subject of her depiction of brutality, she asserts:

I've chosen to represent it because sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality. If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because

experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched. (Ibid)

In short, via Kane's belief in the cathartic power of drama, drama is located, in its affective and emotional power, as being capable of instigating change in the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of any individual who, being a part of society, thereby opens society itself up to change, too.

Character, then, does not die with, or in, Kane's final play. In fact, obversely, I suggest that Kane's characters follow in the tradition of modern character outlined by this thesis that comes out of Shakespeare and identifies a lifelike representation of a complex speaking and acting individual.



## Conclusion

### **‘What makes a human?’**

Through the course of this thesis, my inquiries into dramatic character, human identity, and ontology have been framed by the question, ‘What makes a human?’ I open my thesis with an analysis of Nick Dear’s *Frankenstein* (2011), which brings to light different ways in which the human may be conceived as ‘made’ and what this means for identity, agency, and responsibility. At the same time, I suggest, the play proposes that humans may be simultaneously creators and creations. Building from this paradoxical form of being, I set out some of the features of two of the traditional approaches to character with which my approach both partially aligns and distinguishes itself: that of the humanist and the Cultural Materialist. The former asks, ‘*Who* is character?’ and assumes character to be a coherent individual and the origin of the drama (and, by implication, history); the latter asks, ‘*What* is character?’ as it inquires into the identities and assumptions that characters represent and works to reveal the cultural conditions and structures of power which determine and construct characters’ forms. I present post/humanist theory as an alternative and more comprehensive approach that asks both ‘who’ and ‘what is character?’ since it views character as *both* product *and* ‘individual’ agent, as representing a distinct subjectivity that is, nonetheless, tied irrevocably to the text and the material world. The post/humanist approach also focuses attention upon the question of what the human being is and, by reinserting the human character’s capacity to exert agency (both within and beyond the borders of the play), it also encourages ways of rethinking and remaking the self and the world differently: indeed, in a world that is newly capable of creating life, such a possibility seems more important than ever.

In Chapter One I introduce Donna Haraway’s cyborg, a protean system of natural and artificial parts intimately coupled to its environments, which functions to foreground and trouble the borders between the human and its traditional nonhuman others (animals, machines, and supernatural entities). In the process, the cyborg works to worry the nature of identity and subjectivity as it has conventionally been formulated in the modern period, which conceives it as being predicated on relationships of difference. The cyborg, in its form as material-semiotic actor, works to generate the human as a hybrid structure of organic and technological parts that changes along with changes in context. This form, I argue, describes a fundamental structure of human being and presents an alternative

history of the human, at least since the Renaissance. Finally, the chapter considers the cyborg's implications for mind and the problem of free will in a physicalist universe, proposing that the theory of 'emergence' enables us to view humans and their dramatic representations as self-determining agents and changeable products of their material contexts in a way that is important for the sort of emancipatory politics towards which it gestures.

Having established and argued for the form and importance of the cyborg as a metaphor for human identity and subjectivity in the first chapter where the cyborg arises out of what I loosely term posthumanist discourse, Chapter Two, 'The Subject(s) of Humanism', focuses in *humanist* subjectivity. Specifically, this chapter tells an alternative story about modern subjectivity than is conventionally told about the liberal humanist subject and, in the process of presenting this alternative account, the chapter re-examines humanism and seeks to rehabilitate it, arguing that the early modern humanist subject may be closer kin with posthumanist forms of subjectivity than is generally acknowledged. The early modern humanist writing of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is shown to reveal a humanist subjectivity that, far from being stable and free, was presented as being fundamentally indeterminate and as demonstrating a *permeable* kind of humanistic essentialism indicative of a natural-cultural way of being. In short, this chapter makes the case that the modern human(ist) subject may have been too quickly consigned to history and that important reasons exist, both political- and character-based, to allow for a hybrid structure of subjectivity that is at least partially free.

Chapter Three makes the case for a post/humanist approach to dramatic character. Critiquing two influential schools of thought on the subject – the humanist and the postmodernist – I argue, firstly, that character is an important, even fundamental, constituent of drama and, as such, should be revived as a term in theatre and performance studies. Secondly, I reason that modern dramatic character, in representing, by definition, a 'realistic' human person (a psychologically complex agent in the world), *must be understood and analysed as such*. A post/humanist approach, I argue, offers an appropriate and sufficiently complex lens by which to view this form of modern character: treating character as a cyborg - a system of parts (text, performance, reader/audience, culturally normative assumptions and knowledges, and so forth) - the post/humanist frame identifies dramatic character as being bound to parts that constitute it and clarifies those parts as the objects of character analysis. However, the post/humanist

view also understands that the human dramatic character is, importantly, a *subjectivity*, which finds form in specific instantiations: for example, the performance of an actor or the mind of a reader. The character of Hamlet does not exist as such; only Hamlets exist, in individual and historically specific re-memberments.

