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Author: Dr Rachel Hennessy, University of Adelaide, Australia

Email: rachel.hennessy@adelaide.edu.au

Twitter: @rghennessy

Facebook: rachelghennessy

Web: www.rachelhennessyauthor.com

ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates a humanist commitment in pedagogical ideas circulating around the act of creating character and the related judgements which underly workshop criticism. It considers how many pedagogical texts, and much practice, reinforce the centrality of an individual subject who is separate not only from objects and environment, but from other subjects: technological, human and nonhuman. Whilst acknowledging the challenge to these notions already arising from the textuality of postmodernism it questions the theory of character these challenges have produced and considers what a posthuman theory of character might look like, drawing on Donna Haraway's notion of humanity as 'compost' and utilising *The Overstory* by Richard Powers as an example. The paper considers how student writers could be encouraged to move beyond humanist notions of the individual and to write into the connected realm of the posthuman.

Encouraging "children of the compost": in search of a posthuman theory of character

'Without character, there is no story.' (Bell, 91)

'We must believe in our characters as living breathing humans. If we don't then how can we possibly expect our readers to?' (Perabo, 97)

'A great deal of nonsense is written every day about characters in fiction, from the side of those who believe too much in character and from the side of those who believe too little.' (Wood, 79)

'As soon you create an imaginary being, a character, you are automatically confronted by the question: What is the self?' (Kundera, 23)

A second-year university student brings a short story into the creative writing classroom about a middle-aged, middle-class woman who is mother to a teenager, and wife to a similarly aged man as she. The woman is shown jogging and there is a hint given that she may be in danger from a young, male fellow-jogger. The twist of the story, however, is that the woman is a serial killer and she perpetrates a violent act on the young male, rather than the other way around. The workshop conversation centres around the narrator's character and the plausibility of her being a serial killer. We make the link between representation and reality, for the piece is undoubtably written in a realistic form, and ask the question: would this really happen in real life? As a class, we hone in on the character as an individual and consider the boundaries of her knowable, interior self. Questions circulate about how the character would "get away with it" and the disconnection between the exterior she presents to the world and the violence she contains within.

This workshop conversation, and similar ones I have had before and since, rely on the character in the story being judged against their correlation to a real person. Here, the tension John Frow recognises between 'thinking of characters as pieces of writing or imaging and thinking of them as person-like entities' (2014, 1) is not acknowledged, for the dominant mode of thinking around character, particularly in undergraduate students, is still located in an ongoing belief in stable, fixed identities able to be captured in textual form. Despite the challenges arising from the 'post' theories – poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism and posthumanism, to name a few – this creative writing pedagogical approach draws upon the creation, and judgement, of character via humanist notions of subject formation and subjectivity. Kay Are has noted the 'unmarked ideological commitment to a subjectivity that is integral, insular and (thus) humanist' (2) in much creative writing curricular. She focuses on self-reflective practises such as the use of journals or documentation of 'personal reactions to nominated experiences' (2). Are argues for a reconnection with touch – via object based learning – to find a space for (after Donna Haraway) 'diffractive learning', avoiding 'the humanist atomisation of subject from object in favour of establishing students' interconnectedness with their environments' (Are, 2).

In this paper I interrogate a similar humanist commitment in pedagogical ideas circulating around the act of creating character and the related judgements which underly workshop criticism. I consider how many pedagogical texts, and much practice, reinforce the centrality of an individual subject who is separate not only from objects and environment, but from other subjects: technological, human and nonhuman. I acknowledge the challenge to these notions already arising from the textuality of postmodernism whilst questioning the theory of character these challenges have produced. Following on from this, I suggest what a posthuman theory of character might look like, drawing on another Haraway notion, that of

humanity as 'compost', and utilising *The Overstory* by Richard Powers as an example. I propose that student writers could be encouraged to move beyond humanist notions of the individual and to write into the connected realm of the posthuman. [1]

