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A Will of One's Own: Karin Tidbeck's Short Stories from a Posthumanist Perspective

This chapter examines two short stories from the book *Jagannath* (2012) by Swedish writer Karin Tidbeck¹ from a posthumanist perspective. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to aspects of posthuman thinking in general and the theories of feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti in particular. The stories “Beatrice” and “Jagannath” are then discussed in terms of how their themes and characters relate to posthumanist theories.

Posthumanism is not easy to define. It has been, and still is, used in many ways by critics, philosophers, and literary scholars. However, two distinct directions can be discerned: 1) technological posthumanism, which is sometimes called transhumanism and focuses on technological enhancements and transformations of humans, and 2) what can be called critical or philosophical posthumanism centring on aspects of ecology, gender, disability and postcolonialism.² A common denominator is the questioning of the traditional, stable, and unitary definition of what a human being is and could be. Or, as Pavlína Bakošová and Juraj Odorčák (2020) state:

we simply are not humans in the false sense of humanism, because we are the result and creators of myriads of various interactions (think social, biological, symbolic, physical, virtual, and much more), that are (and forever will be) beyond the scope of our recognition and hopelessly one-sided dreams about the world.³

According to Braidotti, posthumanism rejects the image of man as it is understood in the humanist European tradition with roots in the Renaissance, i.e., as *The Vitruvian man* – a white, European, able-bodied male

who is the master of all living things. For centuries, this man, famously depicted by Leonardo da Vinci in 1492, has been regarded as an ideal human, i.e. more human and therefore more worthy than any other human being. In the Anthropocene era, this image is now rejected on various levels and from different perspectives. For example, feminist theory rejects males as superior, postcolonial theory rejects the idea of Europe as the centre of the world and white as the ideal colour, ecocritical theory rejects anthropocentrism as the ordering principle of the world, and finally, scientific, and technological advances have questioned the physical limits of man.⁴ In this chapter, I define posthumanism as being the diachronical result of these theories and movements and synchronically constituted by them.

Two aspects of posthumanism theory are of special interest in this chapter. The first is the subjectification of other-than-human individuals. One implication of the traditional humanist construction of man is the othering of all those who do not 'fit the profile' – who are not male, white, European, able-bodied, and so on. The Other is seldom allowed an agency or a will of their own but is rather a means to an end, regardless of whether the end is labour, worship, reproduction, food, pleasure, or transportation. The ecocentric turn has made us re-evaluate the meaning and function of nature. The first step in what Braidotti describes as "a serious de-centering of 'Man'"⁵ is to realise that nature is not the mirror of man's emotions, the backdrop on the theatre of man, or the projection site of man's dreams, hopes and ambitions.

The second is the technological aspect. This sub-category of posthumanism is sometimes called transhumanism⁶. According to Ferrando it problematises the understanding of what a human is "through the possibilities inscribed within its possible biological and technological evolutions". She continues:

Human enhancement is a crucial notion to the transhumanist reflection; the main keys to access such a goal are identified in science and technology, in all of their variables, as existing, emerging and speculative frames— from regenerative medicine to nanotechnology, radical life extension, mind uploading and cryonics, among other fields.⁷

Beatrice

In Karin Tidbeck's short story "Beatrice", a physician, Franz Hiller, falls in love with a spaceship, and Anna Goldberg, who works for her father as a secretary, falls in love with a steam engine. Independently of each other, they both give up their old lives to pursue their relationships, although they coincidentally end up in the same warehouse in Berlin, where they live together with their machines. Two separate relationships therefore play out under the same roof. The narrative takes place in a fictional, steampunk timeline in a world where romantic relationships with machines are not unheard of, although not generally accepted.

