ISLANDS AND THE POSTHUMAN IN LITERATURE

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Dedicated to my family,

who supported me every step of the way.

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Abstract

This thesis concerns itself with an exploration of islands and insularity within the posthuman imaginary. Readings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Galápagos* by Kurt Vonnegut and the Malta chapters of Thomas Pynchon's *V* will be carried out with the intention of investigating the relevance and importance of the island setting for the narrative as well as interrogating the manner in which islands can function as objects to 'think with.' As the field of island studies has already ascertained, islands facilitate discussion on topics as diverse as politics, history, economics and literature. On a much broader level, the various ways in which islands are perceived and documented in literature can often tell us a far greater deal about the nature of the human than they do about the island setting itself. This is because often, islands in literature are the mirrors wherein the human subject can either explore alternate subjectivities or alternatively, assert the status quo and their own identities. In this respect, island literature, with its focus on the human, can be read in new and different ways through the application of various brands of posthuman theory. This allows new perspectives to be brought to old stories. Beyond this rejuvenation, a case can also be made for the island as one of many privileged spaces within the posthuman imaginary. Islands share some interesting overlaps with other settings popular to posthumanist and science fiction narratives. In the same manner that the wide cosmos of outer space suggests a vast emptiness of potential and the underground futuristic metropolis engages with themes of insularity and openness, the island is able to bring both of these qualities to the forefront, constituting a seemingly stable entity located in a vast and changeable sea.

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Introduction

This dissertation is an attempt to read three island narratives from a posthumanist perspective. Here, I investigate whether island narratives are in any way amenable to posthumanist inquiry and study. The texts that have been selected for study are Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Galápagos* by Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon's *V.*

The word 'island' is defined by the OED as 'a piece of land surrounded completely by water'.[1] This definition, while practical, does little to account for the richness of the island myth that has remained integral to the Western imaginary, even up to the present day. Islands, while being very real entities in the world, also exist at the symbolic or metaphorical level, where they have undergone heavy reconstruction and fabrication over many centuries of literary history. Some scholars, such as Pete Hay, have gone so far as to assert that 'the island' has been relegated almost entirely to the 'status of idea, conceit, metaphor' within academic discourse, often to the detriment of real islands and the real lived experiences of islanders.[2] Indeed, this dissertation, it could be argued, exemplifies the tendency. This begs the question: why is it that we are eager to privilege the representation of islands above their reality? Reflecting briefly on the mainstream popularity of television programmes such as *Love Island* or *Survivor*, or the manner in which holiday getaways to tropical islands are often marketed, it would appear that in our contemporary culture, the island has come to represent a space in which we can escape the monotony of our everyday lives. To the jaded and

[1] 'Island' in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www-oedcom.ejournals.um.edu.mt/search?searchType=dictionary&q=island&_searchBtn=Search [accessed 14th April, 2020].
[2] Ian Kinane, *Theorizing Literary Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives* (London:Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p. 5.

'civilized' continental human subject, the island is beguiling, promising a simpler, more sensual and primitive way of life, as well as the possibility of renewal, transformation or great reward. As Derrida put it, the island is a place of retirement, of connecting with one's past.[3] It is associations like these which provide insight into why one may refer to islands as abstract or symbolic entities. It is because throughout the history of Western civilization, island spaces have been employed as 'tools' to think with, particularly in relation to questions pertaining to the nature of humanity, as well as various human affairs. Islands help us understand 'the human' better.

The field of island studies has done much to catalogue the numerous ways islands are used to 'think with'. Islands facilitate reflection on topics as diverse as selfhood and identity, civilization and nature, isolation and connection as well as the utopian and the dystopian. In this respect, the island, so far, has largely remained part of a 'humanist discourse', functioning as the literary laboratory for various modes of humanist thought. What remains to be attempted is an investigation of these ideas from a posthumanist rather than a humanist perspective.

There are multiple ways in which such a project can be carried out. One approach relies on challenging the very relation that has been long established between islands and the human. Earlier on I made reference to Pete Hay, and his claim that imaginary islands take precedence over real ones. Post-colonial studies have already challenged notions of 'Otherness' in this respect, arguing that the lived experience of islanders can at times be cast aside in favor of a conception of the island as a 'mirror' that reflects back the image of the Western continental subject. Here, Posthumanism can attempt a similar but not identical task, where it chooses to recognize the radical alterity of the island space. The argument put forward in this dissertation however, does not entirely seek to disavow the relationship that

[3] Stuart Williams, 'Virtually Impossible: Deleuze and Derrida on the Political Problem of Islands' (and Island Studies), *Island Studies Journal*, 7, (2012), pp. 215-234 (p. 221).

has been existing between the human and the island setting. Instead, posthumanism can also do the work of exploring this relation, bringing to light the hidden proto-posthuman aspect that exists within these humanist island narratives. For example, while much has been written on the interrogation of human nature found in works of science fiction such as *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, little attention has been paid to the role the island itself has to play, particularly the manner in which the island helps enable this aforementioned interrogation of the human. What remains to be discussed, therefore, is whether or not we can read island narratives with the intention of bringing out posthuman ideas already implied within the humanist discourse surrounding the island. This dissertation, therefore, will be dedicated towards readings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Galápagos* by Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon's *V* with the intention of exploring the humanist and posthumanist tensions that can be found embedded within the respective texts and their relation to the island setting.

The stakes of this question are exciting. If island narratives are in any way amenable to posthuman inquiry, this opens up the possibility of new readings in genres that may, at first, not seem approachable from a posthuman perspective. Could we, for the sake of example, read children's popular fiction, a genre so littered with islands, from this fascinating point of view? Something like Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*, *Treasure Island* or even the story of Peter Pan?

The task I have chosen to undertake, therefore, is one that involves bringing to light the 'hidden' posthumanism already implied within the humanist discourse on islands. In order to accomplish this goal, it is first necessary to track the ways in which the island myth has undergone radical shifts and transformations throughout human history, bringing along with it, novel conceptions of the human.

Islophilia, (a love for islands) while no doubt still topical, is by no means a recent phenomenon, being a product of a rich literary and cultural heritage that goes back to ancient

times. The earliest, traditional stories featuring islands (from their outset in antique Egypt, Oriental, Greek and Indian literature up to early modern times) were commonly shipwreck narratives, centered around an epic hero who returns home from his travels, describing all the wonders he had seen. The island world of Homer's *The Odyssey* serves as a prototypical example. Our epic hero, Odysseus, in an attempt to return to his island kingdom of Ithaca after the fall of Troy, finds his journey continually driven off course by storms, the work of the vengeful sea god Poseidon. As a result of this godly intervention, Odysseus finds himself brought into contact with various mysterious and magical islands, from those of the lethargic lotus-eaters to the island of Aeaea, home of the enchantress Circe. Such fantastical locations enable a tension to develop between the familiar and native Ithaca and the mysterious 'Other' islands that Odysseus and his men often find themselves in. Here, arrival to each destination is not something that happens willingly, but is the result of being subject to tempestuous, incalculable, divine forces. In order to return home, the hero must show incredible perseverance, struggling against forces that far exceed the powers of his own will. Thus, *The Odyssey* serves as a model in highlighting how ancient island narratives gave great importance to the divine and powerful forces of nature. Later periods of European history, roughly coinciding with the so-called Age of Discovery would bring about a re-writing of the island myth, coming to emphasize not the wrathful power of the gods, but the intelligent entrepreneurship of human explorers and adventurers. This transition is important because it indirectly paves the way for a novel conception of the human, one who has increased agency and insularity.

A text like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is vital from an island studies perspective because it marks the beginnings of a new kind of island narrative. While both *The Tempest* and Homer's *The Odyssey* make use of island and shipwreck motifs, Shakespeare's play departs from the image of the shipwreck as a battle lost against mythical forces. In *The*

Tempest, the hero's success is not measured by his resilient fortitude, but by his ability to dominate the island.[4] This new kind of shipwreck story demands a new humanist hero, one marked by his insularity.[5] Seeming whole, powerful and complete, this hero is able to convert the island into an extension of his own self. As Volkmar Billig has already stated, with *The Tempest*, we have one of the earliest instantiations of a trope that would only become mainstream centuries later: that of the analogy between the solitary individual and the island.[6] As an aside, we may recall that often quoted line by Donne, the bard's contemporary: 'No man is an island'. Of course, Prospero is only able to maintain his humanist veneer of self-sufficiency and establish himself as a man of excellence through his achievements in the occult sciences. This understanding conveys a clear relation between power and knowledge. Quite simply, knowledge is power.

What is important about all this is that this figure of the rational humanist subject, widely celebrated and recognized during Shakespeare's time, indirectly contains within what we could call a proto-posthuman suggestion of sorts. Prospero's magical abilities enable him to manipulate his surroundings for his own personal gain. He uses his books, his tools, to make things happen. Within this idea lies the 'hidden' posthuman implication that Prospero is interacting with the forces around him. The magician must, by necessity, participate in the island assemblage alongside all the island spirits, flora and fauna. The first chapter of this dissertation makes a similar argument, where drawing upon the work of Kevin LaGrandeur, it is suggested that the island played an instrumental role all along and that a 'posthuman' reading is already embedded within the text. It is simply a matter of trying to orient one's perspective so as to see a new way of exploring an old relation between man and his surroundings.

[4] Volkmar Billig, 'I-lands: The construction and shipwreck of an insular subject' in *Modern Discourse in Shipwreck and Island Motifs in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Brigitte Le Juez , Olga Springer (Boston: Brill Rodolphi, 2015), pp. 17-31 (p. 18).
[5] Ibid., p. 18.
[6] Ibid., p. 18.

The following chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to a reading of Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos.* Applying Braidotti's brand of Deleuzian philosophy to the text, the aim of the chapter is to argue that Vonnegut, like Deleuze, laments the tendency of human beings to be 'human all too human'. *Galápagos* is a tale of human evolution with a simple premise: save for a small population of human beings who are marooned on the Galápagos islands, almost all humanity has been driven to extinction. A disease has spread all over the world, rendering much of the world's population infertile and unable to have children. Already, one can intuit the importance and relevance of the myth of the island setting. The island's natural insularity helps limit the spread of the disease, protecting the select group of human beings who, over many generations, would evolve into an entirely new human species. Its properties (such as its sandy beaches and abundance of tropical fish) and environmental stressors also help direct the course of this evolution, as the process of natural selection changes the biological make up of human beings over time. Thus, in sharp contrast to traditional shipwreck narratives, Vonnegut departs completely from a celebration of human intellect as well as efforts to assert 'mastery' over the island. This makes the novel lend itself to fascinating analysis from a posthumanist perspective. This is because Vonnegut does not, by any means, consider his new seal-like neo humans to be a 'de-evolution'. The author's narrator, Leon Trout, makes this claim on ethical grounds: being disposed of their 'big brains' and opposable thumbs, (the defining features of human evolution) the seal people are incapable of the cruelty unleashed by technological weapons of war. It is here that we see something of a paradox emerge within the text, one which allows Vonnegut to both critique traditional humanist island narratives as well as reassert them.

Vonnegut presents the conditions of survival on the island in terms akin to a kind of return into harmony with nature. Repetitively in the text, the author draws upon the fantasy of the island as an Edenic or utopian paradise. His text therefore, amalgamates both humanist

and posthumanist reflections. This is because Vonnegut combines the humanist narrative of the utopian island as a state that 'humanity' ought to go back to together with a rejection of the traits that have long been seen as the defining features of the human (the big brain). He also creates an overlap between the indifferent process of natural selection and the failure of human beings to recognize their inner animal nature and dependence on the island for their continued survival.

A continuation of this theme can be discerned in my interpretation of *V* by Thomas Pynchon. This final chapter will consist of five-character studies. The intention of such character studies will be a working towards the possibility for a kind of posthuman ethics within the text. My argument is this: If there is any hope for a posthuman ethics to be found in Pynchon's novel it can be parsed together through a consideration of the depiction of the island of Malta together with the character of the Maltese Paola. This is because both Paola and the island of Malta hint at the possibility of transcending the 'I' subject position, offering a new radical posthuman attitude. *V* is a fascinating novel because it was seemingly waiting for the advent of posthumanism. It allows for mediations on the nature of the cyborg, human finitude and the apocalyptic, proving excellent material that can be read from a posthuman lens. The island of Malta, serving as the location of the novel's epilogue allows, I will suggest, a breaking away from crisis and a post-war critique of the human towards an exploration of a posthuman future that will bring unity instead of violence and division.

Chapter 1 – Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
Islands as Brave new worlds – Human Focused Historical Narratives

MIRANDA O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in't.
PROSPERO 'Tis new to thee.

(*The Tempest*, V.I. 182-6) [7]

In the above quotation, Miranda's passionate utterances are comparable to those of early modern travelers, both actual and fictional, who ventured out to distant and exotic lands, reporting back on all they had seen. Such a sense of innocent wonder belies a well-known irony, that unlike Miranda, many travelers admiring the wonders of 'brave new worlds' sought nothing more than the pursuit of material wealth and power. James Davy's historical account of the emergence of England as a maritime nation makes this abundantly clear:

> Were we able, through some quirk in time and space, to wander through England in the early 1500s, we would hear little talk of the sea. For the first half of the sixteenth century, the English ignored the possibilities presented by the remarkable voyages of Columbus, Cabot and da Gama, their attention firmly fixed on the British Isles and its immediate environs. And yet, from the 1550s onwards, the English nation 'turned to the sea' with an insatiable fervor, fueled by the prospect of boundless wealth and power. This transformation was not the result of state investment or any grand strategic plan. Instead, it was a policy born out of greed and ambition, as individuals from a variety of backgrounds sought to make their name and fortune on the oceans. Whether through legitimate trade, aggressive piracy, ferocious warfare or the brutal exploitation of indigenous peoples, these seafarers contributed to the emergence of a new kingdom defined by its maritime

[7] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) V.1.182-6.

> powers. Where before England had been withdrawn and peripheral, a second-rate power, by the 1580s it was a nation with global reach and the confidence to assert its burgeoning power.[8]

The Arden edition of *The Tempest* identifies two specific travel accounts that the bard displays 'almost certain' familiarity with. These are: William Strachey's *'True Reportory of the Wracke, and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates'* which describes a shipwreck off the coast of Bermuda in July 1609 and Samuel Purchas's *'Hakluytus Posthumus'* or *'Purchas his pilgrims'*, which was in relatively wide circulation during the bard's career.[9] Interestingly, rather than illustrating a utopian 'brave new world' full of riches ready for the picking, Strachey's description more closely resembles a hell on earth:

> We found it to be the dangerous and dreaded island, or rather islands, of the Bermuda […] rather because they be so terrible to all that ever touched on them, and such tempests, thunders, and other fearful objects are seen and heard about them, that they be called commonly the Devil's Islands and are feared and avoided of all sea travelers alive above any other place in the world. Yet it pleased our merciful God to make even this hideous and hated place both the place of our safety and means of our deliverance.[10]

As Jeremy Black points out, travel is often depicted as a risky venture in Shakespeare's plays, especially if by sea.[11] During Shakespeare's lifetime seafaring technology left much to be desired, and even 'road links' between regions 'remained particularly poor' with distance

[8] James Davey, 'Adventurers: England Turns to the Sea, 1550-80,' in *Tudor and Stuart Seafarers The Emergence of a Maritime Nation 1485-1707*, ed. James Davey (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 38-53 (p.40).
[9] William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: The Tempest* ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) pp. 41-3.
[10] A True Repository, William Strachey, <http://fas-history.rutgers.edu/clemens/Jamestown/StracheyReportoryI.html>[accessed 4 November 2019].
[11] Jeremy Black, *Mapping Shakespeare*: *An exploration of Shakespeare's World through maps* (London: Conway Boomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018) p.178.

setting ‘a ready bound to certainty and confidence.’[12] In *The Tempest*, Ferdinand echoes Strachey ‘s depiction of a hellish Bermuda in that much quoted line: ‘Hell is empty and all the devils are here’.[13] Readers will also recall, however, that by the plays end, the prince, reunited with his father, would come to rescind his earlier opinion:

> FERDINAND: [*sees Alonso and the others*]
> Though the seas threaten, they are merciful.
> I have cursed them without cause.
> (*The Tempest*, V.1. 178-9) [14]

The purpose of highlighting these various paradoxes – brave new worlds and greed, a dangerous and hellish Bermuda and a hospitable one – is to stress that what we have here are not statements of objective fact but vacillating human-centered value judgements. This reading of *The Tempest* will aim to explore and draw out these tensions throughout the play, highlighting moments where a posthumanist perspective facilitates discussion on perspectivism and anthropocentrism within the text. Naturally, an awareness of the historical context the play is situated in helps substantiate these ideas, drawing out the humanist perspectives that a posthumanist approach will critique.

