Reading in Ruins: Exploring Posthumanist Narrative Studies

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READING IN RUINS: EXPLORING POSTHUMANIST NARRATIVE STUDIES

Posthumanism and Colonial Discourse: Nineteenth Century Literature and Twenty-First Century Critique

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Nineteenth Century novelists frequently picture life beyond and across the edges of humanity—figuratively moving the 'posts' of humanity—a practice that this article calls 'posthumanisation'. Inspired by the accelerating as well as mutually reinforcing dynamics of colonial expansion, empiricism, new biological and scientific findings (Darwin, paleontology, and psychology), and the rise of industrialisation, prominent writers such as Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, and Joseph Conrad habitually blur human-animal boundaries. This article engages with versions of posthumanisation in selected novels by these authors—Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898)—and the anonymously published *The Woman of Colour* (1808), examining how they engage either in critiquing the perfidious overlaps between posthumanisation and colonial discourse (*The Woman of Colour*; *Frankenstein*) or blur Cartesian binaries between humans and animals to reinforce colonialism's narcissistic politics of non-relation (for example, see Gandhi, 2006; Simmons, 2007; and Drichel, 2018). The article foregrounds the extent to which a thriving colonial discourse and biological racism do not (necessarily) result in a 'fixing' of racial others on the side of 'animal' (and, as such, in their 'dehumanisation'), but rather in a strategic 'flexibilisation' of 'hum-animality' (see Ellis, 2018) in the interest of plausibilising white supremacy and the slavery system. Arguing for the merit of historicizing literary analysis as posthumanist scholarship directs its gaze to the past; building on race-critical contributions to posthumanist discourse (see, for example, Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Jackson, 2020; Davis et al., 2019; and Yussof, 2019); and also engaging with the still-scarce scholarship on the overlaps of posthuman being and race relations in the context of Britain's 'imperial century' (see Ellis, 2018; and Jackson, 2020), this essay contributes to setting on a more solid, historical foundation a discourse that has repeatedly been criticised for engaging a 'racial' 'wilful blindness' (Yusoff, 2018). The article thus contributes to diversifying not only historical approaches to 'proto-posthumanisms' as they are currently proliferating in the field but also, and by implication, current posthumanist self-understandings and research ethics.

I. Ice-Rafts of Posthumanism

> He sprung from the cabin-window, as he said this, upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance. (Shelley, 2012: 161)

In his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Clarke and Rossini, 2016), one of the first comprehensive collections seeking to distil posthumanism's precursors in the past, Ron Broglio (2016) discusses Shelley's *Frankenstein* in his chapter on Romanticism:

> Frankenstein is horrified to assemble across species and his human nature loathes the thought that *we* are animated flesh like any other animal. To think of humans as animals is to level the hierarchical chain of being that places *us* above other creatures. (Broglio, 2016: 36; emphasis added)

As Broglio aptly observes, 'assemblage across species' is a central aspect of the creature's (seeming) monstrosity—and of Frankenstein's inability, it might be added, to relate meaningfully to his creation. Indeed, the flattening of the animal-human hierarchy that Broglio here identifies clearly carries a posthuman impulse of abandoning both clear-cut species boundaries and hierarchies, which induces dread in the collective human 'we' of the quote. While I agree that the creature and the dynamic in which it is placed can be viewed productively through a posthuman framework, it is doubtful whether a universalised 'we' adequately chronicles the historical differences between past and present understandings of human being. It is further uncertain if the collective 'we' comprehensively captures the heterogeneous positionalities of different readers—like their uneven entitlements to, and possibly differing wishes to be included in, (white) normative notions of 'humanness'.

Sure enough, *Frankenstein* was published amidst fervent, continuing debates about what it means to be human—debates driven by colonial explorations, conquests, and encounters, a thriving empiricism, and by the clashes between abolitionists and pro-slavery agitators. The African slave trade was formally abolished

in the British dominions in 1807, a good ten years before Shelley published the first edition of her novel, whilst continuing, of course, as an illicit trade (see Walvin, 2009). The second edition, published in 1831, preceded the abolition of slavery in the British Empire by only two years, though slavery would continue for decades to come in Britain's former American colonies, and even longer in many other places. The same period saw the onset of Britain's so-called imperial century, together with Queen Victoria's long reign from 1819 to 1901. Given this social and political climate, both empire and racial discourses form a pivotal frame of reference for *Frankenstein*'s representational strategies, as has been widely acknowledged. As a case in point, Frankenstein's friend Clerval strives to learn the languages of India in order to involve himself more effectively in the ongoing, rapid expansion of British hegemony in Asia (see Shelley, 2012: 43; and Fulford, 1998: 43). Similarly, the creature hears 'of the discovery of the American hemisphere, and [weeps] with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants' (Shelley, 2012: 83). Howard L. Malchow (1993: 103) argues that various aspects of the creature's own physique, such as his 'lustrous black' hair and 'black lips' (Shelley, 2012: 35), yellow eyes, huge size, superhuman strength, endurance, diet (vegetarianism), and movements ('apelike ability to scamper up mountainsides') strongly resonate with descriptions rendered in Mungo Park's *Travels* (1799). Shelley read Park's account alongside other colonial (empiricist) depictions of Africans and people of African descent,[1] reportedly frequently objecting to the white supremacist notions contained therein (Seymour, 2000: 138). Other scholars link the creature's revolt to slave mass-uprisings in Barbados (1816) and Guyana (1823) as well as abolitionism and discourses of cannibalism (for example, see Lee, 2002: 171–93), phrenology (Marshall, 2011: 65–90), and miscegenation (Smith, 2016: 211). They also show how the creature visibilises cultural prejudice against racialised Asian peoples (for example, see Bohls, 1994: 33; and Lew 1991: 273) and the extent to which the 'happy communities' of the 'Frankenstein and De Lacey families' are 'inseparable from, in fact depend […] on the violence their civilization does to those whom its structure of value needs to exclude and condemn'

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[1] Such as a study by Bryan Edwards on the slave trade and the Caribbean (Seymour, 2000: 138).

(Bohls, 1994: 29); how that civilization strips black and brown people of the capacity for 'moral feelings or elevated sentiments' (Seymour, 2000: 139) and the right to sexuality and procreation (Smith, 2016). As such, *Frankenstein* not only exemplifies how 'race and raciality' are worked into the very fabric of the Gothic, indeed are 'key conventions of the Gothic' (Lenhard, 2020: 20), but also offers a rare moment in which 'an existing discourse of black monstrosity' is turned 'against itself' (Young, 2008: 5). As *Frankenstein* pits a variously 'othered' being and this being's desperate wish to be loved and belong against the cruel instant-rejection by its maker, the novel unfolds its true Gothic powers not only as it forces upon Frankenstein (and, by extension, some of its readers) the idea of uncanny kinship with a posthuman(ised) creature, but also threatens to expose empire's normalised brutalising powers as it 'reverse-monsterises' a supremacist white culture that inflicts a regime of pain—emotional and physical—on those to whom it is unable, or unwilling, to relate. Through rendering the creature's own intradiegetic narration and thereby voicing its pain, Shelley promotes a rare critique of colonial discourse and its pathological, even narcissistic, non-relationality[2] which the novel lays bare or threatens to lay bare by positing whites and white culture, not the racialised and beastialised other, as the original perpetrators of injury.

