

The Posthumanist Methodology in Literary Criticism

Malgorzata Kowalcze

Institute of English Studies, Pedagogical University of Cracow

Karmelicka 41, 31-128 Krakow, Poland

Email: malgorzata.kowalcze@up.krakow.pl

Abstract Intensified research into the natural world, the deterioration of which caused by humans we are experiencing particularly acutely nowadays, makes us redirect our attention towards our surroundings. Contemporary literary studies are likely, therefore, to benefit from such theories as Posthumanism, which, criticising anthropocentrism, posit a new perception of matter as inherently creative and endowed with subjectivity. The paper discusses selected tenets of posthumanism as a possible ideological backdrop to literary analysis. While not a homogeneous theory *per se*, posthumanism provides the field of literary criticism with particularly illuminating concepts. Its approach stresses the fact that a human being is an intersection point of material and non-material as well as human and non-human determinants. It also emphasizes relational and discursive nature of all existing entities whose meanings are formed in the ongoing processes of interactions ('intraactions') between them. Posthumanist analysis focuses on the sensual immediacy of material objects and on the kind of human – non-human closeness which rests upon material interconnectedness between the two participants of the relation. The posthumanist methodology appreciates the importance of the characters' corporeality and focuses on the so far neglected or underappreciated elements of the diegetic world, namely the non-human subjects.

Key words posthumanism; materialism; non-human; intraaction; corporeality

Author **Malgorzata Kowalcze** is an early career researcher who holds PhD in English literature and a Master's degree in Philosophy. Her principal research interests are in the field of contemporary English literature, phenomenology and new materialism. Much of her work involves philosophical treatment of issues raised by literature. She is the author of *William Golding's Images of Corporeality: Insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body* (published in Polish). She is assistant professor at the Institute of English Studies of the

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland, where she teaches courses in the history of English literature and posthumanism.

Introduction: A New Theory?

Undoubtedly, any literary analysis has to rely on certain theoretical underpinnings which determine the place of a text in the realm of humanities and indeed in the world at large. To what extent the theory of literature can be practiced as a separate discipline is, however, questionable. The „end of theory” (Young 3-20), preceded by the „death of the author”, heralded by Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes in the second half of the XX century, resulted from an assumption shared by an increasing number of scholars that the variety of human forms of expression can hardly be encompassed by a single theory. A model which would be broad enough so that it could account for the diverse, and often apparently contradictory, human experiences as well as peculiar ways of perceiving the world, would have to resign from the exclusiveness of the criteria that make up its body, and thus would cease to be what is commonly understood by the term „theory”, and what could be roughly defined as a set of rules determining a proper way of dealing with a problem. Reality, the way postmodernists saw it, cannot be reduced to a single dimension and cannot be correctly translated into a one-dimensional system of signs.

As a relatively fresh trend and encompassing a number of dissimilar variants, posthumanism does not represent a homogeneous structure of thought which could be referred to as “theory” *per se*. Though its origins can be traced directly to poststructuralism, it draws its inspirations from thinkers as distant in time as Baruch Spinoza or even Protagoras¹. Posthumanists investigate human relationships with animals and the influence of material objects on the lives of individuals as well as humanity as a whole. They analyse the nature-culture dynamics as well as the intricacies of the structure and functioning of matter (as analysed by quantum physics); they are engaged ecologically, politically and culturally. However diverse, though, posthumanist approaches are unified by rejection of anthropocentrism—defined as privileging the human form of existence over the existence of non-human animals and material objects, materialist attitude to the world and objection to the

¹ The appearance of posthumanist approach was to a large extent prompted by scientists’ observation that the Earth has entered a new era – the Anthropocene – as a result of human activity. The term was coined by Paul Crutzen in year 2000, but the author points to the beginning of the 19th century as a moment when, with the increase in use of fossil fuel, human impact on the Earth rose to an unprecedented scale, becoming one of the strongest geological factors.

post-Kantian correlationism (Meillasoux 50-81).

