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“No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity”: Compassion and the Nonhuman in *Richard III*

Abstract: When Lady Anne accuses Richard of cruelty in the wooing scene of act one in *Richard III*, she claims that even the fiercest beast will demonstrate some degree of pity. Her attempt to categorize Richard as somehow both less than human and less than a beast, however, leaves her vulnerable to Richard’s pity retort that he knows no pity “and therefore [is] no beast” (1:2:71-2). The dialogue swiftly moves on, but the relation between the emotional phenomenon known as pity or compassion and the nonhuman, briefly raised in these two lines, remains unresolved. Recent scholarship at the intersection of early modern studies, historical animal studies and posthumanism has demonstrated ways in which the human-animal binary is often less than clearly articulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Building on such work, and adding perspectives from the history of the emotions, I look closely at the exchange between Anne and Richard as characteristic of pre-Cartesian confusion about the emotional disposition—in particular compassion—of animals. I argue that such confusion can in fact be traced throughout *Richard III* and elsewhere in the Shakespeare canon and that paying attention to it unsettles the more familiar notion of compassion as a human species distinction and offers a new way to read the early modern nonhuman.

Keywords: *Richard III*, compassion, emotion, posthumanism, human-animal binary.

In act one, scene two of *Richard III* something strange happens. Richard’s plan, revealed to the audience in the previous scene, of wooing Lady Anne despite having “killed her husband and her father” (1:1:154) is just beginning to gain speed, as is the snappy stichomythic dialogue between the two characters, when Anne accuses Richard of cruelty with what turns out to be a blunt comparison: “No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity” (1:2:71). Her purpose, it seems, is to place Richard as far down a moral hierarchy of beings as possible: entirely devoid of pity, he is *not even* a beast. In the same breath, however, she

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unwittingly confirms his human status because, as Richard then implies in his quick syllogistic retort, if the beast is capable of pity it must belong to a different species from him: “But I know none, and therefore am no beast” (1:2:72). Lady Anne’s inability to be specific about Richard’s ‘humanness’, or ‘non-humanness’, means that she loses that verbal contest, even if she pushes Richard to admit the truth.

The dialogue moves on and the moment passes so rapidly that it hardly seems worth dwelling on, yet there is something about this exchange that invites pause, both in the reading and in the acting of the play. For Jan Kott, who makes a re-appearance in this special issue, it must have stood out too, because he cites Lady Anne’s line early on in his treatment of the scene in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (36), although he does not linger over the moment for long either. Perhaps the exchange simply has an arresting quality because the audience is treated to the full extent of Richard’s rhetorical dexterity and begins, like Lady Anne, to be won over by his quick-wittedness. However, the impulse to pause over these two lines might also be indicative of the ambiguity of what is being said—the strangeness of it. The notion of pity as a parameter for human(e) behaviour (with cruelty as its *inhuman* opposite) may not sound very strange, of course. It is after all common enough in contemporary discourse and, as we shall see, in early modern discourse too. But this simple parameter does not quite cover what takes place between Lady Anne and Richard. Even as the scene and the plot of the play move on, the species confusion briefly raised in these two lines remains unresolved.

In this article, I examine early modern relations between the nonhuman and the emotional phenomenon known as pity or compassion to suggest that there is indeed something ‘strange’ and confusing at work in this brief moment of dialogue. On what grounds does Lady Anne believe that beasts, even fierce ones, will behave compassionately? A text such as Edward Topsell’s oft-cited bestiary *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* (1607) might offer some clues by having—as we shall see—plenty of compassionate animals on show. But at the same time other sources, including *Richard III*, clearly promote compassion as a human distinction. So what seems to emerge is a picture of two different cultural narratives that both overlap and contradict each other. One potential danger in examining emotions, usually articulated as human attributes, in animals is, inevitably, anthropomorphism. Some of the animals mentioned in this article are not ‘real’ animals; rather, they represent a projection of human behaviour of both positive and negative kind. But having to negotiate that tricky fault-line does not mean that these animals should be left out of the equation. In fact, one of the things I hope to demonstrate is that the early modern period offers the possibility of looking at animals in the spacious ground between anthropomorphism and Cartesian automata, and that the question of animal compassion is one of the available road maps in this endeavour. Therefore, while Lady Anne’s

compassionate beast clearly functions on a rhetorical and symbolic level, I will argue that it also bears relation to an indecisiveness or confusion about the emotional disposition—in particular compassion—of ‘real’ animals in the period. And, in turn, that this confusion can seriously unsettle the human-animal binary implicit in compassion discourses that seek to privilege the human.