Given the centrality of colonialism and slavery for Shelley's depiction of the creature, Broglio's assessment of human-animal boundaries and identification of/with a collective 'human we' is on shaky grounds. It is haunted, not unlike the majority-white culture in Shelley's novel, by Western societies' subjugation of racialised and beastialised others, which sharply undercuts any presumptions of homogenous or generic forms of 'human being'. A similar issue arises in Margarita Carretero-Gonzáles' 'The Posthuman that Could Have Been. Mary Shelley's Creature' (2016). Refreshingly arguing beyond the customary interpretation of the creature as signifying Frankenstein's scientific 'overreach', Carretero-Gonzáles contends that, 'if we take the Creature, as indeed we should all other-than-human natures,

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[2] On the theme of colonialism's and/or colonial discourse's narcissistic non-relationality, see Drichel, 2018; Gandhi, 2006; Koegler, Malreddy and Tronicke, 2020; Malreddy, 2019; and Simmons, 2007, for example.

as members of the "bigger, queer family of companion species" (Haraway, 2003: 11), we will be looking at the world in true post-dualistic, post-hierarchical, post-human terms' (63). For Carretero-Gonzáles, Shelley's novel mourns and laments not so much Frankenstein's hubris, but his inability 'to become animal, become other-than-human, become post-human' (ibid.). Like Broglio, Carretero-Gonzáles thus evidently positions the problem of human-animal (non-)relationality in an early nineteenth-century colonial novel outside of race relations. While her reading rightly re-emphasises the creature's stinging pain of being excluded from human sympathy and society, Carretero-Gonzáles' specific wording sits oddly with empire's quotidian consolidation of white-supremacist economic, hetero-patriarchal power through, exactly, the '*racialization* of the human–animal distinction' in much of Enlightenment thought (Jackson, 2020: 2; emphasis added). As per posthumanist tradition, Carretero-Gonzáles frames 'becoming animal' or 'becoming-other-than-human' as uncomplicated and ideal prospects, rather than as overlapping with the history of anti-black racism: chattel slavery, biological racism, human zoos, and affective denial. However, non-engagement with these overlaps risks whitewashing representation and effectively absolves nineteenth-century texts of colonial ideology, a process during which the structural, colonial-systemic reasons for non-white pain and suffering (such as the creature's own) become illegible. In the novel, Frankenstein's creature retreats to 'darkness and distance' (Shelley, 2012: 161)—un-killed, un-dead, left to its own devices, and on shifting icy ground. From this non-place, it continues as an uncanny cipher on the fringes of white-centred (or: white-generic) perceptions of, equally, humanity and post-humanity.

Taking seriously the interlinkages of *Frankenstein* with early nineteenth century race debates means connecting enquiries into past literary posthumanisms with so-called 'anti-humanist' scholarship as has been generated in critical race studies, black studies, postcolonial studies, and neighbouring fields. It also means taking seriously already existing, ongoing dialogues between these and posthumanist scholars (for example, see Livingston and Puar, 2011) and utilising the impetus of these critiques and dialogues for a more nuanced, rigorous, and at times discordant account of posthumanism's historical heritage. In the following, I situate this heritage

within the framework of (what I call) *posthumanisation*: historically and culturally specific flexibilisations of 'human being'—such as racialization, animalisation, dehumanisation and re-humanisation (or: partial humanisation)—that occur in specific contexts and betray posthumanisation's intimacy with power relations. After discussing race-critical perspectives on posthumanism and the Anthropocene in the next section (II), I continue the reflections on literary texts that I have begun here with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* by exploring different practices, processes, and effects of posthumanisation in the nineteenth century setting. This includes discussions of two flanking texts: the anonymously published *The Woman of Colour* (1808) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The article concludes (IV) with a shorter reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), condensing posthumanisation's crossovers with both disenfranchisement and empowerment, and with colonial affective practices and strategies of (non-)relation. The intention, throughout, is to identify how the more open-ended, or even dissonant understanding of 'posthuman being' proposed here, can be read to the diversification of current posthumanist scholarship, particularly—though not exclusively—in its now-proliferating approaches to the past.

II. Whose Posthumanism?

Race critical perspectives have repeatedly and persistently flagged the uncanny crossovers between posthumanism and colonial discourse in a variety of (inter-) disciplinary settings. The controversial notion of the Anthropocene is a pertinent example: commonly understood as that period of planetary development during which the impact of human practice begins to affect environments on a planetary scale (particularly through technological advancement, destruction of biospheres, and climate change), the 'anthropos' was long understood—and often continues to be understood—as signifying a universally destructive, generically 'human' agency. Countering this perception, Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014) have made the much-cited intervention that what is positioned as the *anthropos* or *mankind* in much of posthuman discourse, was in fact a group of 'capitalists in a small corner of the Western world', 'a clique of White British men' (3) who were in the socio-economic position to trigger the processes of *en-masse* exploitation and pollution

now so readily situated at the species-level. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson similarly demands to know 'What and crucially *whose* conception of humanism are we moving beyond?' (2015: 215). She has also insisted that counter-discourse such as 'African diasporic literature and cultural production', particularly in the twentieth century, is ill-understood as 'a plea for human recognition'; instead it finds multiple, at times disparate, ways of re-thinking the applicability of human-animal binaries entirely (2020: Kindle Locations 117/7458; see also Jackson, 2013: 672). Jackson thus pushes back against paternalist representations[3] of former colonial subjects eagerly seeking to gain 'admission' to the white privileges consolidated through humanist categories and ideals. In this vein, and countering the omission of anthropos' exploitation of racialised bodies and both the suffering as well as agency of racialised subjects, Janae Davis et al. (2019) have re-situated the promising term of the 'Plantationocene' which seems to have emerged spontaneously (and as a kind of joke) in a conversation between Donna Haraway, Noboru Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing and Nils Bubandt (2016), introduced by Haraway: 'we need to call it the Plantationocene, forget the Capitalocene! [Laughter]' (557). The focus of Haraway and her co-discussants is on multispecies framing ('plants, animals, microbes, people'), and Davies et al. direct their readers' attention particularly to the following part of the conversation:

> Noboru (Ishikawa): To me, plantations are just the slavery of plants.
> Anna (Tsing)—I agree.
> Donna (Haraway)—And microbes.

As my previous quotes from the conversation show, Haraway does refer to 'people', but the sense that colonialism's regime of racial hierarchization is at play in plausibilising the plantation's politics of 'extraction' (ibid.) remains subtle at best. 'People' is an

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[3] For example, Cary Wolfe writes in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*: 'traditionally marginalized peoples would be sceptical about calls by academic intellectuals to surrender the humanist model of subjectivity, with all its privileges, at just the historical moment when they are poised to "graduate" into it' (2003: 7).

afterthought. This is not least because Haraway and Tsing, while taking issue with the 'Anthropocene's' intimacy with 'Enlightenment Man' and 'capitalism', recognise entanglements with colonial exploitation only indirectly through references to 'plantation'—which is framed as stated above. As Davis et al. therefore convincingly observe, the centuries-long, black experience of slavery is here subsumed under a 'broader constellation of exploited lifeforms' (5)—a degree of reduction and inattention to the distribution of responsibility in producing (human) suffering that is 'inadequate for the creation of more just ecologies in the plantation present' (3). One might add that white agency and humanity are, of course, fully recognised through the term of the 'plantation'—a system of extraction that is instigated and maintained, after all, by whites—which makes the subsumption of black and brown bodies under exploited 'lifeforms' particularly problematic.