In the case studies that follow Chapter Three, I replace the traditional (humanist) question ‘*Who* is this character?’ with ‘*What* is this character?’ to interrogate characters’ identities, forms, and humanity in their parts and at their identifying borders. The ‘what’ question, as I employ it, works to identify an individual form of selfhood, a ‘who’, but without locating the analytical focus in apparently psychologically-constituted gaps. Concentrating in modern lifelike characters, I analyse the human’s identifying formal borders with purportedly nonhuman others, the metaphysical and issues thereby entailed, and the interplay of these elements with the form and structure of the play and the implications of this interplay. In approaching these human representations thus, I assume for the human a structure of subjectivity that is fundamentally hybrid – a post/humanist structure – that, however, posits its content, its parts, in provisional terms. This is a human that is essentially indeterminate for its particular structure posits change as inherent. What this means for humans and their dramatic representations is that culturally specific forms, modes of thought, myths, scientific theories, technologies, and so forth, impact upon ‘individual’ characters in complex and idiosyncratic but nonetheless historically specific ways. In short, although I impose a contemporary structure of subjectivity upon historical representations of humans, it is a structure that permits of historical specificity and, in any case, as I show, such a way of viewing the human self as in indeterminate hybrid is not necessarily uniquely bound to the late twentieth, early twenty-first centuries in any case.

Chapter Four turns to the role most closely associated with the birth of modern dramatic character: Hamlet. William Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a psychologically complex and contradictory individual and his form defines him as the archetypal modern dramatic character. I argue that the play identifies him as a self-conscious ‘player’, an actor who is struggling to negotiate his self, performance, and role in a play that casts him as a malcontent avenger. When Hamlet wonders ‘To be, or not to be’, he is contemplating his role as avenging son knowing that, in performing the part, he risks becoming it, for Hamlet understands that the interplay of natural and cultural parts of the self are productive of a self in process. As I show, such a protean, post/humanist quality of

selfhood permeated Renaissance thinking. Notably, it is in the Renaissance that the notion that humans are fundamentally actors engaged in a dynamic and transformative process of self-performance becomes evident and, as I show, we find this notion subtly and explicitly explored in the play and wider culture. In finding such a ‘theme’ I argue that Hamlet *is* a protean actor and, accordingly, is representative of the human. A creative agent and a determined product, Hamlet is formed by his role at the same time as he exceeds it in a process of ongoing self-performance.

In Chapter Five, I identify the characters of the late nineteenth century’s Naturalist Theatre as ‘social animals’ and in doing so, I pick up on Émile Zola’s influential discourse on Naturalist Theatre at the same time as I foreground the prevailing cultural assumptions that humans are cast in a Darwinian universe which is definitively physicalist. In casting these Naturalistic characters as social animals, I open the way to conceiving of them as hybrids of natural and cultural parts. Focusing on the writing of August Strindberg – specifically his Naturalist play, *Miss Julie*, and his ‘Preface’ to the play – I argue that his characters’ paradoxical forms as physically determined ‘animals’ *and* as modern, psychologically dense, self-determining individuals manifest a structure that is cybernetic and protean. I also argue that Strindberg’s human characters are ‘natural actors’ who find new form in their navigation and performance of themselves as self-aware creatures, possessed of minds that arise out of, and yet remain tied to, the complexity of their physical forms and contexts. It may very well be that upon exiting the stage, we are meant to believe that Julie will go on to kill herself; however, given her *human* post/humanist form, there is always the possibility that she won’t.

The final chapter, ‘Sarah Kane’s Dramatic Worlds: Moving Beyond Character’, employs a post/humanist lens in order to bring Kane’s politics into focus. Kane’s work refuses traditional dichotomous orderings of people and world. Given Kane’s refusal of distinct borders and stable identities, I argue that viewing her work within the conventional frames of liberal humanism or postmodernism functions inappropriately to polarise the human into the forms of free agent or cultural product. Indeed, it is precisely this binary mode of thinking and knowing that the playwright is battling against. By adopting a post/humanist analysis of Kane’s characters, therefore, I demonstrate an approach that works more comprehensively and precisely to open up her plays at the same time as showing that Kane’s complex construction of characters has a political function to foster a greater sense of individual responsibility for our selves, our actions,

and our world. For example, by refusing to locate ‘the monster’ as elsewhere and other, Kane warns that each of us must look to our own complex and protean selves and contexts for the monster’s more mundane but troubling potential to manifest within our own borders. Finally, in relation to Kane’s *Blasted*, I contend that, in terms of character, it is preferable to approach Ian and Cate by asking *what* they are than *who* since the examination of their constitution and their beliefs about their constitution, functions to reveal their identity, ontology, and potential to change themselves and, by implication, the world at large.

Character, then, does not die with, or in, Kane’s final play, *4.48 Psychosis*, nor does it die in drama more generally. In fact, Kane’s characters, as I argue in Chapter Six, follow in the tradition of modern dramatic character that comes out of Shakespeare as identifying lifelike representations of psychologically complex speaking and acting individuals. In identifying this modern dramatic character, however, I reject the common opposition of free agent and predetermined plot. The possibility of freedom is important to this thesis’s conception of character and, like Julian Murphet, I suggest that modern character finds form *in relation to* plot, and stands for ‘subjective particularity and the gesture of free will’ (106). In Kane’s *Blasted*, for example, the possibility that people can and might change and that they are capable of re-making the world differently (and, perhaps, better), is what makes Kane’s play – and her plays more generally – hopeful and politically engaging. However, I also suggest that modern dramatic characters do not appear to be free in any straightforward sense. They are complex and contradictory creatures, constituted of parts which tie the human both to the earth and to the heavens, both to physical matter and to mind, both to nature and culture. Being simultaneously creator and creation, this modern character only ever attains ‘freedom’ provisionally.

