

Posthuman topics in literature and other arts

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Since its origins in the 19th century, science fiction has experimented with imagining the future transformation of humankind, whether a long-term transformation as a result of the ongoing process of human natural evolution in response to new living conditions, as in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) or a much faster transformation as a result of scientific and technological progress, as in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon, or Over the Range* (1872) and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* (The Future Eve, 1886). But it was not until the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century that the theme of transforming man into posthuman forms of being transcended the boundaries of speculative literature and became the subject of the new intellectual movements and academic discourses known as transhumanism and posthumanism.

The very term "posthuman" is quite confusing. It has at least two main meanings, which on the one hand are contradictory and on the other hand intertwine and complement each other. Within the transhumanist discourse, the "posthuman" means the transformation of mankind through various state-of-the-art technologies into a new form that has crossed the biological boundary of *Homo sapiens*. Transhumanism is a techno-optimistic movement that advocates various forms of technological and biomedical enhancement of human capabilities. Transhuman means to be "more human than human"; it is a transitional stage in the development from the human to the posthuman. In contrast, the posthuman in posthumanist discourse refers rather, though not exclusively, to a conceptual construction based on a critical reflection on humanism, as in Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966; *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 1970). Unlike transhumanism, posthumanism emerged from postmodernism, with Ihab Hassan's "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture" (1977) heralding the end of five centuries of humanist tradition. Posthumanism has become an umbrella term for various projects of deconstruction of the humanistic paradigm, such as poststructuralism, critical theory, feminist epistemology, and postcolonial theory, whose criticism is focused primarily on anthropocentrism and the hierarchism of classical humanism. In this case, the posthuman already exists today, as suggested in Donna J. Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) and N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

The concept of the posthuman has been used since the earliest science fiction in both transhumanist and posthumanist meanings. In various narratives describing the encounter of people with posthumans or aliens, human stereotypes, human nature and the humanistic paradigm itself are exposed to challenge and critical reflection.

This issue of WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES presents seven articles identifying transhuman and posthuman topics and motifs in works of science fiction in literature, film and television from a posthumanist perspective. This set of studies builds on previous research on the impact of emerging technologies on the human condition seen from the perspective of post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Peter Sýkora, ed.: *Promises and Perils of Emerging Technologies for Human Condition: Voices from Four Postcommunist Central and East European Countries*, 2019).