Pursuing such questions and contradictions means that I use a critical posthumanist lens in tandem with the methodology known as ‘the history of emotions’ so as to trace perceptions of nonhuman emotion in the period. The sceptical stance towards human exceptionalism which is central to posthumanist critical thinking is highly helpful when it comes to scrutinizing human-animal binaries.¹ This is not least the case when dealing with a period prior to Descartes’s notorious degradation of animals to the status of automata, as Erica Fudge, Karen Raber, Laurie Shannon and other critics working at the intersection of early modern studies, historical animal studies and posthumanism have already demonstrated substantively.²

However, I will suggest that posthumanist alternatives to anthropocentric attitudes also help to frame questions about emotional patterns that we might otherwise take for granted or lightly pass over as exclusively human in the period. Moreover, while my initial focus is on Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, I want at the same time to suggest ways in which early modern discourse might ‘speak back to’, or indeed anticipate, contemporary critical positions. Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano have argued that there are plenty of intellectual alliances to be looked for between Renaissance humanism and later posthumanist theory. That is, not only does the posthumanist critical lens prove productive to studies of Renaissance texts and culture, but the favour is easily returned when certain aspects of pre-Enlightenment thought turn out to be demonstrably already posthumanist. As Campana and Maisano posit, “Renaissance humanism was never a coherent or singular worldview, much less a rallying cry for ‘man as the measure’—or center—‘of all things’” (2).

Bridging the pre-modern and the posthuman can feel like venturing into slippery temporal territory, however. According to Campana and Maisano, there is no easy solution to negotiating the temporal paradox of that bridging: “much of the work on pre-Enlightenment posthumanisms seems to range somewhere between two poles of almost irresistible attraction: ‘we were always posthuman’ and ‘we were never human’” (7-8). In this respect, the pre-modern/posthumanist

¹ For a comprehensive outline of posthumanist thinking—and related terms—see Rosendahl Thomsen and Wamberg (2020). In their introduction, Rosendahl Thomsen and Wamberg explicitly select posthumanism as the governing term for a range of critical positions which in various ways question or displace human exceptionalism.

² See for example Fudge (2000, 2004, 2006 and 2018), Raber (2013 and 2018) and Raber and Duggan (2021) and Shannon (2013).

alliance may a little too easily become what Campana and Maisano call a temptation for scholars to point out “fuzzy contours of the so-called human in premodern eras and how the resulting uncertainty might impact contemporary thinking about contemporary things” (8). In many ways, this article follows this line of thought too, but, as Campana and Maisano also claim, this is “neither erroneous nor outmoded” but “might be just the beginning of a conversation that leads [...] to a larger conversation about what Renaissance humanism is, was, and could be in the future” (8). Karen Raber goes further and dispels Campana and Maisano’s misgivings about applied posthumanism in close readings of Renaissance texts when she advocates a “kind of slow posthumanism” and argues that testing the capacity of posthumanist theory by “fighting anthropocentrism one close reading at a time is not a bad place to start” (*Shakespeare and Posthumanist Theory* 159-60). Taking its cue from Raber, then, this article contributes to that growing catalogue of close readings.

Given that I am concerned with compassion—an emotional phenomenon that is easily simplified or left unquestioned—the particular pre-modern/post-humanist critical alliance I am suggesting is designed to uncover any potential mutual blind spots. Compassion always presents a complicated case-study, partly because it sits awkwardly within the taxonomy of emotions, such as anger, sadness or joy, by representing an emotional reaction to another’s emotional state or situation, rather than an emotion in and of itself.³ Moreover, although the capacity or will to act compassionately is usually understood to be good and desirable, it does not take much probing to complicate the picture. When it comes to early modern compassion discourse too, a historicized analysis soon shows that compassion cannot simply be taken for granted as a signifier of (human) virtue in the period.