In this thesis, I reject the reduction of dramatic character to simple inhuman product or human agent. Instead I advocate an alternative post/humanist model, which more happily corresponds with the complexity of modern dramatic character’s form. Post/humanism brings together agency, embodiment, and subjectivity without entailing metaphysical autonomy or ahistorical permanence. The implication of this post/humanist story is that character becomes a form and identity in process in relation to a world – dramatic and real – that situates her, forms her, and is in turn formed by her.

The ‘worlding’ potential of character – his capacity to re-make himself and the world of which he is, in every sense, a part – is one of the most important political

implications of a post/humanist view of the human and character. The drama we create, the roles we play (in the theatre just as well as in life) are not merely insubstantial, inconsequential fictions; they are always embodied and, in that they are experienced by protean, systemic agents, their effects ripple beyond the ‘borders’ of the play text or the theatre because everything, and everyone, is connected.

Such a systemic and connected view of the world and humans is, of course, bound to the contemporary moment and is informed by British, twenty-first century culture and my ‘character’, which is itself in complex interaction with, and partially determined by, specific and complexly interacting assumptions and structures. My view is informed by: posthumanist modes of thought; ‘desubstantiating’ (to use Elinor Fuchs’s term) poststructuralist theories of the subject; scientific advances and knowledge about human genetics, brain function, mood, psychology, and the creation of life; the repeated demonstration of humans inflicting atrocities upon other humans, the earth, and nonhuman forms of life; advancing technologies which are changing the way we think of ourselves and the way we work, relate, and live; the cultural assumptions and artistic forms and practices that I have encountered; and so forth. Unavoidably, the ‘character’ of my point of view thus formed and integrated into the system of my particular cultural milieu in the contemporary period refracts the dramatic characters and plays that my post/humanist analysis brings into focus. This being so, the theory of the post/humanist subject articulated in these pages as constituting an alternative account of human subjectivity for modernity is as much an anachronism as the liberal humanist that I critique. However, I want to suggest that there is a possibility, too, that, given the techno-scientific advances made in recent years – the discoveries that have constructed new knowledge in relation to the nature of life and human being – the form of human outlined in these pages offers a more enlightening view, in a distinctly humanist sense, of what it means, and has meant, to be human in European modernity. While I make no claims that the post/humanist subject identified and argued for in these pages offers a *true* account of the human, I do suggest that, in the way it responds to problems attaching to some conventional theories of the human which inform or underpin the discourse of character, it may offer a structure and approach that is more comprehensive and instructive than those others.

I would like to close with one intriguing implication of the post/humanist view of the human and character for acting. Through Chapters Four and Five, I argue that in

performing a role, the actors playing Hamlet and Jean, respectively, become their roles in a profound sense. The actor, during the process of rehearsal and performance, may fundamentally transform into his part such that actor and character increasingly become indivisible. Constantin Stanislavsky certainly gestures towards such a post/humanist conception of protean selfhood and becoming when he writes about the process of the actor's development of character. This kind of naturalistic rehearsal process is examined and critiqued by Tim Crouch in his 2009 play for the Royal Court Theatre, *The Author*. The play presents a playwright called Tim Crouch who has written a viscerally and realistically violent play about abuse, which has been staged at the Royal Court. Performed from within two banks of seating that face each other (there is no stage), *The Author* recounts the rehearsal and performance process from the point of view of its playwright, its two actors, and an audience member.

Describing an apparently Stanislavskian style of rehearsal, the actors recount how they submerged themselves in the worlds of their characters and thereby rendered themselves better able to represent their (fictional) characters. Their aim was to 'become' their characters, to take on their bodies (if not their minds). However, although Vic talks in terms of working to transform himself into his abusive character during the process of character development, it is apparent that he, like Tim, perceived no risk in such a project because for Vic the borders of the self – *a liberal humanist self* - are presumed to be fundamentally secure. Although he works hard to become a persuasive, iconic representation of the idea he has of his character, Vic never really perceives any risk to himself in developing the role of an abuser because he thinks he, Vic, is autonomous and stable, with clear and definite borders.

At the end of the production referred to in *The Author*, nice, middle class Vic beats up the audience member, Adrian, having *really*, albeit partially and provisionally, turned himself into his fictional character; Esther, having engaged with real victims (in face-to-face conversations, via digital representations, and in the act of role-play) and having repeatedly enacted the role of a victim, ends the production in need of counselling herself. In short, in the process of working on their characters, the actor, as she is comprehended by Crouch, is given as drawing herself closer to her character such that she becomes influenced by the ostensibly fictional role in her everyday life. Thus, as the actor looks inside herself to locate the seeds of the character, so the imaginative fiction of the character influences the actor's sense and form of herself.

The relationship between the actor and character is an intriguing one that this thesis has only just started to open up. Questions remain: what implications does a protean, post/humanist model of selfhood have in ethical terms for a realistic acting tradition that requires actors to 'become' their characters? Does the post/humanist structure of the self have wider implications for drama or performance, such as in relation to alternative performance modes or styles? And how does an actor's specific historical performance of a character influence the representation of the character for the audience? These and other questions are prompted by the post/humanist model of human being. Their answers wait upon further research.



