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Narrating the Edges of Humanity: Conceptions of Posthumanism in Anglophone Fiction

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Over the last two decades, the term posthumanism has become ubiquitous across a number of academic fields and also gained prominence in Anglophone literary studies. Commonly employed to designate a complex, entangled set of attempts to reframe conceptions of the relationship between biotechnology and human identity and embodiment, it is also prevalent in contemporary popular culture and artistic productions. While the frightening and fascinating possibilities of technological enhancement and human manipulations of nature possess an imaginative appeal that can, of course, be traced much further far back in time, 'posthumans' (such as clones and cyborgs) populate already canonical 21st-century novels like Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and critically acclaimed TV-series like *Orphan Black* (Canada/BBC America 2013) and *Humans* (UK/US 2015).

Focusing on the symbiotic interdependencies between human/animal/machine and ethically charged ontological distinctions between human/nonhuman/inhuman, the general preoccupation of posthumanism is seeking a redefinition of the category of the human. As a philosophical concept, it also interrogates the legacies of Western humanism and captures the tension between a perceived risk of losing the traits of the 'essential' human, which Francis Fukuyama, for lack of a better term, calls the "Factor X" (2002: 149), and the embrace of new possibilities of (co)existence, as envisioned, for example, in Pramod K. Nayar's notion of a "species cosmopolitanism" (2014: 150).

In many ways, posthumanist scholarship has come of age since Katherine Hayles' (1999) early claim that we already *are* posthuman and recent voices even see a "posthumanist turn" (Snaza and Weaver 2014) in the humanities. This panel therefore invites papers which interrogate the critical potential of posthumanism and its intersections with history, philosophy, gender studies, postcolonial studies, animal studies, and disability studies. The papers may examine depictions of the posthuman in and across a variety of genres and media.

Potential papers may be inspired by, but are not limited to, the following topics and questions:

- Ethics and conceptions of species boundaries, companionship, human superiority, alterity, monstrosity, (in)humanity;
- Narrative patterns and motifs. What imaginative shape does the posthuman take?
- Race and gender. Are depictions of the posthuman automatically post-race/gender?
- The impact of the posthuman on concepts of community, the environment, the global, the Anthropocene;
- Interactions of form and content. What happens to genre boundaries, e.g. the borders between realist and speculative modes of narration?
- The posthuman and pedagogical practice. What does it entail to teach the post-human, or in the 'posthumanities'?

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