As Katherine Ibbitt and Kristine Steenbergh have shown in a recent collection of essays on early modern compassionate practices, determining the nature and the value of these practices was subject to several contrasting views. The main rift was between the influences on the early modern mind-set of classical philosophy, particularly Stoicism, which advocated moderation, in some cases even elimination, of compassionate response to others, and Christian morals (further complicated by sectarian variants), which advocated the

³ I do not make a fine-grained etymological distinction between compassion and pity or other related terms here, as some scholars have previously done, since such a distinction is not necessary for the discussion of this article. What I do concede is a potential distinction between the kind of compassion that spares a potential victim (which is the kind Lady Anne refers to in *Richard III*) and the kind of compassion that signifies a co-suffering response in any given situation. However, I would argue that both these usually derive from a common emotional premise.

opposite.⁴ The full scope of contentious compassion(s) in early modern contexts extends beyond my discussion here; but it is important to point out that compassion discourse is already not straightforward in this period, before examining another complication, one that has received comparatively little attention from scholars working on early modern emotion: that is, compassion’s complicated relationship with human-animal binaries.⁵

Lady Anne’s invocation of the compassionate beast in *Richard III* is odd, because it seems to be contradicting the play’s more pervasive perception of beasts as uncompromisingly fierce and cruel. A glance at other beastly references in the play confirms this impression. When the imprisoned Clarence confronts his murderers and entreats their pity, he tells them that “[n]ot to relent is beastly, savage, devilish” (1:4:262), thus firmly defining a lack of compassion as belonging to the nonhuman category. In contrast to the murderers’ beastliness, Clarence demonstrates his own humanist education by understanding the nature of compassion and how to provoke it in others; as Richard is also well aware when he warns the murderers in the previous scene: “do not hear him plead, / For Clarence is well-spoken and perhaps / May move your hearts to pity, if you mark him” (1:33:46-48). Significantly, the discourse here centres on speech as a marker of compassionate behaviour and on the humanist rhetorician’s skill to move others to compassion, which, when recalling Descartes’ speechless animal automata, seems further to exclude the nonhuman. In other words, it looks as if the play’s human-centred compassion discourse here anticipates or represents an early version of the later Cartesian paradigm in which the question of speech contributes to establishing the dividing line in the human-animal binary.⁶

Animal imagery is used elsewhere in the play to signify cruelty, not least in relation to Richard himself. Moments before Lady Anne brings in the

⁴ For a detailed analysis, see for example Ibbitt and Steenbergh’s introduction in Ibbitt and Steenbergh (2021) or Bruce R. Smith’s chapter ‘The Ethics of Compassion in Early Modern England’ in the same collection.

⁵ Studies of early modern emotion so far have not been very concerned with animal emotions or emotional relations between humans and animals, although see Gail Kern Paster’s chapter on animal emotion in Shakespeare in Paster, Rowe and Floyd-Wilson (2004). In reverse, Lara Bovilsky’s essay in Campana and Maisano’s collection (2016) exemplifies an engagement with early modern emotion from a posthumanist perspective. Writing into a more contemporary context, Kristine Steenbergh also brings post-humanism into an interesting conversation about compassion in the Anthropocene in the concluding chapter to Ibbitt and Steenbergh (2021).

⁶ As Descartes sets out in *Discourse on the Method*: “For it is highly deserving to remark, that there are no men so dull and stupid, not even idiots, as to be incapable of joining together different words, and thereby constructing a declaration by which to make their thoughts understood; and that on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect or happily circumstanced, which can do the like” (45).

reference to the compassionate beast in her exchange with Richard, she has cursed him, wishing his fate to be worse than that of “wolves, [...] spiders, toads / Or any creeping venomd thing that lives” (1:2:19-20), and not long after, she refers to him derogatively as “a hedgehog” (1:2:104). All of which makes the appearance of the compassionate beast in the space between these instances of negative animal imagery seem even stranger; clearly animal-related narratives and counter-narratives can co-exist even within a single scene.