## **Bibliography**

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Trans. Kevin Attell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- . *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- ‘An Outline of Humanism’. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. The Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 18 May 2012.
- Aristotle. *Poetics with the Tractatus Coislinianus, reconstruction of Poetics II, and the fragments of the On Poets*. Trans. with notes by Richard Janko. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.
- Aston, Elaine. *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- . ‘Reviewing the fabric of *Blasted*’. de Vos and Saunders 13-27.
- and George Savona. *Theatre as sign-system: a semiotics of text and performance*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Auslander, Philip. ‘Humanoid Boogie: Reflections on Robotic Performance’. Krasner and Saltz 87-103.
- Badmington, Neil. *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- , ed. *Posthumanism*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000. Readers in Cultural Criticism.
- Bell, David. *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, 1980.
- . *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Benedictsson, Victoria. *The Enchantment*. Version and Introd. Clare Bayley. London: Nick Hern Books, 2007.
- Bennett, Andrew and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2009.

- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Bentley, Eric, ed. *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Berkoff, Steven. 'Steven Berkoff on Metamorphosis'. *The Trial; Metamorphosis; In the Penal Colony*. Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1988.
- . *The Trial; Metamorphosis; In the Penal Colony*. Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1988.
- Blau, Herbert. 'A Character Study of Drama'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 13.1 (Sept. 1954): 52-68.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. London: Fourth Estate Ltd., 1998.
- Bottoms, Stephen. 'Authorizing the Audience: The Conceptual Drama of Tim Crouch'. *Performance Research* 14 (2009): 65-76.
- Bourassa, André G. 'Personnage: History, Philology, Performance'. Yachnin and Slights 83-97.
- Bowler, Peter J. *Charles Darwin: The Man and His Influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. Introd. John Russell Brown. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1985.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. London: Methuen Drama, 1964.
- Bristol, Michael. 'Confusing Shakespeare's Characters with Real People: Reflections on Reading in Four Questions'. Yachnin and Slights 21-40.
- Brooks, Rodney. 'I, Rodney Brooks, Am a Robot'. *IEEE Spectrum*. IEEE Spectrum, 11 June 2008. Web. 27 May 2010.
- Brown, Richard Danson. 'From Burckhardt to Greenblatt: New Historicisms and Old'. Whitlock 4-11.
- Bullock, Alan. *The Humanist Tradition in the West*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- Burckhardt, Jacob. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Trans. S. G. C. Middlemore. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

- Burke, Peter. 'Jacob Burckhardt and the Italian Renaissance'. Introduction. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. By Jacob Burckhardt. Trans. S. G. C. Middlemore. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory'. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Campbell, Alyson. 'Experiencing Kane: An Affective Analysis of Sarah Kane's 'Experiential' Theatre in Performance'. *Australasian Drama Studies* 46 (2005): 80-99.
- Capek, Karel. *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*. Trans. Peter Majer and Cathy Porter. London: Methuen Drama, 1999.
- . *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*. Trans. P. Selver. London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- . and Joseph Capek. *The Insect Play ('And so ad infinitum')*. Trans. P. Selver. London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Carlson, Harry G., trans. and intro. *Strindberg: Five Plays*. By August Strindberg. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981.
- Carnicke, Sharon Marie. 'Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor'. Ed. Alison Hodge. *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 11-36.
- Carroll, Noël. 'Philosophy and Drama: Performance, Interpretation, and Intentionality'. *Krasner and Saltz* 104-121.
- Cartwright, Kent. *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Centre for Synthetic Biology and Innovation. 'Our Research'. *Centre for Synthetic Biology and Innovation*. Imperial College London, n.d. Web. 29 Aug. 2011.
- 'Character'. Def. 1a, 8a, and 17a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 20 Sept. 2011.
- Churchill, Caryl. *Far Away*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2000.
- Clark, Andy. *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Clarke, Bruce. *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Clayton, Philip. *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Coates, Willson H., Hayden V. White, and J. Salwyn Schapiro. *The Emergence of Liberal Humanism: An Intellectual History of Western Europe*. New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, Toronto, London, Sydney: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966.
- Cole, Toby and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds. *Actors on Acting: The Theories, Techniques, and Practices of the Great Actors of All Times as Told in Their Own Words*. Introd. with biographical notes by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy. New York: Crown Publishers, 1970.
- ‘Conglomerate’. Def. 4. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 10 Oct. 2011.
- Cox, C. B. *The Free Spirit: A Study of Liberal Humanism in the Novels of George Eliot, Henry James, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Angus Wilson*. London: Oxford University Press: 1963.
- Crewe, Jonathan. ‘Reclaiming Character?’ *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006): 35-41.
- Crouch, Tim. *The Author*. London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2009.
- Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. 1994. Rev. ed. London: Vintage Books, 2006.
- . *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. London: Harper Collins, 1998.
- . *The Origin of Species*. Ed., Introd., and Notes Gillian Beer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Davies, Tony. *Humanism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- de Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet Without Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Dear, Nick. *Frankenstein*. London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 2011.
- Demastes, William W. *Staging Consciousness: Theater and the Materialization of Mind*. The University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Dennett, Daniel C. *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.
- de Vos, Laurens and Graham Saunders, eds. *Sarah Kane in Context*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Dodd, William. ‘Character as Dynamic Identity: From Fictional Interaction Script to Performance’. *Yachnin and Slights* 62-82.

- Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. 1984. Foreward Terry Eagleton. Reissued 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- . 'Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism and Marxist Humanism'. *New Literary History* 21.3 (1990): 471-493.
- Donohue, Joseph. 'Character, Genre, and Ethos in Nineteenth-Century British Drama'. *The Yearbook of English Studies* 9 (1979): 78-101.
- Drakakis, John. 'Introduction'. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Drakakis 1-44.
- , ed. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London and New York: Longman, 1992.
- Dromgoole, Dominic. *The Full Room: An A-Z of Contemporary Playwriting*. London: Methuen, 2000.
- Edgar, David. *How Plays Work*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2009.
- Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. 'The Emergence of Print Culture in the West: Defining the Initial Shift'. Whitlock 55-73.
- Fahlgren, Margaretha. 'Strindberg and the Woman Question'. *The Cambridge Companion to August Strindberg*. Ed. Michael Robinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 20-34.
- Finkelkraut, Alain. *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century*. London: Pimlico, 2001.
- Fordyce, Ehren. 'The Voice of Kane'. de Vos and Saunders 103-114.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Frankenstein*. By Nick Dear. Dir. Danny Boyle. Perf. Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller. National Theatre, London. 19 Feb. 2011. Performance.
- Freeman, Lisa A. *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Fuchs, Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. London: Profile Books Ltd, 2003.
- Gahringer, Robert E. 'Liberalism and Humanism'. *Ethics* 66.1 (1955): 36-50.

- Gale, Maggie B. and John F. Deeney, eds. *Routledge Drama Anthology and Sourcebook: From Modernism to Contemporary Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- . 'Introduction'. Gale and Deeney xv-xxii.
- Gane, Nicholas. 'When We Have Never Been Human, What is to Be Done?: Interview with Donna Haraway'. *Theory Culture Society* 23 (2006): 135-158.
- Gardiner, Cynthia P. *The Sophoclean Chorus: A Study of Character and Function*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987.
- Gaskell, Ronald. *Drama and Reality: The European Theatre Since Ibsen*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.
- González, Jennifer. 'Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research'. Kirkup, Woodward, and Hovenden 58-73.
- Goodall, Jane R. *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. 'The Philosophy, Medicine and Theology of Paracelsus'. Whitlock 314-321.
- Graham, Elaine L. *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Gray, Chris Hables. *Cyborg Citizen*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Greetham, Bryan. *Philosophy*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Greig, David. Introduction. *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays*. By Sarah Kane. London: Methuen, 2001.
- Gritzner, Karoline. '(Post)Modern Subjectivity and the New Expressionism: Howard Barker, Sarah Kane, and Forced Entertainment'. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18.3 (2008): 328-340.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 'Naked'. *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*. Smith and Morra 187-202.
- Gurr, Andrew. 'Physical Conditions of the London Stage'. Whitlock 175-180.
- Guttenplan, Samuel, ed. *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford and Malden (MA): Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995.

- Halberstam, Judith and Ira Livingston, eds. *Posthuman Bodies*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Haldane, John. 'History: Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy of Mind'. Guttenplan 333-338.
- Hall, A. Rupert. 'Science, Technology and Utopia in the Seventeenth Century'. Mathias 33-53.
- Haney II, William S. *Cyberculture, Cyborgs and Science Fiction: Consciousness and the Posthuman*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006.
- . *Globalization and the Posthuman*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.
- Hanson, Elizabeth. *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Haraway, Donna. 'A Cyborg Manifesto'. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 149-181.
- . *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse™*. New York and London: 1997.
- . *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York and London: Routledge, 1989.
- . *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991.
- . 'Situated Knowledges'. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 183-201.
- Harris, Anthony. 'Manifold Impieties: The Social Setting'. Whitlock 342-352.
- Hart, F. Elizabeth. 'Performance, Phenomenology, and the Cognitive Turn'. McConachie and Hart. 29-51.
- Hart, William D. 'Dualism'. Guttenplan 265-269.
- Hartley, Andrew James. 'Character, Agency and the Familiar Actor'. Yachnin and Jessica Slights 158-177.
- Hawkes, Terence. 'A Sea Shell'. Drakakis 399-419.
- Hayles, N. Katherine . *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- . 'Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments'. *Configurations* 10.2 (2002): 297-320.