Nancy Armstrong argues in *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* that the notion of the modern individual has been inherently linked to fictional explorations of identity, with the novel birthing, and then re-defining, the concept of a separate and autonomous character/Man, able to move from a state of incomplete-ness to a position of power, a movement often linked to class and economic mobility. She writes:

> The modern subject came into being as it took in sensations from the outside world
> and, of that material, composed first the ideas and then the judgement and moral sense
> that gave it a self-enclosed and internally coherent identity. (1)

These connections between the novel, the idea of the individual and the narrated self are traced by Armstrong from their beginnings in Victorian times and are, she contends, reinforced by FR Leavis's selection of works that present this type of subject – both highly individual but also, most tellingly, able to be contained by society – into 'the great tradition'. Discussions of character which continue on from this tradition – from EM Forster's division of characters into 'round' or 'flat' to Henry James's 'trick of investing some conceived or encountered individual, some brace or group of individuals, with the germinal property and authority' (9) – focus on the notion of character as intrinsically connected to an individual subject that can be both described in singular detail yet be contained enough within that description to validate universal humanness. This is the paradox of pretending to uniqueness – to the creation of a character – for, at the same time as they striving for originality, the writer must simultaneously embody their character with enough similarity to human others to be recognisable and relatable to the reader.

This connection between individual character and authenticity via their correlation to a perceived real self permeates discussion around the creation of character in creative writing pedagogical texts, particularly when it comes to the avoidance of either the limited individual – the stereotype – or the undefined individual, the universal. Lina P Varotsi argues that 'the author should strive for plausibility of character, to be established through the degree of approximation or deviation, by comparison to the prototype' (72), even whilst the actual definition of a 'prototype' is never clear. Linda Anderson, in her workbook for creative writers, is more specific: 'try to avoid using stereotypes or stock characters even in your secondary characters, for example boring accountant, inarticulate footballer, vain film star, world-weary detective, old-fashioned elderly person and so on' (72-73). One might question this list of examples when we run it alongside the notion of plausibility: for why wouldn't an accountant be bored if their job is unsatisfying to them? If society values the physical skills of a footballer, is there any reason for them to be verbally articulate? Doesn't the very act of being a "star" engender vanity? In working against stereotype, a character must become something different from recognisable, even as their correlation to reality will be judged against plausibility in life.

At the same time, specificity is needed to avoid the charge of attempting universality. Janet Burroway, in her highly popular *Writing Fiction,* warns:

> … though you may labor to create an individual character, and you may make that characters a credible example of type, I don't think you can set out to be "universal". It is true, I believe, that if literature has any social justification or use it is that readers can identify the *common humanity* in, and can therefore identify with, characters vastly different from themselves in century, geography, gender, culture and beliefs;

and that this enhances the scope of the reader's sympathy. Yet, paradoxically, if you aim for the universal, you're likely to achieve the pompous, whereas if you aim for the individual, you're more apt to create a character in whom a reader can see aspects of himself or herself. (my italics – 82)

Here one can clearly see a commitment to the humanist notion that, even whilst we must avoid universalism, we are fundamentally the same underneath it all, as if these layers of difference – 'century, geography, gender, culture and beliefs' – can be made transparent enough for a reader to relate to the core character beneath. Similarly, Anderson advises:

Be specific and particular when imagining your characters. New writers sometimes reach for abstractions and generalities, thinking that this is the way to indicate the wider or universal significance of a particular plight. But the more specific and grounded your stories are, the more they will illuminate *the human condition*. (my italics, 73)

This call to avoid generalities is recognised by Terry Eagleton as one of the fundamental locations of praise for the realist text: 'literary characters, at least in realist fiction, are thought to be at their finest when they are most richly individuated (56)'. Eagleton goes on to point out that, however, 'if they were not also to some extent types, revealing qualities we have encountered before, they would be unintelligible' (57). This contradiction, he argues, is a relatively recent phenomena, maintaining that Aristole's *Poetics* has little time for character – privileging, instead, plot or dramatic action [2] – and that our current notions of character are a result of a 'robustly individualist social order' (Eagleton, 60). Armstrong might counter that the novel's individual character helped create that social order for Victorian fiction began the pathologizing of *collective* humanity by rendering 'alternatives to individualism in phobic terms', relegating 'them to dreams, hallucinations, uncanny experiences, orientalism, exoticism and tales of horror', with 'the longevity of liberal individualism [attributed] to its

skill at defending the very concept of the individual against assault on its universality that come from other notions of subject formation' (Armstrong, 11).

