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Campana, Joseph and Scott Maisano, eds. Renaissance Posthumanism

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connexes découlent toutefois de la fécondité du propos, non d'une nécessité de l'argumentation qui, fluide et convaincante, se lit avec plaisir et grand profit.

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Campana, Joseph and Scott Maisano, eds.

Renaissance Posthumanism.

New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. Pp. 335 + 35 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-8232-6956-3 (paperback) US\$35.

This collection of eleven essays offers a balanced assessment of the intersection between Renaissance humanism and “posthumanism.” The latter questions the assumptions of human exceptionalism, especially those founded on humanity’s supposedly unique rationality, and instead posits a more fallible and fluid range of human characteristics, ones more closely aligned with those of other animal and plant species and even mineral elements. As the editors, Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano, argue in their introduction, posthumanists have often treated Renaissance humanism as a single and closed set of ideas, according to which humanity’s special dignity elevates it above the rest of the world. Yet the essays demonstrate the ways that Renaissance humanists anticipated the very features about humanity that posthumanists would like to accentuate. In the introduction’s second section, they study *Paradise Lost* as an example of the blurring of human and animal sensibilities, by applying to the poem Giorgio Agamben’s critique of Martin Heidegger’s sense of the “open.” The introduction overall showcases the volume’s strengths and weaknesses: while the contributions address the complexities of Renaissance and indeed premodern conceptions of humanity, they succumb at times to a lack of clarity about their theoretical presuppositions.

In the volume’s first essay, Kenneth Gouwens presents a lucid, magisterial overview of the issues at hand. He takes to task posthumanists’ often limited representations of humanism by tracing the ways Renaissance historians and humanists themselves identified diverse notions of humanity: they recognized not only humanity’s sublimity, but also its depravity, whereby thinkers used animal comparisons to question human exceptionalism. Stephen Campbell

follows with a ground-breaking analysis of Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas*. He reads the work in light of art-historical commentary, beginning with Erwin Panofsky, showing how the sensory violence in Titian's late paintings brings together the animal and the human in a manner beyond the debates of *disegno* and *colore*, with the result that bodies seem to merge into space. Judith Roof then takes on Rabelais's witty treatment of the Silenus in the *Gargantua*. The humanist vision of the Silenus, who conceals his interior behind outward masking, is rendered playfully complex and paradoxical in the work, which dwells on external ornament and continual reversals of meaning.

The fourth essay, by Holly Dugan, explores the meaning of humanity, civility, and wildness by studying the late-medieval lives and tales of Alexander the Great. She asks whether Alexander's conquests in these works represent a privileged ordering of heterosexual masculinity by pushing female sexuality into the marginalized other, in association with the wild creatures of the tales. In her discussion of "farmyard choreographies," Erica Fudge appreciates the typically silent, and under-valued, relations between farmers and their animals in early modern England. Looking at wills and ballads, as a contrast to the high-minded decorum of Milton's *Comus*, she lights upon "tacit knowledge" (156), one found beyond the texts themselves, to underscore the ways that people and animals enhanced each other's lives. Julian Yates investigates these liminal spaces in his essay on English sheep. Humanity's use and abuse of this animal, evoked by Jake Cade's lines in *Henry IV, Part II*, demonstrate how humanity's own self-understanding is dependent upon a network of animals and plants that provides it both order and unease. While people wear wool and eat mutton, they too are sheep within the divine sheepfold.

Vin Nardizzi, in the seventh essay, offers a fine and playful treatment of "posts" in Shakespearean theatre, which are both structural elements of the stage and the word for wooden actors. Suggesting another meaning of "post-human," bad actors, by under- or over-performing their roles, fail in the mission to enliven and enlighten their audiences and thereby enhance their humanity. Diane Wolfthal next looks at the changing visions of the anthropomorphic mandrake, alternately male and female. She recounts the history of the plant's legendary medical uses, in Greek, Latin, and Arabic commentary, before analyzing the seventeenth-century etching by Abraham Bosse that accentuates its female sexuality. This etching challenged the quest for objective analysis by early modern scientists while also displaying their pursuit

of biological analogies and the period's codified gender norms. In an analysis of mineral imagery in Shakespeare, Lara Bovilsky examines how his plays use the metaphor of stones to show the virtues and failings of emotional restraint. As a dynamic variation on this theme, she reads the frailties of Brutus's Stoicism in *Julius Caesar* through the repeated reminders of his flinty nature, which is outwardly unmoved and inwardly incandescent. Joseph Campana concludes the volume with a discourse on the volume's themes and contributions, meditating on the ways humanism, often in its own self-reflection, yields a hazy mirror for identifying what is human, and he presents a new line for research on this theme by focusing on ways writers and thinkers viewed the malleable and labile state of childhood.

The volume thus offers much food for thought on the ongoing importance of Renaissance humanism and also on the recent critiques over its value. At a number of junctures, contributors cite theoreticians—Agamben, Michel Foucault, Cary Wolfe, to name a few—without always explaining clearly the terms of their debates, and as a consequence the critical argot obscures the illumination the essays otherwise provide. There are a number of moments when medieval and Renaissance sources, too, seem to wait in the wings of an argument: one expects, in vain, the appearance of the Silenus from Erasmus's *Stultitiae laus*, or the stony verses of Dante and Petrarch. In sum, the volume helpfully directs our attention to the manifold meanings of *humanitas*: did it imply for Renaissance humanists a code of conduct or culture, similar to Cicero's notion, or the kindness and clemency stressed by Quintilian and Seneca, or something more or less? Does education—the *studia humanitatis*—enhance humanity, or mask it? The collection rightly leaves these questions open, inviting further investigation.

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