- . 'Unfinished Work: From Cyborg to Cognisphere'. *Theory Culture Society* 23 (2006): 159-166.
- Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- Herman, David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- . Introduction. Herman 3-21.
- Hodge, M. J. S., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Höfele, Andreas. 'Humanity at Stake: Man and Animal in Shakespeare's Theatre'. *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production*. Ed. Peter Holland. Vol. 60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Theatres for Shakespeare. 118-129.
- Holzapfel, Amy Strahler. 'Strindberg as Vivisector: Physiology, Pathology, and Anti-Mimesis in *The Father* and *Miss Julie*'. *Modern Drama* 51.3 (Fall 2008): 329-352.
- Houghton, Norris, ed. and introd. *Seeds of Modern Drama*. New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1986.
- Huer, Jon. *The Post-Human Society*. Baltimore: PublishAmerica, 2005.
- Iball, Helen. 'Room Service: En Suite on the Blasted Frontline'. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15.3 (2005): 320 – 329.
- Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Version by Frank McGuinness. London and New York: Faber and Faber, 1996.
- . *Four Major Plays (A Doll's House; Ghosts; Hedda Gabler; The Master Builder)*. Trans. James McFarlane and Jens Arup. Introd. James McFarlane. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- IEEE Spectrum. 'Female Android Geminoid F'. *YouTube*. IEEE Spectrum, n.d. Web. 7 Sept. 2010.
- Innes, Christopher, ed. *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Ionesco, Eugène. *Rhinoceros*. Trans. Martin Crimp. London: Faber and Faber, 2007.
- J. Craig Venter Institute. 'First Self-Replicating Synthetic Bacterial Cell'. *J. Craig Venter Institute*. J. Craig Venter Institute, n. d. Web. 29 Aug. 2011. <<http://www.jcvi.org/cms/research/projects/first-self-replicating-synthetic-bacterial-cell/overview/>>.



- . Press Release. 'First Self-Replicating Synthetic Bacterial Cell'. *J. Craig Venter Institute*. J. Craig Venter Institute, 20 May 2010. Web. 29 Aug. 2011. <<http://www.jcvi.org/cms/press/press-releases/full-text/article/first-self-replicating-synthetic-bacterial-cell-constructed-by-j-craig-venter-institute-researcher/>>.
- Jerz, Dennis G. 'Resources: *R. U. R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*: Intro & Summary'. *Dennis G. Jerz Weblog*. Dennis G. Jerz, 8 Oct. 2001. Web. 1 Sept. 2011. <<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/resources/RUR/>>.
- Johnson, Walter, trans. and intro. *Pre-Inferno Plays*. By August Strindberg. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1970.
- Jones, Mark Peter. 'Posthuman Agency: Between Theoretical Traditions'. *Sociological Theory* 14.3 (Nov 1996): 290-309.
- Kalakrishnan, Mrinal, Jonas Buchli, Peter Pastor, Michael Mistry, and Stefan Schaal. 'The Latest Version of the LittleDog Robot'. sschaal1. *YouTube*, 24 Mar. 2010. Web. 3 June 2010.
- Kane, Robert. *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Kane, Sarah. Interview by Dan Rebellato. 'Brief Encounter Platform'. Royal Holloway, University of London, 3 November 1998. Unpublished print copy courtesy of Dan Rebellato.
- . *Complete Plays (Blasted; Phaedra's Love; Cleansed; Crave; 4.48 Psychosis; Skin)*. London: Methuen, 2001.
- . *Blasted and Phaedra's Love*. London: Methuen Drama, 1996.
- Kelleher, Joe. *Theatre and Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Kelley, Donald R. *Renaissance Humanism*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991.
- Kellner, Douglas and Tyson Lewis. 'Liberal Humanism and the European Critical Tradition'. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Science Methodology*. Eds. William Outhwaite and Stephen P. Turner. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2007.
- Kelly, Paul. *Liberalism*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005.
- Kirkup, Gill, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward, and Fiona Hovenden, eds. *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Kiss, Jemima. 'Facebook leaps into future as smartphones prepare to get smarter'. *Observer*. *Observer*, 16 Jan. 2011. Web. 5 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/jan/16/facebook-future-smartphones-social-media>>

- Knights, L. C. *Some Shakespearean Themes and An Approach to Hamlet*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books in association with Chatto and Windus, 1970.
- Krasner, David. 'Empathy and Theater'. Krasner and Saltz 255-277.
- and David Z. Saltz, eds. *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Liberalism, Community and Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Lane, David. 'A Dramaturg's Perspective: Looking to the Future of Script Development'. *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 30. 1 (2010): 127-141.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. 1991. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Lawton, Graham. 'Uprooting Darwin's Tree'. *New Scientist* 24 Jan. 2009: 34-39.
- Lee, John. *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans. and Introd. Karen Jürs-Munby. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Lenkeith, Nancy. Introduction. *Fabula de homine*. By Juan Luis Vives. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1948. 385-386.
- LePage, Louise. 'Posthuman Perspectives and Postdramatic Theatre: The Theory and Practice of Hybrid Ontology in Katie Mitchell's *The Waves*'. *Culture, Language and Representation* 6 (2008): 137-149.
- . 'Posthuman Sarah Kane'. 'Backpages 18.3'. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18.3 (2008): 401-403.
- Leroi, Armand Marie. 'Frankenstein, or, The Pursuit of Perfection'. *National Theatre Programme for Frankenstein* (2011): n. pag.
- Letwin, David and Joe and Robin Stockdale. *The Architecture of Drama: Plot, Character, Theme, Genre, and Style*. Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008.
- Levine, George Lewis. *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-Enchantment of the World*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c2006.
- Lewes, George Henry. *On Actors and the Art of Acting*. 1875. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968.