Theories of character are often suspicious of any straightforward connection between representation and the notion of relatability. Hélène Cixous locates the idea of characterisation itself into the 'game of ideology' (42) because, caught in the interplay between the imaginary and the established order, subjectivity is 'under the aegis of masterdom, of the conscious, which conventionalises, evaluates and codes so as to conform to set types' (42). By drawing attention to the genealogy of the word 'character', Cixous critiques the fixed nature of its use in fiction: 'coming from the Greek *Kharattein*, to engrave it is first the mark, the drawn, written, preserved sign' (43). Such rigidity is a sure indicator of 'homogenising, reductive, unifying reason' allying itself to the 'single, stable, socialisable subject' (Cixous, 47). Frow looks at the etymology of 'character' and notes a similar trajectory:

> from distinctive *symbolic* mark to distinctive spoken or written style, to a distinctive
> set of moral qualities, and, beyond this to the representation of those qualities …
> 'character' as letter of the alphabet or as the repeatable and combinable unit of
> printer's type which both represents and imprints it … carries through to a sense of a
> character as something imprinted on the features … suggesting the external,
> physiognomic traits of an inwardly figured personality. (8)

Thus, the act of creating a character *per se* holds within it the reinforcement of unity and the notion of repeatability, a shutting down of waywardness, trapping the individual into clearly defined boundaries of self.

At the same time as the realist text aims to establish the identification circuit with the reader –
'the more 'character' fulfils the norms, the better the reader recognises it and recognises
himself' (Cixous, 42) – the process of character creation itself is frequently treated as a case
of individual authorial connection with a pre-existing subject. James's Preface to *The Portrait
of a Lady* speaks of the 'single' character coming first to him, ahead of any notions of plot or
environment:

> Trying to recover here, for recognition, the germ of my idea, I see that it must have
> consisted not at all in any conceit of a "plot," …; but altogether in the sense of a
> single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to
> which all the usual elements of a "subject," certainly of a setting, were to need to be
> super added. (6-7)

James also quotes the author Ivan Turgenieff as finding his original idea in 'the vision of
some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive
figure, interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were' (7).
Here, characters already exist prior to the text – 'they come from every quarter of heaven …
they are *there* at almost any turn of the road' (James, 8) – and it is the author's task to,
simply, call them forth. Modern creative writing pedagogical texts are less likely to believe in
the character who appears "whole" to the writer, yet the processes of evolving characters into
'living breathing humans' (Perabo, 97) rely on similar notions of found matter, often drawing
on autobiographical material or biographically real people to weave together a composite
subject whose borders are to be clearly defined by the writer:

> We must have a sense of what they are feeling, what they are wishing and desiring,
> what they might do next. (Bradbury, 117)
>
> … you need to find out as much as possible about the interior life of the people you
> are working with. (Lamott, 76)

Whilst these ideas of how to create characters pay little attention to the postmodern acknowledgement of textuality, to be discussed later, at this point I am more interested in the tendency toward locating feelings, wishes and desires inside a highly *singular* self. References may be made to considerations of cultural or interpersonal background as a way to develop a character, yet there are telling spatial metaphors at work here also. The word 'background' itself pushes the self to the fore, their 'roundness' obtained via filling the details behind or underneath them, reiterating the notion of an individual standing apart from the systems which create them and, tellingly, unable to escape them. Cixous again: character 'is the instrument and the essence of what pertains, what belongs' (43). Or, as Brian McHale puts it, 'a key constituent of much modernist fiction is embodied consciousness – the mind in its engagement with the world' with a focus on 'the representation of interiority, temporality, and language'.