Franz Hiller meets the two-passenger airship Beatrice at a fare, where she is on show, and is immediately attracted to her:

Franz couldn't stop looking at her. Her body was a voluptuous oblong, matte skin wrapped tightly over a gently rounded skeleton. The little gondola was made of dark wood (*finest mahogany!*) and embellished with brass details (*every part hand-wrought!*), with thick glass windows that rounded at the edges. Inside, the plush seats were embroidered with French lilies, facing an immaculately polished console. Beatrice was perfect. She bobbed in a slow up-down motion, like a sleeping whale. But she was very much awake. Franz could feel her attention turn to him and remain there, the heat of her sightless gaze.⁸

Franz returns to the fair each day and the connection between them grows. He senses her longing for his touch. He tries to buy Beatrice, but as she is a prototype she is not for sale. If he wants an airship, he will have to order one. He goes home and looks at Beatrice's picture in the catalogue. His desire is overtly sexual: "Her smooth skin, her little gondola. How he wanted to climb into her little gondola"⁹ After leaving his parents' house, moving to Berlin, and renting a warehouse, he orders an exact replica of Beatrice, but does not connect emotionally with the new airship. She is cool, disinterested and does not feel the same as the other when he touches her. Despite this, he does not give up: "We'll manage", Franz says to the console. "We'll manage. You can be my Beatrice. We'll get used to each other"¹⁰ Already here, a sense of discomfort starts to mount in the reader: what choice does Beatrice have? She is in Franz's hands and the unwilling recipient of his love and desire – feelings that she clearly does not share.

Unlike Franz, who had never had a romantic interest in airships or other

vehicles before he met Beatrice, Anna Goldberg has always had a thing for machines: “When other girls her age mooned over boys, she had a violent crush on a Koenig & Bauer”.¹¹ She meets the love of her life, the semi-portable steam engine Hercules, at the same fair where Franz met Beatrice: “a round-bellied oven coupled to an upright, broad-shouldered engine. He exuded a heavy aroma of hot iron with a tart overtone of coal smoke that made her thighs tingle. And he was for sale”.¹²

Franz and Anna live side by side in the warehouse in Berlin and even start sharing their meals. They become friends and confidants and one evening Franz shares his worries with Anna. Despite his efforts to please Beatrice II, she still seems emotionally distant: “Beatrice remained cold and distant, no matter how Franz tried to warm their relationship. He was meticulous in his care for her. He read newspapers to her daily; he made love to her with great care. Nothing seemed to get her attention”.¹³ Thus, it seems that the new Beatrice never gets used to, or even likes Franz, yet is obliged to endure intercourse. Anna never asks why Franz thinks that this type of behaviour is acceptable. In this world, machines can feel and think, and thus feel hurt and pain. However, since Beatrice is silent, Franz can pretend that they have an agreement.

In contrast, Anna’s feelings for Hercules appear to be mutual. Unlike Franz, who goes to work every day, Anna never leaves Hercules’ side. She spends her days and nights feeding him coal every other hour, and in-between studies technical manuals. After a while she realises that she is pregnant: “When Franz laid an ear to her belly, he could hear clicking and whirring sounds in there”.¹⁴ When she goes into labour, Franz helps to deliver the baby: “The child was small but healthy, its pistons well integrated with the flesh”.¹⁵ After having given birth to her daughter, Anna bleeds out onto the warehouse floor. Her last wish is to be put inside Hercules’ oven and incinerated. If we examine their relationship, it is obvious that Anna gives up her life, both literally and metaphorically, for the relationship. A woman, bleeding to death from labour complications on a warehouse floor after having spent her days and nights tending to her beloved, is a powerful image of the asymmetrical power relations between woman and man throughout history. Hercules, although a machine, is construed as male with traditionally male features: strong and powerful, but also silent and demanding. Anna can be viewed as a representative of an older, less advanced human being, that must die for a new world order to take place: her daughter, who comes after her, belongs to a new species - the transhuman.

Geologist Paul J. Crutzen, who put the term Anthropocene¹⁶ into a modern context, dates the beginning of the era as “the latter part of the eighteenth century (...) This date also happens to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784”.¹⁷ The invention of the steam engine is often said to be the root cause of the climate crisis and other ecological disasters that we face today. Thus, an interesting aspect of *Hercules* is the destructive force it represents. It is also the only character in the four (or five with Josephine) character chamber play whose interactions are not revealed to the reader. We are told that it has agency and a will of its own, but do not get to witness it.

When Franz presents the baby, which he names Josephine, to Beatrice and tells her that they are going to be foster parents, Beatrice seems content. Franz greases Josephine’s pistons and feeds her with coal. When she is older, she spends her days in Beatrice’s gondola when Franz is at work: “Beatrice radiated affection whenever the girl was near”.¹⁸ Belonging to two realms, the human and the other-than-human Josephine can communicate with both. When Josephine is four years old, despite not having vocal cords as we know them (“but instead a set of minuscule pipes arrayed in her larynx”¹⁹), she develops the ability to speak and delivers a message from Beatrice to Franz. Beatrice wants him to know that that is not her name, that Franz has treated her like a slave and has raped her “while pretending she was someone else”.²⁰ It turns out that she hates him and that she wants to fly. Franz stands by helplessly while Josephine climbs into the gondola and flies away with Beatrice. The story ends with that scene, which is heavily symbolical. In it, Franz represents the old, outdated notion of what a human is and/or should be: male, white and a ‘pure’ human. In his perspective (and to a certain extent in the reader’s) he is a romantic hero: a man who gives up everything for his love. The cause of his tragedy is that he took his human, male subjectivity for granted. Beatrice the first and the second were always his Other: a mute object of pleasure without agency, until Josephine gave Beatrice II a voice. That Franz never really recognised Beatrice as a subject, but instead treated her as an object becomes clear when he replaces Beatrice I with an identical airship and imagines that it will have the same feelings for him as he was convinced that the first Beatrice had.

Josephine, on the other hand, represents the future. She is the typical cyborg: half girl, half engine. She has the strength of a machine, but unlike her mute father she has the capacity for speech and can speak for or be spoken through by those who cannot. In this way, Beatrice can finally commu-

nicate her true feelings for Franz. To some extent, Josephine represents the transhumanist idea of the posthuman. Being both human and machine, she seems to have the advantages of both. However, as her body is constituted both by flesh and pistons, she does not represent what Braidotti calls “the trans-humanist fantasy of escape from the finite materiality of the en fleshed self”.²¹ In fact, Tidbeck’s works seldom avoid the physical aspects of the body, such as its functions, fluids, smells, and sounds. Their writing is carnal in the widest sense.

Is the relationship with Beatrice II a metaphor for a human relationship, where the woman is given less power and agency than the man (Beatrice is, after all, female)? Or should it be read literally, as a relationship between a human and a machine? To answer these questions, we must first examine posthuman theories about the relationship between humans and machines. Donna Haraway,²² Braidotti,²³ and N. Katherine Hayles²⁴ all agree that modern technology from the late 20th century and onwards, such as cybernetics, artificial intelligence, information technology and so on, blurs the boundaries between human and machine. Haraway writes: “Late-twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines”.²⁵ As this technological progress has continued, Braidotti argues that “[t]he relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion”.²⁶ However, humanity has always had a complex relationship with machines, long before AI and cybernetics. Even though the machines in “Beatrice” are pre-cybernetic, they represent a kind of technological development that thoroughly transforms the living conditions of all organisms on the planet and not only those of humans. Thus, the historical importance of the steam engine and the airship is mirrored in the personal significance they have for the human characters in the story.

Even though cyborgs and enhanced humans are common tropes in science fiction, “Beatrice” is not that easy to categorise. Science fiction demands a *novum*²⁷ but we don’t get any. There is no scientific explanation to why Beatrice and Hercules are conscious, nor to how a human woman and a steam engine could conceive a child. Therefore, they – and the story itself – cannot be inscribed in a conventional science fiction tradition²⁸. Rather, we can locate Tidbeck’s literary roots in the so called new weird fiction²⁹.

Subjectification, Objectification and Othering Practices

In posthumanist thinking, the subject is situated and dynamic, or “nomadic”, depending on our circumstances and experiences.³⁰ When we otherise someone, we see them as fundamentally different from us and therefore objectify rather than subjectify them. In traditional humanist thinking, many groups of humans and non-humans have been othered:

The dialectics of otherness is the inner engine of humanist Man’s power who assigns difference on a hierarchical scale as a tool of governance. All other modes of embodiment are cast out of the subject position and they include anthropomorphic others: non-white, non-masculine, non-normal, non-young, non-healthy, disabled, malformed or enhanced peoples. They also cover more ontological categorical divides between Man and zoo-morphic, organic or earth others.³¹

Subjectivity cannot be exclusively reserved for certain groups of humans, or even for humans in general. At the core of the theories of philosophers like Braidotti and Haraway lies a post-anthropocentric and ecocentric worldview, in which positions of power and hierarchy between humans, non-human animals and ecosystems are renegotiated. This in turn leads away from dichotomies and othering practices. Furthermore, we all exist on a nature–culture continuum. We have more in common with some non-human animals than others. Apes and humans have more in common than apes and butterflies, for example. Humans and animals are not opposites, as Haraway famously writes: “By the late twentieth century in the United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached (--) language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal”.³² Another false dichotomy on the nature–culture continuum is the man/machine dichotomy. As Hayles points out, “[c]yborgs actually exist. About 10 percent of the current U.S. population are estimated to be cyborgs in the technical sense, including people with electronic pacemakers, artificial joints, drug-implant systems, implanted corneal lenses, and artificial skin”.³³ Hayles thus establishes that cyborgs manifest themselves both as technological objects and as discursive formations, i.e., narrative constructions.³⁴ Even though Josephine is a narrative construct, she is not unthinkable, and that is the allure of the literary cyborg.

Felix Guattari’s theory on the technological subject, which he develops in *Chaosmosis*³⁵ sees the machine as an agent: “Another name for subjectiv-

ity, according to Guattari, is autopoietic subjectivation, or self-styling, and it accounts both for living organisms, humans as self-organizing systems, and also for inorganic matter, the machines”.³⁶ Guattari asserts that “[m]achinic subjectivity, the machinic assemblage of enunciation, agglomerates these different partial enunciations and installs itself, as it were, before and alongside the subject–object relation. It has, moreover, a collective character, it is multi-componential, a machinic multiplicity.”³⁷ According to Guattari,

[t]he phylogenetic evolution of machinism is expressed, at a primary level, by the fact that machines appear across ‘generations,’ one suppressing the other as it becomes obsolete. The filiation of previous generations is prolonged into the future by lines of virtuality and their arboreal (sic) implications.³⁸

Braidotti concludes that

Guattari’s machinic autopoiesis establishes a qualitative link between organic matter and technological or machinic artefacts. This results in a radical redefinition of machines as both intelligent and generative. They have their own temporality and develop through ‘generations’: they contain their own virtuality and futurity.³⁹

Josephine can be understood as a result of what Guattari calls “machinic heterogenesis”, and Anna’s death thus serves as a symbol for the obsolescence of the anthropocentric human.

In conclusion, I would say that Beatrice is not mainly a metaphor for an abused woman, because reducing her to a metaphor would take away the tangibility and retrofuturistic materiality of the machines in the narrative. As readers we can almost smell Beatrice’s polished brass and feel her velvet seat. It would also distance the story from the intriguing issue of our relationships with the machines we surround ourselves with, the history we share and the ominous results of that history. The narrative instead invites us to imagine another world where machines can have feelings and desires that we identify as ‘human’ and to reflect on the consequences of issues such as objectification, othering, and agency. That said, Beatrice the airship is an Other, just as women so often are – in literature and otherwise.

Jagannath

What are the limits of mankind? In the Anthropocene, and in the light of scientific progress (here referring to scientific discoveries and scientific and

technological innovations), we need to ask ourselves what, if any, is the essence of mankind? Haraway discusses the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. First, she concludes that “nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal”.⁴⁰ The next “leaky distinction” is the one “between animal-human (organism) and machine”.⁴¹ Here we need to examine the relations between humans and other-than-humans from different perspectives. Biological, ecological, moral, technical, economic, and reproductive aspects all need to be taken into consideration when renegotiating what a human can be or become. The human body is not a monolithic structure but an ecosystem of its own:

What new microbiological research argues is that the human cannot be imagined as this bounded biological and psychological entity. The human body, this research argues, is an assemblage of thousands of species the members of which outnumber the cells of the human body. According to the most recent estimates, the human body is made up of roughly 3-3.7 trillion human cells, but it is also inhabited by 3-4 trillion bacterial cells belonging to 500-1000 different species.⁴²

Thus, not even on a biological level are we who we think we are. We are not unitary, or definite monoliths, in either body or mind. This opens a creative space for new philosophical and poetic visions of the life, living and limits of humans as well as of other organisms. In Karin Tidbeck’s short story “Jagannath”, we are invited to imagine ourselves as existences living inside and in symbiosis with a creature that is both organism and machine – Mother. Mother is a self-conscious being and does not seem to have been created by man. Her origin is unknown to us.

Unlike in “Beatrice”, where we are only presented with the fact that Anna is pregnant but get no explanation to how, here we are told a lot about the reproductive functions of Mother. The following excerpt describes the birth of the protagonist, Rak:

Another child was born in the great Mother, excreted from the tube protruding from the Nursery ceiling. It landed with a wet thud on the organic bedding underneath. Papa shuffled over to the birthing tube and picked the baby up in his wizened hands. He stuck two fingers in the baby’s mouth to clear the cavity of oil and mucus, and then slapped its bottom (---) Papa tucked her into one of the little niches in the wall where babies of varying sizes were nestled. Cables and flesh moved slightly, accommodating the baby’s shape. A teat extended itself from the niche, grazing her cheek; Rak automatically turned and sucked at it. Papa patted the soft little head, sniff-

ing at the hairless scalp. The metallic scent of Mother's innards still clung to it⁴³

We are not told anything about Papa or his background but understand that his role is to care for the newly born. After they are born, Mother's system nurses them. Maternal instincts correspond in Mother to mechanical, automatic functions. The babies answer as babies do. Rak grows up and Papa tells her and the other children what they need to know about life. Rak is female and therefore a worker, since females are big and strong. Only a few male babies are born. Their role is to fertilise Mother's eggs and steer Mother. As they are tiny, they can fit into Mother's head. Mother combines features from machines, insects, and human beings. Her body is a mixture of flesh and cables, and she has mandibles and multiple legs. Her eggs are fertilised inside her body by her own offspring. She is thus almost a closed system – almost because she needs to feed and sometimes needs to mate, otherwise her genetic system will malfunction, and the fetuses become deformed. She can communicate verbally with her children and can express feelings for them. What we do not know is whether these are human features, artificial intelligence, or something else completely.

Rak is the focaliser throughout the story. The reader does not know anything that Rak does not about Mother or the outside world. The only thing that we and Rak are told is that Mother saved her ancestors a long time ago:

“She took us up when our world failed. She is our protection and our home. We are Her helpers and beloved children”. Papa held up a finger, peering at them with eyes almost lost in the wrinkles of his face. “We make sure Her machinery runs smoothly. Without us, She cannot live. We only live if Mother lives.”⁴⁴

What is mentioned is that ‘our world failed’ – presumably the human world – although we are not told how, why, or when this happened. Towards the end of the story, Mother tells Rak: “*Your ancestors used to live there. But then the cities died, and they came to me. We entered an agreement. You would keep me company, and in exchange I would protect you until the world was a better place*”.⁴⁵ Thus, “Jagannath” is set in a postapocalyptic world, which we only get a few glimpses of towards the end of the story. We are told that there are other beings like Mother out there, but we do not know whether they too have entered a symbiotic relationship with humans or humanoid creatures. Rak's ancestors were probably human,

but as time passed, they must have become less and less so. Braidotti points to the “dialectics of otherness” as “the inner engine of humanist Man’s power”.⁴⁶ However, to otherise we need dichotomies and in “Jagannath” all concepts are blurred and mixed. Mother is both insect and machine (and human, in that she has coexisted with humans for generations in a symbiotic relationship, which has affected every part of her physical and psychological being). Rak and her siblings, although of human ancestry, get half their DNA from Mother and the other half from their own brothers, who also get half their DNA from Mother. Thus, we do not know what Rak looks like, but can only conclude that she is posthuman.

Just as we are inhabited by a multitude of species that help us function and which survive because of us, Rak and her siblings live inside Mother and help her to function:

“I’m hungry”, said Rak. Hap scraped at the wall, stringy goop sloughing off into her hand.

“Here” she said. “This is what you’ll eat now. It’s Mother’s food for us. You can eat it whenever you like.”

It tasted thick and sweet sliding down her throat. After a few swallows Rak was pleasantly full⁴⁷

Rak works in Mother’s belly, kneading her intestines to let the food pass and be absorbed. Other workers are placed in her legs, making them move. Mother is the workers’ entire universe. The atmosphere is humid, warm, and penetrated by the sound of Mother’s machinery/bodily functions and the workers’ songs. Rak lives in this nourishing and safe environment for years, surrounded by soft flesh, intestines, wires, and cables. When a worker dies, she is absorbed by Mother and a new worker is fetched from the Nursery.

Following Haraway, the workers, the pilots, Mother, and Papa can be seen as holobionts:

Like Margulis, I use *holobiont* to mean symbiotic assemblages, at whatever scale of space or time, which are more like knots of diverse intra-active relations in dynamic complex systems, than like the entities of a biology made up of preexisting bounded units (genes, cells, organisms, etc.) in interactions that can only be conceived as competitive or cooperative. Like hers, my use of *holobiont* does not designate host + symbionts because all of the players are symbionts to each other, in diverse kinds of relationalities and with varying degrees of openness to attachments and assemblages with other holobionts.⁴⁸

Mother is a network in which all parts must intra-act to function optimally. Therefore, neither the individual worker, nor Mother herself, can be construed as a subject in the traditional, humanist sense: autopoietic (self-organizing), fixed and unitary, but rather as sympoietic: complex and dynamic with no distinct boundaries between them.⁴⁸ The workers, although conscious, have no agency: already when they are born their faith is decided, and their place in the world is cut out for them. It could be argued that the interrelations are hierarchical with Mother at the top, followed by Papa, the male pilots, and the female workers at the bottom. However, it is more complicated than that. Even though she originally functioned as a host – “she took us up” – Mother now depends on all holobionts for her existence. Every component in Mother is needed and needs the others to exist. Mother is also dependent on other creatures like herself for her genetic system, and on the affordances of her surroundings to feed.

When it is Rak’s turn to go to the Nursery to get a new worker, it turns out that no healthy babies have been born for a long time but have instead come out severely disformed and nonviable. Rak then crawls to Mother’s head to find out what has happened. Already this initiative differentiates her from the other workers, including Papa. They never question the order of things but stay in their designated workspaces, and when Mother dies, they die with her. What made Rak act without being ordered to do so, when nothing in her life had prepared her to make such a decision? Rak’s individualism cannot be explained by the affordances of her environment. Perhaps her curiosity is a mutation that, as the theory of evolution informs us, gives her greater chances of survival? Or is her sense of self a remnant from a time before the “world failed”?

When Rak reaches Mother’s head she finds a dead pilot blocking the tubes and cables in her brain. She removes the body and Mother tells her: “*You can be my pilot*”. For the first time she gets to see the outside world through Mother’s eyes, and it is filled with colour and light. She sees abandoned cities, canyons, and grasslands, as well as the sky, sun, and stars. She also gets a glimpse of Mother’s appearance: her many legs and her mandibles. Mother tells her the name of the things she sees. Even though Rak has removed the dead body from the tubes in her brain, Mother is still dying. Instead of dying with her, like all the others, Rak finds her way out of Mother. When Rak leaves Mother for the first time it is as though she has been reborn (“The aperture opened out between two of Mother’s jointed

legs”⁵⁰). From Rak’s own perspective, this rebirth is described in the way we often imagine birth to feel like – terrifying, overwhelming, and exciting:

The air coming in was cold and sharp, painful on the skin, but fresh. Rak breathed in deep. The hot air from Mother’s insides streamed out above her in a cloud. The sun hung low on the horizon, its light far more blinding than Mother’s eyes had seen it. One hand in front of her eyes, Rak swung her legs out over the rim of the opening and cried out in surprise when her feet landed on grass. The myriad blades prickled the soles of her feet. She sat there, gripping at the grass with her toes, eyes squeezed shut. When the light was a little less painful, she opened her eyes a little and stood up.⁵¹

When Rak leaves Mother’s body she begins to transform. First, she has a dream in which she gains insect-like properties: “She dreamed of legs sprouting from her sides, her body elongating and dividing into sections, taking a sinuous shape”.⁵² When she wakes up, she sees a creature that reminds her of Mother, only smaller. It drops an egg-sack which Rak eats. By ingesting the offspring of another creature, she becomes one of them: “She ate until she was sated, then crouched down on the ground, scratching at her sides. Her arms and legs tingled. She had a growing urge to run and stretch her muscles: to run and never stop”.⁵³ Out in the world, Rak can now become what she has the potential to be. However, her process of becoming is not a solitary one: it depends on the existence of others. The ingesting of the egg-sack is the start of a new sympoiesis.

Apocalypses

Human history is filled with imaginings of the post-Apocalypse, lively descriptions of heaven or hell in the Christian tradition, and in a more modern context, of post-apocalyptic existences a la *Mad Max* or McCarthy’s *The Road*. In a secular tradition, post-apocalyptic life is often described as one of suffering and scarcity, although it can also mean rebirth and new possibilities. Even at the darkest time there is a glimmer of hope. A question that sometimes arises in the anthropocenic discourse is if humanity will destroy the planet beyond the chance of recovery, or if our time here will be one era amongst others in the history of the planet.⁵⁴ In “Jagannath”, the apocalypse has rendered the cities uninhabitable. It is unclear whether the word ‘cities’ is a synecdoche for the human habitat in general, or whether in this fictional universe people only live in cities. The humans who survived the apocalypse came to Mother and the holo-

bionic relationship began. The world, however, survived this apocalypse. Through Mother's eyes, Rak sees the sun, the starry sky, other creatures that look a bit like Mother and different landscapes. The world still exists, even though the human race is extinct – extinct because whatever Rak is, she is not human in the traditional understanding of the word. For Rak and her siblings, Mother's death constitutes another apocalypse. Mother was their universe (their Mother Earth) and when she dies most of them die with her. Rak survives because she can imagine another way of life. Apocalypse literally means revelation, and the outside world is revealed to Rak in Mother's final hours.

Concluding Remarks

In the two analysed short stories, subjectivity as we usually understand it – autopoietic, stable, and unitary – is put in question. Josephine and Rak are posthuman subjects, multifaceted and complex, taking part in various assemblages and networks. The old humanity, represented in Beatrice by Anna and Franz, and in Jagannath by Rak's ancestors, belongs to the past. The new human is mixed and blurred: part human, part machine, and/or part animal. The posthuman world belongs to them, and to others like them. Even though the short stories discussed in this chapter envision the end of humanity as we know it, they are paradoxically full of hope: they invite us to imagine a future where there are still grass, sunshine and breathable air. In that future, humanity in a new shape and form might get a second chance.

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- ¹ Karin Tidbeck. *Jagannath*. London: Vintage, 2018.
- ² Rosi Braidotti. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013; Francesca Ferrando. "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations", *Existenz*. Vol. 8, no. 2, 2013, pp. 26–32; Cary Wolfe. *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- ³ Pavlína Bakošová and Juraj Odorčák. "Posthumanism and Human Extinction: Apocalypse, Species, and Two Posthuman Ecologies". *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*. Vol. 19, no. 57, 2020, p. 53.
- ⁴ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, pp. 1–2.
- ⁵ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 2.
- ⁶ Although not always. Some scholars distinguish transhumanism from posthumanism.
- ⁷ Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations", p. 27.
- ⁸ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 10–11.
- ⁹ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 11.
- ¹⁰ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 12.
- ¹¹ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 12.
- ¹² Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 12.
- ¹³ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 13.
- ¹⁴ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 15.
- ¹⁵ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 15.
- ¹⁶ "From the ancient Greek word *Anthropos* meaning 'human being' and *kainos* meaning 'recent, new', the Anthropocene is then the new epoch of humans, the age of man" (Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz 2016, pp. 3–4).
- ¹⁷ Paul J. Crutzen. "Geology of Mankind". *Nature*. Vol 415, no. 23, 2002, n.p.
- ¹⁸ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 17.
- ¹⁹ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 17.
- ²⁰ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 17.
- ²¹ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 91.
- ²² Donna Haraway. *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press. ProQuest Ebook Central, 2016.
- ²³ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.
- ²⁴ N. Katherine Hayles. "Cognitive Assemblages: Technical Agency and Human Interactions". *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 43, No. 1, 2016, pp. 32–55.
- ²⁵ Hayles, "Cognitive Assemblages: Technical Agency and Human Interactions", p. 11.
- ²⁶ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 89.
- ²⁷ Novum is a term coined by science fiction scholar Darko Suvin and can be explained as the technical and/or scientific innovations that make something possible that is impossible in our time, such as time travel. These innovations need to be scientifically explained. Magic is not involved.
- ²⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that one of Tidbeck's literary inspirations is the work of Ursula Le Guin.

- ²⁹ See f. ex Gry Ulstein. “Age of Lovecraft’? – Anthropocene Monsters in (New) Weird Narrative”. *Nordlit: Tidskrift i litteratur og kultur*, No. 42 (2019).
- ³⁰ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 189.
- ³¹ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 68.
- ³² Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, p. 10.
- ³³ Katherine N. Hayles. How we became Posthuman: *Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 115.
- ³⁴ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, pp. 114–115.
- ³⁵ Felix Guattari. *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-Aesthetic paradigm*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1995.
- ³⁶ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 94.
- ³⁷ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-Aesthetic paradigm*, p. 24.
- ³⁸ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-Aesthetic paradigm*, p. 40.
- ³⁹ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 94.
- ⁴⁰ Donna Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, p. 10.
- ⁴¹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, p. 11.
- ⁴² Johan Höglund. The Anthropocene Within: Love and Extinction in M. R. Carey’s *The Girl with All the Gifts* and *The Boy on the Bridge*. In *Gothic in the Anthropocene: Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth*, Justin D Edwards, Rune Graulund and Johan Höglund (eds), pp. 253–269. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021, p. 3.
- ⁴³ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 103.
- ⁴⁴ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 104.
- ⁴⁵ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 110.
- ⁴⁶ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁷ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 105.
- ⁴⁸ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, p. 60.
- ⁴⁹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, p. 58
- ⁵⁰ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 112.
- ⁵¹ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 112.
- ⁵² Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 113.
- ⁵³ Tidbeck, *Jagannath*, p. 114.
- ⁵⁴ Dibley, Ben. “Anthropocene: The Enigma of ‘the Geomorphic Fold’”. In *Animals in the Anthropocene: Critical Perspectives on Non-Human Futures*, The Human Animal Research Network Editorial Collective (eds), 36–48. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2015.

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