For example, since naval expeditions remained, since in their infancy, private rather than state initiatives, organizations like the Virginia shipping company were forced to resort to propaganda in order to solicit the manpower for their often-life-threatening expeditions. Emblematic of this tendency is the fact that following Strachey’s shipwreck off the coast of Bermuda, the Virginia shipping company took measures to cast the island in as favourable a light as possible. As part of this initiative, Sylvester Jourdain’s *A Discovery of the Bermudas*, otherwise called the *Isle of Devils*, was renamed *A Plain Description of the Bermudas, now*

[12] Ibid., p.178.
[13] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.2.213-4.
[14] Ibid., V.1. 178-9.

called the Summer Isles.[15] The function of the Summers Isle propaganda is clear; while the *Sea-Venture* was utterly wrecked, some scant members of its crew had survived. These survivors were able to sustain themselves on the island of Bermuda, and, one fateful day, discovered a lump of ambergris, worth up to £12,000 at the time. Such a rare waxy substance, prized for its use in the manufacture of perfumes and cosmetics, represented an economic opportunity that the Virginia company could not risk losing. The discovery meant that it was now imperative that more expeditions be carried out to this previously unimportant island location. As Steve Mentz has rightly pointed out, prior to this decade, Bermuda held little to no importance for the European colonial interest: 'The first published image of Bermuda in Europe appears in a map of the Caribbean, published by Peter Martyr and printed in Seville in 1511. 'La Bermuda' appears in a corner of the map, far from larger islands such as Hispaniola and Cuba, and even more distant from the American mainland. Perhaps coincidentally, the orientation of the map forces readers who are looking at the names of better-known islands to encounter the words 'La Bermuda' upside down'.[16]

To capitulate, the Bermuda islands underwent various metamorphoses. From an unimportant smudge on a map, easily forgotten, to a nefarious devil island, and later, to an easily exploitable haven ripe with resources. Such is the narrative people have written for the island. And yet, the island has its own story to tell; that if not for the massive system of currents and winds, the coral reefs framing the island, and the digestive by-product of a sperm whale, England's colonial history may have been shaped differently. This chapter, in seeking to 'read back' Shakespeare's play from a post-human perspective, will attempt to gradually depart from such aforementioned human centered narratives in order to place greater importance not on human affairs but the island itself. In this reading, human characters will be brought to the same level as the flora and fauna of the island, as well as the

[15] Steve Mentz, 'The Bermuda assemblage: Toward a posthuman globalization', *Postmedieval: A journal of medieval cultural studies*, 7, (2016), pp. 551–564 (p.556).
[16] Ibid., p. 556.

island itself. That is, they are to be regarded as part of an interconnected island assemblage. The result of such a reading experiment, I will argue, emphasizes that in more traditional, human focused readings of the play, the island is stripped completely of its own agency. It recedes into the background and remains a shadowy, withdrawn entity, regarded as little more than a stage for human concerns. The shipwrecked sailors, most noticeably, Gonzalo and Antonio, readily construct their own island worlds, choosing to see the island not for what it is, but in terms of all its tantalizingly exploitable resources. In other words, the island is reduced to nothing more than the bearer of symbolic projection as characters participate in the construction of their own travel narratives. In spite of this, I will argue that the play's focus on exploration and shipwreck facilitates discussion on the ways in which the body's engagement with the environment through the senses allows us too to be shaped by our surroundings. As Cary Wolfe has asserted, posthumanism does not merely concern itself with the decentering of the human, but also on 'how thinking confronts those thematic, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges'.[17] By the play's end, I argue, the sea-farers have been forced to question their own limited perceptions of reality. Their old expectations of the island have been truly 'shipwrecked' and the nature of their thought, in a sense, must become more posthuman. They come to embody a true state of shipwreck, a posthuman state where they are wet, touched everywhere by the inhuman elements of wind and water and truly shaken by catastrophe, excluded from the dry land of their illusions.

The Island of *The Tempest*

Much like the Bermuda Islands, or the isle of More's *Utopia*, the island of *The Tempest* appears to be a perfect case of insularity. For many scholars and readers, the precise geographical location of the island remains forever inaccessible and elusive. Utopia, by

[17] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) p. 16.

definition, generally 'remains remote, undiscoverable, forever distant from scrutiny'.[18] Consequently, we, as readers, 'are forever distanced from the possibility of critique'.[19] Indeed, Shakespeare's island is enchanted partly because it would seem to exist outside of time and worldly constraints. While such magic may be evoked through the rich poetry of Shakespeare's language, and in the case of live performances, through the accompaniment of music, acting and the various techniques of stagecraft, there is also the fact that the play tells us very little about the actual island itself. Adrian, a member of Alonso's court and of no specified rank, only speaks a handful of lines in the play, and his efforts to describe the island are interrupted by the jocular rebukes of the other sailors:

ADRIAN: Though this island seem to be desert –
ANTONIO:Ha,ha,ha
SEBASTIAN: So, you're paid.
ADRIAN: Uninhabitable and almost inaccessible –
SEBASTIAN: Yet-
ADRIAN: Yet-
ANTONIO: He could not miss' t
ADRIAN: It must needs be of subtle, tender and delicate
temperance
ANTONIO: Temperance was a delicate wench.
SEBASTIAN: Ay, and a subtle, as he most learnedly
delivered.
ADRIAN: The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.
SEBASTIAN: As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.
(*The Tempest*, II.1.36-50) [20]

It is the first time that the travelers have set foot on the island, and their immediate reaction is to participate in the unitary, European and humanist mindset of the early modern period. By this, I mean that the description of the island stresses, not its place as part of a grander system

[18] Ivan Callus, 'In Praise of Insularity: Tone, Autonomy and Critical Practice' in *Insularity: Representations and Constructions of Small Worlds* ed. Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel (Würzburg, Germany: Köingshausen and Neumann, 2016) pp .31-43 (p. 35).
[19] Ibid., p.35.
[20] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II.1.36-50.

of natural forces (the winds, the sea-currents) but as an entirely insular, unconnected stretch of land, whose properties exist to be evaluated in relation to the needs and comforts of human beings. The island becomes a space where characters can project their own fantasies onto it. Even Adrian, who seemingly attempts to describe the island objectively, resorts to the words 'uninhabitable', 'desert' and 'inaccessible' – all words that denote the relative absence of human intervention in the space. This detail is important, for it will open a space where, the sailors, having survived a tempest, will now strive to exert a kind of mastery over the land beneath their feet. The island is anthropomorphized by Antonio. Equating the island to a bawdy maid and thus, the acquisition of territory to sexual conquest, Antonio rebukes Adrian's evaluation of the isle as a deserted and untouched space. Roland Greene explains such an encounter with the island as an example of what he calls 'worldmaking'.[21] 'Major characters' Green writes 'are defined in part by their involvement with the making of worlds. Between Tunis, Milan, Naples, Bermuda, Carthage and the strategic no-place of Prospero's island, Shakespeare posits a plurality of worlds – that is symbolic orders that represent social, religious and political regimes – that can scarcely be bridged in human experience'.[22] Such a plurality of worlds is made palpable to the readers as both Antonio and Adrian are bound to their individual conceptualization of the space around them. Adrian sees a desert and uninhabitable space, while Antonio intuits the possibility of material gain. Gonzalo, meanwhile, is busy racking his brains in the hopes of devising a commonwealth:

> GONZALO:
> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavor, treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
> Would I not have ; but nature should bring forth
> Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people.

[21] Roland Green, 'Island Logic' in *'The Tempest' and Its Travels* ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion Books, 2000) pp. 155-164 (p.138).
[22] Ibid., p.138.

(*The Tempest*, II.1.160-5.)[23]

Gonzalo seeks to display his sophisticated learning, and yet his conception of the future of the island is all too idealized, having little concrete basis in reality. In choosing to visualize the island space as an area where a new model for society could be realized, Gonzalo engages in an active fantasy that runs counter to established notions of governance under sovereignty. Perhaps, deservedly, Gonzalo's shipmates are all too eager to dismantle his ivory tower thinking. Antonio is quick to point out the obvious contradiction in Gonzalo's wanting to be 'king' in a society that he has decreed will have no sovereignty. In Early Modern England, speculation on the forms of government was approached mainly from two perspectives: (1) The Primitivist and (2) The Humanistic.[24] Gonzalo's argument appears a primitivistic one, because it centers around the premise that human beings ought to recover the state of nature where human beings can exist in perfect harmony with their surroundings. This is a pastoral or Edenic view of man's rightful place in the world. Despite this, his position, rather than being a true embrace of nature, still remains firmly attached to a privileging of the human over nature. Utopian societies, like Gonzalo or More's, built by and for human beings, cannot exist, because utopists themselves are often so distrustful of the individual's capacity to live together in harmony.[25] Fátima Viera, in her study on the concept of utopias in literature notes that 'we very frequently find a rigid set of laws at the heart of utopian societies – rules that force the individuals to repress their unreliable and unstable nature and put on a more convenient social cloak'.[26] This is precisely the observation made by Antonio and Sebastian. While the sailors adopt an equally human-centered position, their outlook is far more cynical. Antonio and Sebastian propose a vision of the island as a space where social barriers, as well

[23] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II.1.160-5.
[24] Simona Laghi, 'Utopias in The Tempest', *Pólemos*, 11, (2017) pp. 177-193 (p.179).
[25] Fátima Viera, The Concept of Utopia in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 3-27 (p.7).
[26] Ibid., p. 7.

as norms and values are erased. Examples of island narratives which share this outlook, perhaps, most distinctly, would be William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*; as well as the archetypal Island of Dr. Moreau. The task undertaken by these fictional islands is precisely to expose the 'social cloak' or 'thin varnish of culture' that composes much of what we traditionally think of as 'human'.[27] Here, I am intrigued by the fact that a discussion on the island has so quickly evolved into a debate on the nature of the human. The text establishes a binary between two distinct political ideologies. Gonzalo, the utopian, trusts that human nature is essentially benign and capable of creating an Edenic situation, one where individuals can exist in complete harmony amongst themselves. By extension, the island will be hospitable, as nature freely doles out its resources, as 'nature should bring forth' in 'abundance' to cater to the human. Antonio and Sebastian, conversely, attack Gonzalo's ideology on the grounds that human beings are in fact, brutish and focused on their own individual self-preservation above all else. Both parties, thus, justify their attitudes towards the island through a core philosophy that places the human at the very center. While Gonzalo wishes to transform the island into a commonwealth, Antonio and Sebastian use their cynical views of humanity to justify their own selfish pursuit of riches.

Prospero's Servant Network

Kevin LaGrandeur's reading of *The Tempest* posits an alternative social model, one that arguably, provides a counterpoint to the sailors' conceptions of the island. In traditional readings of the play, Prospero (whose very name holds connotations of wealth and prosperity) is seen as a humanist symbol of power par excellence. Interpretations of

[27] Peter Arnds, 'Insularity and the Homo Sacer in William Goldings's Lord of the Flies' in *Insularity: Representations and Constructions of Small Worlds* ed. Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel (Würzburg, Germany: Köingshausen and Neumann, 2016) pp. 201-210 (p.201).

Prospero's characterization range from the image of a king or godly man, a representation of Shakespeare himself, or in more recent times, a colonial oppressor.

While early modern audiences of the play may have readily considered Prospero the rightful ruler of the isle, contemporary readers may be more willing to minimize the magician's importance, exploring the play from the perspectives of Caliban, Miranda, or even the shipwrecked sailors. LaGrandeur, takes matters a step further, proposing a new posthuman re-reading of the play. Borrowing from Aristotle's views on slavery, La Grandeur suggests that Prospero uses his knowledge of the occult sciences in order to forge an extended servant network of spirits, flora and fauna, including the space of the island itself.[28] For Aristotle, the slave or 'organon' was to be regarded as an extension of the master's body. That is, an additive prosthetic or enhancement that enabled the master to exceed his natural human limitations. The slave that lifts heavy loads, for example, is one that adds to the master's physical strength. What this implies is that the master-slave relation is a deeply interconnected one. The slave functions as a part of the master's body to form an extended intelligent network. Despite this interconnection however, the master, in Aristotle's view represented the center of the network, the top of the chain of command. LaGrandeur does not deny this sense of hierarchy, but carefully quotes Aristotle's recommendation that masters treat their slaves well because 'the interests of part and whole, of body and soul, are the same, and the slave is part of the master'.[29]

Here, I read this as an invitation to interpret such a manifestation as not simply an attempt at mastery but a situation that, in fact, could equally be said to undermine the idea of a master to begin with. Aristotle provides a precedent for thinking about posthuman systems, but his perception of how systems function does not take into account the posthuman

[28] Kevin LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Artificial Slaves* (London: Routledge, 2013) pp. 111-6.
[29] Kevin LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Artificial Slaves* (London: Routledge, 2013) pp. 111-6.

understanding that such systems, in actuality, have no center. Indeed, an important difference between Aristotle's views and LaGrandeur's evaluation of Prospero's servant network is that for LaGrandeur, Prospero's network in fact, has no real centre. Essential to LaGrandeur's argument is the understanding that the relations between entities are in a continual state of flux and change. Thus, Prospero's position as a central hub in the network is actually a rather unstable one.[30] Firstly, Prospero, while seemingly all powerful, is entirely dependent on his servant system: to ensure the safety and survival of himself and his daughter as well as to enact his future plans of securing his dukedom and escaping the island. Both of these goals, LaGrandeur reminds us, are achievable only by proxy.[31] For example: in spite of Miranda's insistence that she cannot bear to look upon his monstrous form, Caliban remains indispensable even after repeated attempts to rebel against Prospero's authority. This is because it is up to the 'earthy' monster to perform vital, everyday labors such as fetching firewood. 'We cannot miss him' Prospero reminds his daughter 'he does make our fire/Fetch our wood, and serves in offices/That profit us'.[32] Caliban's usefulness is also made clear through Ariel, who while incredibly powerful, cannot replace the monster, being a spirit 'too delicate' and thus better suited for less 'earthy and abhorred commands'.[33] Instead, LaGrandeur identifies Ariel as a 'key element' to Prospero's network because that spirit 'acts as the interface and the primary agent in the system of forces, things and entities on the island'.[34] Ariel, like Prospero, must integrate within a larger system of forces and requires the co-operation of lesser island spirits in order to accomplish tasks. The spirit, however, stands apart from Prospero in that its power greatly exceeds that of its master.[35] Throughout the

[30] Ibid., pp. 122-4.
[31] Particularly since we do not see Prospero performing much actual magic during the course of the play.
[32] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.2.311-314.
[33] Ibid. I.2. pp. 272-3.
[34] Kevin LaGrandeur, 'Early Modern' in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 16-28 (p. 20).
[35]Kevin, LaGrandeur, *Androids and Intelligent Networks in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Artificial Slaves* (London: Routledge, 2013),p.124.

course of the play, Ariel acts as Prospero's eyes and ears; warning the magician of Caliban's murderous intentions, and even allowing its master to speak through its voice. Additionally, from a pillar of flame, capable of dividing and burning in many places to an invisible 'nymph o'th' sea', Ariel is also capable of changing shape, modifying its airy body to suit any specific task.[36] Such malleability, LaGrandeur claims, not only communicates incredible power but also evokes fears pertaining to 'the danger of human ingenuity'. Quite simply: 'it is perilous to create servant systems so strong they could flip the master-servant relationship and, in fact, displace the maker'.[37]

To recapitulate, LaGrandeur discusses some themes which resonate within posthuman discourse. He notes firstly (1) The growing dependency on the technological as expressed by Heidegger in his question concerning technology. Secondly (2) he references the modern human fear that human beings may be surpassed by an artificial intelligence of their own making. Bearing these two points in mind, an importance aspect of La Grandeur's argument depends on Prospero's awareness that he must act with thoughtful care. If Caliban is to be believed, then some spirits may truly resent the magician for exerting influence over his surroundings: 'They all do hate him/as rootedly as I'.[38] As a result, Prospero can secure his 'mastery' by continually keeping a firm awareness of the ground beneath his feet, a spatial understanding of the positioning of everything within the network. A network, we recall, is defined as 'An entity made up of other independent entities that work together as one'.[39] It is an information system. In a sense, the spirits of the isle, that is, the isle itself, and all the

[36] Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I.2.302.
[37] Kevin, LaGrandeur, 'Early Modern' in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 16-28 (p. 23).
[38] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III.2.92.
[39] Kevin LaGrandeur, 'Early Modern' in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 16-28 (p.19).

natural forces and living organisms inhabiting their respective niche within, have, in fact, been incorporated into the magician.[40]

LaGrandeur's analysis raises some valuable questions. On the surface level we may easily read Prospero's ability to understand his surroundings as being a mark of mastery, one that allows him to dominate the island. Despite this, the magician's connectivity, the implied understanding that he forms part of an interconnected island assemblage, that is, that he is not separate from his subjects implies, even indirectly that the magician decenters himself in the act of surveying the island. It is a matter of perspective. What appears to be an act of mastery relies upon an effort to adjust one's perspective, moving from a view that places the individual at the centre of the system, to one where power is distributed. This same duality applies to the understanding that the island itself has been incorporated into the magician. Depending on one's perspective it is either an act of appropriation, or from a posthumanist lens, one that undermines the idea of appropriation and mastery to begin with.