In my creative writing workshops questions of character and character creation frequently centre around the concepts which Cixous is so suspicious of: 'communicability', 'identification' and whether the 'reader recognises it and recognises himself' (42). When we treat characters as though they were actual people and debate the likelihood of a character behaving in this way or speaking in that way, the question of plausibility is unconsciously linked to the notion of a fixed symbolic order: for the subject must act or move within the confines of unmarked societal beliefs and norms even if they may, momentarily, represent an aberration. In the student story discussed at the beginning of this article, the workshop conversation centred around the likelihood of such a character existing and what psychological motivation for her actions could be shown by the writer to make the story believable. In line with James's idea of other elements being 'super-added' (7), we worked towards biographical details which might make it plausible for a woman from an affluent

background to randomly kill men in her neighbourhood. Whilst the question could focus on whether this made the story "better" or not, the process itself relied on a series of presumptions which were not addressed in the workshop discussion. What are the economic assumptions being made regarding this character? How do psychological factors work in relation to the gendered body? What is the context for making such an aberrant character when the majority of serial killers, in the real world, are male? The search to make the exterior, the markers of class, race and gender, match the interior – the psychological factors which might result in violence – relies on what Sara Ahmed identifies as the 'inside out' model of the emotional self, that is, the 'presumption of interiority' (8):

> I have feelings and they are mine … I may express my feelings: I may laugh, cry, or shake my head. Once what is inside has got out, when I have expressed my feelings in this way, then my feelings also become yours, and you may respond to them. (8)

Like Cixous's critique, this sense of self centres around the notion of sympathy and the creation of fellow-feeling, or not: 'if you don't understand, we might feel alienated from each other' (Ahmed, 9). Ahmed seeks to problematise this model of emotion, arguing that 'emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices' (9). From a different angle, but with a similar presumption, Eagleton argues that the Romantic and modernist writers' emphasis on the inner life of the individual stands in contrast to ancient thinkers who tended to place inner life 'in the context of action, kinship, history and the public world' (59). Character was not perceived as a list of identifiable qualities that adhere to fixed notions of what it is to be (hu)Man. Rather, the individual is always reacting to its allocated historical, social and cultural space.

Why, then, does much creative writing pedagogy not recognise the different ways in which subjects form, and re-form? To what extent are humanist conventions urging student writers

towards a particular model of identity: the individual character whose interior and exterior coherence is valued above other qualities? And what other models could teachers be recognising or encouraging?

This is not to claim that all creative writing pedagogies around character are reliant on these concepts. The postmodern emphasis on language and fractured identity problematises ideas of character embodied in the realist text and these ideas have permeated much pedagogical approaches to character. McHale points out the ways in which postmodern fiction does not take

> … the world for granted as a mere backdrop against which the adventures of consciousness can be played out, but rather foregrounds the world itself as an object of reflection and contestation through the use of a range of devices and strategies. Postmodernism multiplies and juxtaposes worlds; it troubles and volatilizes them.

Moving away from the 'adventures of consciousness' takes us one step away from the focus on the individual. In *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, William H Gass, whilst examining the character of Mr Cashmore in Henry James's *The Awkward Age,* succinctly articulates the postmodern theory of character:

> Mr Cashmore is (1) a noise, (2) a proper name, (3) a complex system of ideas, (4) a controlling perception, (5) an instrument of verbal organization, (6) a pretended mode of referring, and (7) a source of verbal energy. He is not an object of perception, and nothing whatever that is appropriate to person can be correctly said of him. (44)

Here, the notion of character is removed completely from any perceived connection to a real being. One of the most prominent Australian postmodern pedagogical texts – *The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Writing* by Hazel Smith – does not dedicate any time to

the idea of the individual realist character, instead deferring to a 'plurality of identity', highlighting 'how people's personalities, roles, backgrounds, experiences and ways of viewing the world overlap' (140). Postmodern theories have, Smith suggests, 'transformed the way we think about character' where 'fluid and multiple subjectivity' plays 'down individuality' (140) and splintered subjectivities are everywhere. Here, 'loosely differentiated', 'one trait', 'non-human', and 'marginalised' characters (Smith, 140-144) are explored, with examples drawn from writers such as Paul Auster, Kazuo Ishiguro, Bret Easton Ellis, John Barth, Julian Barnes, Italo Calvino and Toni Morrison.