There can be no doubt that race-critical scholarship is leaving its marks on posthumanism, including on more mainstream positions and particularly within critical posthumanism. The human has always been 'a normative category that indexes access to privileges and entitlements', writes Rosi Braidotti in 'A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities' (2018). Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin (2015) indicate 1610 as an appropriate start date for the Anthropocene, which is inspired by the observable global 'dip in atmospheric CO_2' (175) at the time of European invasion in the Americas. As the authors show, this invasion is followed by a 'large decline in human numbers', from an estimated 54–61 million to about six million, 'via exposure to diseases carried by Europeans, plus war, enslavement and famine' (175). Audra Mitchell (2015) reads this as the Anthropocene's 'constitutive [colonial] violence', while Kylie Crane (2019) argues that this intimacy with white settler colonialism 'unsettles' the Anthropocene. Finally, in her powerful *A Billion Black Anthropocenes Or None* (2018), Kathryn Yusoff situates 'Black Anthropocenes' as capturing the 'proximity of black and brown bodies to harm'—'an inhuman proximity organized by historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism' (Yusoff, 2018: Kindle Locations 105/1943). Yussof further rejects the notion of the Anthropocene as 'a dystopic *future* that laments the *end* of the world' (emphases added) because

'imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence' (Kindle Locations 105/1943); this, she says, reveals the extent of 'racial blindness' and 'wilful blindness' at posthumanism's heart (Kindle Locations 120/1943; emphasis added). While heterodox challenges of posthumanism are thus mounting, they are not always pervasive. In *Posthuman Glossary* (2018), Stefan Herbrechter positions 'critical posthumanism' as exploring: 'how did *we* come to think of ourselves as human? Or, what exactly does it mean to be human (especially at a time when *some* humans have apparently decided that they are becoming or have *already* become *post*human)?" (original emphasis). Whilst the first question suitably points to the past as a source for situating and understanding the (post-)human present ('come to'), it also utilises a by-now-familiar free-floating 'we' without reference. The second question posits posthuman being as a self-directed choice or perspective ('have apparently decided'). Both questions are built around a universalising language that whitens experiences of 'thinking oneself human'—or posthuman for that matter—not only gliding over positionality as a possible factor in posthuman (self-)understanding but also over anti-colonial and decolonial struggles that have sought to decentralise white-Western signifying power.[4] A broader survey of posthuman scholarship further reveals that 'race' or 'racism', where they are mentioned, are so often in longer 'alterity lists', for example, 'gender, race, class, able-bodiedness, age, etc.' or 'racism, classism, sexism'. These kinds of lists signal the scholar's general awareness of diversity as a factor in (post-) human being or positioning, yet only rarely blossom into more sustained analyses

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[4] The entries 'Afrofuturism' (Ramon Amaro), 'Decolonial Critique' (Shannon Winnubst), 'In/Human' (Keti Chukhrow), 'Neocolonial' (Sandra Ponzanesi), and 'Real Cool Ethics' (Shannon Winnubst) add important, diversifying perspectives to the wider project of the *Glossary* (which contains 160 entries), but are situated, of course, at a slightly different level than 'Critical Posthumanism': they are existing fields—fields existing outside of posthumanism and/or across different field boundaries, and as such do not have the same consolidating and defining function as an entry such as 'Critical Posthumanism' (and the latter's omission of race/colonialism-related perspectives suggests that the amount of cross-fertilization between different areas of the glossary is not necessarily even). Nevertheless, it is significant that these entries were included by the editors, it being their concession that, 'regarding entries in the postcolonial and race fields of posthuman study, we are aware of our critical ellipses and see them as a limitation of this collection' (4), and indeed that 'decolonial, black and race studies […] are often marginalized in both new media and posthuman scholarship' (5).

of one or more markers (or their intersections; see Deckha, 2012), also implying a level of analogy between different markers that can be deeply misleading as to their differently geared ways and structures of operating.[5] Indeed, there seems to be little curiosity to probe more deeply into how 'the very ontology of "the human" is an endemically violent conceptual apparatus' (Winnubst, 2018a: 97) because of its entanglements with antiblack racism, and slavery and colonialism as racism's historical inflections.[6] Frankenstein's creature still beckons from the shadows.

III. Literature and Posthumanisation in the Colonial Setting

Projects of decolonizing current posthuman thought or of finding common ground between posthumanism, on the one hand, and race-critical or postcolonial inquiry, on the other, are on the rise,[7] and so is scholarship that engages with posthuman precursors in the past, as already indicated with my initial reference to Clarke and Rossini (2016). However, inquiry that is sensitive to the intersections between past forms of posthuman being *and* race or colonialism—and the implications that such an interconnected perspective might have for twenty-first century posthumanist critique—is a much rarer and fairly recent phenomenon. It is precisely at this intersection that literary analysis of nineteenth-century texts—of the imperial century—can fruitfully locate its main interest, focussing on the processes and dynamics of

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[5] Shannon Winnubst (2018a) stresses, for example, how 'the effort to undo "the human" through the axes of either gender or sexual difference still works within the closed economy of colonial modernity' (98), which indicates the different levels of being *and* awareness at which race, gender, and sexuality operate.

[6] As a case in point, the online project *criticalposthumanism.net*, which cites wide support by posthuman academics, artists and writers (see: 'About'), and lists over forty 'keywords' through which to approach the topic, does not include 'race', 'colonialism', 'slavery', 'alterity' etc., nor 'postcolonialism', whilst including, for example, 'feminism' and 'ecocriticism'. The platform does include Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's important contribution 'High-Tech Orientalism (Cyberpunk & Race)' (2019), but this is, to date (August 2020), the only one that discusses the topic at any depth.

[7] In addition to the works already mentioned, see also Mark Jackson's edited collection *Coloniality, Ontology, and the Question of the Posthuman* (2018) which brings together scholars from political science, sociology, geography and other subjects to build bridges between postcolonial and posthuman thought with a focus on the current political/social landscape. See also Kalpana Rahita Seshadri's *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language* (2012).

posthumanisation. Existing race-critical historical scholarship is essential for this endeavour, such as *Antebellum Posthuman* (2018) in which Cristin Ellis deepens her readers' understanding of how notions of humanism and biological racism begin to intertwine at the turn of the nineteenth century, introducing changes to perceptions of the human: 'Western cultures had, for centuries, defined human being by contrast to its material body, identifying the mark of humanity in mankind's supposedly transcendent freedom from material causality' (2). This emphasis shifts with the increasing popularity of scientific empiricism, flanked by colonial voyages and cross-cultural encounters. They inspire a systematisation of alleged speciological differences between different 'races' that are incorporated into a modified, extended concept of the human. In his contribution to *Posthumanism in the Age of Humanism* (Landgraf and Weatherby, 2019), Patrick Fortmann discusses this in relation to the German-speaking debate, suggesting that the works by 'Viennese physician and anatomist' Franz Joseph Gall (the inventor of phrenology) show how 'the human/animal divide has given way to a contact zone', with 'biological differences [being] quantitative, resulting from varying degrees of expression of features shared (in some form) across species' (51). In her discussion of Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*, Kalpana Rahita Seshadri (2012) writes: 'Cavell forces us to reckon with what in fact is really meant and held as a belief by the slaveowner. "What [the slaveowner] really believes," Cavell suggests, "is not that slaves are not human beings, but that some human beings are slaves … [T]his man sees certain human beings as slaves, takes them for slaves" (375)' (Seshadri, 2012: Kindle Locations 179–81; Cavell, 1999: 375). As such, while it is currently often assumed 'that slavery and racism are practices that operate by dehumanization' (Ellis, 2018: 1), there are indicators that the 'human' is *flexibilised rather than fixed* at the turn of the nineteenth century. In a climate of competing 'liberal and biological epistemes' (3), the notion of a common, shared humanity across species is frequently admitted, yet 'makes no definite claim about the moral equality of all members' (4).[8] The discourse moves 'beyond' (or: 'post') old boundaries

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[8] Jackson similarly emphasises this point: 'Too often, our conception of antiblackness is defined by the specter of "denied humanity," "dehumanization," or "exclusion"' (2020: 46). Harking back also to

and binaries ('posthumanisation') to systematise and, of course, hierarchise different versions of human being—a process that allows different kinds of 'humans' to inhabit the same category whilst also facilitating selective animalisation and/or non-humanisation (such as calling slaves 'livestock'; see Seshadri, 2012: 176) in tune with the shifting and developing interests of white imperial power. Such flexibility surrounding the notion of (post-)human being is a keen reminder that inclusion in generic 'humanness' or, indeed, 'posthumanness' does not forestall antiblack violence. In this vein, the following sub-sections will provide readings of a number of nineteenth-century novels[9] to investigate how they participate, like many other canonical texts of the nineteenth century, in practices of posthumanisation, and to what effects.