Any technological network, in our age of the 'internet of things' would indisputably rely on the executable function of computer code. In Shakespeare's play, Prospero relies on his 'books', his magical spells and incantations – essentially, the power of language or rhetoric. Caliban, in conspiring against the magician, instructs Stephano and Trinculo to first possess his books, before attempting any kind of violence ; 'thou mayst brain him, Having first seized his books […] Remember/First to possess his books, for without them/He's but a sot'.[41]

Prospero, La Grandeur maintains, can only hope to maintain his authority through the power of language:

[40]Kevin LaGrandeur *Androids and Intelligent Networks in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Artificial Slaves* (London: Routledge, 2013) pp. 19-20.
[41] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. III.2.93-95.

> in the face of the greater processing speed and brute power of advanced A.I, humans save themselves from subjection to their own intelligent creations only by dint of the flexibility of their intellect, their creativity, and their instincts – something that does not emerge from non-human systems or in fact (yet) […] what we actually see in the play is Prospero controlling his servants, and by extension the network of which they are a part, by the power of his rhetoric. In the face of a perilously powerful servant network, in other words, Prospero resorts to something uniquely human – the creative and particularly human power of persuasion.[42]

Prospero stands apart from other characters in the play, not merely through knowledge, but his ability to completely understand both the gifts and limitations of his own humanity. This double-awareness can be explained if we consider that knowledge, by necessity, is embedded within language, some system of signification or communication. Such systems, like the very servant network, LaGrandeur illustrates, presuppose an infrastructure in reality that is constantly changing. Experience comes through us through momentary flashes of stimuli, flows of sensory information, and it is these acts of sensing which shape the ways in which we inhabit our world. To return to the case of the Utopian Gonzalo and the cynical Antonio, their discourse underlies an Early Modern humanism that enables them to see the island as a place of desire wherein to project their fantasies. This is meaning-making and world making in action, but it is also a tendency that also exemplifies a kind of insular subjectivity. This is natural, for what we experience as our own mind operates, essentially, as an isolated autopoietic system. The difference with Prospero however, is not, I will argue, that he transcends this limitation, but that he seeks to be constantly aware of it. Late in the play, the magician exposes this limitation when he tells his old friend Gonzalo that he ‘do yet taste

[42] Kevin LaGrandeur, ‘Early Modern’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 16-28 (p. 22).

some subtleties o'th'isle' that will not let him 'believe things certain'.[43] What the magician reveals is that the island exerts its own force, its own illusory magic that cannot be completely swayed by his influence. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that even Prospero himself may be susceptible to the island's spell. What prevents the magician from succumbing, what makes Prospero exceptionally gifted is not, paradoxically his knowledge, but the careful awareness of what he cannot know, accomplish without aid. For the posthumanist Cary Wolfe, Prospero would embody the figure, not of the utopian or the cynic, but of the skeptic.[44] This is a condition that, rather than allow the magician to participate in world-making, in the creation of an illusory island of the mind, results instead in a more profound and ethical 'loss of world'.[45]

In order to explain this 'loss' I will be making reference to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Briefly, the text makes the following observations involving human understanding and experience:

1. Experience is constituted by appearances.
2. Appearances are of something else, which accordingly cannot itself appear.
3. All and only functions of experience can be known; these are our categories of understanding.
4. It follows that the something else – that of which appearances are appearances, whose existence we must grant – cannot be known. In discovering this limitation of reason, reason proves its power to itself, over itself.
5. Moreover, since it is unavoidable for our reason to be drawn to think about this unknowable ground of appearance, reason reveals itself to itself in this necessity also.[46]

[43] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, V.1.
[44] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 170.
[45] Ibid., p. 171.
[46] Wolfe, p. 172.

Prospero is aware of the human condition as being characterized by an anthropocentric ignorance at the heart of things. It is a recognition of the fact that subjectivity is the grounds of knowing, and that this knowing is often inaccurate. The 'magic' and illusory abilities that manifest themselves through the island network reflect the tensions between an insular subjective view of the world, and a posthuman awareness of the connectedness of all things. Such tensions, I will argue, can be explored in relation to the music of *The Tempest*, along with Ariel and the accompanying spirts and forces of nature that exist at one with the island itself.

The Music of the Island

> CALIBAN:
> Be not afeared. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
> That if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming
> The clouds, methought, would open and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
> I cried to dream again.
>
> (*The Tempest*, III.2.135-143)[47]

In the above soliloquy, Caliban attempts to comfort his new masters, Trinculo and Stephano, who are frightened by the music of the island. This music is the product of an invisible Ariel who plays a tune 'on a tabor and pipe'.[48] What is interesting about Caliban's response to the music here, is that he draws a distinction between this enjoyable music that lulls him into restful sleep and dreaming, and the torment wrought onto him by the spirits under Prospero's

[47] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III.2.135-143.
[48] Ibid., IV.2.124

command. The magician's spirits are aware of Caliban's every movement. They 'hear' him and yet 'they'll not pinch' or 'frighten with urchin-shows' unless commanded to do so by their master.[49] Caliban fearfully recalls moments where, it would seem the very fauna of the island, had turned against him. Spirits in the form of 'apes', 'hedgehogs' and 'adders' are set upon him for 'every trifle'.[50] Equally worthy of mention is a moment towards the close of Act 3 in the play, where Ariel torments Caliban and his friends through the agency of the flora of the island: briars, thorns and a dirty pool. Caliban's response to the 'sweet airs' of this particular music, however, suggests that he distinguishes between the music that seeks to punish him and that which promises pleasant dreams. It would suggest, then, that, some spirits of the island, or perhaps the island itself, at times, do allow him moments of not only respite, but escape from his dull wood-fetching duties.

Critics devoting themselves to the study of music in *The Tempest* often give Ariel central importance. Joshua Cohen, for example, goes so far as to argue that Ariel is the very living embodiment of music. This is because music is played every time Ariel makes an appearance.[51] Another critic, John P. Cutts, adopts a similar perspective. He begins his reading by suggesting that the supernatural music of the island can be contextualized in relation to Boethius's theory of music, particularly, that of the music of the spheres. In his *De institutione musica*, the Roman philosopher isolates three different types of music which include: (1) *Musica mundane* (2) *Musica humana* and (3) *Musica instrumentalis*. *Musica humana* is subjective, and pertains to the music of the soul that exists in every human being. *Musica mundane*, on the other hand is the music of the wider, broader cosmos. It is the music of the spheres. When Cutts references the notion of *musica mundane*, he takes Ariel and the

[49] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II.2.4-5.
[50] Ibid., II.2.14.
[51] Joshua Cohen, 'The Music of the Tempest', *Raritan*, 33, (2013) pp. 70-82 (p. 72).

island to be inseparable entities.[52] Both Ariel and the island itself come to reflect the powers of a beautiful and ordered universe. This is because, in his words 'the whole play is conceived as taking part on an island that resounds continually to music in the air'.[53] As Emily A. Sulka emphasizes, the word 'Air' in Shakespeare's time was commonly associated with music, most likely because it brought to mind Arias and other melodies.[54]

Cataloging every mention of music in the play, it becomes apparent that the effects it has on various characters often carry associations with confusion, chaos, sleep, dreaming or the illusory. Caliban and Stephano sing whilst under the influence of alcohol (2.2.41-54 and 2.2.176-182). Ariel sings the sailors to sleep, causing a 'strange drowsiness' to possess them, only later waking Gonzalo and Alonso to prevent their deaths.[55] The appearance of the phantom banquet in Act 3 is also accompanied by 'solemn and strange music' as are the later appearances of the spirits in the form of Greek goddesses. At the close of the play, when Prospero has decided to abjure his 'rough magic', 'solemn music' plays, alluding to 'charmed' state the shipwreck survivors find themselves in, unable to move, fixed in a magic circle. The only exceptions in the play, where magical events are not accompanied by music, would be when the stage direction, instead, calls for the sound's effects of thunder. This would be the case during the opening titular tempest, and later, in Act 4, when Prospero sets the spirts in the form of hounds upon the sailors. The purpose of cataloguing these instances of music in the play is to stress the importance of music in granting the island its magical atmosphere and, by extension, to argue that music, being associated with states of confusion, chaos and the illusory, opens a space where various characters in the play are asked to question their own subjective assumptions concerning their surroundings.

[52] John Cutts, 'Music and the Supernatural in "The Tempest": A Study in Interpretation', *Music & Letters*, 39, (1958), pp. 347-358 (p.347).
[53] Ibid., p. 347.
[54] Emily Sulka, 'Shakespeare's Philosophy of Music', *Musical Offerings*, 8 (2017), pp. 41-48 (p. 41).
[55] Shakespeare, *The Tempest.* II. 1. 198.

One particular stage direction, early on in the play, calls for the spirits singing in a chorus accompaniment to Ariel's chanting to be 'burdened 'dispersedly'.[56] What this suggests is that the refrain or chorus would be sung, not from one specified point on the stage, but from various locations. Furthermore, such singing would not occur in unison. Of course, this bit of stagecraft would ideally provide the intended effect of giving Ferdinand's reaction to the melody a touch more credibility:

> FERDINAND:
> Where should this music be? I'th'air, or 'th'earth?
> It sounds no more, and sure it waits upon
> Some god o'th' island. Sitting on a bank,
> Weeping again the King my father's wreck,
> This music crept by me upon the waters,
> Allaying both their fury and my passion
> With its sweet air.
>
> (*The Tempest*, I.2. 388-396)[57]

The prince cannot determine the source of the melody. The spirits that play the tune are invisible to him, and Shakespeare's stage directions ensure that the music is 'dispersed' and can be heard emanating from multiple points of the stage. In a recent publication entitled *On Music, Value and Utopia* Stan Erraught discusses the processual beauty of music, positing that the listener of music is one who's experience is 'of and by a particular subject of experience who also experiences herself as both subject and object'.[58] Furthermore, Erraught makes reference to Adorno and Kant's theories of music, claiming that both philosophers point towards an acceptance of music as 'both a simulacrum and a substitute for nature and for our possible access to it'.[59] Ferdinand's confusion and inability to 'place' the music he is exposed to reflects a much larger dilemma: that of the position the human occupies in the world. Music, as an art form, not only challenges the humanist schema of visuality, but also

[56] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I. 2. 375SD.
[57] Ibid., I.2. 388-396.
[58] Stan Erraught, *On Music: Value and Utopia, Nostalgia for an Age yet to come?* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), p.108.
[59] Ibid., p. 113.

aligns itself with the ineffable, its content being ascribed as being intrinsically resistant to conceptual determination:

> Music is ineffable, not because it is meaningless […] but because it represents too much – music suggests near-endless chains of association, of determinations that move with each tonal shift, combining and separating and recombining. The experience is personal and subjective in the sense that it is mental and uncommunicable, not because the subject cannot find words, but because the description is endless and yet does not exhaust the musical material. [60]

An important distinction needs to be made between the nature of the visual and the auditory. Seeing something requires that the object of one's gaze is within a given field of view. Often, one's gaze must be consciously directed towards that object. We look at the object directly. An island, to some extent, is seen as an island because its boundaries meet water. This suggests that a very large island when seen close up may not appear an island at first. The auditory, while still involving our perception, on the other hand, rather than commencing from the point of view of the subject, proceeds from the object, that is 'where the sound comes from'. We can hear something even without directing our senses towards it. 'Every acoustic event' be it discourse or music, 'is inseparable from the space in which it occurs'.[61] And yet, in the case of this particular scene in *The Tempest,* the 'object' has withdrawn itself completely. Ferdinand's confusion can be explained in terms of what Stanley Cavell, in his interpretation of Heidegger calls, 'the worldhood of the world announcing itself''.[62] The scattered music of the island is able to make Ferdinand aware of the limits of his human

[60] Erraught, p. 4.
[61] Wolfe, p.178.
[62] Ibid., p. 175.

perception. What the island shows is that it exists apart of human perception of it. His role in making the world manifest is removed from the equation. The island asserts itself in the moments where we feel unable to see it.

Late in the play, after Prospero has decided to give up his power, Alonso and his men, freed from the magic circle, find themselves in a state where they are aware of their inability to distinguish appearances from reality. Upon seeing Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess, Alonso attests 'If this prove/A vision of the island, one dear son/Shall I twice lose'.[63] When the Boatswain emerges to remark that the ship, once wrecked, is now as 'tight and yare and as bravely rigged' as ever before, Alonso reveals the full extent of his bafflement.[64] The island has turned into a 'maze' containing business that exceeds human comprehension. Gonzalo earlier, in Act 3, had made the same observation: 'By'r lakin, I can go no further, sir ;/My old bones aches. Here's a maze trod indeed, Through forthrights and meanders!' [65]

Conclusion – Perspectivism

This reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has sought to argue that the magic of the island, emphasized by its insular and withdrawn nature, demonstrates that what is constructed by humanity are perspectives or paradigms. These include even the concept of the subject position, which, taken to its extreme strips the natural world of any ontological or agential status. The island encountered by the shipwrecked individuals was an island of the mind, an insubstantial pageant that was fruit of the imagination. It would be only in moments of self-doubt and confusion, moments of skepticism, that the individual comes to realize that things are more complicated than they appear. The subjective and insular condition, perfect

[63] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. V.1. 176-7.
[64] Ibid., V.1.223-4.
[65] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III. 3.1-3.

autonomy of thought, does not exist. The island, and all the interrelations that compose it, including weather patterns, diverse flora and fauna, teach humility. The island teaches a dissolution of the notion of ‘world’ of clear and objective boundaries and separations between entities, to instead consider ecological interconnectedness, the levels of causality that structure the spaces we live in. There is an impossibility of maintaining true critical distance, but the ‘brave new world’ will confront us with a being that is just as profound as our own.

Chapter 2: *Galápagos* by Kurt Vonnegut
The Problem with Big Brains

In the previous chapter on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I attempted to describe the ways in which the play can inspire an exploration and critique of the limitations of the human subject. More specifically, it can facilitate the discussion of questions relating to perspective anthropocentrism and the realization that as human beings, we remain blind to much that goes on around us in the natural world. By perspective anthropocentrism, I am referring to what Timothy Morton, in his book *Hyperobjects*, dubs 'the Kantian gap between phenomenon and thing.'[66] Referencing Kant's own example, Morton writes 'consider raindrops: you can feel them on your head – but you can't perceive the actual raindrop itself. You only perceive your particular anthropomorphic translation of the raindrops.'[67] The aim of this second chapter is to discuss Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos* as an example of a literary work that not only investigates the limitations of what the text refers to as the human 'big brain' but also utilizes the island setting as a laboratory for a peculiar kind of evolutionary thought experiment. That is, the novel does away with the understanding that the human is the measure of all things, instead stressing how human beings must adapt to the pressures of their surrounding environment to survive. It considers a world where human beings are able to coexist in harmony with their surroundings, actively adapting to environmental pressures not through technological advancement but through natural evolution and bodily adaptation. The titular *Galápagos* islands of course, were first Darwin's evolutionary laboratory, acting as the space where the scientist could carry out his fieldwork, studying both species instability as well as the very instability of the islands themselves. Johannes Riquet, in his

[66] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 18.
[67] Ibid., p. 18.

reading of Darwin's *Volcanic Islands*, argues that the very experience of a volcanic island represented for Darwin, - an encounter that 'made it possible to imagine the seemingly solid structures of the world as perpetually shifting.'[68] While islands may appear to be solid and unchanging land masses, the etymology of the world, 'island', is perhaps surprisingly, that of a fluid and unstable 'watery land'. In likening the activity of the underwater volcanoes to cannon fire, Darwin reminds us of this natural changeability of islands: 'I presume that a narrow-mouthed crater […] like a great air-gun, shot forth, before its final extinction, this vast accumulation of loose matter.'[69] Here, the use of violent, warlike imagery in Darwin's account is remarkable, and I would like to argue that the first chapter of Vonnegut's novel *Galápagos* urges readers, perhaps, to experience a similarly visceral and changeable setting. Providing a geological analysis of the Galápagos islands, Vonnegut's narrator stresses that 'the islands didn't look as though they had been split off from anything. They were clearly young volcanoes, which had been vomited right up right where they were.'[70]

What do both descriptions, penned by Darwin and Vonnegut respectively, have in common? I shall suggest that they both draw attention to the idea that the island itself it something that is capable of change and transformation. This allows for an association be eventually set up between the island itself and the changing environmental pressures that would direct the process of evolution. Both descriptions offer equally vivid descriptions of what Deleuze would recognize as a profound struggle or opposition between ocean and land.[71] For Deleuze, such struggle communicates a kind of non-human expressivity that, rather than rightfully commanding our admiration and awe, sadly, does 'nothing to reassure

[68] Johannes Riquet, 'Islands as Shifting Territories: Evolution and Geology in the Island Poetics of Darwin, Wallace, Wells and Ghosh' in *Insularity: Representations and Constructions of Small Worlds* ed. by Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel (Würzburg, Germany: Köingshausen and Neumann, 2016) pp. 223-236 (p. 226).
[69] Ibid., p. 226.
[70] Kurt Vonnegut, *Galápagos* (Hammersmith, London: Flamingo, 1994) p. 12.
[71] Gilles Deleuze, 'Desert Islands' in *Desert Islands and Other texts 1953-1974* ed.by David Lapoujade, trans. by Michael Taormina (California, South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 9-14 (p. 9).

us.'[72] This is because 'human beings' Deleuze states 'cannot live, or cannot live in security, unless they assume that the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained.'[73] This is the point where Vonnegut's 'big brain' theory comes into play, as well as the larger scope of his literary island experiment. Throughout the entirety of this chapter I will be arguing that Vonnegut's narrator much like Deleuze, laments the tendency of human beings to be 'all too human' alienating themselves from their surrounding environment. In order to understand these ideas, we must first say something about the structure of *Galápagos* the novel.

