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Başak Ađın, and Şafak Horzum, eds. *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 257pp.

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As schools, universities, and other institutions closed, as national borders were shut down, and as hospitals struggled to provide medical care for an extraordinarily high number of patients, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has reminded humans across the globe of the disruptive power of pathogens. Whereas the institutional, social, economic, cultural, and conceptual challenges brought on by the Corona virus have resulted in a sense of despair and doom or denial in many, Başak Ađın and Şafak Horzum’s edited collection embraces these challenges as an opportunity to scrutinise and re-think some common Western conceptions of the (non)human, viruses, and contagion. *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* contains ten chapters that explore representations of (real and imaginary) bacterial and viral infection in cultural artefacts. All chapters look at different narrative texts from a posthumanist perspective, the underlying theoretical and conceptual framework being outlined in Ađın and Horzum’s introduction to the book. Those familiar with posthuman theory will recognise some of the book’s basic concepts, such as nonhuman agency, naturecultures, and human-nonhuman entanglements. Based on these notions, the volume understands pathogens as nonhuman actors, with whom human life, history, and culture are deeply entwined (3), and which often function as “meddler[s] of systems” (2). This understanding of pathogens and diseases allows the authors of the chapters to point to and discuss particular representations of contagion that call into question dominant humanist concepts and deeply anthropocentric ideas, especially the notions of human exceptionalism and the binary conception of nature and culture—ideas that constitute the root of many of the crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (247). Even though the recent COVID-19 pandemic is not the designated focus of the book, references and discussions of it permeate all of its chapters. In doing so, *Posthuman Pathogenesis* makes a timely contribution to ongoing public and academic debates on the COVID-19 pandemic by offering a critical posthumanist perspective—one largely absent from public discourse—on the recent global virus outbreak and its economic, political, cultural, and environmental implications.

The volume consists of five parts, each of which tends to different conceptual and theoretical approaches of reading textual representations of contagion. Part I scrutinises and challenges traditional humanist concepts through Stefan Herbrechter’s reading of Albert Camus’ *The Plague* (1947) and Kerim Can Yazgünođlu’s engagement with literary dystopias. Herbrechter discusses how *The Plague* engages with the question of what it means to be human in times of viral crises

and argues that Camus' novel constitutes a deeply humanist text that invokes a nostalgic desire to reconnect with liberal humanist values when these values are called into question in times of pandemics and other crises. Yazgünoğlu follows Herbrechter's critique of humanism and puts forth an understanding of the human as "always already enmeshed with the nonhuman" (42)—a conception that, he suggests, is particularly prevalent in dystopian texts such as Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden* (1989), Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and Clare Morrall's *When the Floods Came* (2015).

The contributions of the second part of the collection consider how contagious diseases call into question dominant conceptions of time. Ruth Clemens and Max Casey criticise the modern "societal progress narrative" (63) and propose the concept of "viral temporality" (64) in its stead, that is an understanding of time "that accounts for the multifaceted ways that disease, in its multispecies entanglements, creates different structures of time that are not simply quantifiable, discrete, or striving for linearity" (68). Similarly, André Vasques Vital discusses the conceptualisation of epidemic temporalities as "linear and non-linear, and continuous and discontinuous" (92) in an episode of the American television series *The Amazing World of Gumball* (2011-2019).

The question of pandemic temporalities gives way to the idea of nonhuman narrative agency in part III of the book. Şafak Horzum's reading of Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) illustrates how the novel's narrative is navigated by the endless instances of becoming-with that its posthuman protagonist experiences. Z. Gizem Yilmaz Karahan turns the attention to art and suggests that Turkish miniature paintings serve as evidence of "the narrative power of agentic contagious diseases" (127) since their production has been shaped by Anatolia's history of disease.

Part IV is entitled "Contagious Networks of Communication" and contains two articles that apply posthuman theory to some of the fundamental questions of literary studies and linguistics, proposing a reconceptualization of literature and language as posthuman rather than human artefacts. Jayde Martin and Ben Horn conclude from their reading of Greg Bear's science-fiction novel *Darwin's Radio* (1999) that literary texts constitute hyperobjects, in Timothy Morton's sense (155), and Tan Arda Gedik and Zeynep Arpaözü's propose to look at language as coming into being through, and being shaped by, countless human and nonhuman agential forces and their entanglements with each other, rather than as a product of the human mind (171).

The two articles in part V look at the changing patterns of disease narratives from the long twentieth to the twenty-first century. Stian Kristensen reads the short story "Waugh" (2018) by Bryan Washington as an example of how anxieties about HIV/AIDS "linger in contemporary fiction" (190). Ronja Tripp-Bodola compares Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) with Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) and highlights the narratives' expression of changing attitudes towards contagion throughout the long twentieth century (207).

The articles featured in *Posthuman Pathogenesis* revisit some key concerns of posthuman criticism, including the pertinent question of what it means to be human, and they propose new concepts and trajectories for the field, including the concept of viral temporalities, nonhuman narrative agency, and a posthuman reconceptualization of human artefacts like literature and language. The majority of

articles (seven out of ten) present analyses of literary texts. A more extensive inclusion of discussions of non-literary cultural artefacts would not only have been in line with Ađın and Horzum’s agenda (3-4), but would also have made the book more appealing to scholars within cultural studies, material ecocriticism, and the medical humanities, especially considering how all articles outline ideas and analytical approaches that have merit outside of literary studies. However, it should be pointed out that despite the main focus of the collection on literary texts, all articles offer a broad contextualisation of their analyses, which point to the broader theoretical, cultural, and social significance of their respective case studies and offer many points of departure for further research.

*Posthuman Pathogenesis* finishes with a coda, which collects each contributor’s account of how they have experienced writing about humans’ interactions with viral agents during the COVID-19 pandemic. This section constitutes another strong feature of the book: it not only reveals how research is often shaped by personal, individual experiences and observation and by the presence of nonhuman agents, such as viruses (and, thus, is posthuman itself), it further shows how some of the insights offered by the book have shaped their authors’ perception of the pandemic. The authors’ accounts demonstrate that “posthumanism is not just a theory” but “a way of existing” and “a way to understand who we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, as Francesca Ferrando puts it in her afterword (248), in which she proposes to look at anthropocentrism as a disease causing multiple current crises. Indeed, the book’s intriguing exploration of posthuman ways to conceive pathogens, disease, and pandemics not only provides new pathways for research in several disciplines of the humanities, but it can also help navigating 21<sup>st</sup>-century crises, including pandemics as well as environmental catastrophes, climate change, and so forth.