1. (Un-)Becoming Animal in Anonymous' The Woman of Colour (1808)

Anonymously published, *The Woman of Colour* is a fairly recently re-discovered epistolary novel, re-published by Broadview Press in 2007. Written in 1808, it was published to respectable acclaim 'in a year that was, quite literally, bursting at the seams with new long prose fictions' (Dominique, 2008: 20). It received three reviews in contemporary journals, more than *Mansfield Park*, for example, which 'was never critically reviewed by Austen's contemporaries' (see Claudia Johnson, cited in Dominique, 2008: 19). With the exception of E.M. McClelland's mentioning the novel in 1967 and his subsequent work *Impossible Purities* (chapter 1), Dominique tells us that the novel has been largely forgotten about, including in such contexts where

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Saidiya Hartman's work, she comes to a position where 'the process of making the slave relied on the abjection and criminalization of the enslaved's humanity rather than merely on the denial of it. Thus, humanization is not an antidote to slavery's violence; rather, slavery is a technology for producing a kind of human'. Differently put, black people have been '*selectively incorporated*' into the liberal humanist project (original emphasis)—something that is starkly reminiscent of even today's 'politics of contingent belonging', employed in Europe and other places.

[9] Michael Lundblad (2013), in *The Birth of a Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture*, similarly approaches the topic through literary history, discussing animality in the context of sexuality, naturalism, and race to foreground how the trope of 'the jungle' remains salient even today in a long, continuous tradition. Karen Raber's *Shakespeare and Posthumanist Theory* (2018) similarly uses literary analysis to discuss posthumanism in Shakespeare, occasionally bringing in racial discourses of the Renaissance.

critics have sought to chronicle stories that centre on and/or are written by black women. *The Woman of Colour* is told through the eyes of Olivia Fairfield, a Jamaican, mixed-race heiress. Olivia travels to England to marry her cousin Augustus Merton, which is the condition stated in her dead father's (a white plantation owner's) will for her securing her inheritance. If the cousin rejects marriage, the money will go to Augustus' already-married brother on whose benevolence Olivia will depend.

Narrating her journey across the Atlantic and her experiences in England to her governess in a series of letters, Olivia's account subverts and openly challenges some of the racial hierarchies that sustain the slavery system. It illuminates and valorises the position of a black woman by picturing her as a fierce critic of biological racism, and she is positioned in a female tradition of doing so. Olivia's mother, Marcia, is brought to Jamaica from Africa as a young woman and is purchased there by Olivia's father. A proper novel of sentiment, *The Woman of Colour* ennobles Marcia, the slave, through attributing to her refined forms of emotional expression and kinship with African royalty (Marcia is described as 'sprung from a race of native kings and heroes'; Anonymous, 2008: 54). In a similar vein, plantation owner Fairfield (attracted to Marcia for these qualities) is characterised as a particularly benevolent, humane master whose equally refined character transforms Marcia into a grateful slave: 'his kindness, his familiarity, his humanity, soon gained him an interest in [Marcia's] grateful heart!' and she 'fell a victim to gratitude' (54). As the two are joined in romance, Mr. Fairfield's interest in Marcia makes him want to share religion and knowledge, 'pour[ing] into her attentive and docile ear, those truths for which the soul of Marcia panted' (54). The unintended effect is that Marcia realises the extent to which their unwed union violates the Christian faith, refusing any further intimacy and thus challenging the logic that puts her into the subordinate position. In her daughter Olivia's words, 'The scholar taught her master—The wild and uncivilised African taught a lesson of noble self-denial and self-conquest to the enlightened and educated European' (54–55).

As these lines already suggest, Olivia has an astute awareness of the extent to which colonial discourse strategically flexibilises the being of black(ened) others. These others are posited as 'wild' and, as such, as blurring the human-animal

divide whilst remaining sufficiently 'human' to need saving by white men from heathendom and instil admiration and lust in white masters (who would commonly not consider themselves as committing sodomy; see Seshadri's [2012] discussion of Cavell, Kindle Locations 193–94). Indeed, the sentence beginning 'The wild and uncivilized African etc.' carries a note of cynicism, subversive appropriation, and trickster discourse, as the fact that Marcia is an intelligent, moral woman—more so than her master—and capable of teaching *him*, exposes how (and which) colonial dichotomies are upheld in line with the interests to white power. As such, Olivia can be seen as countering the posthumanising forces of colonialism (which time and again will blur human-animal-boundaries in the interests of whiteness) and as acting herself as a *counter*-posthumaniser of sorts: she stresses continuity and kinship between the white 'master race' and those inferiorised in exactly those places where black people are positioned as allegedly animal or 'more animal'. Accordingly, whilst the novel also affirms a number of imperial myths that play into the hand of white paternalism (such as the tropes of the grateful slave and humane slave master), Olivia has already begun to unsettle some of the conceived discursive strategies that are part and parcel of colonialism's seat in white supremacy. This sense of unsettling is heightened as readers learn that Mr. Fairfield will not marry Marcia though he loves her, because he worries about the social repercussions of such a move—another moment in which the ideological colonial force of selective flexibilisation manifests itself. In any case, Marcia dies giving birth to Olivia, thus relieving Mr. Fairfield of the vexed marriage question, and he receives Olivia as his daughter whose status in the white-human family network is thus more securely anchored than her mother's. In a number of situations, Fairfield exhibits his 'generous intention', such as when instilling a high opinion of her mother in Olivia and also when seeking to 'secure to his child a proper protector in a husband [in England], and to place her far from scenes which were daily hurting her sensibility and the pride of human nature!' (55). While receiving her father's comparatively 'progressive' (and this is, of course, a very relative term) views on race and kinship positively on the whole, Olivia nevertheless remains critical of the marriage proposition. As she tells her governess, Mrs. Milbanke, she would much rather stay in Jamaica, her 'native island' (56).