The text of *Galápagos* is composed of what Oliver W. Ferguson calls a 'double narrative' structure.[74] This is because it is an experimental text that alternates sporadically between two different narrative strands. The first narrative strand is a cosmic one. Vonnegut's novel is equal parts evolutionary and apocalyptic, one that deals with the biological fate of humanity over many generations. The premise of the novel is this: save for a small population of human beings who travelled to the Galápagos islands almost all humanity has been driven to extinction. A strange disease has spread all over the world, rendering much of the world's population infertile and unable to have children. The second narrative strand focuses on the personal life and afterlife of Leon Trout, a spectral and ghostly disembodied consciousness who takes it upon himself to recount the fate of humanity.[75] Detailing the series of events that would lead to the shipwreck of the *Bahía de Darwin*, Trout adopts the role of a third person omnipresent narrator, able to, quite literally, inhabit a

[72] Ibid., p. 9.
[73]Gilles Deleuze, 'Desert Islands' in *Desert Islands and Other texts 1953-1974* ed.by David Lapoujade, trans. by Michael Taormina (California, South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2004) pp. 9-14 (p. 9).
[74] Ferguson Oliver, 'History and Story: Leon Trout's Double Narrative in Galápagos', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 40, (1999), pp. 230-238 (p. 230).

[75] Readers familiar with Vonnegut's fiction will most likely establish a connection with the character of Kilgore Trout, often read as representative of the author's own alter-ego. Kilgore Trout features most prominently in *Breakfast of Champions* where we are told that he is an unsuccessful author of science fiction novels. Later on in *Galápagos*, Trout will affirm the connection, citing his father's failure as a writer.

character's mind. Taking an interest in the sea captain, Captain Adolf von Kleist, Trout says the following:

> My choosing the Captain's head for a vehicle, then, was the equivalent of putting a coin in a slot machine in an enormous gambling casino, and hitting the jackpot right away […] I was mystified to find his big brain thinking about meteorites. That was often the experience back then: I would get into the head of somebody in what to me was a particularly interesting situation, and discover that the person's big brain was thinking about things that had nothing to do with the problem right at hand.[76]

Here, Vonnegut's novel illustrates the problem with 'big brains'. Captain Adolf von Kleist is supposed to be navigating a ship, but lacking any real expertise or skill, attempts to alleviate his anxiety by thinking about meteorites. In the captain's mind, it is vastly more comforting to think of the planet being struck by a meteorite, to delight in a kind of nihilistic escapism, than to actually get the job done. As a result, he endangers both himself and the entire crew, his 'big brain' useless from an evolutionary perspective as it actually leads the man to behave recklessly and dangerously. It exemplifies the human tendency, at times self-destructive, towards insularity and a complete disregard of the surrounding environment.

As another example, let us consider Trout's evaluation of James Wait's 'big brain. James Wait, a predatory 'eviscerator of widows' has no other motivation for joining the *Nature Cruise of the Century* other than escape. Wait, a man who marries women only to clear out their jewelry boxes and bank accounts hopes that the *Galápagos* islands will offer him hiding from police authorities. Trout tells us that:

[76] Vonnegut, p.103.

> Wait had never heard of the Galápagos islands before. He expected them to be like Hawaii, where he had once honeymooned, or Guam, where he had once hidden out – with broad white beaches and blue lagoons and swaying palms and nut-brown native girls.[77]

Again, the purpose of the above quotations is to stress what lies at the core of Vonnegut's 'big brain' dilemma, a focus which remains central to *Galápagos*. Focusing briefly on Wait's island daydream, I am reminded immediately of Deleuze's note on dreaming of islands. To dream of an island, Deleuze insists, is to dream of 'pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew.'[78] Here, Wait's imaginings no doubt comply with Deleuze's evaluation of island imaginings as being all too often focused on notions of escape and being 'separate'. Certainly, Wait has every reason to wish for escape. His desire to hide is understandable –getting intercepted by police authorities could only mean that he is eventually brought to justice and made to face the full force of the law. Captain Adolf von Kleist, likewise, finds solace in thinking of anything other than the immediate problem at hand. What I would like to argue here, and also throughout the entirety of this chapter, is that like Deleuze, Vonnegut's narrator laments the tendency of human beings to be 'all too human'. James Wait, who fantasizes about sandy beaches exhibits a tendency towards isolation that is shared by the rest of the human voyagers upon the *Nature Cruise of the Century*. These characters continually isolate themselves from their surrounding environment. They reflect the human desire to make desertion and isolation sacred. I quote Deleuze: 'it is no longer the island that is separated from the continent, it is the humans who

[77] Ibid., p. 18.
[78] Gilles Deleuze, 'Desert Islands' in *Desert Islands and Other texts 1953-1974* ed.by David Lapoujade, trans. by Michael Taormina (California, South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2004) pp.9-19 (p. 10).

find themselves separated from the world when on an island'.[79] Vonnegut's island project uncannily mirrors Deleuze's injunction that humans ought to 'reduce themselves to the movement that brings them to the island, the movement which prolongs and takes up the élan that produced the island'.[80] In my reading of *Galápagos*, Vonnegut's text will be interpreted as an example of a posthuman novel, not simply because its narrator is a disembodied consciousness, information sans matter, but because the text attempts to re-write the island myth so as to rekindle an appreciation for the Galápagos islands as a transforming and transformative space. Vonnegut's novel utilizes the island setting so to as to deliver a powerful critique of human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism, advocating for an alternative view of the world where human beings are able to live in harmony with nature.

The case for *Galápagos* as a posthumanist text

By suggesting that Vonnegut's novel is a posthuman work of art I am making some other claims as well. I am suggesting that, first of all, there is such a thing as 'posthuman art' in the first place. Braidotti, taking a cue from Deleuze, neatly outlines the trajectory that any work of art attempting to align itself with 'posthumanism' or 'posthumanisms' will most likely follow:

> Art, not unlike critical philosophy, is for Deleuze an intensive practice that aims at creating new ways of thinking, perceiving and sensing Life's infinite possibilities. By transporting us beyond the confines of bound identities, art becomes necessarily inhuman in the sense of non-human in that it connects to the animal, the vegetable, earthy and planetary forces that surround us. Art is also, moreover, cosmic in its resonance and hence posthuman by structure as it carries us to the limits of what our embodied selves can do or endure.[81]

[79] Ibid., p. 10.
[80] Gilles Deleuze, 'Desert Islands' in *Desert Islands and Other texts 1953-1974* ed. by David Lapoujade, trans. by Michael Taormina (California, South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2004) pp. 9-19 (p. 10)
[81] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) p. 107.

Naturally, some scholars would contest this understanding on the grounds that, novels are written by humans and for human beings. This is A.W Moore's argument, who maintains that narratives are by definition necessarily anthropocentric.[82] This is far from a matter of choice of course, given that the subjects, aims and forms of narrative are human. Another scholar, Monika Fleudernik adopts an analogous position. In her view, narrative contains an anthropocentric bias because, quite simply, narrative relies on our natural cognitive scheme as well as our embodied nature.[83] In other words, our real-life bodily experiences are what help us understand narrative.[84] What I am trying to suggest here is that there is a clear paradox present within Galápagos. It is the paradoxical nature of any (human) text that attempts to provide a non-anthropocentric experience.

Indeed, Vonnegut's novel, rather than try to counter this idea, underscores it multiple times throughout the novel. His seal-creatures have no use for stories. They do not have use for anything that does not go beyond matters of instinctual self-preservation: 'Thanks to their decreased brainpower, people aren't diverted from the main business of life by the hobgoblins of opinions anymore'.[85] There is an underlying paradox within the text. Any 'human' text that attempts to present a nonhuman perspective necessarily cannot entirely escape its own anthropocentrism. In spite of this, *Galápagos* as a text, while forced to conform to such limitations, employs various narrative strategies in an attempt to make readers aware of their own anthropocentric leanings and in some ways, critique them.

Marco Caracciolo, in a recent paper titled *Posthuman Narration as a bed case for Experientiality: The Case of Kurt Vonnegut's Galápagos*, provides a comprehensive list detailing many such strategies. These include:

[82] James Williams, 'Time and the Posthuman: Rosi Braidotti and A.W Moore on the Posthuman and Anthropocentrism after Deleuze's Philosophy of Time' in *Posthuman Ecologies Complexity and Process after Deleuze* ed.by Rosie Braidotti & Simone Bignall (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) pp.105-122 (p.105).
[83] Ibid., p. 105.
[84] Ibid., p. 105.
[85] Vonnegut, p.22.

1. Frequent juxtapositions of the cosmic and comedic. This includes ironic references to both evolutionary theory as well as biblical narratives of origin (Genesis and Noah's Ark).

2. The narrative of *Galápagos* like evolution itself, is not driven by design or intention. Rather, it is conveyed through what Caracciolo calls 'mindless progression' and 'nonlinear temporality'.

3. Important events in the story generally happen by pure chance. The fact that humanity even manages to survive at all is matter of dumb luck.

4. Frequent use of counterfactuals.

5. Characters are often depicted as having very little mental agency.

6. The narrator focuses closely on the stories of the characters of the shipwreck and fast-forwards to the distant future of marine mammal humans (leaping back and forth between 2 temporal planes)

7. Haphazard narrative overall – the survivors of the 'Nature Cruise of the Century' appear to be subject to the whims of an eccentric and unpredictable narrator.[86]

The characteristics pinpointed by Caracciolo stress the contingency that underlies human existence. Vonnegut departs from the idea that the creation of human beings is part of some divine plan, that the human being exists at the center of creation. I argue that Vonnegut has written a narrative that requires readers to acknowledge that human beings are generally the principal characters of every narrative, that it is they who run the show and shape their world, and to criticize this same view. *Galápagos* presents us with a cast of human characters, and it

[86] Marco Caracciolo, 'Posthuman Narration as a test bed for Experientiality: The Case of Kurt Vonnegut's Galápagos', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 16, (2018) pp. 303-314.
[86] Ibid., pp. 303-314.

is their lives we read about. In spite of this, the lives of these characters and the outcomes of events are repeatedly shown to be nothing but the product of pure chance. It is a human narrative that aspires to reflect and critique its own innate anthropocentrism.

What Vonnegut's novel is doing is turning Charles Darwin's theory of evolution into a plot. The text not only draws attention to the environmental pressures that have acted on the human survivors, but emulates the way that these external factors shape a species in its own narrative structures. Elements that may appear random and haphazard in fact only appear so through our own limited human viewpoint. The gradual biological modifications brought about by Darwin's principle of natural selection may have been glossed over in a narrative gap of about a million years, but the novel nonetheless demonstrates Vonnegut's interest in satirizing 'the human', that is, critiquing the tendency of human beings to assume that they occupy a privileged position in relation to the rest of the natural world.

Of particular interest is the continual shifting between two temporal frames. Often, any situation that could inspire pity and pathos for the stranded survivors, or humanity in general, is undercut via prolepsis, a fast-forward to the distant future where human being have evolved, losing their 'big brains' and opposable thumbs. As an example, let us consider Trout's reaction to witnessing a schizophrenic and dangerously armed, Delgado, barging into a defunct souvenir shop:

> Delgado, facing starvation like so many people in Guayaquil, thought his big problem was enemies with little radios. And when he broke in through the back door of what was plainly a defunct souvenir shop, it wasn't a souvenir shop to him. To him it was the headquarters of the Ecuadorian Ballet Folklórico, and he was going to get his chance to prove that he really was the greatest dancer in the world. There are plenty of hallucinators today, people who respond passionately to all sorts of things which aren't really going on. They could be a legacy from

> the Kanka-bonos. But people like that can't get hold of weapons now, and they're easy to swim from. Even if they found a grenade or machine gun or a knife or whatever left from the olden times, how could they ever make use of it with just their flippers and their mouths?[87]

Another, more generic example, can be found earlier on in the novel:

> A million years ago, there were passionate arguments about whether it was right or wrong for people to use mechanical means to keep sperm from fertilizing ova or to dislodge fertilized ova from uteri – in order to keep the number of people from exceeding the food supply. That problem is all taken care of nowadays, without any-body's having to do anything unnatural. Killer whales and sharks keep the human population nice and manageable, and nobody starves.[88]

The above quoted episodes, I maintain, achieve more than what Caracciolo points out. For Caracciolo, the rapid alternating between two temporal frames enables Vonnegut to craft a literary text that goes against the grain of anthropocentric perspectivism. Both extracts, we can acknowledge, work by presenting the reader with a topic or issue that is of key 'human' relevance and importance. Such issues would be the violent political turmoil in Guayaquil and the use of weapons by soldiers, as well as the debates concerning the abortion of human embryos. The gravity and seriousness of such matters however, is undercut by Trout's insistence that, in the distant future, such concerns completely lose their relevance. What is war-torn Guayaquil to the seal-people of the future, who not only cannot understand what a gun is, but lack the necessary hands to be able to wield it? Similarly, concerns of over-population mean little to a community of future human beings whose population numbers are

[87] Vonnegut, p. 125.
[88] Ibid., p. 101.

kept in check naturally by their natural predators – killer whales and sharks. The text teaches that what may appear to be of crucial importance now is still a matter of perspective and context. I propose, however, that beyond this, Trout's eccentric form of narration takes matters a step further. The juxtaposition of two distinct temporal frames, I argue, allows for the staging of something akin to a 'becoming other'. Rosi Braidotti, in her book *Metamorphosis: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, defines 'becoming' as a happening not determined by any kind of linear sequence in time. That is, 'becoming works on a time sequence that is neither linear nor sequential'.[89] Consequently, a 'stable, centralized self' is not a necessary requirement.[90] 'Processes of becoming' instead ' rest on a non-unitary, multi-layered, dynamic subject'. [91] When Trout presents a human-centered problem such as violence and famine and chooses to deflate or detract from the seriousness of the matter by fast-forwarding to the future of small brained seal people, he both draws attention to the broader processes of becoming within which subjecthood is immersed, but also attempts to use language in an attempt to create this multi-layered dynamic, subject.[92] The 'human' as a signifier must extend itself, to encompass its seal brethren. This in itself, is a kind of becoming other. The narrative creates these links, draws these connections, it manifests this becoming through its own narrative structures. This is because 'the process of becoming-woman/animal, in fact, is not about signification, but rather than opposite: it is about the transcendence of the linguistic signifier […] the different stages or levels of becoming trace an itinerary that consists in erasing and recomposing the former boundaries between self and others.'[93] Becoming is an active continual process that depends on the negotiation of meaning, linguistic signifiers are shaped and modified through use in new contexts. Trout,

[89] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p. 118.
[90] Ibid., p.118.
[91] Ibid., p.118.
[92] Ibid., p.118.
[93]Rosi, Braidotti, *Metamorphosis Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p. 119.

Vonnegut's narrator, actively prevents the reader in any way, from attempting to achieve complete distance from its evolved seal creatures. Instead, the interpenetration of two temporal frames encourages a kind of identification in spite of any inherent biological differences. Indeed, what we have here is a moment characterized by simultaneous identification and distancing. Such a moment appears analogous to what Roberto Marchesini calls 'animal epiphany'. 'Animal epiphany' consists of 'a double movement' characterized by 'recognition and disavowal', its result being that 'the human subject finds itself changed, infected by animal otherness'.[94] In truth, readers of *Galápagos* are made to recognize that:

> if we refer to the predicates expressing the particular specialization of each animal, we cannot build an oppositional dichotomy between humans and other species. To create a gap between the living, it is essential to treat predicates like appearance and irrelevance in the definition of the condition itself. In other words, be it a swallow circling in the sky or a dolphin pirouetting in the water, a mole underground or a monkey on a branch, the condition of those living beings does not change. In fact, it is not the diversity/specificity of their predicates that defines their being in the world, but the rootedness that these predicates produce, in their total performative adequacy, denying freedom to the non-human.[95]

What is being said here? The above quotations suggest that it is the text itself which creates these becomings, and it is the island itself that connects us to Vonnegut's seal humans. We must regard the seal-humans not in terms of their phenological characteristics, but their 'attachment to and interdependence' on the island – more specifically their underwater

[94] Roberto Marchesini *Over the Human Post-humanism and the Concept of Animal Epiphany*, ser.ed. by Dario Martinelli, trans. by Sarah De Sanctis (Springer International Publishing, 2017) < https://1lib.eu/book/3376521/a48629> [accessed: 5th February, 2020] p.3.