With regard to literature, posthumanism does not aim at offering a new “theory” of interpretation which would prove the previous methodologies misguided or deficient. Since posthuman perspective strives to account for variety of sensibilities which individuals display, while encountering literary works it does not preach one correct method of interpreting literature. Posthumanist thinkers challenge the traditional humanistic definition of the human as a creature marked by certain distinct qualities which justify their leading position among other beings. This takes place by undermining of the fundamental humanistic distinctions which have defined man’s place in the world such as body vs. mind, body vs. soul, sensual vs. mental, human vs. animal or human vs. thing. Posthumanism puts forward the issue of corporeality as the founding principle of the human existence and thus sees a human being as *Homo somaticus vivens*, rather than *Homo sapiens*. Thus the bedrock of the tools for an in-depth study of various aspects of human condition that posthumanism offers is necessarily one’s very body-ness which makes one bound up with the world most intimately. Posthumanist approach to literature seeks to bring to the reader’s attention certain elements of the diegetic world which might have been previously overlooked and which are arguably vital for discovering new strata of meaning. These elements include animals, plants, material objects and matter as such, the status of which—in literature and in the real world—is changing dramatically as our knowledge and understanding of the non-human beings deepen. No longer is the natural environment understood as a passive stage on which human actors are sole performers of meaningful acts. A literary work comes to be perceived as a result of an indispensable, active and constant interchange of meaning between human and non-human participants of a relationship which results in a particular form of message which is open for interpretation. My paper does not provide a thorough study of all the aspects of posthumanist methodology. Its purpose is much more modest as it aims at pointing out but a few ways in which literary criticism may benefit from the posthumanist theory. I do hope, however, that the reader will find my sketchy analysis interesting.

Posthumanism: A New Exploratory Perspective for Literary Criticism

Protagoras’s assertion that the human being is “the measure of all things” placed them in the position of epistemological superior instance¹. The superior position of human (and, specifically, of the human male) is, according to Rosi Braidotti,

1 Although it must be mentioned that the meaning Protagoras intended to convey was supposedly that of the relativism of human cognition.

symbolised by the Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, which, apart from stressing the utmost beauty and perfection of human (male) body, at the same time credits human with a set of "mental, discursive and spiritual values" (*The Posthuman* 13). The belief in human predominance over other species goes hand in hand with Eurocentrism which was built on the conviction that a European man is not only inherently moral, but also endowed with exclusive access to knowledge of what is right, just, true and noble. Such a humanistic Eurocentrist stand justified the imperialist ambitions of some European countries which actively sought to expand their political influences to bring enlightenment to "the darkest corners" of the world. It promoted the derogatory image of a "primitive savage" also in those European countries whose imperial ambitions were limited. The power dynamics between "us" and "them," "kin" and "alien," much of the literature of the nineteenth century is focused on, further cemented the tendency to perceive difference in terms of binary oppositions representing inherent ethical and aesthetic value. Out of two cultures, one needs to be "better," out of two principles only one has to be "true," which makes the other one necessarily false.

That ideological perspective was mirrored in the field of literary theory in which structuralist ambitions to discover a precise universal theory of language predominated well into the twentieth century. With the arrival of poststructuralism marked by the works of Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva and others, the conviction about the possibility to find Truth (with a capital T) gave way to much more modest hope to gain some understanding of what may be true *for* somebody. Although not freed completely from the predominance of language, literary theory tried to account for diversity as not an aberration, but the inherent quality of being, and thus as an indispensable element of any interpretation.

Criticism of correlationism was another consequence of disillusionment with "objective truths" and with the pervasive power of the human mind. Correlationism is believed to have originated in Immanuel Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal dimensions of the world and the idea that humans can only have access to the phenomenal layer of reality. What appears to us is always and necessarily filtered through our senses and minds, therefore we cannot reach the thing "in itself." Our thoughts, on the other hand, are always filled with stimuli coming from the "outside" of our minds, thus a "pure thought" does not exist either. Correlationism, Quentin Meillassoux opines, is "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (5); it also means that things are only real inasmuch as they are perceived by a human subject (Bryant).