Postmodernism's focus on the text as text encourages us to think of character as 'assemblages of words' (Wood, 81) but it does not encourage consideration of the material experience of the individual in the world, nor the concomitant implications of a social order which does not recognise inter-connectedness. The recognition of textuality does not help when attempting to create a character in the realistic form who is not a separated, unique individual. Thus, I am less interested in the multiple, fractured subject envisioned by postmodernism and more in ways by which the character in the realist text might come closer to the experience of the posthuman.

Posthumanism, as Neil Badmington summarises, emerges 'from a recognition that "Man" is not the privileged and protected center, because humans are no longer – and perhaps never were – utterly distinct from animals, machines, and other forms of the "inhuman"; are the products of historical and cultural differences that invalidate any appeal to a universal, transhistorical human essence; are constituted as subjects by a linguistic system that pre-exists and transcends them; and are unable to direct the course of world history towards a uniquely human goal' (2010, 374). Whilst there is clearly some overlap here with the project

of postmodernism – particularly around the recognition of linguistic systems and the dismissal of the universal – it is the both its commitment to de-centering "Man" and to 'process ontology' (Braidotti, 23), which I think offers the most to creative writers. As Ros Braidotti writes: 'whereas postmodernist deconstructions led to moral and cognitive relativism, posthuman research is neo-foundationalist and aims at re-grounding concepts and practices of subjectivity in a world fraught with contradictory socio-economic developments and major internal fractures' (14). This should not imply that the term 'posthuman' is easily defined – the debates around its parameters are ongoing (see Badmington 2003; Post; Wolfe) – but rather I want to use this recognition of the anthropocentric focus of much pedagogical practice to consider how we might re-envision character in the realist text:

> Becoming posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual coordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call 'the self'. (Braidotti, 25-26)

How might we consider character that is 'moveable assemblage within a common life space which the subject never masters but merely inhabits, always in a community, a pack or an assemblage' (Braidotti, 26)? That is, how do we write a collective self? Bruno Latour identities 'two main topics explored by the new empiricist project':

> … what is it for any sort of entity to appear to be real in a narrative? And how can the distribution of agencies between humans and non-humans be made visible instead of being taken for granted? (5)

These questions sit closely alongside my own question: what does a theory of character influenced by posthumanism look like? Or, as Armstrong asks, can we 'think of a genuine

alternative to the individual, one that does not inspire phobia and yet is grounded in the world we now inhabit' (25)?

In the last chapter of *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway outlines a collaboratively-written speculative fabulation entitled 'The Camille Stories'. She explains its genesis in a Science Fiction workshop where she, along with the filmmaker Fabrizio Terranova and psychologist, philosopher, and ethologist Vinciane Despret were asked to write about a character over five generations (2016, 134). The result is a narrative multi-verse, proposing a future society of symbionts – children who are genetically connected to a critter [3] – whom she names 'Children of the Compost':

> Compostists eagerly found out everything they could about experimental, intentional, utopian, dystopian, and revolutionary communities and movements across times and places. One of their great disappointments in these accounts was that so many started from the premises of starting over and beginning anew, instead of learning to inherit without denial and stay with the trouble of damaged worlds. Although hardly free of the sterilizing narrative of wiping the world clean by apocalypse or salvation, the richest humus for their inquiries turned out to be sf —science fiction and fantasy, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, and string figures. Blocking the foreclosures of utopias, sf kept politics alive. (Haraway, 2016, 150)

The piece continues, telling us about the different lives of the invented character 'between the birth of Camille 1 in 2025 and the death of Camille 5 in 2425' (Haraway, 2016, 143). Whilst Haraway's 'story' reads as somewhere between a series outline, an academic essay and a literary assemblage – drawing on an array of already present science fiction texts, popular songs and examples of environmental activism – both her process and product present a

model which may offer a way forward in the current challenge of teaching character in a posthuman world.