As the plot unfolds, Olivia begins to increasingly overtly trouble various aspects of the taken-for-granted norms of valuation in place at the time of the novel's publication, including perceiving England as a superior attraction or centre by default and the father as a naturally righteous authority. During her passage to England, Olivia is wooed by a besotted suitor, Mr. Honeywood, who, when wondering if he will ever see her again, is told: 'We can speak with certainty of nothing […] and you must remember, that from the moment when I set my foot on your land of liberty, I yield up my independence—my uncle's family are then to be the disposers of my future fate' (66). Olivia here expresses awareness of her conjoined racial and gender inequality as perfidious, laying open her impatience with the fact that England, celebrated as a 'land of liberty', bestows liberty only on a select few. She also clearly signals that these matters of personal freedom and dependence weigh more than those of the nature that Honeywood is pursuing, i.e. romantic or domestic entanglement. This sense repeatedly re-emerges during the novel. Arriving in England, Olivia learns that her intended husband, Augustus Merton, is a decent though preoccupied man whom she can love and who is kind to her. Augustus' father, too, appears to be fond of his prospective daughter-in-law. By contrast, Augustus' brother, George Merton, and his wife, Mrs. George Merton, are a source of continuous hostility that Olivia repeatedly challenges. In the so-called 'rice scene' (Dominique, 2008: 28), Mrs. Merton's servant carries in a plate of rice that Mrs. Merton has specifically ordered for Olivia's breakfast, and Mrs. Merton explains that 'I understood that people of your—I thought that you almost *lived* upon rice […] and so I ordered some to be got,—for my own part, I never tasted it in my life, I believe' (Anonymous, 2008: 77). Preparing Mrs. Milbanke for her rebuke, Olivia's letter reads 'this was evidently meant to mortify your Olivia; it was blending *her* with the poor negro slaves of the West Indies! It was meant to show her, that, in Mrs. Merton's idea, there was no distinction between us—you will believe that *I could not* be wounded at being classed with my brethren!' (original emphasis). Again, Olivia exhibits sharp insight into how Mrs. Merton seeks to reinforce the social and racial distance between herself and Olivia as the descendent of a black woman. It is Mrs. Merton's clear intention to move Olivia down on the scale of both entitlement and privilege by associating her with her black 'brethren', triggering shame, dread,

and self-subordination in Olivia. Keenly aware of this, and again moving 'post' colonial views of privileged white human being, Olivia communicates her pride in her kinship and rebuttal of Mrs. Merton's affective-racial politics:

> I, perfectly unabashed, and mistress of myself, pretended to take the mischievous officiousness, or impertinence (which you will), of Mrs. Merton in a literal sense; and, turning towards her, said,—"I thank you for studying my palate, but I assure you there is no occasion; I eat just as you do, I believe: and though, in Jamaica, our poor slaves (*my brothers and sisters*, smiling) are kept upon rice as their chief food, yet they would be glad to exchange it for a little of your nice wheaten bread here;" taking a piece of baked bread in my hand. (Anonymous, 2008: 77–78; original emphasis)

By eating the bread and emphasising that her 'brothers and sisters' would very much enjoy doing likewise—clearly also a Christian rebuke—Olivia illuminates how absurdly and yet cruelly alleged culinary preference is instrumentalised here for the sake of distinguishing superior from inferior human being. The scene is followed by Olivia also challenging the racist views of little George, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Merton, who rejects Olivia and her maid, Dido, as 'nasty' and 'dirty' (80). Again referencing the Christian belief-system, Olivia suggests that black and white are created equal, and illustrates this to the child in the following way: '"Those black slaves are, by some cruel masters, obliged to work like horses," said [Olivia]; "but God Almighty created them *men*, equal with their masters, if they had the same advantages, and the same blessings of education"'. To this, little George replies: '"But what *right* have their naughty masters got to make them slave like horses? for I'm *sure* they can't like it—I shouldn't like to work like mamma's coach-horses, and stand shivering for hours in the wet and cold, as they do"' (80; original emphases). Olivia here clearly holds on to the human-animal distinction, insisting that black slaves share human kinship with white masters, both groups having been created as '*men*', which delegitimises their treatment 'like horses', or animals. For little George, this is when the penny drops, but it does not drop in line with Olivia's own rationale. Little George is unable to

grasp the concept of racial equality in and for itself, or through empathising with the slaves. It is through empathising with the *horses*—with them 'stand[ing] shivering for hours in the wet and cold' (like his Mama's horses)—and as such through 'becoming animal', that he can understand the injustice of slavery. He learns to relate to fellow black humans after relating, first, to the horses that pull his mama's coach. What might be read as childlike innocence—or, perhaps, veganist egalitarianism—in little George, is probably more aptly understood as a case of early-internalised racism. Little George's gut instinct betrays how colonialism fosters empathy unevenly, making those internalising its logics as children channel their fellow feeling more easily towards horses than black(ened) colonial subjects. In this scene, then, if Olivia seeks to equalise white and black people *as humans* (thereby herself moving the posts of privileged humanity 'post' conceived notions of white privilege), then little George acts even more overtly as a posthumanist, something that he can only do because he has been exposed to racist-colonial ideology from an early age. His kinship is here extended to think 'white human, horse, black human, and back', flexibilising those categories according to—and beyond—Olivia's instruction. This passage, then, can be read not only as a poignant reminder of the centrality of moving the posts of privileged humanness of early nineteenth-century colonial discourse (Olivia), but also of the pitfalls of thinking posthumanism without proper attention to questions of racial inequality. Differently put, and harking back to those posthuman theories that centre on human-animal relations, (white) posthumanist readers, when reading little George's response, might be inspired to ask themselves one question: why is it that, at least for the past two decades, fellow-feeling with animals has come so much more naturally and easily—has filled so much more page space—than fellow-feeling with black or brown people?

Olivia marries Augustus Merton and they live together happily enough for a while when it materialises that Augustus is already married to a wife whom he himself had presumed dead (a jealous ploy of Mrs. Merton and her friend, Miss Danby). Olivia lays no blame on Augustus and wishes him, his wife, and their two-year-old son (also unknown to Augustus) well. She secures a small annuity from George Merton in

exchange for relinquishing her fortune without giving any trouble. After living on her own for a while in Wales (and rejecting Honeywood a second time), Olivia decides to go back to Jamaica to engage herself in charity work, as she would have initially preferred to do. This decision has been read as a self-directed and empowering move (Dominique, 2008: 41), and alternatively as one that conveniently rids the narrative, and those vexed white protagonists, off Olivia's presence (Salih, 2010). The novel has also been read as staging how slave money is purified by moving through the realm of female domesticity and marriage, rather than being transacted directly between men, in this case, Olivia's father and Mr. Merton (Reed, 2019). In this way, men can uphold public personas, even self-identities, of benevolent and virtuous virility despite contact with (and thriving from) money yielded through the toil of black and brown bodies. I would add that, despite its considerable political significance of voicing abolitionist counter-discourse, *The Woman of Colour* can similarly be seen as engaging in a misogynist replacement of colonial crime by positing Mrs. Merton as a power-hungry, monstrous female who, of all the white characters in the novel, acts in the most hostile and morally corrupt way toward Olivia. This implies that it is really women like her, and not the colonial system or white men, who inflict damage on the protagonist—another moment in which white virility and male virtue are protected and even celebrated. In a different context (a discussion of Le Fanu's *Carmilla*), Amanda Paxton (2019) has aptly spoken of the 'parasitic nature of hereditary patriarchal lineage, with its dependence upon the female body as a host for offspring' (6). In *The Woman of Colour* (and other novels with similar plots), this 'offspring' would be the economic and symbolic advantages bestowed on white patriarchy through the travels and travails of the bodies of Olivia and Mrs. Merton.

Despite these issues, *The Woman of Colour* is surely a remarkable novel for its time, lead as it is by a black female protagonist who eloquently and persuasively challenges racial stereotypes. The novel carries a historical, critical posthuman impetus that criss-crosses colonial-normative perceptions of the 'human', challenges as nonsensical the system of hierarchisation that it supports, and forges continuities

between white masters and their black(ened) counterparts. While Olivia's diversification of the human, from today's perspective, could be considered more antihumanist, it is important to stress that her resistance against white signification and identification stretches privileged humanity considerably and beyond the established status quo at the time in which the novel was written. Meanwhile, little George's affective experiments—learning empathy with slaves through empathy with horses, which comes to him more naturally—resonate with current notions of posthumanism insofar as his ruminations extend his human being beyond white humanity and into the non-human. Little George 'becomes animal' to establish a connection with Jamaican slaves; understanding that animals—horses—suffer, he can grasp that slaves must be suffering, too. As suggested, this kind of posthumanisation is the blood-child of colonial racism, betraying George's more intuitive relationality with horses from which he then extrapolates.