Throughout the play, Richard’s heraldic symbol of the boar is equated with his brutality in the mouths of his antagonists and, of course, the play also abounds with references to dogs—from the dogs in Richard’s opening soliloquy, who bark at him as he halts by them, to the frequent likening of Richard to a dog by his opponents. The Richard-as-dog trope is especially favoured by Margaret but also used by Richmond, whose final triumph over Richard assigns the former king to the animal kingdom only: “God and your arms be praised, victorious friends: / The day is ours; the bloody dog is dead” (5:5:1-2). Richmond’s lines imply that his new rule will be a human(e) one, setting rational kingship against animalistic tyranny, and the trope is arguably anticipated by Richard’s own willingness to exchange his kingdom for a horse in his final lines immediately before Richmond’s proclamation of victory. In this sense, Richard’s claim to human status is closely bound up with animal imagery that unsettles it and, while his animality is his cruelty (and vice versa), at the end of the play it has also become his abjection.

While these animal references are, as I say, tropes, I am not convinced that the animals in *Richard III* are there simply to serve symbolic purposes; or rather, I do not believe that the symbolism is simple. The early reference to barking dogs by Richard is particularly ambiguous in this respect. Why would the dogs bark at Richard as he halts by them? Because his misshapen form unsettles them? Because their barking confirms his exclusion by other humans? Or because, rather than seeing him as a stranger, they recognise a certain kinship, which he, by referring to them, recognises too? (And which is confirmed to the audience by the subsequent references to Richard as dog-like by the other characters?) Rather than representing the other side of the human-animal binary, the barking dogs in *Richard III* seem to suggest an interspecies relation that is unclear in its division.

Human-dog relations in Shakespeare have recently been analysed by Bryan Alkemeyer with reference to another early play in the Shakespeare canon, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. According to Alkemeyer, the play’s depiction of the relationship between Crab the dog and Lance his master (con)fuses their species in ways that, I would argue, resemble some of the confusion I am tracing in *Richard III*. Alkemeyer cites, for instance, Lance’s re-enactment of his departure from his family in which he swaps selves with Crab several times: “I am the dog. No, the dog is himself, and I am the dog—Oh, the dog is me, and

I am myself” (2:3:21–22). Significant for my discussion too is Crab’s (in)famous lack of pity, which Alkemeyer reads by the letter, and which I want to return to further on. For now, I wish to underline Alkemeyer’s point that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (also) contains a species reversal by which, as he says, “Shakespeare dislodges conventional understandings of the human” (39).

Richard’s barking dogs do not belong to Lady Anne’s category of compassionate beasts: their behaviour, like Richard’s, is in line with the play’s representations of ferocity and cruelty. However, later in the play, two dog-like humans, or human-like dogs, perform a decided shift from cruelty to compassion. In James Tyrrell’s account of the princes’ murder in the tower, the two murderers, Dighton and Forrest, hired to complete the royal infanticide, are overcome with emotion even as they undertake the act: “Dighton and Forrest, who I did suborn / To do this piece of ruthless butchery, / Albeit they were fleshed villains, bloody dogs, / Melted with tenderness and mild compassion” (4:3:4-7). Is it a sign of their underlying humanity despite their dog-like nature that the murderers should be subject to “tenderness and mild compassion”? Or is it that, being bloody dogs (Tyrrell does not indicate that the dog reference is metaphorical), they are nonetheless capable of compassion, like Lady Anne’s fierce beast? As Laurie Shannon has pointed out, some early modern thinkers berated humans, rather than animals, for behaving cruelly, which would also complicate a straightforward reading of supposed animal-like cruelty in Tyrrell’s account. Referring to writings by, among others, Erasmus and Luther, Shannon notes that “[t]he persistent idea that a tyrant declines from a civil humanity into savage animality contradicts a rival observation about species and violence” (75). The point here is that to some early moderns, humans, despite their supposed rationality, could not be trusted to be kind, not even or especially not, to their own kind. Shannon cites, for example, Luther’s observation of animal compassion in contrast to a human lack of pity: “When a pig is slaughtered or captured and other pigs see this, we observe that the other pigs clamor and grunt as if in compassion [...]. Only man, who is after all rational, does not spring to the aid of his suffering neighbour in time of need and has not pity on him” (qtd. in Shannon 75-76).