In the first instance, the process may seem like little more than a collaborative writing project, aligned with the familiar (and often maligned) "group work" model. I want to argue that there is more at work here and that Haraway's declaration that 'we are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities' (2017, 45) can offer a way forward which allows for individual aspiration alongside encouragement of connectivity and kinship. It must be acknowledged that the neoliberal [4] university system does not easily accommodate the idea of collaborative writing, particularly not in terms of assessable work. At my current university – the University of Adelaide – group work cannot be more than 30% [4] of the overall assessable work produced, which precludes any serious engagement with the notion. How, then, can we encourage writing which, whilst having to emanate from individuals, does not focus on unique individuals, and searches for interconnectedness?

What Haraway offers is an example of writing which, whilst created collaboratively, can also be seen to re-position ideas of what a character might be. In contrast to fixed notion of the self or to the postmodern idea of multiplicity, here character creation is about layering, where boundaries are not set by ideas of individual history but collective history; where textual connections and technological changes are acknowledged as integral to an embodied self; where traditional kinship networks are challenged and where the divide between human and nonhuman animal has been problematised. In contrast to postmodern strategies, the aim is not to highlight the *textual* nature of character, but to challenge the sense that any individual, created or real, is not explicitly and inherently connected to environment, object, history, texts, and other subjects, both human and nonhuman: 'stories nest like Russian dolls inside

ever more stories and ramify like fungal webs throwing out ever more sticky threads'
(Haraway, 2019, 565). There is no such thing here as the isolated, individual self: character is
only formed over generations and in relationship to systems, the compost of collective
humanity having seeped through them. This, as Gregory Day puts it, is 'a permacultural
approach to organising human society' and a way to consider character which problematises
the focus on singularity and interiority.

Whilst Haraway herself excavates many individual and collaborative art projects as examples
of compost work (2011, 2017), Latour identifies Richard Powers as an individual writer
whose works perhaps come closest to presenting the posthuman character I am seeking.
Powers, Latour argues, constantly asks the question: 'how many distinct layers, routines, and
transformations are necessary for a character to have "a life of its own"?' (4). In Power's
most recent work, *The Overstory*, each human character is given their 'roots' – familial
relationships traced back at least one generation, if not more – but, as the novel progresses,
through 'trunk' and 'crown', notions of self are challenged in regards to connections to
environment, with kinships [6] formed through responses to animated nature. The sheer
number of characters in *The Overstory* – we follow nine main protagonists – attempts its own
form of layering and the story-line is continually focused on the characters' interaction with
an exterior environment that shifts their perceptive boundaries. For example, Douglas
Pavlicek is a subject of the infamous Stanford prison experiment, beginning his role in the
novel as a pretend prisoner, then joins the army and is saved by a tree. He returns as a veteran
and eventually spends time planting seedlings, until he discovers his actions are justifying the
logging of old growth forests. Mima Ma leaves her corporate job to attend protests after the
trees in the park across from her building are torn down at night-time. These two characters
become kin in their attempts to stop logging – transforming their subject limitations – and

eventually connect with a number of the other characters who are driven to an extreme act of eco-terrorism in their attempt to speak for the trees. The interiority of these characters is never the focus for, as Latour, argues:

> Powers asks what it is for a character to exist at all, when so much of existence depends upon the things one is attached to – the most important connection being to the biological basis of life itself. (Latour, 3)

In *The Overstory*, the 'biological basis of life' is the ground on which we walk and the air in which we breathe, both determined by the presence, or removal, of flora. In contrast to placing characters inside their language limitations, and drawing attention to this, Latour maintains that Powers' engagement with a form of realism stemming from 'matters of concern' rather than 'matters of fact' makes 'language, far from being this impotent medium or the narrow world we should inhabit at a safe distance from the real one […] the medium which is able to establish subterraneous connections between everything on Earth and above' (13). Whilst Jason Childs believes *The Overstory* to be overly 'conventional' (12), Powers himself articulates his general novelist project in the following terms:

