Call for Papers: *Word and Text – A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics*, **VI (2016)**

Proto-Posthumanisms

Western thinkers have long been fascinated by the possibility of creating new forms of organic and inorganic life. In Plato, Homer and Aristotle we read of the living bronze and gold statues modelled by the master craftsman Daedalus and the divine blacksmith Hephaestus, while in Ovid's tales it is Pygmalion that fashions himself an ivory girl to love. Marking the beginnings of science fiction, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein imbues a patchwork monster with the breath of life, a fictional Thomas Edison creates what he believes to be the perfect female android in *Tomorrow's Eve*, and in Karel Čapek's play from 1920, the Rossum factory churns out hundreds of thousands of robots that are indistinguishable from human beings. Influenced by Darwin's revolutionary understanding of the notion of species and evolutionary change, other writers chose to turn their attention towards the human species itself and began to reflect on the possible evolution of the human into new forms of being. H.G. Wells contemplated the possible degeneration of man into creatures that descended from, but could no longer be recognised as, human, while in *The Coming Race* Edward Bulwer-Lytton created an elaborate fictional world in which mankind is succeeded by highly-technologised creatures whose capabilities far exceed those of *Homo sapiens*. In their dreams of extending the experience of human life to objects that were previously inanimate and in their portrayal of mankind as containing the germs of its own otherness, these texts disturb essentialist conceptions of the human and pre-empt our contemporary fascination with the figure of the posthuman.

Over recent decades several theorists have utilised the notion of the posthuman to describe a new phase in the history of humanity – one that has evolved out of man's extended relationship with technology. In her now famous 'Cyborg Manifesto', Donna Haraway describes a new form of life emerging out of the congress of man and machine; a "joint kinship" that defies the perceived boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, the human and the non-human. N. Katherine Hayles, meanwhile, argues that the human is being transformed into "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (*How we Became Posthuman*). Under the banner of transhumanism, other thinkers have foretold of the coming of a technological singularity that will utterly transform the nature of the human species.

In distinction to these visions of the 'post' or 'after' of the human, a number of other theorists have chosen to use posthumanism to investigate more specifically how our perception of the human has been transformed and to recognise that what we have defined as human has always been inherently other. Whereas some theorists have chosen to write about a 'post-' to the *human*, others have sought to articulate what they conceive of as the 'post-' of *humanism*. Bringing these two positions together, the notion of the posthuman prompts us to think of that which comes 'after' the human or humanism, while also inviting us to look back upon the evolution of the human, of language and of technology, or, as Cary Wolfe describes it, "the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanism [...] all of which comes before that historically specific thing called "the human"" (*What Is Posthumanism?*).

Marked by a curious temporality, the posthuman "comes *both before and after*" (*What Is Posthumanism?*; my italics) the human and humanism and prompts us to look backwards and forwards to our past and our possible futures. The title of this journal issue adds one more layer to this temporal deferral, inviting contributors to think about how contemporary theories of the posthuman are pre-empted by philosophical, literary and scientific works from earlier periods. Contributors are invited to look back upon works from the past that project themselves into imagined futures, other past texts that in their old age reveal the germinal roots of a more contemporary understanding of the human, or perhaps contemporary texts that seek to inscribe the posthuman into our human past.

In one sense, then, this issue seeks to explore a genealogy of posthumanism, tracing its roots and origins into the past. In addition, however, it invites us to question the very notion of genealogy itself. The conflation of the two prefixes 'proto' and 'post' may be understood as an invitation to reflect more closely on how the temporal ambiguity opened up by our use of the term 'posthumanism' is *inherent* to any possible thinking of it. According to R. L. Rutsky, "the posthuman cannot simply be identified as a culture or age that comes 'after' the human, for the very idea of such a passage, however measured or qualified it may be, continues to rely upon a humanist narrative of historical change" ('Mutation, History and Fantasy in the Posthuman'). If one is to truly speak of – or speak *as* – the posthuman, then this must necessarily entail a new understanding of time and history. By drawing attention to the strange temporality of a 'post' that is always already a 'proto' – and a 'proto' that is always already a 'post' – the title to this issue urges us to rethink the very notions of human temporality, evolution, history and genealogy.

We invite contributions related, but not limited to, the following:

- Past literary, philosophical, religious and scientific texts that speak of the future of the human, the possibility of human obsolescence, or, indeed, the promise of a higher order of human being;
- Philosophical, literary and scientific works whose representation of the human pre-empts that of current posthumanist thought;
- Contemporary texts that seek to rewrite or reinterpret the past through the lens of posthumanism;
- Explorations of how the origins of the human species, of technology, and of language may be rethought through understandings of posthumanism;
- A rethinking of the notions of temporality, evolution, genealogy and history from the perspective of posthumanism.

We welcome interdisciplinary approaches, ranging across critical theory, literary and cultural studies, linguistics, as well as other disciplines in the humanities and the sciences. Contributors are advised to follow the journal's submission guidelines and stylesheet. The deadline for abstract submission is January 31, 2016. Please send 1,000 word proposals to the editor of the volume who will answer any queries you may have. Articles selected for publication must be submitted by April 30, 2016. All submitted articles will be blind-refereed except when invited. Accepted articles will be returned for post-review revisions by June 30, 2016, and will be expected back in their final version by September 30, 2016 at the latest.

Proposals and articles should be sent as attachments to wordandtext2011@gmail.com.