With its own discourse on (post-)human being, *The Woman of Colour* can do much to diversify posthumanist thought. The novel is not only a strong reminder that (critical) posthumanist inquiry can indeed gain much from historicising 'posthumanisation' and 'posthuman being', but also that this necessarily requires a (further) flexibilisation of the still-powerful dichotomy of anti-humanism vs. posthumanism, a dichotomy that remains ill-suited for grasping, specifically, colonial forms of posthumanisation and its strategic fluctuation between humanising and animalising the colonised. In addition, the dynamics described in *The Woman of Colour* trigger important questions regarding posthumanism's own normalised, primary relationality with, to put it in Haraway's words, 'plants, animals, microbes, people' (Haraway et al., 2015: 557). Clearly, colonial literature pursues its own customary movements into the realms of the non-human and/or 'animal' whilst exhibiting a non-relationality or less-relationality (á la little George) toward black(end) or otherwise 'deviant' bodies (the poor, the mad, the queer, the less able-bodied, women). As such, posthumanist relationality and its seemingly progressive prioritisation of 'plants, animals, microbes' over 'people'—where stripped of a historicising, critical

discourse on posthumanisation and (post-)human being—risks resonating with, and invigorating, the uncanny colonial echoes steadily borne toward the present from Europe's imperial centuries.

2. Becoming Jane's Animal in Jane Eyre (1847)

'In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face'. (Jane's description of Bertha Rochester; Brontë, 1999: 295)

"It is time some one undertook to rehumanise you" (Jane to Rochester; 386)

Even though published almost forty years before *Jane Eyre*, *The Woman of Colour* is considerably more progressive in its depiction of a Jamaican creole heiress than, what retrospectively reads as, this theme's adoption in *Jane Eyre*.[10] The novels share the instalment of a creole, black(ened) woman as a transactress of wealth; while *The Woman of Colour* presents this woman's own perspective, *Jane Eyre* turns her into an object of signification whose agency is limited to haunting the fringes of white subjectivity. As is well-known, Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre* is likened to an animal, demonised, and blamed for white suffering (Rochester's, Jane's), while her demise in the flames of Thornfield paves the way for white romance to finally, belatedly, flourish. By committing suicide, she removes herself—like Frankenstein's creature, and like Olivia—from the centre of white action. She thereby enables Rochester to finally become Jane's husband and found a family with her who has returned from her rambles abroad a more empowered, self-assured, and financially 'independent woman' (385), having lately inherited her uncle's fortune made on a plantation in

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[10] Reed (2019) persuasively argues that *Jane Eyre* not only borrows from *The Woman of Colour* but also from eighteenth century sentimental colonial novels such as Sarah Scott's *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) which also depicts a version of this trope.

Madeira and from black(ened) bodies such as Bertha's. As also seen in other Brontë novels (most prominently *Wuthering Heights*), the demise of the racialised other means that negative feelings in white bodies subside, facilitating white reconciliation, romance, and reproduction (see Koegler, 2021 [forthcoming]).

 Scholarly treatment of the Brontës' and particularly *Jane Eyre*'s imperial entanglements is long-standing and extensive.[11] These entanglements include white feminist appropriation of the slavery trope (white women as slaves in a patriarchal system)[12] which was criticised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as early as 1985 in her intervention 'Three Women's Texts and A Critique of Imperialism' (1985). Spivak challenges Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's canonical interpretation ([1979] 2000) of Bertha as Jane's 'dark double', an uncanny reflector of what is, in truth, Jane's own abject confinement in a hetero-patriarchal, classist system. Spivak argues that this interpretation re-inscribes the colonial logic of instrumentalising creole women, as Bertha is turned into a mere apparatus of Jane's (and by extension white feminism's) identity consolidation and 'soul making' (247). Because Bertha's own subjectivity

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[11] For example, see Spivak's early critique 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' (1985), Firdous Azim's *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1993), Joyce Zonana's 'The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of Jane Eyre' (1993), Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Deirdre David's *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing* (1995), Susan Zlotnick's 'Jane Eyre, Anna Leonowens, and the White Woman's Burden' (1996), Christine Alexander's 'Imagining Africa: The Brontës' Creations of Glass Town and Angria' (1996), Susan L. Meyer's *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (1996), Carolyn Vallenga Berman's *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery* (2006), and Maja-Lisa von Sneidern's 'Wuthering Heights and the Liverpool Slave Trade and Sue Thomas's *Imperialism, Reform and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre*' (2008), all of which flag the complicity of white feminism with imperialism on *Jane Eyre*. In relation to the Brontës more generally, see for example Sarah Fermi's 'A Question of Colour' (2015), and Judith Pike's 'Disability in Charlotte Brontë's Early Novellas, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*: The Legacy of Finic's Disabled and Racialized Body' (2018). These critiques are making their way also into neighbouring fields such as Neo-Victorian Studies; for example, see *Black Neo-Victoriana* (forthcoming), edited by Felipe Espinoza Garrido, Marlena Tronicke, and Julian Wacker.

[12] Spivak traces not only the novel's complicity with colonial racism, but also targets dominant feminist readings at the time, such as by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* ([1979] 2000), which denied Bertha subjectivity and instead positioned her as the personified reflection of Jane's own unconscious. Firdous Azim picks up this critique to question feminist celebrations of the Brontës that either ignore or silently condone its entanglement in imperialist politics; Joyce Zonana, Edward Said, Susan Zlotnick, and Sue Thomas similarly focus their critique of complicity on imperialism in *Jane Eyre.*

and suffering are concealed—and with them the colonial structures that enable her instrumentalisation—Jane and white feminism get to save face, cleansed as they are of colonial complicity (to strike another connection with Reed's argument). As such, Brontë's novel 'dramatizes how intolerable such figures [like Bertha] are within British social order, even in service of imperial acquisition' (Reed, 2019: 528), whilst also, and perhaps paradoxically, revealing the extent to which their presences sustain imperial 'soul making' in the homestead, including white feminism. It is through the very staging of threateningly aggressive, racialised incomers—figures that are doubly 'revolting', dreaded and rebellious (Koegler, 2021 [forthcoming])—that white English identity and domesticity can retain a virtuous 'eyre', selflessly carrying the white man's or white woman's burden. As a case in point, not only is Bertha Rochester figured as maliciously disrupting her husband's first attempt at conjugal bliss with Jane—he is, after all, already married—'Rochester is [also] imagined as a captive of his wife' (Reed, 2019: 526). Throughout his self-pity of being married to an 'insane' woman, Rochester takes on the role of Bertha's unjustly suffering victim, despite the steep inheritance he gains from the marriage and despite his own family's initiative in sending him to procure Bertha in Jamaica. Rochester figures as Bertha's victim despite showing no sympathy for her struggles that he, undoubtedly, exacerbates by keeping her incarcerated in a room without natural light and without sign of care or sympathy. Like Jane, Rochester is unable to relate to the black(ened) other whom he can never perceive of as sharing the same humanity or, should we say, posthumanity?