> If mimetic fiction, on one hand, inviting an act of unbroken identification that wilfully takes the symbol for the symbolised, trades in what John Gardner called the 'vivid and continuous' fictional dream, and if postmodernism, on the other hand, calling attention to itself as an artifice through all sorts of antinarrational devices, employs wilful interruption of this unbroken dream, the novel I'm after functions as a kind of bastard hybrid, like consciousness itself, generating new terrain by passing 'realism' and 'metafiction' through relational processes, inviting identification at one gauge while complicating it at others, refracting the private through the public, story through form, forcing the reading self into constant reciprocal renegotiations by always

insisting that no level of human existence means anything without all the others.

(2008, 308)

This passing of 'realism' and 'metafiction' through 'relational processes' seems close to the idea of a posthuman theory of character, where individual consciousness is in frequent 'renegotiations', no longer able to be considered without attention to 'all the others'. This work presents more than the fractured, multiple identity associated with postmodernism. Powers creates characters whose sense of self is rooted in their connection with environment, even as it crumbles around them; with their notion of time, even as it loses all sense of synchronism; with their familial ties, even as they re-form around created kin who are not blood related.

As Ken Gale proposes, we need pedagogical approaches which aims to 'disrupt and displace writing as a location that is coded by humanist and phenomenological discourses where the individual will of the author is agentic in the production of a metaphysics of being' (242). While Gale urges student towards collaborative writing, I have noted the difficulties of this in the neoliberal university system. Creative writing pedagogical approaches which encourages a view of humanity as 'compost' and works towards Powers' 'hybrid bastard', could move student writers away from creating the isolated individual character via humanist notions of finding and/or inventing an interiority, as well as de-centre postmodern fixations on metafictional evolutions of multiple character. Instead, it would seek to make students consider the ways in which subjects interconnect with realities, imagined as a system that, whilst textual and linguistic, still has material form, a place where 'words carry worlds mysteriously' (Latour, 21). The posthuman character is one whose interiority is always in negotiation with 'material forms emerging in combination with forces, agencies, and other matter' (Iovino and Oppermann, 1). A posthuman character cannot indulge in solipsism,

knowing their self is part of a long line, and circle, of related selves. Here, the subject 'is a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of nonhuman (animal, vegetable, viral, technological) relations' (Braidotti, 26). If we place the subject into these relations, we can create characters who are more than individual selves stood against humanist backgrounds. Instead, we can create posthuman characters who know, as Powers puts it, that

> Life runs alongside them … Creating the soil. Cycling water. Trading in nutrients. Making weather. Building atmosphere. Feeding and curing and sheltering more kinds of creatures than people know how to count. (2018, 4)

NOTES

[1] I want to acknowledge that Donna Haraway has herself moved away from the term 'posthuman' and articulates herself as a 'compostist':

> Beings – human and not – become with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in early worlding and unworlding. (2017, 45)

[2] 'So the plot is the source and (as it were) the soul of tragedy; character is second.' (Aristotle, 12).

[3] Haraway explains that 'the taint of "creatures" and "creation" does not stick to "critters"' and, for her, 'refers promiscuously to microbes, plants, animals, humans and nonhumans, and sometimes even to machines' (2016, 169).

[4] Here I define 'neoliberal' as the 'political, economic, and social arrangements within society that emphasize market relations, re-tasking the role of the state, and individual responsibility' (Springer, Birch & MacLeavy, 2).

[5] See "Assessment for Coursework Programs Policy", University of Adelaide

https://www.adelaide.edu.au/policies/700/?dsn=policy.document;field=data;id=1044;m=view

[6] Interestingly, none of the characters in *The Overstory* traditionally procreate, embodying Haraway's call to 'make kin, not babies!' (2015, 162).

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