

Conclusion

Michel Foucault formulated a definition of humanism as based on an overarching desire to restrict the abuse of power which fits well with the tradition that Todorov refers to in *The Imperfect Garden*. The constitutive elements which Foucault identifies as historically making up humanism are nearly all present in the works examined in this study:

Humanism invented a whole series of sovereignties: the soul (ruling the body, but subjected to God), consciousness (sovereign in a context of judgment, but subjected to the necessities of truth), the individual (a titular control of personal rights subjected to the laws of nature and society), basic freedom (sovereign within, but accepting the demands of an outside world and “aligned with destiny”). In short, humanism is everything in Western civilization that restricts *the desire for power*. It ... excludes the possibility of power being seized. The theory of the subject (in the double sense of the word) is at the heart of humanism and this is why our culture has tenaciously rejected anything that could weaken its hold upon us.

FOUCAULT, “Revolutionary,” 221–222

To this list we may add that the human is always narratively constructed. One might say that the accumulative effect of these elements is to fight irredeemable, definitive loss. This is as true of Christian humanist tradition (which posits a metaphysical redemption, itself a concept of total recuperation) as it is of the liberal humanist tradition. In the end, as Foucault clearly states it is the subject whose loss humanism fights. While the stability of the humanist subject has wavered and faltered in the past fifty or so years of fictional narrative (its very substance refuted, undermined or simply denied), what has returned with force – spurred by an increasing general interest both in the workings of the mind, in the connections between technology and the mind and in the area of artificial intelligence – is the central, if problematic, position of consciousness.

Following many theorists and philosophers, I have argued that the mind is an embodied story-making machine. Because embodied consciousness is shaped by imagined and real spatio-temporal relations, it evolves dynamically in the form of possible selves, trajectories of embodied, perceptual desire: meta-bodies. But this play between self and other relies upon a viable subject position, something which posthumanism is thought to eliminate.

Yet, even in posthumanist fiction the mind's fundamental need for narrative produces characters which, relying on narrative and embodied consciousness, ultimately reject the disembodied state as unethical partly because it lays bare the fiction of self-mastery (*Abre los ojos*) and partly because its denial of the limit makes both a stable subject position and more generally a tripartite temporal horizon impossible (*La ciudad ausente*). The ethics of history also demand that subjects be embodied, for if disembodied selves do not experience "lived time" then pain no longer makes sense and ethical memory becomes impossible (as we saw in *Time's Arrow* and *La ciudad ausente*). Among the works I examine here, only *Moon* imagines a truly posthuman transpersonal model for survival, one which posits nonetheless an ethics of self-sacrifice which fits perfectly within the humanist paradigm (as does its emphasis on narrative construction of personal identity). Marie Darrieussecq's short novel *Naissance des fantômes* is one of the very few which thoroughly rejects the discourse of self-recuperation and while the narrator's pain is palpable, she attains a level of minimal agency without enjoying an autonomous self or a clearly defined body – though her physical dispersal is not meant to be taken literally as in the case of Piglia's *Machine*. Despite this, her narrator does not escape the fundamental need for narrative. *Cronocrímenes* provides the most brutal reaction to the threat to the self which an identical clone represents and suggests that the dark side of the ideology of the autonomous self is far from leaving the scene.

Pain and the Clean Slate

It may be argued that posthumanism represents in many cases a longing for a more radical clean slate than humanism. Humanist narratives at least recognize that a past exists when they depict the yearning to go back and correct it (as an impossible, ever-renewed project), posthumanism does not. Non-narrative time bears no relation to any possible past. And without any concept of a relation to the past there can be no ethics.

In an essay on hypertextuality and the body Christopher Keep makes the following argument about how we read texts today in our connected multi-tasking lives: "Dispersed among the hypertextual links of the Net, the ego's sense of itself as embodied, as comprising a discrete entity, is eroded, broken up, and scattered..." (178). This breaking up of the autonomous subject (equipped with a whole body, seeking a sense of completion in fiction) is not a loss, rather it is a gain: "it is precisely the absence of a determinable center that allows the reader to discover pleasures other than those of closure and comprehension, to imagine bodies as something other than monadic" (179). This is a description of one