As critics have pointed out, Jane, Rochester, and Bertha 'become animal' at different stages in the novel, though to different, at times diametrically opposed, effects. Spivak critically remarks that 'Bertha's function in *Jane Eyre* is to render *indeterminate* the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law' (249)—and I italicise 'indeterminate' as this word again reinforces the observation of a *flexibilisation* of human-animal categories (rather than a clear fixing of racial[ised] others on the side of the 'animal'). And yet the occurrence of this flexibilisation is not limited to Bertha alone. As scholars have frequently suggested, Jane, too, repeatedly slides into

non-human territory under the gaze of more powerful others—the Reeds, and also Rochester himself who repeatedly calls her 'elf', 'sprite' etc. Summarizing some of the relevant passages, Isobel Armstrong (2019) writes:

> Animalism is attributed to both women: the same feral language appears: 'Rat! rat!' (Jane, p. 14), 'some strange wild animal' (Bertha, p. 338). 'Shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room' (Jane, p. 20). 'She parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors' (Bertha, p. 338). (239)

Following these examples, for Armstrong, there is a 'constant attempt [in the novel] to calibrate Bertha and Jane; [an] attempt to compare the two women as species-being and its understanding that human subjecthood can be arbitrarily taken away from both women' (246). But does the novel really *equally* "weaken [their] entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law' (249) as Spivak has suggested of Bertha? In her contribution to *The Brontës and the Idea of the Human* (2019), Jan-Melissa Schramm suggests that

> any attempt to conceptualise *Jane Eyre* as a powerful contribution to the paralegal advocacy of women's rights runs aground on the representation of Rochester's incarcerated first wife, Bertha Antoinetta Mason. On seeing her for the first time, Jane fails to perceive her shared humanity […] A line is drawn, then, between the young woman who can be enfranchised and empowered by the ever more polite rehearsal of her tale, and the entrapped young woman in the attic whose humanity the text refuses to recognise and whose voice the reader is never allowed to hear. (182)

As Schramm here indicates, not only is feminist celebration (and calibration) of the text severely complicated by Jane's inability to relate to Bertha, the novel itself also clearly positions Jane and Bertha differently in relation to power, including the power to signify. *Jane Eyre* strikes its readers with its sheer absence of critical perspective on Jane, positively celebrating its protagonist and sympathising with her in moments

of difficulty. This means there is no indicator that readers should question Jane's positioning of Bertha as, e.g., 'blackened' and 'purple' with lips 'swelled and dark' (Brontë, 1999: 250), as an 'it' that 'grovel[s], seemingly, on all fours', that 'snatch[es] and growl[s] like some strange wild animal' (258), a 'clothed hyena' that stands 'tall on its hind-feet' (259). Following Rochester's challenge, 'see what sort of being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human' (258)—and it is, of course, Jane that is 'at least human'—Jane's descriptions also legitimise Rochester in both incarcerating his first wife and seeking to marry Jane though he is already wed. As such, without any checks and balances, Jane's positioning of Bertha becomes programmatic signification, and even exceeds Rochester's in the extent to which it animalises Bertha. For sure, Rochester shows no sympathy for Bertha's condition, treats her like a non-subject and an intolerable-though-sustaining source of his own white pain. And yet it is still notable that he refers to Bertha Rochester as his 'embruted *partner*' (emphasis added) and that Jane will be told by the local inn-keeper upon her return to Thornfield that the 'lady' of the house burned down the estate. It is in Jane's own, chilling descriptions that Bertha is particularly—thoroughly and unrelentingly—animalised.

   If Bertha thus becomes Jane's animal, Rochester meets a similar fate. Returning from her rambles to the neighbourhood of Thornfield, and in a conversation with the inn-keeper, Jane learns that Rochester 'grew savage – quite savage' (378) after she left him. When first seeing Rochester again, Jane's description of him echoes her description of Bertha as a 'figure' 'in the deep shade, at the father end of the room' (258) insofar as Rochester is a 'figure' who comes 'out into the twilight' (381).[13] *This* figure, however, Rochester's figure, is quickly identified by her as 'my master, Edward Fairfax Rochester, and no other'. She also fondly remarks, 'It is time some one undertook to rehumanise you', and 'parting his thick and long uncut locks'

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[13] In her first encounter with Bertha, Jane describes how 'In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell', as cited earlier (295).

continues, 'for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort' (386); and finally: 'the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this; and making too much of you' (386). As these expressions of heartfelt, intuitive care suggest, Jane easily relates to Rochester's 'animality' whilst Bertha is entirely forgotten—lost to darkness and distance like a bad dream. As such, the consequences of the three characters' animalisation could not be any more different: Bertha is loathed, dreaded, abjected. When she dies she is not mourned. Jane and Rochester, by contrast, fuss over each other's animalness as they also do over each other's injuries. Under Jane's fond care, Rochester quickly recovers: is quickly 'rehumanised'. While all three share a sense of 'posthumanness' and 'hum-animality', the radically different consequences of this are neatly organised along racial lines. In particular, *Jane Eyre* shuns the notion of a shared entitlement to well-being and happiness, attention and care and, in so doing, also actualises rivalling mental health discourses of the time to the detriment of the racialised-animalised Bertha Rochester. As Michel Foucault writes in *Madness and Civilization* (1988) about asylums such as Bethlehem, until the onset of the nineteenth century,

> violent madwomen were chained by the ankles to the wall of a long gallery; their only garment was a homespun dress. (p. 67). […] The notion of a "resipiscence" is entirely foreign to this regime. But there was a certain image of *animality* that haunted the hospitals of the period. Madness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast. (Foucault, 1988: 67–68).

This understanding of madness would become gradually outmoded in Britain over the first decades of the nineteenth century, making way for the rise of the asylum—organised around the idea of more humane treatment and the possibility of cure—with the 1840s being a time of particularly intense public debate, frequent government reports, check-ups, and continuing reform. The treatment of Bertha Rochester, increasingly reprehensible even in Brontë's time, has triggered much criticism and perplexity, and yet can be explained by linking her representation with research on how black(ened) others, Africans in particular, are frequently figured in

nineteenth-century literature: as 'prehistoric' or 'anachronistic' versions of Western man (see McClintock, 2001). As Anne McClintock has suggested, this understanding is one way of 'guarantee[ing] *difference* within the Enlightenment idea of universality. Through the progress narrative and the trope of anachronistic space, Europeans could retain belief in the idea of a universal mankind (represented and managed by Europe) while at the same time retaining the idea of *difference* and hierarchy' (18–19; original emphasis). As a result of such normalised colonial anachronism, Brontë can plausibly hold Jane's and Rochester's own slippages into the realm of madness to a different standard of scientific knowledge, to a new and emerging standard that is 'more humane', based on the idea that mental illness is reformable and curable[14] and does not foreclose relating. (Indeed, Rochester's animal madness makes him more, not less, lovable to Jane.) By contrast, as a result of Brontë's double-standard, Bertha can be legitimately and permanently othered, can be incarcerated and physically restrained. As Foucault writes of the classical understanding of madness, here vividly applied, 'Unchained animality could be mastered only by discipline and brutalizing' (1988: 70). Whilst heavily involved in trying to understand and ameliorate each other's injuries, Jane and Rochester feel no moral obligation to do the same for Bertha in order to help her heal.[15] This means that the novel rehearses, like so many other novels of the nineteenth century, affective non-relation with the colonised. Posthumanism, fundamentally interested in learning to *relate* to heretofore discounted 'lifeforms' (to use, again, Haraway's formulation), can draw significant insights from these failed, exploitative practices and politics of relating. Again, as in the context of *The Woman of Colour*, the pitfalls of ignoring how colonial

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[14] Elizabeth J. Donaldson also notes the difference between Bertha's incurable madness and Rochester's curable condition (2002: 109), yet does not link this difference to the racial discourse in *Jane Eyre.*

[15] This, again, fits in with Foucault's observation that, right until the end of the eighteenth century, the view was that 'Animality, in fact, protected the lunatic from whatever might be fragile, precarious, or sickly in man. The animal solidity of madness, and that density it borrows from the blind world of beasts, inured the madman to hunger, heat, cold, pain. It was common knowledge [...] that the insane could support the miseries of existence indefinitely' (1988: 69–70). It is of course a telling factor that slaves and black people in general have often been perceived as not feeling pain similarly to white people—yet another colonial ideological proposition in favour of systems of colonial exploitation.

racism tips the balance for the thriving or perishing of select 'lifeforms'—indeed, for deciding whose 'becoming animal' should be regarded fondly and whose should be condemned—become starkly apparent.