[95] Roberto Marchesini, *Over the Human Post-humanism and the Concept of Animal Epiphany*, ser.ed.by Dario Martinelli, trans. by Sarah De Sanctis (Springer International Publishing, 2017) < https://1lib.eu/book/3376521/a48629> [accessed: 5th February, 2020] p.3.

territory that forms part of the island. It is only 'the ethology of forces that animate them' that separates Vonnegut's seal-people from us.[96] What connects all forms of life is the biological necessity to cope with the needs, the expressivity of the environment. The strength of animals is a being one with a territory, being in tune to the expressivity of their surroundings. [97]

Galápagos and 'Becoming Animal'

The character of Mary Hepburn, a biology professor, in the days before her embarking on the *Bahía de Darwin*, used to share with her students videoclips of various creatures inhabiting the Galápagos islands. One particular lecture focused on the courtship rituals of the great frigate birds. Quoted below is a description of the ritual, as found in the text of *Galápagos:*

> Each male great frigate bird at mating time tried to attract the attention of females by inflating a bright red balloon at the base of his throat. At the mating time, a typical rookery when viewed from the air resembled an enormous party for human children, at which every child had received a red balloon. The island would in fact be paved with male great frigate birds with their heads tilted back, their qualifications as husbands inflated by their lungs to the bursting point -while, overhead, the females wheeled. One by one the females would drop to the sky, having chosen this or that red balloon.[98]

The above quotation is a perfect example of how *Galápagos* attempts to account for the non-human, yet still relies on human paradigms of thought to convey its meaning. This is the paradox I alluded to earlier in this chapter. The mating behaviors of the male great frigate birds have been compared to a children's birthday party. Beyond this anthropomorphism however, readers are also informed that the 'red balloons' of the male great frigate birds also

[96] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 126.
[97] Ibid., p. 126.
[98] Vonnegut, p. 91.

serve as a form of territorial marker. Mary Hepburn makes this clear, citing the opinions of people who have devoted their lives to studying them. 'It is their opinion' Mary says, 'that the females are in fact choosing the red balloons which mark the best nesting sites'.[99] Territoriality is important for Deleuze. In Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, a distinction is made between the self-organizing principles that function at the level of the 'inorganic' and 'organic strata'. The 'inorganic strata' is governed by processes of expansion or contraction, or in terms borrowed by Deleuze and Guattari, the 'systole' and 'diastole', or heartbeat of the cosmos. These are the kind of forces that lead to the 'big bang' or the formation of a diamond as a result of intense heat and pressure. The great frigate birds belong, conversely, to the 'organic stratum' where lifeforms undergo processes of self-organization though random genetic mutation, natural selection and even sexual selection. For Deleuze as for Darwin, mutation is responsible for giving rise to difference. A process of selection is what consolidates these differences, potentially giving rise to new species as a result. Everything for Deleuze, is able to exhibit expressivity. A diamond, for example, expresses itself by reflecting the light that hits it, producing that characteristic dazzling effect. The difference however, between this form of expressivity, and that of the great frigate birds, is that the expressivity of the birds is characterized by an excitability that is not present in that of volcanoes, mountains, or diamonds. Even the humble bacterium that destroys much of humanity in Vonnegut's novel, exhibits what Lefebvre calls 'the intelligence of the body'.[100] This intelligence prevents it from living underwater, where it cannot thrive. Living organisms, using the senses, must adapt to a specific environment. It is with this sensitivity that territoriality in lifeforms emerges. Territoriality can be marked by various bodily secretions such as feces and urine, but also by color, such as the aforementioned 'red balloons' of the great frigate birds. This adaptation therefore, is a product of evolution, one

[99] Ibid., p. 91.
[100] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. trans, by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Victoria Australia: Blackwell publishing, 1991) p. 176.

that demonstrates a dependency on a particular space, a particular surrounding environment or ecology. In a sense, the organism responds or adapts to the expressivity of that space. The living organism – may, in fact, be defined 'as an apparatus which, by a variety of means, captures energies active in its vicinity'.[101] Space becomes the driver for evolution. When Lefebvre comments on the natural ingenuity of the spider's web, he asserts that this event marks the production of space:

> Thus the spider, for all its 'lowliness, is already capable, just like human groups, of demarcating space and orienting itself on the basis of angles. It can create networks and links, symmetries and asymmetries. It is able to project beyond its own body those dualities which help constitute that body as they do the animal's relationship to itself and its productive and reproductive acts.[102]

Lefebvre gestures towards an intelligence that does not describe the human mind but simply the body. 'Long before formal knowledge' Lefebvre states, 'there was an intelligence of the body'.[103]

Mary Hepburn wonders deeply about this 'bodily' intelligence and its relation to survival. Discussing the courtship rituals of another species, the 'blue footed booby', Mary wonders if such intelligence could go by another name: 'Dare we call it 'religion'? Or, if we lack that sort of courage, might we call it 'art?' Your comments please'.[104]

I will provide a response to Mary Hepburn's question in Deleuzian terms. For Deleuze, art can be something animal. It is like the expression of all that exists in the natural

[101]Ibid., p. 176.
[102]Ibid., p. 174.
[103]Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. trans, by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Victoria Australia: Blackwell publishing, 1991), p. 174.
[104] Vonnegut, p. 91.

world. This is art as a celebration of life. The song of birds, or the courtship rituals of the blue footed boobies, grant them status as artists. As Braidotti points out:

> Writing is for Deleuze a sort of becoming animal […] Writers, like animals, are committed creatures who live on full alert, constantly tensed up in the effort of captivating and sustaining the signals that come from their plane of immanent contact with other forces.[105]

Vonnegut the artist, sensitive to the expressivity of everything in the world, takes the 'big brain' of human beings and communicates that such a mind does nothing to grant human beings a privileged position over other organisms that inhabit the island. When the 'big brain' pushes individuals towards isolation, it actually weakens that individual and makes them vulnerable. There are moments when Trout, our spectral narrator, points out the weaknesses of subjectivity and excess emotion (which supposedly, lower animals, cannot experience) particularly in moments when it drives human beings to take decisions which are self-destructive or harm others:

> What made marriage so difficult back then was yet again that instigator of so many other sorts of heartbreak– the oversize brain. That cumbersome computer could hold so many contradictory opinions on so many different subjects all at once, and switch from one opinion or subject to another so quickly, that a discussion between a husband and wife under stress could end up like a fight between blindfolded people wearing roller skates […] Of what possible use was such emotional volatility, not to say craziness, in the heads of animals who were supposed to stay together long enough, at least, to raise a human child, which took about fourteen years or so.[106]

[105] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis*: *Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p. 126.
[106] Vonnegut, p. 59.

The alternative to this insular arrogance, of course, depends on entering into relations, or alternatively of recognizing one's embeddedness in the world. It is a recognition of zoë, that which links us all in an unstoppable web of interconnections. Zoë expresses the shared simple fact of living common to all living beings.[107] *Galápagos* as a text, often features episodes that highlight a tension between the desires of the human 'big brain' and the zoë that features as part of the ecology of the *Galápagos* islands. Often, the depiction of this zoë within *Galápagos* the novel, comes in two distinct variations. The first is exemplified most distinctly, in that instance where Mary Hepburn, assuming the role of a formidable 'mother nature personified'(a phrase that is doubly anthropomorphic) assures the survival of the human race by stealing seminal fluid from her lover, the captain, utilizing it to impregnate some of the island women. The captain's later mortification when he realizes that all this has taken place without his knowledge is important. Mary is cold when confronted. She finds humor in the 'limited role males played in the reproduction back then, and which they still play today. They are still these big lunks who can be counted upon to squirt lively sperm in season'.[108] It is paradoxical that Mary intentionally zoomorphorphises the processes of human reproduction here. At the level of rhetoric, she plays the role of 'mother nature', a title that is anthropocentric. In addition, it is only through human artifice (artificial insemination) that she can bring about this process of zoomorphising.

The purpose of this episode is to emphasize the understandable shock and modification of the ego-bound captain. His mortification is one directed at zoë, the fact that the proliferation of cells and other form of life processes involved in reproduction can carry

[107]Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, ed. by Werner Hamacher and David. E Wellbery, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 1.
[108] Vonnegut, p. 222.

on relentlessly, despite his wishes or knowledge.[109] He has come to experience a part of his own self as strange and out of his control, as something other or alien. A similar example concerns Mary Hepburn's husband Roy, whose own cells have turned cancerous, manifesting themselves as a brain tumor. Not only did the tumor slowly kill Roy from the inside out, but it also addled his memory and destroyed his rational judgement altogether, muddling his own personal sense of self. Trout tells us that Roy's mind was filled with recollections of events that had in fact, never taken place: 'While Roy Hepburn was dying […] Roy's big brain persuaded him that he had been a sailor at the United States atom bomb tests at Bikini Atoll, equatorial like Guayaquil in 1946. He was going to sue his own government for millions, he said, because the radiation he had absorbed there had first prevented his and Mary's having children, and now it had caused his brain cancer'.[110] In reality 'Roy had served as a hitch in the Navy, but otherwise his case against the United States of America was a weak one, since he was born in 1932, and his country's lawyers would have no trouble proving that. That would make him fourteen years old at the time of his supposed exposure'.[111] Roy's belief that exposure to nuclear radiation is what caused his tumor, while likely incorrect, can be considered from a uniquely posthuman perspective. This is because Roy's misconception indirectly gestures towards an important truth. Cancer is not merely the result of one's own cells turning against one's body. It is not merely a self-enclosed process, but one that can be tied to external causes. In this respect it draws attention to the permeability of the human body at the cellular and the individual level. External, environmental factors do not merely effect changes at a species level, they also affect individual bodies in the most intimate of ways. In *Galápagos* both Roy Hepburn and Captain Adolf von Kleist are pushed to the limit of their ability to endure. They experience their own biological existence as something

[109] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p. 126.

[110] Vonnegut, p. 39.
[111] Vonnegut., p. 3.

independent of their will, coming to experience themselves as a host of life-processes which in themselves, express the force of Zoë. As Braidotti maintains, under the dicta of humanism, such power would be rendered 'in terms of a hierarchy that privileges bios and reflects a reason-matter, control-chaos binary scale of values. This potency (potential) of Life is experienced as 'other' by a mind that cannot do anything else but fold upon itself and go on patrolling its own consecutive elements as if it were in charge of them'.[112] From a posthuman lens, the self or 'big brain' Vonnegut laments allies itself with 'a micro-fascism of a dominant vision of the subject, which serves the purpose of a vampire-like economic system based on stock and exchange, accumulation and profit'.[113]

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to argue that Vonnegut's novel *Galápagos* shares Deleuze's concern that the human being risks becoming all 'too human'. This state means that the human being loses an important sensitivity, unable to detect the expressivity of the surrounding spaces around them. *Galápagos* is a novel about transformation, a literal becoming animal that draws attention to the fact that the surrounding space, the islands of the *Galápagos* exert pressures that we must respond to in order to adapt and survive.

Chapter 3 – The Island of Malta in Thomas Pynchon's *V*

[112] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p 126.
[113] Ibid., p. 126.

> Nostalgia and melancholy . . . Hadn't he bridged two worlds? The changes couldn't have been all in him. It must be an alien passion in Malta where all history seemed simultaneously present […] In London were too many distractions. History there was the record of an evolution. One-way and ongoing. Monuments, buildings, plaques were remembrances only; but in Valletta remembrances seemed almost to live.[114]

The above quotation, taken from the epilogue of Thomas Pynchon's *V* touches upon an important sentiment that is central to my discussion of the Maltese sections of the novel. My reading of *V* will serve as an attempt to trace different forms of posthumanism and the complexities associated with them through various characters in the novel. The intention of such character studies will be a working towards the possibility for a kind of posthuman ethics within the text. My argument is this: If there is any hope for a posthuman ethics to be found in Pynchon's novel it can be parsed together through a consideration of the depiction of the island of Malta together with the character of the Maltese Paola. In the above extract, Stencil's father contrasts Malta with London. The city of London, for Sidney Stencil, represents the easy flow of linear time. Its buildings are the record of an evolution, placing neat demarcations between past, present and future. Malta, conversely, resists such patterning. Instead, the island would appear to be infected by some non-human passion where, consequently, the experience of time enfolds differently. On an island where all history seems simultaneously present, the spy struggles to find his footing, losing his sense of direction. Repeatedly in the text, Pynchon casts the island in terms of a kind of thirdspace.[115] Soja coined the term 'thirdspace' to describe a site in which 'everything comes together' the subjective and the objective, the real and imagines, the fantastical and historically accurate.[116]

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[114] Thomas Pynchon, *V.*, (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 481.
[115] Paolo Simonetti, 'Chapter Eight: "He Could Go to Malta and Possibly End It": Malta as 'Prime Location' in The Epilogue of V', in *Dream Tonight of Peacock Tails, Essays on the Fiftieth anniversary of Thomas Pynchon's V* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015),pp. 153-172 (p. 164).
[116] Soja, *Thirdspace*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803103943995> [accessed 1st May 2020].

It is a space where remembrances seem to live, being historically accurate as well as magical. Because of this, the island of Malta becomes a site where subjectivity and objectivity, the real and the imagined, are brought into dialogue. From a posthuman perspective, such dialogue offers an opportunity to explore tensions between a posthuman ethics concerned with collective good and the individual subjective vision. By 'collective good' I mean a worldview that takes into account the embeddedness of the human subject as part of an interconnected network of other lifeforms and inanimate objects and forces. When Sidney Stencil experiences Malta as disorienting and alien location this suggests that there is something about the space that does not cohere to form an organized whole. Stencil cannot form a clear map in his mind, he cannot create an absolute totalizing vision that 'humanizes' the space according to his own subjectivity. This is apt, given that locations are not self-designed spaces, but 'collectively shared and constructed'.[117] In this way, Stencil is made to feel the limitations of his own anthropocentrism, opening up the possibility for the consideration of a worldview that is more posthuman.

To explain this more, I would like to reference a few observations made by Frank Kermode in his celebrated work *The Sense of an Ending*. The book, as we already know, concerns itself with the apocalyptic sense that Kermode identifies as part of the Modernist aesthetic sensibility. In an epoch blasted between two world wars many individuals found themselves anxious for the narrative of an ordered universe, one divided into a clear beginning, middle and ending. It is this false perception of a structured world that Stencil is accustomed to and in London he sees around him relics devoted to this humanization of space and time. London appears entirely familiar and thus, in such a setting, he can feel secure. Malta however, in allowing its streets to be full of the specters of the past, does not appease

[117] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis Towards a Materialist theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 12.

the human wish for intelligible ends. It is as if Stencil's subjective 'I' must shift and adapt regularly, to accommodate sensory information that does not readily cohere to his vision. In Deleuzian terms, the island 'de-territorializes' Stencil, estranging him from his comfortable humanist assumptions.[118]

To put it another way, the difference between Stencil's perceptions of London and Malta is analogous to the distinction Kermode makes between fiction and myth:

> Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for the absolute, fictions for conditional assent.[119]

Stencil finds certainty and comfort in the space of his native London. Like a myth, it encourages stability, reaffirming his identity and values. Pynchon's Malta, conversely, is like a fiction that injects skepticism into what was once certain. It dissolves boundaries established by centuries of humanist thought, posing the possibility for example, that the human body can inhabit different time-zones simultaneously.

In order to trace the development towards a posthuman ethics in the novel, I will first be discussing the characters of Herbert Stencil (Sidney Stencil's son) and Benny Profane. I will read these characters in relation to Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, attempting to argue that these two seemingly antithetical figures are in fact united by what Kermode calls a 'continuity of crisis' and by extension, a questioning of humanist values. Benny Profane, a kind of Prufrock figure, wonders what can be considered human in his day and age. He interrogates the relations between subject and object as well as cause and effect. Despite this, his fear of romantic relationships and technology implies that he cannot see his own

[118] Ibid., p. 13.
[119] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 39.

embeddedness in the world. Blind to his own anthropocentrism, he is fearful of losing his insular sense of self, his subjectivity, unaware than even the most private moments of self-reflexivity are not individual, but rely upon a social network of exchanges. Profane, therefore, can never be 'free' from the contamination he fears. Likewise, Stencil seeks to write a new mythology, but his quest for revelation is undone by his own tendency to 'stencilize' any information he comes across to suit his own personal vision. In this way Benny and Stencil attempt to challenge humanist values but they remain too firmly entrenched in their own subjectivity to proceed any further. They cannot perceive their own embeddedness or entanglement in the world and thus their questioning of humanity can only go so far.