Posthumanists believe instead that not only do things exist independently of human existence, but also that it is possible for humans to access reality not as a linguistic construct, but in its pure materiality. What is more, the world's materiality consists in concrete material objects which do not merely provide a neutral background to our existence but actively influence our lives, bodies and minds.

The two main posthumanist groups of theories which spring from a new perception of reality are Object Oriented Ontology¹ and New Materialism, and within the latter agential realism of Karen Barad and vital materialism of Jane Bennett are distinguished. Both groups of theories question Kantian correlationism and focus on other-than-human beings, whose existence is independent from human perception acts and conceptualization processes. That being said, however, while Object Oriented Ontology perceives reality as a collection of independent objects which withdraw from human or non-human interaction (Harman 2), New Materialism stresses the relational and discursive nature of all existing entities whose meanings are formed in the ongoing processes of interactions ("intraactions") between them (Barad, *Posthumanist* 801-831); material object is characterized by its inherent vitality and the capacity to participate in a meaningful dialogue, which takes place between humans and non-humans at a material level (Bennett 24). Both approaches, however, regard matter as somewhat uncanny in the way it presents itself to us—an inexhaustible reservoir of creative potential, thus their perception of matter is far from reductionist. The sheer *mattering* of matter, a physical process in which new forms come to existence, is the way in which meaning emerges, as Karen Barad stresses (*Meeting* 3).

As a result, the "active character" vs. "passive setting" polarity, which seems to be one of fundamental tenets of literary analysis, reveals its conventionality and dubiousness. Inherent vitality, creativity and agency of matter can be spotted in literature wherever personification of supposedly inanimate beings, ranging from small material objects to the fundamental elements of earth, air, fire, and water, does not merely serve the purpose of mirroring the acts of human characters, but reveals intrinsic personhood of various forms of matter. Also, abundant application of nature imagery makes reader notice quite a few similarities between human mental and bodily processes and natural phenomena. Their role in the literary text goes beyond the illustrative function of symbolizing human psychic states. Acting as independent agents, the elements actively contribute to, and at times generate, certain reactions on the part of the human subjects. Rather than consisting of two dissimilar spheres:

1 The most important representatives of Object Oriented Ontology include Graham Harman, Timothy Morton and Levi Bryant.

nature and culture, human reality is portrayed as Donna Haraway's *naturecultures* – nature and culture representing two sides of the same “natureculture phenomenon” defined by continuous interchange of dynamic elements; a collective of different forms of existence unified by a common material foundation.

While poststructuralism and deconstruction are focused on language as a fundamental dimension of the human existence, posthumanism directs its attention towards the body. Contrary to the previous humanistic paradigm, backbone of which being the belief that a human being is defined predominantly by their power of reasoning, the new attitude stresses the importance of one's body in forming their identity. Human has proven only too often that relying on rational thinking does not necessarily prevent one from displaying behaviour which is destructive for individuals and for humanity at large, not to mention the natural environment¹. Since reason does not provide humans with a substantial support in forming a mutually beneficial relation with their surroundings, perhaps it is one's corporeality that ought to be devoted more attention to? The motivations for a ‘somatic turn’² came from the humanities as a result of scholars' realization that the stiff categories of traditional humanism no longer correspond to the way individuals experience their existence and understand their identities. What humans expose on a daily basis is not their “nature,” but their immediate corporeality and the concrete world which permeates their bodies with smells, sounds, images, tactile impressions and some conceptually elusive experiences which constitute the uncanny dimension of our existence.