Thus, while scholars working on early modern emotion have not paid a great deal of attention to animals, scholars such as Shannon and Fudge, working with the perspectives of historical animal studies and posthumanism, have addressed the complicated question of human-animal cruelty and, by extension, compassion within early modern discursive frameworks. Fudge observes a similar perception in the period to that noted by Shannon. Citing sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, she finds an early modern understanding of cruelty that is inescapably human:

By being cruel, humans destroy other humans, but more significantly in this discourse, they destroy their own humanity and descend to the status of the beast. Paradoxically, this descent is something only humans can achieve. Animals, it would seem, are wild but not cruel; or, if they are depicted as being cruel then that cruelty is in this logic an anthropomorphic, not (to use an anachronistic term) a zoological statement. (*Brutal Reasoning* 68-69)

Shannon and Fudge engage more with the question of cruelty than with that of compassion, but their observations are decidedly helpful in unsettling compassion-centred discourses that privilege the human and in uncovering some of the context for Lady Anne's compassionate beast. An early modern text regularly cited by early modern animal studies scholars—Edward Topsell's bestiary *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* (first published in 1607 and in an extended edition in 1658) offers several, sometimes contradictory, perceptions of animal emotion behaviour. To the many meticulous depictions of the physical characteristics of the animals listed in his bestiary, Topsell adds lengthy anecdotes and historical and literary references to describe the behaviours and dispositions, including emotional dispositions, of his subjects. He draws on humoral vocabulary—a key discourse very familiar indeed to scholars working on emotions in the early modern period—and finds that horses can be melancholy (as well as mad and frantic), elephants can be deeply sorrowful and love-sick—that is, love-sick for humans—while cows show a strong sense of emotional affinity with each other and “are said to loue their fellowes with whom they draw in yoake most tenderly, whom they seeke out with mourning if he be wanting” (80).

Although many of the non-domesticated animals in Topsell's bestiary are predictably fierce, he frequently supplies a counter-narrative. His lions, for example, are both cruel and bloodthirsty, but their cruelty is offset by stories about their high-mindedness and how they deal justly with both humans and animals, correctly measuring out their revenges and not killing unless necessary. They are also highly emotional, especially when mourning the death of their cubs, courageous, companionable (including to humans) and, not least, compassionate. In describing what he calls the admirable disposition of lions, Topsell commends them for their ability to love both animals and humans and, crucially, their honourable sparing of weaker creatures and a compassionate attitude towards human misery:

Their clemencie in that fierce and angry nature is also worthy commendation, and to be wondered at in such beastes, for if one prostrate himselfe vnto them as it were in petition for his life, they often spare except in extremitie of famine; and likewise they seldome destroy women or children [...] *Solinus* affirmeth that many Captiuies hauing bene set at liberty, haue met with Lyons as they

returned home, weake, ragged, sicke, and disarmed, safely without receiuing any harme or violence. (Rr6r)

According to another of Topsell’s anecdotes, lions will even understand human speech when they are entreated to show compassion. He relates the Libyan story of a fugitive woman who is set upon by a group of lions but escapes by using supplicant speech and gestures,

[f]alling down on her knees vnto them, beseeching them to spare her life, telling them that she was a stranger, a captiue, a wanderer, a weake, a leane and lost woman, and therefore not worthy to bee deuoured by such couragious and generous beastes as they: at which words they spared her, which thing she confessed after her safe returne. (Rr6v)

We might thus detect a through-line of shared cultural references between Lady Anne’s compassionate beast and Topsell’s merciful lions, whose nature seems to consist of equal parts fierceness and clemency.