We can compare and contrast their efforts with those of Fausto Majistral. In his confessions, the poet-priest expresses a clear dissatisfaction with the humanist project. Unlike Stencil and Benny however, Fausto is consciously aware of his inability to move past this questioning of the human. He is aware of his own anthropocentric bias. He understands the fact that his humanity entails the non-human. Yet, even while displaying the self-awareness that Stencil and Benny lack, he nonetheless remains nostalgic for humanist values and ideas, yearning for the illusory authenticity and integrity of the subject.

The concluding section of this chapter will be dedicated to a study of two more characters. These are the mysterious lady V herself as well as Fausto's daughter Paola. The intention here is to 'read back' and critique posthuman theory through these two characters. V I shall posit represents a form of posthumanism associated with the pipe dream of immortality and a complete distancing of the body from natural materiality. By extension, V's interest in prosthesis contributes to a kind of self-serving posthumanism that becomes associated with personal gain and the destructive aspects of technological enhancement. Paola by contrast, could represent a kind of posthumanism without technology, one where she can embrace a multitude of identities and play multiple roles. In this way, Paola offers a

posthuman solution to the problem posed by the crisis of Modernism. Choosing not to be paralyzed by the false promise of absolute knowledge, Paola is capable of enjoying the alternative subjectivities born in Malta. I read both Paola and her native island as being both characterized by a certain 'liminality' or 'in-betweenness'. They symbolize a dual recognition of their embeddedness in the world, while also holding respect for the difference of the 'other', seeking to empathize rather than control. Thus, it is in Paola and the island of Malta where we can come closest to going beyond the individual subject position towards a more sensitive and ethical way of life.

Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane

What do we know about Benny Profane? We know that he is a self-proclaimed 'schlemihl' and a man with no real ambitions or prospects. He also frequently displays a disinclination or unwillingness to make connections between things or events. Even women, we are told, happen to him by accident: 'Women had always happened to Profane the schlemihl like accidents: broken shoelaces, dropped dishes, pins in new shirts'.[120] Quite literally living a directionless life, Pynchon's narrator recounts that Profane would spend much of his free time 'travelling up and down the east coast like a yo-yo' and that this had become routine for 'maybe a year and a half'.[121] Such yo-yoing, coupled with a refusal to link cause and effect reach hilarious new heights when Profane is nagged into getting a job. Unable to decide where he should apply, Profane resorts to allowing the dent his erection makes in *The Times* Newspaper to make the decision for him:

> He'd thought himself into an erection. He covered it with the Times classified and waited for it to subside […] He happened to look down. His erection had produced in the newspaper a

[120] Pynchon, p. 134.
[121] Ibid., p. 10.

> crosswise fold, which moved line by line down the page as the swelling gradually diminished. It was a list of employment agencies. O.K., thought Profane, just for the heck of it I will close my eyes, count three and open them and whatever agency listing that fold is on I will go to them. It will be like flipping a coin: inanimate schmuck, inanimate paper, pure chance.[122]

Profane's yo-yo tendencies, characterized by an overall lack of direction and sense of apathy have already been read as representative of twentieth century post-war Western culture. John Dugdale for example, adopts this position, summing up Profane as 'a composite parody of a character in post-war literature, resembling a […] soulless body tossed about by hostile forces.[123] Personally, I find myself largely agreeing with this evaluation of Profane. I find it especially convincing in shedding light on Profane's fear of inanimate objects, as well as his deficiency in his emotions and communicative skills. Both of these aspects of his personality can be contextualized in terms of post-war culture, specifically in relation to trends focused on 'a blurring of the distinction between person and object, and a dehumanization of vision in which people are observed or described as if they were inanimate'.[124]

Needless to say, while posthumanism concerns itself with the problematizing of boundaries between humans and non-humans, it does not necessarily translate into the dehumanizing or objectifying of people. Interestingly, Profane, a man who would much rather avoid making connections, finds he must do so occasionally when it involves linking inanimate objects to human beings. Let us consider, for example, an incident where he spies on Rachel Owlglass while she is alone with her MG:

[122] Pynchon, p. 215.
[123] John Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power*, (London: Macmillian, 1990), pp. 100-1.
[124] Jeff, Wallace, 'Modern' in *Literature and the Posthuman* ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 41-54. (p.49).

> He was about to approach her when he saw her left hand snake out all pale to fondle the gearshift. He watched and noticed how she was touching it. Having just been with Wedge he got the connection. He didn't want to see any more.[125]

Profane's disgust I read in terms of the advent of cybernetics and artificial intelligence in the 20th century, revelations which 'perturbed the material and conceptual demarcations between machine and living beings'.[126] Profane's anthropomorphizing of materiality, such as when he spots Rachel with her MG, or when he converses with a crash test dummy, are all moments which hint at an unhinging of the relations between subject and object. Potentially, such gestures work towards the abolishing the ontological privileging of human beings over other subjectivities. It is the first step in overcoming humanist divisions standing in the way of a reevaluation of ethics; a reevaluation where we observe not the actions and decisions of human individuals, but secure an understanding of agency and co-dependency distributed across complex networks or fields of relations.[127] This is also a point where the Modernist aesthetic sensibility and posthuman thought intersect.[128] The slothful, Prufrockian Profane, veering dangerously towards the inanimate, stands in direct opposition with the image of the liberal humanist subject, who would ideally have goals and a clear vision of this life's direction. Profane's passivity bears similarity to an inanimate 'deadness' that, as Jeff Wallace explains, many Modernists sought to capture in their poetry. It was a poetics seeking, not the expression of personality but an escape from it.[129] Thus, Profane, even unconsciously, draws attention to the fact that the compendium of qualities ideally possessed by the liberal

[125] Pynchon, p. 29.
[126] Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, J. Benjamin Hurlbut, 'Technology, Utopianism and Eschatology' in *Perfecting Human Futures* (Springer, 2006) <https://link-springer-com.ejournals.um.edu.mt/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-658-11044-4.pdf> [accessed: 16th March, 2020] p. 1
[127] Jeff Wallace, 'Modern' in *Literature and the Posthuman* ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 41- 54 (p. 49).
[128] Ibid., p. 49.
[129] Jeff Wallace, 'Modern' in *Literature and the Posthuman* ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 41- 54 (p. 49).

humanist subject do not entirely apply to him, a 'real' human being. If explored further, this idea encourages us to contemplate the possibility of a new ethics, one founded, not on the values of agency and unalienable rights, but one of compassion, inclusive to non-human life, centered around an awareness of our shared finitude.[130] Of course, what hinders Profane's challenging of the object-subject relation from being developed further into a posthuman ethics is his inability to recognize that his subjectivity is inextricably entangled with the rest of the world. He is incredibly afraid of losing his subjectivity, his insularity, unable to understand that this connection to the outside environment is vital and already securely in place.

In Profane's anxieties we can detect a similarly to N. Katherine Hayles' portrait of Norbert Weiner, the originator of cybernetics. Hayles recounts how Weiner's development of cybernetic theory led him to fret over the fate of the liberal human subject. Creating a division between good and bad machines, Weiner expressed fear at the thought of 'bad' inflexible machines engulfing humanity, turning once autonomous human beings into little more than mechanical components.[131] Hayles remarks that for Weiner it was 'important to construct the boundaries of the cybernetic machine so that it reinforces rather than threatens the autonomous self'.[132] Similarly, in an essay *The Clockwork Eye: Technology, Woman and The Decay of the Modern in Thomas Pynchon's V,* Kathleen Fitzpatrick links Profane's aversion towards objects to an 'anxiety of obsolescence' and an 'anxiety of contamination' that was a subject of hot debate in the late twentieth century.[133] Quoting Husseyn, Fitzpatrick identifies a strand of Modernist culture that promoted this kind of insularity, insisting that

[130] Ruben, Borg, *Fantasies of Self- Mourning Modernism, the Posthuman and the Finite* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2019), p. 6.
[131] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 88.
[132] Ibid., p. 105.
[133] Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'The Clockwork Eye: Technology, Woman, and the Decay of the Modern in Thomas Pynchon's *V.*' , in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*, ed. by Niran Abbas (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 91- 107 (p.91).

'modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other'.[134] Profane, fearing such contamination, be it through the inanimate or romantic love, feels driven to preserve the illusion of the integrity of the subject. Pynchon shows us that Profane's excessive guardedness proves to be self-destructive, given that it prevents the schlemihl from being able to have balanced romantic relationships.

Profane's strong desire to keep his selfhood intact is supported by Herbert Stencil's behavior. This is because both of these characters are united by their situatedness. They are modernist figures who must respond to what Kermode calls a 'painful transitional situation' in history. Two possible reactions to crisis are outlined by Kermode: continuity and schism. In Benny Profane we find schism, a Prufrock figure who tries to keep his identity intact, free from contamination, a 'hipster anarchist'.[135] Herbert Stencil, on the hand, can be read as one who chases continuity. Both, in their own separate ways, try to reconfigure the human relation to finitude, but they equally fall short.

Herbert Stencil, as his name suggests, has a stencil-like view of situations and events. By 'stencil-like' I mean that Stencil has a deep-seated need for structure and order in the world. He desires continuity, comparable with Kermode's figure of the 'authoritarian traditionalist'.[136] Referring to himself in the third person singular, Stencil voices a need to be the hero of his own story and a wish for events to proceed in a linear fashion with a clear beginning, middle and ending. Maarten Van Delden supports the idea that Stencil's role in *V* draws on elements of the Modern tradition.[137] The Modernists, seeing their world as fragmentary and uncertain, sought to order these fragments into a new whole, often through the manipulation of mythic allusions.[138] Thus, as the dentist Eigenvalue points out, Stencil

[134] Ibid., p. 91.
[135] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 121-122.
[136] Ibid., pp.121-122.
[137] Maartin Van Delden, 'Modernism, the New Criticism and Thomas Pynchon's "V"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 23, (1990), pp. 117-136 (p. 119).
[138]Ibid., p. 119.

always connects, seeking to weave bits of information together into one complex narrative whole even when it may prove insensible to do so:

> Cavities in the teeth occur for good reason, Eigenvalue reflected. But even if there are several per tooth, there's no conscious organization against the life of the pulp, no conspiracy. Yet we have men like Stencil, who must go about grouping the world's random caries into Cabals. [139]

At the intuitive level, it may seem that Profane and Stencil are complete opposites. Profane is content to allow life to flow freely, while Stencil must energetically 'stencilize' any information he comes across, inevitably linking it to his vivacious quest for V. Yet, to say that Stencil and Profane are nothing more than foils of each other would be something of an oversimplification. Evidence to suggest that they both draw from Modernist ideas is supported by the fact that until 1945 Stencil had a very similar way of life to that of Profane: 'Since 1945, Herbert Stencil had been on a conscious campaign to do without sleep. Before 1945 he had been slothful, accepting sleep as one of life's major blessings'.[140]

Stencil was once like the slothful Benny, consumed by ennui and having little direction in his life. His life was changed when he was able to forge a mythology, a complete 'whole' truth that gives his life meaning. We know that Stencil is aware of the fact that he has created his own search because he expresses fear at the thought of ever completing it: 'Finding her: what then? […] if he should find her, where else would there be to go but back into half consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid'.[141]

[139]Pynchon, p. 153.
[140] Pynchon, p. 54.
[141] Pynchon, p. 55.

Stencil becomes fascinating from a posthumanist perspective because when old humanist narratives fail him and he loses meaning in his life, his response is to conjure up a new epic mythology. Crisis in the modernist sense had much to do with the fact that the values most cherished by Christian and post-enlightenment modernity as 'human' (science, intellectual idealism, democracy etc.) had become an incredible danger to humanity's future in the form of technological warfare.[142] Stencil, like Benny, found himself feeling disillusioned with the present and disconnected from the past. The difference between the two comes from the fact that Stencil's behavior becomes comparable to that of apocalyptic sects who prioritize what Kermode calls 'consonance' over hard facts.[143] Rather than accept the contingency of his existence, Stencil would much rather attribute meaning to the most minute of details and coincidences. I reference Ruben Borg's comment that behind Modernism's investment in myths of total cultural recall or anthropological knowledge lies the false promise of absolute Truth.[144] In light of this fact, I am reluctant to interpret Stencil's continual referring to himself in the third person as a posthuman effort to transcend 'I' subjectivity. Instead, such efforts are best described as a projecting of the self-outwards in an almost narcissistic gesture. Braidotti refers to this as the tendency of the 'dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture'.[145] Stencil could very well wish to see himself from the outside, but he is too self-aggrandizing, casting himself as some hero on a quest for illumination rather than accepting his own human limitations. At most, he substitutes one humanist narrative for another, achieving this by imposing his own personal subjectivity onto facts, distorting them in the process. This is, for example, precisely what happens when Stencil listens to Mondaugen's story: 'Stencil listened attentively […] Yet the

[142] Jeff Wallace, 'Modern' in *Literature and the Posthuman* ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 49.
[143] Kermode, p. 17.
[144] Borg, p. 6.
[145] Braidotti, p. 11.

next Wednesday afternoon at Eigenvalue's office, when Stencil retold it, the yarn had undergone considerable change: it had become, as Eigenvalue put it, Stencilized'.[146]

Petra Bianchi links the imaginative nature of Stencil's quest to his perception of the island of Malta. [147] She notes that in chapter eleven of the novel we may locate the following: 'He had stayed off Malta. He was afraid of ending it; but, damn it all, staying here would end it too. Funking out; finding V; he didn't know which he was most afraid of'.[148] Stencil's quest inevitably 'stencilizes' his perception of the island. He has reason to suspect that this is where his father disappeared for good, and to begin cracking a case, it bodes well to visit the original scene of the crime. In this respect, the stakes of visiting Malta are high. Stencil may either solve the mystery and lose that which gives his life meaning or he may find nothing at all – an outcome that suggests the ultimate absurdity of human existence. Paolo Simonetti has evaluated the importance of the island of Malta in Pynchon's text, affirming that 'throughout the novel Pynchon depicts Malta as a privileged site, where crucial information may be acquired, and where the fates of the characters—possibly of the whole world—may be decided'.[149] I maintain that, to an imaginative man like Stencil, an island setting could only prove to be incredibly resonant with meaning. First of all, islands, we may recall, spark mythic associations with man's place of origin. Deleuze makes this abundantly clear when he asserts that 'the island is the origin, radical and absolute'.[150] Stencil as we know, is on a mission of self-discovery, one where he hopes to discover what happened to his father. Secondly, Baldacchino also confers that islands can be neatly conceptualized in terms of an absolute space. An island is, in his words, a 'naturally closed entity' with its shoreline

[146] Pynchon , p. 228.
[147]Petra Bianchi, 'The Wittgensteinian Thread in Thomas Pynchon's Labyrinth: Aspects of Wittgenstein's Thought in V', in *Pynchon Malta and Wittgenstein* (Mġarr: Malta University Publishers, 1994), pp. 1-14. (p.2).
[148] Pynchon, p. 346.
[149] Simonetti, p. 158.
[150] Gilles Deleuze,'Desert Islands' in *Desert Islands and Other texts 1953-1974* ed. by David Lapoujade, trans. by Michael Taormina (California, South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 10.

functioning as a boundary that separates it from the rest of the world.[151] By extension, islands are also 'easily imaginable wholes' possessing a beguilingly simple form.[152] The vision of an island as being a naturally closed, hermetic space could only make it all the more seductive to one who is after a finite, unitary conception of Truth. It is as if he could catch V at last, or Truth itself, as if it could be neatly bordered, held like a captive. It is an expectation that evokes the opening chapter of Derrida's *Aporias*, where the philosopher conceptualizes truth as something that is 'precisely limited, finite and confined within its borders'.[153] To speak symbolically, the humanist narrative of truth would appear to be something much like an island, readily contained within absolutes, a mythical construction.

Stencil perceives the island as if he were the hero of his own epic. Some readings of the Malta chapters even catalogue evidence which supports this view. Evans Lansing Smith, for example, in his study of the underworld motif in Pynchon's novels identifies Malta as an ideal site for what he calls 'one of the great themes of the nekyia, both Classical and Biblical: that of the nostoi, or homecoming of the hero'.[154] In some respects, the text would appear to partially support Stencil's view of the island. Malta is described as both a motherly haven a 'womb of rock' as well as a 'magic circle' of entrapment, associated with the escapades of the seductive but dangerous enchantress Mara, whose name means 'woman' in Maltese. The sailor Mehemet recounts the legend of Mara and her involvement in protecting the island during the Great Siege. The witch was able to hypnotize the Turk's leader, forcing them to retreat:

[151] Godfrey Baldacchino,'Only ten: islands as uncomfortable fragmented polities' In *The Political Economy of Divided Islands* (Palgrave Macmillan UK: 2013), pp. 1-17.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Jacques Derrida,*Aporias*, trans. by Thomas Dutoit (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 1.
[154] Evans Lansing Smith, *Thomas Pynchon and the Postmodern Mythology of the Underworld*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012) p. 38.

> ‘History attributes it all to bad reconnaissance. But the truth is this: the words were spoken directly to Mustafa by the head of the Sultan himself. The witch Mara had sent him into a kind of mesmeric trance, detached his head and put it in the Dardanelles, where some miraculous set and drift […]sent it on a collision course with Malta’.[155]

Stencil has an ambivalent attitude towards the island. He wonders if it will be a haven or a place of entrapment. Will it conform to his expectations or cast doubt on what he feels is most crucial to his identity? Stencil’s fear is palpable at some points in the novel. He refuses to visit Valletta alone and later regrets it, voicing his paranoid thoughts as follows: ‘Stencil went out of his way to bring Profane here. He should have been more careful; he wasn't. Is it really his own extermination he's after?’.[156]

Stencil is not alone in his worries. It is significant that Profane also exhibits a reluctance to visit Malta, excusing his unwillingness with the utterance: ‘Malta never showed me anything. Anywhere you care to go in the Med there is a Strait Street, a Gut’.[157] Malta confronts Benny with his fears of engulfment. His equating of Strait Street with a gut connotes the threat of assimilation. Stencil, meanwhile, is made to doubt the assumption that fragments can be forced together into a cohesive whole that panders to his subjectivity. These reactions to the island make sense once we consider that islands are liminal spaces. This special property of islands means they can function as ‘spaces between here and there’. Such liminality is important because it facilitates the interrogation of both Stencil and Benny’s worldviews.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that Pynchon repeatedly casts Malta as a feminine space. Pynchon’s depiction of Malta is one that complicates the assumptions associated with

[155]Pynchon, p. 465.
[156]Ibid., p. 451.
[157]Ibid., p. 416.

womanhood and the feminine, specifically in terms of the binaries that dictate women's experiences. To put it clearly, it is as if the natural liminality of the island has been carried over to a challenging of the 'myth of the dualistic nature of woman as either asexual virgin' (with reference to the island, a chaste virgin mother) or 'prostitute-vamp'.[158] This is because the island is depicted as both a caring maternal entity and one tied to the escapades of the wicked enchantress Mara. What posthumanism can bring to this discussion is an awareness of the fact that a similar ambivalence was directed towards technological enhancement during the Modernist period. We can recall Hayles' portrait of Norbert Weiner and his distinction between good and bad machines. For Weiner, a 'good' machine is one that reinforces the user's subjectivity. When Pynchon sets the scene by providing his readers with an island setting, I argue that associations with the liminality of island spaces (even if unconscious) are making us aware that while Benny and Stencil would like to adapt the island of Malta to support their own identities and assumptions about the world, the island exerts its own influence. In a sense, Malta is the female, threatening 'other' which must be excluded so as to consolidate an identity founded on the 'Same' – the modern humanist subject, the Stencils and Bennys of the majority. A liminal space, it brings opposites into harmony; history and myth, the land and the sea, life and non-life. Thus, it challenges an anthropocentric, Stencil-like way of understanding the world. It derives in part from not seeing one's embeddedness, the realization that what is perceived as 'other' not only interacts in necessary relations with you, but is also an entity unique and separate in its own right. While of course, an expression of gendered otherness is not necessarily posthumanist, the island serves as the counterpoint to Benny and Stencil's humanist assumptions on the world.

[158] Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'The Clockwork Eye: Technology, Woman, and the Decay of the Modern in Thomas Pynchon's *V.*', in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*, ed. by Niran Abbas (Madison: Fairleigh, Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 91-107 (p .91).

Fausto Majistral

We can contrast Stencil's regard for the island space with some observations penned by Fausto Majistral in his confessions. Fausto Maijstral is a man who witnessed the disassembly of V at the hands of Maltese children during a WWII bombing and thus could potentially have vital information needed to crack Stencil's case. Despite this, while Fausto's confessions do contain important information about V, they also confront the difficulty of being able to access Truth itself. Fausto begins his confessions by describing the room he writes in, saddened by the awareness that it takes 'quite unhappily, no more than a desk and writing supplies to turn any room into a confessional'.[159] The implication of this statement is that the quality of 'the confessional' is not something that is an intrinsic property of the room. Rather, 'the confessional' is something we actively produce together with the room. Fausto affirms that the confessional booth, taken by itself, 'has nothing to do with acts we committed' and any attempt to occupy the space and find a metaphor for memory is 'our own fault'.[160] Here, Majistral demonstrates an awareness of his own anthropocentric blindspot, something that Stencil and Profane do not achieve. Indeed, while Stencil readily appropriates the island so he can weave it into his personal narrative, Fausto wonders if he is fabricating the truth, projecting his own emotions onto his surroundings. He interrogates the humanist assumption that the confessional booth can function as a space reserved for the localization of his memories. Bachelard, in outlining the poetic significance of rooms, highlights this process of localization, writing of the desire to 'fix' time into a static space:

> At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in

[159] Pynchon, p. 304.
[160] Ibid., p. 304.

> the past, when he sets out in search for things past, wants time to 'suspend' its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for.[161]

The above quotation is startling because it suggests that the experience of 'being human' is mediated through non-human agents. To know oneself in time, one requires the 'fixation' of space. It is not simply that the room provides us with an opportunity to think about ourselves, our passage in time, but that, our humanity can only be understood by incorporating non-human dimensions. As Herbrechter states: 'the human is always necessarily inhabited by something other than itself, something inhuman which never *necessarily* defines the human'.[162] This could explain why in writing to his daughter, the poet-priest chooses to define himself in only three ways: 'As a relationship: your father. As a given name. Most important, as an occupant. Since shortly after you left, an occupant of the room'.[163] By ascribing to himself the title of 'occupant', Maijistral accepts the fact that his humanity is open, entailing a reciprocal (both ways) relationship between life and the inanimate. Such reciprocity also implies that the self is by nature fragmentary rather than continuous, that rather than experience life as a continuous flow, the human experience is cut up and dispersed into fragments. Indeed, Fausto's confessions pinpoint the precise moment when the poet-priest was able to glimpse the inanimate within. While seeking refuge in an underground shelter during an air raid, Fausto places his palm flat against the wall. Doing so, he feels the powerful reverberations from the falling bombs passing through him:

> Don't touch them, these walls. They carry the explosions for miles. The rock hears everything, and brings it to bone, up the fingers and arm, down through the bone-cage and bone-sticks

[161] Gaston Bachelard,*The Poetics of Space*,trans. by Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books 2014), p. 30.
[162] Stefan Herbrechter, 'Humanism, Subjectivity and Autobiography' *Subjectivity* 5(3), 2012.
[163] Pynchon, p. 305.

> and out again through the bone-webs. Its little passage through you is accident, merely in the nature of rock and bone. [164]

Arguably, this precise moment marks a transition between a questioning of the human into the posthuman. 'Posthumanism' Neil Badmington has stated 'is the acknowledgement and activation of the trace of the inhuman within the human'.[165] Seen from this perspective, Stencil's unrelenting quest to humanize time, as well as Benny's anxious need to preserve the integrity of the human subject become futile endeavors. Both of these goals rely on the false assumption that the self is insular and continuous, closed like a circle. Stencil and Benny choose the illusion of an immortal life, one free from 'embodiment' in the world. Fausto, on the other hand, must see the carnage of war all around him. He sees the countless broken buildings of his island home; symbolic representations of the breaking down of boundaries between the human and the non-human. Fausto's lithic epiphany teaches him that there are no real boundaries. The subject necessarily forms part of a complex network of relations. It is this truth that informs Fausto's criticism of autobiography, aware that the 'autos' or capacity to say 'I' in confession or autobiography depends on the inaccurate image of a self that 'returns to itself like a wheel, a self that has a certain ambit, that takes a certain detour or turn through the world but always returns […] to its point of departure'.[166] It is in this respect that Fausto, seeking to put his autobiography into words, faces an ethical dilemma. He knows that 'memory is a traitor' and that writing is nothing more than the production of 'a romance – half fiction – in which all successive identities taken on and rejected by the writer as a function of linear time are treated as separate characters'.[167] The communicative act of

[164] Ibid. p. 319.
[165] Neil, Badmington, *Alien Chic*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 129.
[166]Ibid., p. 92.
[167] Pynchon, p. 306.

writing is supposedly what makes him human, and yet, it also forces the man to acknowledge the very instability of his relation to himself.[168] In the book *The Intellective Space,* Laurent Dubreuil expresses this sentiment wonderfully, lamenting the 'defective circularity' of writing. For Dubreuil, the condition of humanity is attained through the technology of writing. This is because writing allows for an extension in cognition. Writing 'gives rise to intellection via imaginary recognition and performative qualification'. This process results in the creation of an 'other' which must be 'looped back through intellection' completing the circle.[169] The ethical implications of this process become clear when Fausto equates writing with a demonic pact, for it is writing that makes the documentation of history into a linear chronology possible: 'so we do sell our souls: paying them away to history in little installments. It isn't so much to pay for eyes clear enough to see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with reason'.[170]

Fausto attempts to move past the crisis of Modernism through an acceptance of the inhuman within, but as a poet, he feels an attachment to the illusion of the authentic subject promised in writing. The stakes of this illusion are no less than a blindness towards one's own finitude, the yearning of a subject that does not want time to pass by. Fausto asks himself: 'How, the reasoning goes: how can a man write his life unless he is virtually certain of the hour of his death?'.[171] In this way, Fausto continues to write his confessions, even if he knows it is a temptation of godhood, a deceit: 'It is the "role" of the poet, in this 20th Century. To lie'.[172] As Donald Brown has parsed it, while Fausto's uncanny confession documents a considerable effort to move beyond the rationality of the humanist modernist subject, the poet remains an 'idealist' inasmuch as he sees the loss of the authentic subject as

[168] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) p. 90.
[169] Laurent Dubreuil. *The Intellective Space Thinking Beyond Cognition,* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2015) pp. 39-40.
[170] Pynchon, p. 306.
[171] Pynchon, p. 306
[172] Ibid., p. 326.

something to be mourned over.[173] He ends his confessions with the following prayer, not being able to envision a happy life that does not aspire to the illusion of a complete self: 'May you be only Paola, one girl: a single given heart, a whole mind at peace'.[174] Later on in my discussion I will be arguing that Paola, in direct contrast to her father's wishes, will find inner peace in embracing the fragmentary nature of her being. She is able to achieve what her father could not.

V and Paola

The image of cyborg has become central to posthuman thought because it serves as a potent symbol for the pre-existing amalgamation of the human with the post-human. It represents a very literal enmeshment between the human and the inhuman. It is for this reason that Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* has become essential reading for anyone interested in posthuman thought. Haraway, a feminist thinker, had originally penned the manifesto with social justice in mind. Her manifesto was a powerful critique of feminist essentialism, where the identity of women is seen as naturally given, unchanging and self-evident. Traditionally, the feminine is understood in relation to biological or organic differences between men and women. This is also the understanding that woman's identity is essentially bound to nature, to biology, her womb and ability to have children. Framed within this content, we can interpret Haraway's exclamation of 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' as a rejection of efforts directed towards defining human identity on the basis of nature.[175] It makes strides towards opening a new, radical space for female identity. Attempting to read the character of V from this perspective, some interesting ideas for discussion emerge. We know that V is a

[173] Donald Brown, 'Uncanny Confession: Thomas Pynchon's Fausto Maijstral', *Modern Language Studies,* 29 (1999), pp. 49-71. (p. 60).
[174] Pynchon, p. 314.
[175] Graham, Elaine, 'Have we ever been Modern?', In *Perfecting Human Futures* (Springer, 2006) < https://link-springer-com.ejournals.um.edu.mt/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-658-11044-4.pdf> [accessed: 16th March, 2020] p. 56.

literal cyborg, and that as the novel progresses, she steadily substitutes body parts for mechanical prosthetics, gradually becoming more and more inanimate. By the time she reaches Malta she has become almost sexless, her incarnation as the 'bad priest' allowing her to pass off as male. A hybrid, she straddles biological and ontological categories. Even when she seemingly dies during an air raid, her death is termed a 'disassembly' implying that even her status as a living being, as a creature of finitude, has become questionable.

At first, it would seem that in direct opposition to Fausto, Stencil and Benny, V truly represents a posthuman way of understanding the world. She has literally severed the boundaries between animate and inanimate, human and machine. Despite this, there are some issues. The first of these lies in an observation made by Kathleen Fitzpatrick, who laments that throughout the novel, V is often sexualized, converted into a male fantasy.[176] If one recalls that the cyborg has its roots in social justice and the emancipation of women, then it is easy to see the problem at hand. V, potentially, in substituting her body parts for prosthetics, threatens to transform herself into an object, the very thing the symbol of the cyborg ought to oppose. It is possible, therefore, that Pynchon's text is highlighting some dangers. The first of these dangers is the possibility that the cyborg could be vulnerable to objectification and exploitation by capitalist and patriarchal systems. Often, any information we gleam about V is only obtained through the viewpoints of other characters. For Stencil, V is an apocalyptic goddess, and his gaze does perceive her as an object of desire. He languishes over her 'skin radiant with the bloom of some new plastic' and 'flawless nylon limbs'.[177] Kathleen Fitzpatrick states that V's objectification is entirely Stencil's fault, that he chooses to deify and objectify her.[178] I would add that Stencil is not the only one to do so, for even Fausto

[176] Kathleen, Fitzpatrick, 'The Clockwork Eye: Technology, Woman, and the Decay of the Modern in Thomas Pynchon's *V.'*, in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*, ed. by Niran Abbas (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 91-107 (p.104).
[177] Pynchon, p. 411.
[178] Fitzpatrick, p. 104.

Majistral cannot keep his mind from wandering before administering the last rites soon after V's disassembly:

> Surely her arms and breasts could be detached; the skin of her legs be peeled away to reveal some intricate understructure of silver openwork. Perhaps the trunk itself contained other wonders: intestines of parti-coloured silk, gay balloon-lungs, a rococo heart.[179]

Even Benny, while not directly referring to V, fawns over the thought of an 'all-electronic' woman: 'Someday, please God, there would be an all-electronic woman […] Any problems with her, you could look it up in the maintenance manual'.[180]

Here, the male characters cannot see V for what she is because they project their own subjective visions, their own fantasies onto her. In this way, V is used to reinforce their own masculine, heterosexual identities. They attempt to force her into a category rather than respect her hybridity, fluidity and continual becoming. Besides this, however, lies another danger, a more pressing matter for contemplation. Even if V is not directly after her own objectification, her drive towards technological emancipation from fleshly embodiment negates her of her own humanity. If the bad priest sermon is anything to go by, she aspires towards immortality:

> The girls he advised to become nuns, avoid the sensual extremes – pleasure of intercourse, pain of childbirth. The boys he told to find strength in– and be like– the rock of their island

[179] Pynchon, p. 343.
[180] Ibid., p. 385.

> [...] to be like God we must allow to be eroded the soul in ourselves. Seek mineral symmetry, for here is eternal life: the immortality of rock.[181]

Immortality is a lack of death, but it also entails a lack of life. In the book *Radical Atheism* Martin Hagglund makes the point clear when he writes that 'the desire to live on after death is not a desire for immortality, since to live on is to remain subjected to temporal finitude'.[182] Instead, the wish for immortality runs counter to the desire for survival, for survival entails being subject to the time of mortal life.[183]

She tells the children to exchange flesh for stone, the animate for the inanimate so that they may find 'eternal life'. Let us consider also, her attitude towards her own prosthesis:

> Even in Florence […] he had noted an obsession with bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter. "See my lovely shoes […] I would so like to have an entire foot that way, a foot of amber and gold, with the veins, perhaps, in intaglio instead of bas-relief. How tiresome to have the same feet: one can only change one's shoes. But if a girl could have, oh, a lovely rainbow or wardrobe of different-hued, different-sized and -shaped feet.[184]

V's brand of transhumanism is dangerous because it threatens to make the same mistakes it sought to correct. V desires a perfect, immortal body, one where parts can be replaced as needed. She challenges her own finitude, which is defined by Ruben Borg as 'an original ability to be affected by the world— and by dint of that passivity, to find a measure of

[181] Pynchon., p.340.
[182] Martin Hagglund, *Radical Atheism* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008) p.2.
[183] Ibid., p. 2.
[184] Pynchon, p. 488

irreducible freedom within'.[185] This challenge is arguably unethical for multiple reasons, but it would do well to note that it also harks back to Enlightenment notions of perfectibility. If we take the assumption that a relation exists between the discursive constructions of bodies and political power then V's posthuman body poses the possibility of creating or enabling dangerous political ideologies. Throughout the course of human history, 'bodies […] helped to build hierarchal systems of domination as well as taxonomies of the human/inhuman/nonhuman that for centuries have legitimated […] the oppression, torturing, eating and killing of beings not falling into the category of human'.[186] V creates an 'ideal body' and then, in her incarnation as the bad priest, seeks to indoctrinate the youth in the absolute values of her cyborg religion. The Vitruvian man has been replaced by the cyborg, but it is equally destructive. Pynchon offers us a milder example of the power of the 'normative' body through Rachel Owlglass' opinions on cosmetic surgery:

> Four months from now would be June; this meant many pretty Jewish girls who felt they would be perfectly marriageable were it not for an ugly nose could now go husband-hunting at the various resorts all with uniform septa. It disgusted Rachel, her theory being that it was not for cosmetic reasons these girls got operated on so much as that the hook nose is traditionally the sign of the Jew and the retroussé nose the sign of the WASP or White Anglo-Saxon Protestant in the movies and advertisements.[187]

V's posthumanism threatens to create divisions between individuals rather than overcome them. Her posthumanism is not within the interest of celebrating a shared embodiment within the world. This is Hayles' nightmare of a culture 'inhabited by posthumans who regard their

[185] Borg, p. 8.
[186] Manuela Rossini, 'Bodies' *in Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 153-169 (p. 155).
[187] Pynchon, p. 45.

bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being'.[188] V is associated with the destructive aspects of technology, and it is this aspect that is her own undoing. She is disassembled by Maltese children after debris from a bombed building crushes her, destroyed by the same destructive technology she embraced. Perhaps Pynchon hints at this when he tells us that the name of the building that crushes the cyborg is 'Ta Kali'; arguably a reference to the Hindu goddess of death and change.

In direct contrast to V, the figure of the Maltese Paola comes closest to a true nomadic becoming. I interpret her character as the closest we can get to the positive subject described by Braidotti as 'an intensive multiple subject, functioning in a net of interconnections'.[189] If V is inert sterility, Paola is full of fertile connectivity. In his novel, Pynchon gives us the history of Malta. In the confessions of Fausto Majistral, we are shown an island reduced to ruin. Yet, while Fausto may be unable to imagine a way forward, his daughter Paola paves the way for the future. In Fausto's daughter we are able to see a new side of the island, one that Simonetti associates with the classical representation of Malta as the center of the Mediterranean.[190]Paola is shown to be a hybrid figure, a kind of cyborg without technology because the novel documents her playing two roles. In chapter 10 of the novel the Maltese girl appears disguised as the black prostitute Ruby who entertains the Jazz Musician Mc ClinticSphere. It is only later that Paola reveals her true identity, establishing her liminal nature:

> [N]obody knows what a Maltese is. The Maltese think they're a pure race and the Europeans think they're Semitic, Hamitic, crossbred with North Africans, Turks and God knows what all. But for McClintic, for anybody else round here I am a Negro girl named Ruby. [191]

[188] Hayles, p. 5.
[189] Braidotti, p.22.
[190] Simonetti, p. 161.
[191] Pynchon, p. 350.

Paola sees herself as having no fixed traits, of uncertain race and no 'real' nationality. Instead she is more comfortable thinking of herself as a child inhering a rich mixture of historical narratives and traditions. This allows her to remain flexible and adaptable. While the cyborg V is a kind of sterile, deathly figure, her sermons being a kind of resistance to life itself, Paola holds none of these negative connotations. Unlike her father, Paola does not yearn for some illusory 'whole' or 'complete' identity. Any internal contradictions form constituent elements of her subjectivity. They are never a tragedy. Paola's caring but also cool way of life means that she can inhabit the world but also respect the separate being of others:

> Maybe the only peace undisturbed that night was McClintic's and Paola's […] While she told him about who she was, about Stencil and Fausto – even a homesick travelogue of Malta – there came to McClintic something it was time he got around to seeing […] Love with your mouth shut, help without breaking your ass or publicizing it: keep cool, but care.[192]

Earlier on in this discussion I mentioned Fausto's equating of writing to an evil temptation. If we evaluate Pynchon's own novel on these grounds what we find is that the novel itself struggles in trying to capture a form of writing that is posthuman and ethical. My stance on this is that Pynchon is able to go a step further in attaining this goal in comparison to something like Vonnegut's *Galápagos.* This is because V, in contrast with Galápagos, aims to go beyond the subjectivity of a third person omnipresent narrator, instead providing readers with content where the narrator may be ambiguous and a setting like Malta which provides a counter to any one totalizing narrative.

[192] Pynchon, p. 366.

Conclusion

Paul Kinkaid, in an article that provides some fascinating insights on the genre of British science fiction, commences his analysis with the following:

> '*Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More, *The Tempest* (c.1611) by William Shakespeare, *New Atlantis* (1627) by Francis Bacon, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) by H. G. Wells, *Deluge* by S. Fowler Wright (1928), *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) by William Golding, *Concrete Island* (1974) by J. G. Ballard, *A Dream of Wessex* (1977) by Christopher Priest, *Web* (1974) by John Wyndham, *The Wasp Factory* (1984) by Iain Banks […] That is a brief list of some notable works in the history of British science fiction […] everything I named would share one obvious characteristic: they are all island stories!'[193]

With this opening move Kinkaid has set the stage for a very innovative hypothesis; that islands can make appealing settings for science fiction narratives.[194] While this dissertation does not specifically focus on works of science fiction, there is little doubt that the posthumanist imaginary, with its the 'future is now' visionary perspective, does draw upon such literature for inspiration. Island settings, while not a dominant motif within works of science fiction or posthumanist narratives, are powerful because they draw upon the 'mythical and cultural resonance' found within a rich Western literary tradition.[195] This cultural inheritance, according to Kinkaid, can manifest itself in the form of islomania. Islomania denotes a love for islands and discovery that harks back to England's Age of Exploration. This is the island as an object of desire. Islands are beguiling because they are in a sense, blank slates. Islands can function as sites of incredible potential or emptiness where

[193] Kinkaid, Paul, 'Islomania? Insularity? The Myth of the Island in British Science Fiction', *Extrapolation* 48, (2007), pp. 462-472 (p.462).

[194] Ibid., p. 462.
[195] Kinkaid, p. 463.

one can project their own desires. That is, they can function as 'mirrors' which project or reflect back the human. Both my readings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as well as my interpretation of Stencil's attitude towards the island of Malta in *V* reflected on this idea. Shakespeare's play features a party of shipwrecked sailors, who, soon after having been washed ashore, have their immediate perception of the island colored by their own individual subjectivities. Gonzalo, for example, is eager to refashion the enchanted island as ideal commonwealth, one where nature would freely bring forth 'all abundance' to feed human beings.[196] Here, Gonzalo gives voice to a utopian impulse that could only remind us of More's earlier island vision. *V*'s Herbert Stencil, on the other hand, sees the island as a space that can potentially bring personal fulfilment. In direct opposition to the wide, changeable and unknown sea, Stencil hopes the island of Malta can serve as a bastion of certainty and stability. He hopes that, at last, he will be able to discover what happened to his missing father.

This much has been covered in the previous chapters of this dissertation. What has not been entirely brought to light however, is the fact that both Gonzalo and Stencil, are characterized by a particular kind of idealism. In a sense, both *The Tempest* and *V* are texts that concern themselves with the theme of perfectibility, a theme that certainly invites posthumanist inquiry. Traditional Robinsonade narratives, the most famous of course being *Robinson Crusoe*, often tell a tale of a castaway who must hone various skills, exercise the powers of the intellect and utilize various tools in order to survive and perhaps even come to dominate the island. While perspectives on perfectibility are more often centered around humanity as a whole, Robinsonade narratives, potentially, may allow reflection on an individual castaway's improvement and perfectibility. Here, besides Crusoe, we may be reminded of Prospero and a host of other industrious castaways such as the plucky

[196] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II.1.160-5.

schoolboys from R.M Ballantyne's *Coral Island* or the main protagonist of the movie or novel *Castaway*. Critics interested in investigating the success of *Robinson Crusoe* and other narratives of this type often cite the strong individualism of its central protagonists.[197] An island setting, in its ability to isolate an individual from the mainland of civilization, can emphasize the importance of a well-developed and determined sense of independence or self-sufficiency.

Texts like More's *Utopia*, conversely, employ island settings not with the intent of exploring the evolution or perfectibility of any single individual, but are instead more interested in investigating alternative social models. In this case, the island serves the function of a 'pure space' that facilitates a kind of 'thought theatre' where readers are presented with the reform or perfectibility of society at large. In *Utopia*, we are told that King Utopos was able to bring his kingdom into a greater state of excellence by severing the connection that held the peninsula to the rest of the mainland. Utopia, now an island, was quite literally cut off from any baleful external influence that could hamper its perfectibility. With reference to the text:

> But King Utopus […] caused fifteen miles' space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up, and so brought the sea around the land.[198]

As Kathrin Schödel has already stated, utopian thought is closely linked to notions of insularity in the Western tradition.[199] Supposing that this connection does exist, then this would open up other avenues for discussion relating to the posthumanist imaginary. Most

[197] Ian Kinane *Theorizing Literary Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives*. (Rowman & Littlefield: New York, 2017). p. 34.
[198] Sir Thomas, More, *Utopia*, tr. Ralph Robinson (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1987), p. 60.
[199] Kathrin Schödel, 'Insularity Now Here and Nowhere: Private Circles and Utopian Isles' in *Insularity: Representations and Constructions of Small Worlds* ed. by Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel (Würzburg, Germany: Köingshausen and Neumann, 2016), pp.43-54 (p. 45).

importantly, is there a recurring emphasis on notions of 'space' or place within the posthumanist imaginary? This dissertation has sought to argue that indeed, there are privileged spaces within the posthuman imaginary, islands being one of these spaces. Beyond the island, there is for example, the topos of the futuristic techno-city which readily brings to mind films like *Blade Runner* (1982) or Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Equally relevant is Deep Space or Outer space, where the spaceship can be seen as a kind of island, an insulating stronghold of safety amid a vast, cold and inhospitable cosmos. It is not mere coincidence, perhaps, that cities in many futuristic literary texts, like islands or spaceships, are often insular. There is a rather formulaic or archetypal narrative plot that without a doubt is very familiar to us all. It is a story of a young man or woman who grows up in a closed and very orderly society, often in the name of their own safety and benefit. While the outside world is unpredictable and dangerous, circumstances will be such that this young person will have to leave the stability of their city to discover the world beyond.[200] Sometimes the home city can be dystopian and carceral, as in the case of the 1976 science fiction film *Logan's Run* or it can be a more well-meaning walled utopia. In various post-apocalyptic scenarios where much of the world has been rendered almost uninhabitable, these cities can often be found underground.[201] The large, underground vaults of the *Fallout* videogame series, supposedly intended to protect their inhabitants from the devasting effects of nuclear fallout, exemplify the trope perfectly.

The island of Malta as presented in *V* is a matriarchal and protective space, its underground shelters shielding the Maltese from the falling bombs of WWII air raids. Yet, despite this, the island is also shown to be something of a frightful prison. As Paolo Simonetti

[200] Carl Abbot, *Cities in Science Fiction and What we might learn from them: Imagining Urban Futures* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press 2016) p. 93.
[201] Ibid., p. 94.

has already pointed out, the island of Malta is also a confining 'charmed circle'.[202] Commenting on Stencil's predicament, Pynchon's narrator divulges the following: '[P]erhaps four years of sitting sequestered' in this 'quarantine' might have 'brought him some belief in Malta as a charmed circle, some stable domain of peace' and yet Valletta is a suffocating 'chastity belt so insulating that Zeus himself might once have quarantined her and her island for an old sin or an older pestilence'. [203]

The underground shelters where Fausto Majistral must retreat into during the air raids heighten the sense of confinement and entrapment that can be felt in the Maltese chapters. It is as if the space is doubly island-like, doubly insular. Yet, despite this, the opening sequence of Fausto's confessions indicate that the poet-priest regards the confessional booth (arguably the most closed off of spaces, where one can feel alone with one's most private thoughts) not as an insular secluding space, but as a site of contamination. It is in the confessional booth that Fausto expresses the understanding that his humanity entails the non-human, that there is no difference between 'in and out', 'here and there'. Such an understanding most likely came to him while in the shelters, when he realized that even in this safe haven, nothing could prevent the jarring of his teeth as the impact of the bombs caused powerful reverberations to powerfully shake the walls. This is a powerful moment of 'contamination' in the novel, one that demonstrates the dissolving of boundaries between 'inside and out' or 'here and there' in the novel. It identifies Malta as one of other islands in Pynchon's fiction that, once a peaceful and utopian space, is now threatened by malignant outside forces, be they war, capitalism or colonialism.[204]At the same time, Malta challenges this idea, not being simply the protective mother-island but also a site that is contaminated and contaminates. It reflects on the very

[202] Paolo, Simonetti, 'Chapter Eight: "He Could Go to Malta and Possibly End It": Malta as "Prime Location" in The Epilogue of V' in *Dream Tonight of Peacock Tails, Essays on the Fiftieth anniversary of Thomas Pynchon's V* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) pp. 153-172 (p. 164).
[203] Pynchon, p. 480.
[204] Simonetti, p. 165.

paradox of boundaries and limits that is vital to posthumanist discourse. That is, posthumanism challenges the understanding of limits.

Furthermore, when considered from a posthumanist lens, it is also a moment that subverts an old story. While Pynchon may have chosen a moment where Malta is a lonely island outside of time, a time when the Maltese may, more than understandably, have felt trapped and alone, the scene in the shelter allows Pynchon to tap into another side of Malta's history. This is Malta's heritage as a valuable point of connection in the Mediterranean.

Since posthumanist thought seeks in some way or another to 'decenter' the human from a position of special and isolated privilege over other modes of existence, it is perhaps not surprising that this dissertation ventured into a reconsideration of the island not as an isolating space of retreat but as one that can facilitate reflection on connectivity and otherness. That is, the island is not read as a space that furthers the discourse of human exceptionality, of the human as being separate from everything else, but as a space that can help decenter the human. This is where, perhaps, it becomes evident that posthumanist readings of island narratives, while still employing the island as a conceptual tool with which to investigate or question the human, may in some ways prioritize connectivity over the assumed isolating quality of islands. The posthumanist conceptual frameworks used to guide the readings I have presented in this dissertation have all sought to overturn the common association shared between 'I' and 'island'. Instead, the theme of 'connection' or connectivity has featured in every chapter of this dissertation. Perhaps surprisingly, it has appeared most clearly and distinctly in the chapter dedicated to a reading of Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos.* We recall that *Galápagos* is a tale that draws upon evolutionary theory. It is a story about human evolution. Thus, it is a story that, like *The Island of Dr Moreau,* could only have taken place on an island. The reasons for this are practical. Islands have natural boundaries which provide a kind of controlled laboratory environment, setting the conditions that influence how species

evolve over time. For example, certain scientific phenomena such as the Founder's effect are often generally dependent on scenarios such as shipwrecks where a small group of individuals become *isolated* from a larger group, setting the conditions for genetic drift to take place. Thus, Vonnegut's furry neo-humans could have only come to be through the islands ability to keep a select group of human beings separate over the course of generations. Indeed, Vonnegut's narrator expresses his distaste for the tendency of human beings to be 'all too human' on *ethical* rather than scientific or logical grounds. 'Big brains' Trout reminds us, are 'capable of being cruel for the sake of cruelty'.[205] The question of ethics which also featured in chapter 3 of this dissertation is interesting because it suggests that any engagement with posthumanism entails a kind of residual humanism. Leon Trout, supposedly no longer human, still appeals to a kind of humanist moral code or system of values.

If Robinsonades are about the improvement or perfectibility of the individual and utopian narratives about the betterment of society, then it should follow that stories of evolution are about the perfectibility of the species, in this case, the human. Isn't this the post-human project? Yet Leon Trout's ideas of betterment center around compassion and humility, sensitivity towards others and one's surroundings. An article discussing compassion and the post-human makes the following observation:

> It is noteworthy that the posthumanist emphasis is on the biotechnological enhancement of discrete human units, the single one. This is in tension with the humanistic perfectiblism we associate not with biotechnology, but rather with Dewey, Rousseau, Comte, Kropotkin, Sorokin, the Dalai Lama, and those who have stressed human enhancement through the strengthening of prosocial bonds, virtues, and the capacity for sympathy or compassion.[206]

[205] Vonnegut, p. 73.
[206] Stephen Post, Humanism, Post-humanism and Compassionate Love <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160791X09001031> [accessed 25th May, 2020]

When Vonnegut takes the island setting and provides us with a tale of human evolution, he provides a posthumanist vision that substitutes technology for a more natural, gradual approach towards the betterment of humanity. This is a social view of perfection as preferred over an atomistic one. Looking back at each chapter of this dissertation, it becomes apparent that a trend seems to be emerging. There is, potentially, a transition from looking at something from a humanist frame of reference to a posthumanist one. This entails: (1) a distancing from theories of unity and (2) a growing importance being placed on collective rather than individual agency. By 'theories of unity' I mean a perspectivism that, rather than consider difference, engages in an anthropocentric, totalizing view of the world. It is a perspective that does not recognize the diverse multiplicity and complexity of being.

Ideally, what posthumanist thought can offer to the island is a way of thinking with and about them that does not focus on what an island 'is' or what it could represent, but 'how' islands shape narratives and help construct narratives.

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