That is the reason for which many posthumanist researchers are greatly inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of corporeality. With its pivotal concepts of *one's own body*, *body schema* and *la chair*, his philosophy does not refer to the symbolic or cultural meaning of the body, but describes it as a concrete material object characterized by certain biological functions and intrinsically interconnected with the word (*Phenomenology*). The validity of a number of dualisms, such as body-mind, body-soul, physical-metaphysical etc., with which human existence has often been defined, is questioned on the basis of the psycho-corporeal nature of human experiences in which the demarcation line between the two supposedly separate categories becomes blurred. That said, according to the philosopher, the

1 That obviously applies to particularly appalling events such as the Holocaust, but it is also visible in excessive exploitation of the Earth's natural resources, both organic and inorganic. Suffice it to say, a rational human fails to notice certain logical cause and effect relations due to which the harm meant for other beings unavoidably ricochets.

2 D. Hillman, U. Maude, *Introduction*, s. 7.

uncanny quality of the body which resembles the uncanniness of *la chair—flesh* of the world—cannot be uncovered by scientific research only, as its relationship with the world includes certain components which appear ‘magical’ to us (*Visible* 146-151). Therefore, the literary genres which include fantastical elements, such as magic realism, science fiction, fantasy, weird fiction, to name but a few, do not seem too far conceptually from his phenomenological theory which is built on the presumption that there is much more to this world than what is clearly visible.

Apart from rational thinking, our day to day existence depends equally on the “bodily wisdom,” a faculty of the body which allows it to respond to external stimuli without the involvement of mental processes, and which appears to be rooted in a particular kind of a “dialogue” between the body and the material world. The importance of sensory perception which, according to Merleau-Ponty, brings us closer to things themselves, and which allows us to ‘touch’ the world rather than think about it, as well as “taste” it rather than speculate about its possible dimensions, is emphasised in the posthuman thought. A posthumanist literary analysis would therefore appreciate the instances of sensual imagery in which the interconnectedness between humans and the world is revealed. Sensual perception plays a crucial role in the process of forming the characters’ identities and defines their attitudes towards the world. Protagonists’ experiences are interpreted as a stream-of-perception flowing incessantly through their bodies and minds. Similarly to the modernist stream-of-consciousness technique, which revealed the fleeting nature of human mental representations, the stream-of-perception technique (Brinton 363-381) points to the dynamism of human existence which corresponds to the variability and fluidity of reality as such. A human being appears to be a dynamic material centre consisting of a plethora of different sensual stimuli, rather than an established constant “self.” It does not mean that the concept of an independent human subject is negated, but it certainly means that the subject is not entirely independent. That is to say, an individual is not a separate being, similar to a Leibniz’s “windowless monad,” but is an open structure which is naturally inclined to form bonds with the external world. The impossibility of determining a clear border line between what forms the internal portion of their bodies and minds and what belongs to the external world becomes apparent if we scrutinize our interaction with the surrounding world closely enough. Bodies are permeable and their very existence rests upon the acts of absorbing the elements of our surroundings, such as oxygen, food, sunlight etc. What we eat, what we experience, and even the air pressure influence our perception and interpretation of reality as well as our behaviour. As what is external becomes internal—is literally

incorporated, as it becomes part of our bodies—the boundary between the two becomes blurred. When regarded in the broad context of meaningful surroundings constantly influencing their body and mind, perception and understanding, the human as such represents a thing—an object of creative work of matter. The bodies of literary characters are interpreted as entities subjected to transformative changes resulting from not only biological forces, but also societal and cultural forces which determine their behaviour and meaning throughout their lifetime. Human identity can be therefore defined as an intersection point of material and non-material determinants, whose indispensable formative influence on a human being undermines the possibility of individual freedom or independence.

In the epistemological sense, therefore, the human can be defined as a knot in a perceptual net of living creatures, whose account of reality is but one of many possible ones. Although we do experience the same reality, our interpretations of it can both overlap and differ greatly, but undoubtedly they cannot be reduced to one universal version. This seems to apply to literary studies where variety of interpretations is only possible thanks to variety of individual sensibilities and does not contradict unity, quite the opposite, it is the very condition of unity as the term denotes a group of similar items of partially dissimilar qualities.