Are Topsell’s animals anthropomorphic? Yes and no. Many of the qualities he attributes to the lion are predictable to a degree that suggests the interference of human imagination, and there is, of course, nothing remotely empirical about his gathering of evidence when it comes to animal emotion. Yet perhaps one of the most striking aspects about Topsell’s text—one that contradicts the impression that the emotional dispositions of his animals are thinly disguised human practices—is the suggestion in his dedication to the dean of Westminster, “the reverend and right worshipfvll Richard Neile”, that humans should look to animals to learn how to practice compassion:

Were not this a good perswasion against murder, to see all beastes so to maintaine their natures, that they kill not their owne kind. Who is so vnnaturall and vnthankfull to his parents, but by reading how the young *Storkes* and *Wood-peckers* do in their parents olde age feed and nourish them, will not repent, amend his folly, and bee more natural? What man is so void of compassion, that hearing the bounty of the *Bone-breaker Birde* to the young *Eagle*, will not become more liberall? (A5r)

Topsell does not supply any specificities regarding the behaviour of the “bone-breaker bird”, or vulture, to young eagles, so the reader must guess what he means, but what matters more is the implied image of that feared and unappreciated scavenger as a surprising embodiment of compassion. In the same vein, Topsell hopes to discourage human cruelty and tyranny with an example from the insect world: “And what King is not inuited to clemency, and dehorted from tyranny, seeing the king of Bees hath a sting, but neuer vseth the same?” (Ibid.).

While Topsell's animal lessons in compassion might serve as a cultural subtext for Lady Anne's compassionate beast, they are firmly contradicted by another Shakespearean animal, the aforementioned Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*—at least according to his master Lance's often-cited description of the dog's pitiless demeanour:

I think Crab my dog be the sourest-natured dog that lives. My mother weeping, my father wailing, my sister crying, our maid howling, our cat wringing her hands, and all our house in a great perplexity, yet did not this cruel hearted cur shed one tear. He is a stone, a very pebble-stone, and has no more pity in him than a dog. (2:3:4-10)

Much of the joy (for the audience) of Lance's lament relies on it being an instance of what happens when 'real' and anthropomorphised dog(s) meet. Bearing in mind that Crab might have had a material existence on the early modern stage undoubtedly adds to the fun. But although Crab deservedly takes center-stage, figuratively, materially, and usually critically, we might also ask: what about the cat? Crab may be incapable of pity, but he is not the only animal mentioned in the account. The "hand-wringing" cat provides something of counter-narrative to Crab. The fact that Lance genders it (her) also confirms its compassionate disposition, given the early modern tendency to understand compassion as a predominantly female emotion in humoral terms.⁷ Lance's cat is of course thoroughly anthropomorphic, which perhaps counts for the fact that it is frequently overshadowed by Crab, but it arguably deserves to belong among the group of cats which has prompted more explicit investigations of the human-animal binary. This group includes Montaigne's cat who, in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, prompts the philosopher to ask the famous question: "when I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?" (505), but also the cat who appears at the centre of a contemporary critical conversation.

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway responds to Derrida's often-cited reaction to being watched by a cat in his bathroom, which appears in the opening sequence of Derrida's 1997 lecture 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)'. According to Haraway, despite his lengthy attention to the cat, Derrida fails what she calls "a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that

⁷ Several early modern treatises on the passions take the view that women's humoral make-up, by being moister than that of men, made them more compassionate, including Thomas Wright: "Women, by nature, are enclined more to mercie and pitie than men, because the tendernesse of their complexion moveth them more to compassion". (40)

morning” (20). Instead, as she argues, Derrida turns his attention to the question of animal suffering, which he posits as the “*first and decisive* question” in the human-animal relation (396). The question of suffering also brings Derrida to the question of human compassion with animals, or rather to the certainty of compassion with animals (because there can be no doubt about their suffering):

[T]he response to the question ‘can they suffer?’ leaves no doubt. [...] No doubt either, then, for the possibility of our giving vent to a surge of compassion, even if it is then misunderstood, repressed, or denied, held in respect. