Renaissance Posthumanism. Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano, eds. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. viii + 336 pp. \$35.

Renaissance Posthumanism follows Posthumanist Shakespeares in claiming the critical label for the period, but takes on board the challenge for Renaissance studies at large. The introduction principally makes the case that "critical 'posthumanism' . . . has its roots in and remains an offshoot of 'Renaissance humanism'" (2). Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano go on to propose that works from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries represent humans "de-centered amid a weird tangle" of life in a way that not only shows an affinity with posthumanist approaches, but reveals twenty-first-century ideas like systems theory and companion species already growing within it (3, 4). I think there is some strategic overstatement here, to which I will return; in any case, the tone is set for a volume that identifies posthumanism as organically embedded within Renaissance writing.

The collection presents a good range of current work in the field. Three of the essays align in their endeavor to show that human-nonhuman divisions have a history that is necessarily political. Holly Dugan's essay takes up medieval tales of "ravishment" that reappear in Renaissance natural histories to show a continuing phallocentric logic of brutality across species boundaries. Diane Wolfthal suggests that a mid-seventeenthcentury illustration of a woman-like mandrake for a French natural history invokes contemporary misogyny but also hints at a magical and sexual desire for plant life. Erica Fudge takes ideas of interspecies ontological choreography to the level of methodology in order to point out traces of early modern farmers' relations to their animals in the margins of the archive. I see another set of three essays united in a posthumanist materialism that refigures the distance between humans and things in literary representation. For Julian Yates, a lambskin-cum-parchment in Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI not only links skinned sheep and branded humans, but also points to different political uses of sheep in pastoral and utopian Renaissance writing that threaten to undo the biopolitical arrangements they serve. Vin Nardizzi is interested in the "wooden actor" in Renaissance drama, whose failure to enchant the audience also reveals him as a theatrical artifact; Lara Bovilsky identifies in Shakespeare's rhetorical register of stones a uniquely early modern idea of mineral emotion between human subject and object. While many of the essays point to textual moments of fraught human boundaries, Stephen J. Campbell

goes further in seeing Titian's late painting *The Flaying of Marsyas* as shifting abject violence toward a deliberate "annihilation of boundaried personhood" (91).

The essays are united in their brave commitment to pushing against the limits of the sayable required by a probing of human limits. The collection also addresses scholarly Renaissance humanism: Kenneth Gouwens patiently argues that humanists from Petrarch to Montaigne tend not to assert absolutes but to posit "provisional truths as manifested in particular situations" that defy humanist exceptionalism. If this sounds like a familiar poststructuralist insistence on context, Judith Roof proves the point by showing how Rabelais's Gargantua invokes humanist wisdom only to refuse pedagogies of transcendental truth: in the book, there is only "a relativity—something that exists because the other is there" (105). All these are welcome points, and opportunities for future scholarship emerge throughout the volume—for example, the introduction's discussion of Christ as beast in Milton's Paradise Regained points to the underexplored role of animals in early modern religion; the not-quite-human child in Campana's epilogue points to humanist pedagogies ready for posthumanist rereading (23, 296). For me, one question remains: in this perilous writing toward the unsayable, what are the risks of the polemical assertion that "we have always been posthuman" (4)? Much as the affinities between posthumanism and Renaissance humanism are worth affirming, the differences, first of all historical difference, need to be acknowledged, too. In relation to this, I see one key posthumanist challenge marginalized: the thinking of human techne that includes the writing of history and our own critical prostheses. If we let new ways of thinking "the open" obscure the ways in which we, like Renaissance humanists, are constrained by our own moment, we run the risk of ending up, once more, with an ahistorical human essence, however entangled with other forms of life.

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