The fundamental distinction of humanism is the one in which a human being is presented as an anti-thesis of an animal. That is not to say that humanism does not acknowledge the reality of human bodily existence, but it certainly suggests that one's existence does not exhaust itself in the corporeal phenomena. Whether perceived from a religious point of view, as God's creation, or from the atheistic standpoint, as an ultimate achievement of the process of evolution, the human is a being which exceeds its sheer biological potential. Calling somebody „an animal” is generally believed to be offensive as it suggests the person's inferior position resulting from either non-human appearance or non-human behaviour¹. But then, as it has been mentioned before, posthumanist approach recognises the importance of those qualities of living creatures which have been so far downgraded by classical humanistic system of values. Posthumanist methodology questions the very human–animal dualism on the grounds of striking mutual translatability of human and animal functions. This ‘humanimal’ kinship is stressed by means of applying animal imagery to portrayals of humans on the one hand, and expressing animal point of view in terms of human faculties on the other. Informed by posthumanist

1 Undoubtedly the set of qualities which are attributed to humans and which distinguish them from animals, is culture-specific, dependent on geography and history as well as prone to ideological influences.

non-anthropocentric methodology, literary studies focus on examples of animal narration, which try to reveal the animal perspective and the way in which the world meaningful non-human animals. Naturally one of the core issues in such analyses is the one of language as a means of communication and a conceptualization tool, which lies at the heart of the humanistic human-animal distinction. It is no longer the human language only which is capable of effective interchange of meaning, but multitude of other means of communication, including the ones which are alien to humans, that are appreciated and accentuated as intelligent, meaningful acts. Posthumanist literary criticism therefore, as it has been mentioned before, aims at shifting the centre of attention from the anthropocentric point of view to the “*zoe*-centric” perspective which makes room for other-than-human sensibilities and functions.

Zoe and *bios* are two Greek terms for “life.” Whereas *bios* denotes life in its biological sense, *zoe* refers to life as a general attribute of beings, as a force permeating the world, the very condition of existence. Human participation in *zoe* does not differ from the participation of other animals or plants, although the kinds of their *bios* do: “*Zoe* is the poor half of a couple that foregrounds *bios* as the intelligent half; the relationship between them constitutes one of those qualitative distinctions on which Western culture built its discursive empire” (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 37). That is why when a posthumanist scholar refers to a human being as a „humanimal” the term is not supposed to be derogatory, but it serves the purpose of stressing the importance of the biological basis without which the human being cannot truly understand their behaviour. It is only thanks to realising the fact that we actually are animals whose brains have developed in a particular way, but whose other “animal” functions remained intact, that human is ever able to make sense of one’s drives and yearnings. What posthumanism suggests then is trying to approach one’s animality with humility and sympathy, which with time may give way to actual pride in possessing an in-depth knowledge about the processes taking place in one’s own body and in being able to interpret its subtle signals.

Acceptance of the otherness of the other as well as acknowledgement of the fact that it serves establishing my identity and does not threaten it, lies at the heart of a posthuman perspective, which sees the world as inhabited by a community of equally important beings. Hence the increasing popularity of new animism among some posthumanist scholars, and the emergence of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Berkes 1-10) which rests upon the belief that subjectivity and personhood should be distributed more generously among non-human beings as well. Posthuman literary analysis reaches to the concepts produced by it when

focusing on the role of the non-human protagonists whose influence on the development of the plot has often been overlooked or belittled. The formative activity of the elements, for instance, used to be diminished and reduced to the illustrative function; their role was to metaphorically reflect the inner states of a protagonist's mind¹. Rarely has nature been interpreted as an actant² possessing equal rights with human actants and displaying the qualities of a person: it wants something, aims at something, expresses some emotions. The question remains whether such an interpretation of nature is not yet another example of anthropomorphism in which human perspective prevails. It certainly might be the case, however, there is no shame in admitting that humans cannot exceed their species-specific cognitive faculties and have to do with what is at their disposal. In that case associating the natural phenomena with human experiences may be seen as a way to bring one closer to nature. It can also be argued that since the world abounds in 'natural' connections, pointing to certain similarities between human and non-human phenomena is justified, not as an act of reducing one to the other, but as an attempt to stress those aspects of reality on which its unity is founded.

To highlight the necessary connection between various elements of the world, Karen Barad has introduced the term "intraactions" (*Posthumanist* 801-831) which stresses the dynamism and processual quality of reality but also its inclusiveness. While the term „interactions" suggests that the relationship between two participants of it is voluntarily and they themselves exist independently, the term "intraaction," according to the author, describes the nature of those relations much more adequately, as it suggests that objects are immersed in the common material reality and they cannot but stay in connection to some other objects. More importantly, Barad's term points to the author's belief that it is the relations ("phenomena") that are the primitive components of reality, not particular objects which interact with each other: "That is, relations are not secondarily derived from independently existing 'relata,' but rather the mutual ontological dependence of «relata» —the relations—is the ontological primitive" (815). Everything, therefore,

1 Romantic poetry may serve as an apt example of literature in which nature 'mirrors' human emotions and even if it does induce certain reactions in humans it is still presented as a passive source of stimuli rather than an independent 'character' in a literary work.

2 The term 'actant' is believed to be coined by Algirdas Julien Greimas, who used it to describe the structural roles typically performed in storytelling. The sense in which the term is used in the present paper is closer to the one present in Bruno Latour's book *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, in which it refers to any entity which is capable of initiating movement or inducing reaction in another entity. In that sense the term can denote both animate and inanimate objects (Latour 237).

comes to existence as related and appears because it is related.

The world, as perceived by the posthumanist thinkers, is not centred on human beings who, due to their power of rational thinking are solely entitled to attribute meaning to things and phenomena. Meaning is perceived as an attribute of sheer matter which, rather than a static substance, is, as Barad observes, „an ongoing open process of mattering through which »mattering« itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities” (817). The main criterion for classifying a given entity into the “person” category—consciousness—which is believed to be an exclusively human feature, is thus questioned on the basis that first, we cannot be sure that it is indeed limited to human beings, second, there is no objective reason for regarding the conscious existence as in any way superior to the unconscious existence. Consciousness certainly does not prevent humans from self-destructive behaviour which, from evolutionary point of view, testifies against it. Humbled by their own history of violence, brutish cruelty and short-sited anthropocentrism, humans have come to the point when re-thinking of their place in the world and relationship with the non-human members of the earthly community is a matter of survival, and an urgent one.

One of the most important aspects of posthumanist analysis of literature is thus its ecological dimension, funded on the belief that the human, being a biological organism, is naturally subject to the influences of one’s surroundings. Human corporeal processes not only bear striking resemblance to the external phenomena, but are directly linked to them: “Like the vicissitudes of persons in love or conflict, the vicissitudes of bodies are cornerstones of narrative fabulae. Body changes may play out as the representation of familiar corporeal experiences—as aging, as the renovations of puberty or pregnancy, or as the result of mundane violence of other persons, physical forces, living processes, or cultural models” (Clarke 45-46). What should be emphasized is the fact that the material context within which the main hero (the “text” proper) exists is the very condition of making sense of the world created by the author. Therefore, even if it is actually the mental process that is meant to be shown in a text, the author cannot do without employing a host of objects which are “external” to the mind—physical reactions, material objects, natural phenomena. The two dimensions are dissimilar, and yet the link between what is mental and what is material is unquestionable; we understand one of the pair only thanks to or by means of another. And indeed the extent to which the non-human surroundings impact upon the human actants in literary works more often than not raises doubts as to who plays the main role.

It is quite common in Europe that the so called “close senses”, such as touch

or smell are regarded as inferior, and the “distance senses,” such as sight and hearing as superior ones. Such an attitude seems to be based on the presumption that close proximity of matter is in a way defiling. It is surprising then that the tactile immediacy of material objects is what defines our existence to a degree incomparable to any other sense. The sense of touch is necessitated by sheer gravity which makes us always touch something, if only the floor under our feet. Any object I touch is my multidimensional point of reference: its temperature, hardness as well as texture make me relate to my own temperature, hardness and texture, it makes me define myself as a three-dimensional object among other three-dimensional objects.

We are used to interpreting material objects as symbols of some abstract concepts, reminders of people and events, mere pretexts leading to texts proper. It is not my intention to deny the fact that things do function as symbols and sometimes convey meanings which only narrowly refer to their material substance. What I would like to stress however, is that we are not necessarily aware that things we surround ourselves with do determine our lives and perception, alter our habits and plans, shape the way in which we value others. The owner of the only bicycle in the village will be defined predominantly by the uncommon object she possesses. Owning a bicycle has impact on her conduct of everyday life—the object calls for regular repairs, requires a place to store it in and it entails the necessity to acquire other things (a pump, some grease) that are indispensable in order to make sure that it functions well. An object then not only influences the way its owner is perceived by others but it also impacts one’s immediate material surroundings, their behaviour and the way one perceives reality (e.g. focusing on other bikers in the area, news concerning biking industry etc.).

Literary characters are individuals imitating human beings of flesh and blood and thus they cannot do without interacting with material objects, whereas they can and often do exist away from fellow humans or animals. Even if the world presented in the novel is the one taking place in the protagonist’s mind, the content of it is in fact a reminiscence of one’s interaction with the „external” world. The concepts of “external” and “internal” worlds are themselves questionable, since between the two there is a constant interchange of content: our minds process the outside stimuli but at the same time they are the ones to determine the way we perceive those stimuli. There is no “objective external world” that we reach to, and there is no independent subjective “inner world” we can lock ourselves in. The unavoidable permeability of our bodies (and/= minds) undermines the thesis of human freedom understood as the ability to exist independently from the external factors. This is not to say that the human is a formless entity mechanically driven by constantly fluctuating

outside world. Indeed, we are aware of our identities being separate from the rest of reality and we do have the power to exercise our will. Whether that „will” is free, however, is doubtful. There are various actors in literature, “not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological” (Haraway 297), and it is only natural that the very many ways in which they shape and define one another constitute the body of majority of literary works. The posthumanist literary analysis does not aim attention at the symbolic dimension of things, focusing instead on the tactile immediacy of material objects and on the kind of closeness between man and an object which is based on participating in the same material substratum. The identity-building quality of things functioning as extensions of self, which rests upon corporeal interconnectedness between man and material objects, is scrutinised. Hence the affinity of posthumanist approach and the ontological assumptions of New Animism, which equates subjectivity with the ability to relate and consequently it attributes the status of being a subject to inanimate objects as well.

The “new human”—the post-human—therefore exemplifies the “cyborgised human,” an individual whose existence necessitates his/her being attached to material objects which function as extensions of the individual’s powers. While reaching out to the external world for new ways of solving problems appears to be quite a common feature among all the living organisms, the post-human is at the same time aware of the fact that with such an attachment comes a great responsibility. Since our dependence on objects, plants and animals runs deep into the core of whatever it means to be human, the non-human should be given its due place in the world. Monika Bakke rightly observes that even if it is not the ‘post-human’ who is waiting around the corner, then it is definitely “a decentered human—a biological organism existing in vital interdependence between human, the non-human life forms and technologies” (Bakke 8), the human who is much more aware of their bodily life and of being inseparable from the biological world.

Conclusion

The posthumanist portrayal of the human condition which questions the dominant role of rational thinking and emphasizes alternative ways of experiencing the world, might make criticism open up for the literary representation of corporeality as the main source of human lived experience of reality. Its perspective transcends the limitations of Cartesian dualisms and presents the human being as a coherent psychophysical being, intrinsically interconnected with other forms of animate and inanimate existence and defined by the dynamics of its ‘nature’ as well as the unbreakable intimate connection with the material world. Posthumanism views matter

as inherently meaningful and endowed with an inexhaustible potential to manifest itself in a variety of forms. As such posthumanism may be a source of new interesting methodology in literary studies as it provides the tools which make it possible for a critic to see in a new light the previously ignored elements of the diegetic world. Attributing personhood also to other-than-human beings is a way out of the limitations of anthropocentrism, as it facilitates the perception of man as an actor among other human and nonhuman actors unified in their profoundly uncanny materiality.

In the posthumanist perspective discourse is not perceived as a synonym for language, but much more broadly, as a function of reality which involves interlocutors of various kinds. Under the umbrella term of posthumanist literary criticism diverse analyses can be carried out: some of them may focus on the agential role of nature, while others might stress the importance of non-human actants as well as the active role of matter. Scholars may choose to concentrate on “cyborgised” human body, the transformative role of technology or the dynamics between human and non-human spheres of reality and all of those topics will remain within the realm of posthumanist thought. It should be emphasized that the number of scholars whose attention is attracted by the posthumanist perspective is growing. Whether it is due to the pervasiveness of technology or not, we are becoming increasingly aware of the inescapable interconnectedness between phenomena and interdependence between beings. Much of scholars’ interest is devoted to ecological issues which, surprisingly, prove to be inseparable from those areas of research which are traditionally associated with the field of “humanities.” As Christoph Kueffler rightly observes: “environmental studies have recently gained new momentum by strengthening the role of the humanities and by developing new collaborations among arts and design, indigenous peoples, social activists, and natural sciences” (Kueffler 254). Such a collaboration ought to take place in between or beyond the fields of literary criticism and science as well, allowing cross-discipline fertilization and, possibly, better understanding. Certain foregoing standards in literary analysis, such as “dualistic thinking, anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, generalized systems analysis, and unidimensional problem-framings” (255), overlap with the core issues discussed in posthumanism, therefore the analyses combining those areas, focusing on issues of mutual concern, may prove both fruitful and inspiring.

Works Cited

Bakke, Monika. *Bio-transfiguracje. Sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu*. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2012.

- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meanings*. Durham&London: Duke UP, 2007.
- Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3/28 (2003): 801- 831.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham&London: Duke UP, 2010.
- Berkes, Fikret. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge in perspective." *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Concepts and Cases*. Ed. J. T. Inglis. International Development Research Centre, 1993. 1-10.
- Braidotti, Rossi. *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- Braidotti, Rossi. *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
- Brinton L. "'Represented Perception': A Study in Narrative Style." *Poetics* 9 (1980): 363-381.
- Bryant, Levi. "Onticology—A Manifesto for Object-Oriented. Ontology, Part 1." *Larval Subjects*: <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/01/12/object-oriented-ontology-a-manifesto-to-part-i/>. January 12, 2010. Accessed 21 July 2019.
- Clarke, Bruce. *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems*. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.
- Crutzen, Paul Josef, et. al. "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" *Ambio* 8/36 (2007): 614-21.
- Haraway, Donna. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriated Others." *Cultural Studies*. Ed. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. A. Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1991. 295-337.
- Harman, Graham. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2002.
- Latour, Bruno. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Transl. Catherine Porter. Harvard:Harvard UP, 2004.
- Young, Robert. "Post-Structuralism: The End of Theory." *Oxford Literary Review* 2/5 (1982): 3-20.
- Kueffer, Christoph. "Applying the Environmental Humanities." *Gaia. Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society. Ökologische Perspektiven für Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft* 27/2 (2018): 254 –256.
- Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude*. London and New York: Continuum, 2008.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Visible and Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968.