IV. Recognition in Ruins

> Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? (Chinua Achebe on *Heart of Darkness*, 2016: 21)

Joseph Conrad's *fin-de-siècle* novel *Heart of Darkness* situates its intradiegetic narrator Marlow's experience of racial otherness and hum-animality in the colonial territory proper. Adrift in one of the last 'blank spaces' on the global map during a maturing imperialism, Marlow's dawning realisation of humanness in the animalised and black(ened) indigenous population of the Congo gives the appearance of reaching across racial divides—an awakening of sorts after a long century of delusions—and yet this stance is perhaps best captured as a 'flattering lie' (Schmitz: 2020):[16] at the time that Conrad was writing, the presence of colonial subjects in European countries,

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[16] In *Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies. The Poetics and Ethics of Anglophone Arab Representations*, Markus Schmitz (2020: 163) discusses *Heart of Darkness* and its management of imperial truths vs. lies, foregrounding Marlow's 'flattering lie' to Kurtz's Intended at the end of the novella: 'Instead of telling the Intended his true last words, Marlow saves her illusions and symbolically preserves the colonial lies of Europe's dishonest home culture: "I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether ..."'. As I wish to suggest by deploying Schmitz's concept of the 'flattering lie', whilst Conrad renders visibility to the crucial functioning of 'white lies' or 'flattering lies' as part of the imperial project, the depiction of the Congolese is in itself flattering—flattering to the imperial project and colonial 'everymen' like Marlow—because the dehumanised extremity of the depiction of black(ened) bodies renders plausible a range of affective reactions that ultimately confirm empire's narcissist grounding in non-relation. Even if Marlow's rendition paints a dystopic image of Africa, as has often been suggested, the dystopic nature of the picture deepens dissociation of kinship rather than enforcing white affective self-relativisation and the dismantling of white-human supremacy. (Without wishing to further reiterate Conrad's racist language, I am referring particularly to Marlow's description of the animalsed 'ugly', 'prehistoric man'.)

Africans included (and via a multiplicity of routes), had already been longstanding and for centuries. As such, the extremity of Marlow's disorientation and 'thrill[]' when confronted with black(ened) bodies—the thought of 'remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar' (Conrad, 2007: 44)—is not only starkly exaggerated, but also reveals the extent of imperialism's narcissistic-pathological inability to relate to people of African descent, both at home and abroad.

Marlow's stance comes at the end of a long century whose literature has often shown significant investment in deriving a thrilling dread from the 'dawning' notion of kinship and/or consanguinity with beings that bear marks of otherness *and* posthumanness: black(ened) others, vampires, 'prehistoric' men, monstrous females/witches, vivisected animals, and (genetic) mutants. White 'everymen' like Marlow encounter such 'othered' beings in a wide variety of places: in tropical jungles, on desert islands, high up in the mountains, in the Arctic, and in the British homestead; at the 'centre of the earth' and thousands of years into the future (as in H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*). As such and in many ways, the nineteenth century is a decidedly *post*human century in which a toxic mix of imperial zeal, anxiety, and fascination surrounding the accelerating, commingling possibilities of human kinship, colonial exploration, scientific discovery, and technology produce a proliferation of the literary imagination—of animalised humans and humanised animals and various in-between stages of being and becoming. In *Heart of Darkness*, human-non-human being is imagined from several sides. Travelling on the river Congo, Marlow encounters a ship—'She'—that he describes as 'incomprehensibl[y], firing into a continent' (16); 'Nature' is pictured as ostensibly 'ward[ing] off intruders'. Meanwhile, 'A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants' (17), while there is also an 'undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal' (18). Exhausted from the trials of colonial extraction, 'Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees' (19). These well-known as much as troubling passages oscillate between fascination and dread, and indicate that *Heart of Darkness* performs a kind of uncanny, proto-modernist reverse-dehumanisation: there are glimpses here that

the white self's recognition of itself and its environment is othered—or indeed 'borne away'—displaced into, and by, a posthuman territory.

In comparison with *Jane Eyre*, Conrad's novel offers little certainty as to where the boundaries of human-animal being might 'rightly' be instated—or how they might best be managed to the reliability and self-determination of the white male protagonist. Jane's fond and almost cheerful announcement of her intention to 're-humanise' Rochester suggests a confidence about negotiating the (post-) human that ultimately escapes Marlow. His mind unravels, unravels into a stream of consciousness, resonating also with Kurtz's psychological unravelling in the 'darkness' that is, apparently, the remote jungle of the Congo and the colonial project. This 'unravelling' could well be termed a moment of 'becoming non-human', a moment in which the mind is turned stream, running through, as much as up against, the sublime ravages of imperialism. As such, *Heart of Darkness* is transparent about being a *recognition in ruins*—which however continues to centre, even in its very ruination, on white experience. In its economy of affect and attention—whose feelings/concerns/experience/troubles count?—black suffering may be seen and noted, but is thingified and not engaged with. Diametrically opposed to *The Woman of Colour*—which does considerable work to shift its readers' perception of black(ened) others in the interest of promoting racial equality and black subjectivity—and also starkly different from *Frankenstein*—which does much to show the injurious impacts of racial(ised) othering and white supremacy—Conrad mounts a wall of exoticism and disgust around those black 'shapes', their alleged customs, language, appetites, and so forth, thereby reinforcing imperialism's habitualised (as much as strategic) practice of foreclosing relation. It is Conrad's abjection of those 'black shapes' that at least partially actualises what Kathryn Yussof criticises through her concept of 'absorbent black and brown bodies' (2018: Kindle Locations 105/1943)—bodies that are normalised to carry the burden of white practices of brutalisation, extraction, and extinction. Non-relation overlaps with all three: the injuriousness of being dissociated and nonetheless instrumentalised for imperial soul-making, being rendered 'extinct' as a feeling subject.

As such, like the previous novels here discussed, *Heart of Darkness* can be read as instructive for posthumanist discourse and in two ways. First, it shows that black(ened) bodies and experience can be seen, heterodox voices can be heard, but can nonetheless be disavowed and left to one side (Conrad's 'black shapes' in the 'gloom'). Second, it shows that even where white and/or human epistemology is in crisis—dramatising itself as a recognition in ruins—these ruins can still prohibit the envisioning of new practices of relation; ruination can dismantle 'the human' as a cornerstone of thinking without necessarily moving beyond whiteness as a default epistemology/ontology or groundwork from which to erect new forms of conviviality and knowledge production. What exactly *are* the differences between colonial discourse and posthumanist discourse? How *does* the relationship between the two change—or not—over the course of different historical periods, or across different cultural contexts? What might be gained from 'reverse-monsterising' posthumanism, exploring more thoroughly the injuriousness of its own habitual self-explications? In engaging with these and similar questions, posthumanist inquiry might tackle its own politics and practices of non-relation.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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