- . 'On Actors and the Art of Acting'. Cole and Chinoy 341-352.
- . *Problems of Life and Mind*. Memphis, Tennessee, U.S.A.: General Books, 2010.
- 'Liberal-humanist'. Def. S1b. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 24 May. 2012.
- Lieblein, Leanore. 'Embodied Intersubjectivity and the Creation of Early Modern Character'. Yachnin and Slights 117-138.
- Livingston, Ira. *Between Science and Literature: An Introduction to Autopoetics*. Foreword N. Katherine Hayles. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- Lublin, Robert I. 'I love you *now*': time and desire in the plays of Sarah Kane'. de Vos and Saunders 115-125.
- Luckhurst, Mary. 'Infamy and Dying Young: Sarah Kane, 1971 – 1999'. *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660 – 2000*. Ed. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 107-124.
- Macpherson, C. B. *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*. London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Mamet, David. Interview. *ATW – SDCF Masters of the Stage*. December 1992. iTunes University: American Theatre Wing and SDCF, 23 March 2009. Podcast.
- Mancing, Howard. 'See the play, read the book.' McConachie and Hart 189-206.
- Mangan, Michael. *Performing Dark Arts: A Cultural History of Conjuring*. Bristol, UK, and Chicago, USA: Intellect Books, 2007.
- Manovich, Lev. 'Visual Technologies as Cognitive Prostheses: A Short History of the Externalization of the Mind'. Smith and Morra 203-220.
- Margolin, Uri. 'Character'. Herman 66-79.
- Martin, John. 'Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe'. Whitlock 11-31.
- Mathias, Peter, ed. *Science and Society 1600-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- . 'Who Unbound Prometheus? Science and Technical Change, 1600-1800'. Mathias 54-80.
- Mazlish, Bruce. *The Fourth Discontinuity: the co-evolution of humans and machines*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

- McConachie, Bruce. *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- . 'Moving theatre studies beyond Freud and Lacan.' McConachie and Hart 52-75.
- and F. Elizabeth Hart, eds. *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- McKenna, Michael. 'Compatibilism'. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/compatibilism/>>.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1962.
- Megson, Chris. 'Introduction'. *The Methuen Drama Book of Naturalist Plays*. Ed. Chris Megson. London: Methuen Drama, 2010. vii-xxi.
- . 'Sarah Kane and the Politics of Identity'. *Sarah Kane: Reassessments*. University of Cambridge. 16 February 2008. Keynote Paper.
- Meriweather, Elizabeth. *Heddatron*. New York: Playscripts, Inc., 2008.
- Milner, Andrew. *Cultural Materialism*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1993.
- Mitchell, Katie. *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.
- . *Waves: A record of the multimedia work devised by Katie Mitchell and the company from the text of Virginia Woolf's novel The Waves*. London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2008.
- Moi, Toril. *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Morin, Emilie. "'Look Again": Indeterminacy and Contemporary British Drama'. *New Theatre Quarterly* 27.1 (2011): 71-85.
- Motton, Gregroy, trans. *The Plays: Volume One (The Father; Miss Julie; The Comrades; Creditors)*. By August Strindberg. London: Oberon Books, 2000.
- Muri, Allison. 'Enlightenment Cybernetics: Communications and Control in the Man-Machine'. *The Eighteenth Century* 49.2 (2008): 141-163.
- Murphet, Julian. 'Character and Event'. *SubStance* Issue 113 36.2 (2007): 106-125.
- Nellhaus, Tobin. 'Performance strategies, image schemas, and communication frameworks'. McConachie and Hart 76-94.

- O'Mahony, Marie. *Cyborg: The Man-Machine*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2002.
- Pankratz, Annete. 'Neither here nor there: theatrical space in Kane's work'. de Vos and Saunders 149-160.
- Panksepp, Jaak and Jules B. 'The Seven Sins of Evolutionary Psychology'. *Evolution and Psychology* 6.2 (2000): 108-131.
- Parker-Starbuck, Jennifer. 'Becoming-Animate: On the Performed Limits of "Human"'. *Theatre Journal* 58.4 (2006): 649-668.
- . *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Pepperell, Robert. *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness beyond the brain*. Bristol, UK and Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2003.
- Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni. *On the Dignity of Man*. Trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, Paul J.W. Miller, and Douglas Carmichael. Introd. Paul J.W. Miller. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.
- Pink, Thomas. *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Ponech, Trevor. 'The Reality of Fictive Cinematic Characters'. Yachnin and Slights 41-61.
- Preston, Claire. 'In the Wilderness of Forms: Ideas and Things in Thomas Browne's Cabinets of Curiosity'. Rhodes and Sawday 170-183.
- Rattansi, P. M. 'The Social Interpretation of Science in the Seventeenth Century'. Mathias 1-32.
- Rebellato, Dan. 'Introduction to Part I: Naturalism and Symbolism: Early Modernist Practice'. *Routledge Drama Anthology and Sourcebook: From Modernism to Contemporary Performance*. Eds. Maggie B. Gale and John F. Deeney. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- . 'Sarah Kane Before *Blasted*: The Monologues'. de Vos and Saunders 28-44.
- . 'When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play?' *Performance Research* 14.1 (2009): 17-28.
- Rée, Jonathan. *Heidegger: History and Truth in Being and Time*. London: A Phoenix Paperback, 1998.
- Reynolds, Brain. *Transversal Enterprises in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: Fugitive Explorations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

- Rhodes, Neil. 'Articulate Networks: The Self, The Book and the World'. Rhodes and Sawday 184-196.
- and Jonathan Sawday. 'Introduction: Paperworld: Imagining the Renaissance Computer'. Rhodes and Sawday 1-17.
- and Jonathan Sawday. *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Richardson, Brian. 'Drama and Narrative'. Herman 142-155.
- Ridout, Nick. *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- . *Theatre and Ethics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Roach, Joseph R. Jr. 'G. H. Lewes and Performance Theory: "Towards a Science of Acting"'. *Theatre Journal* 32.3 (Oct. 1980): 312-328.
- Robinson, Michael, trans. *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. By August Strindberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Rothwell, Andrew, trans., intro., and notes. *Thérèse Raquin*. By Émile Zola. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Ross, Stephanie. 'Gardens' Powers'. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33.3 (Autumn 1999): 4-17.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Imaginary*. Ed. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, trans. Jonathan Webber. Abingdon: Routledge 2004.
- Saunders, Graham. *About Kane: The Playwright & the Work*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2009.
- . "'Just a Word on a Page and There is the Drama": Sarah Kane's Theatrical Legacy'. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13.1 (2003): 97-110.
- . *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Sawday, Jonathan. 'Towards the Renaissance Computer'. Rhodes and Sawday 29-44.
- Schiebinger, Londa. 'Taxonomy for Human Beings'. Kirkup et al 11-37.
- Schlueter, June. *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.
- Searle, John. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Serpieri, Alessandro. 'The Breakdown of Medieval Hierarchy in *King Lear*'. Drakakis 84-95.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Methuen Drama, 2006. The Arden Shakespeare.
- . *Hamlet*. Ed. George Rylands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- . *King Lear*. By William Shakespeare. *The Complete Works*. Eds. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Shaw, George Bernard. 'A Dramatic Realist to His Critics'. Bentley 175-196.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. 1818 Text. Ed. with Intro. and notes by Marilyn Butler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Smith, Marquard and Joanne Morra, eds. *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2006.
- Smolensky, Paul. 'Computational Models of Mind'. Guttenplan 176-185.
- Sobchack, Vivian. 'A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality'. Smith and Morra 17-41.
- Sprigge, Elizabeth, trans. *Twelve Plays*. August Strindberg. London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1963.
- Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Methuen Drama, 1988.
- States, Bert. O. *Hamlet and the Concept of Character*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- . 'The Anatomy of Character'. *Theatre Journal* 37.1 (March 1985): 86-101.
- Stepan, Nancy Leys. 'Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science'. Kirkup et al 38-49.
- Stephenson, Heidi and Langridge, Natasha. *Rage and Reason: Women and Playwrights on Playwriting*. London: Methuen Drama, 1997. Includes interview with Sarah Kane.
- Stoker, Bram. *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving Vol II*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970.
- Stone, Allucquère Rosanne. *The War of Desire and Technology: At the Close of the Mechanical Age*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1996.

- Strindberg, August. *Miss Julie*. Trans. Michael Robinson. *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- . 'Preface' to *Miss Julie*. Trans. Michael Robinson. *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 56-68.
- Styan, J. L. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice I: Realism and Naturalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Thompson, Ann and Neil Taylor, eds. *Hamlet*. By William Shakespeare. London: Methuen Drama, 2006. The Arden Shakespeare.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. London: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Tinker, Jack. 19 Jan. 1996. Rev. of *Blasted* by Sarah Kane, dir. James MacDonald. Daily Mail. Theatre Record (1995): 42-43.
- Toffoletti, Kim. *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996.
- Turner, Henry S. 'Life Science: Rude Mechanicals, Human Mortals, Posthuman Shakespeare'. *South Central Review* 26.1 & 2 (2009): 197-217.
- Tycer, Alicia. "'Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander": Melancholic Witnessing of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*'. *Theatre Journal* 60.1 (2008): 23-36.
- Urban, Ken. 'An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane'. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23.3 (Sept. 2001): 36-46.
- Urmson, J. O. 'Dramatic Representation'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*. 22.89 (Oct 1972): 333-343.
- Vives, Juan Luis. *Fabula de homine*. Eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1948. 387-393.
- Voskuil, Lynn M. *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004.
- Waddington, Julie. 'Posthumanist identities in Sarah Kane'. de Vos and Saunders 139-148.
- Waldby, Catherine. *The Visible Human Project: Informatic bodies and posthuman medicine*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Wertheim, Margaret. *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*. London: Virago Press, 1999.



- Whitlock, Keith, ed. *The Renaissance in Europe: A Reader*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Wiles, David. 'Aristotle's *Poetics* and Ancient Dramatic Theory'. Eds. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 92-107.
- Wills, David. 'Techneology or the Discourse of Speed'. *Smith and Morra* 237-263.
- Wilshire, Bruce. *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Winner, Langdon. *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought*. Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: The MIT Press, 1978.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Yachnin, Paul and Jessica Slights. 'Introduction'. Yachnin and Slights 1-20.
- and Jessica Slights, eds. *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Zagorin, Perez. 'On Humanism Past and Present'. *Daedalus* 132.4 (2003): 87-92.
- Zola, Émile. 'Naturalism in the Theatre'. Trans. Albert Bermel. *Bentley* 351-372.
- . 'Preface to the Second Edition'. *Thérèse Raquin*. By Émile Zola. Trans. Andrew Rothwell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . *Thérèse Raquin*. Trans. Kathleen Boutall. *Seeds of Modern Drama*. Introduction and ed. Norris Houghton. New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1986.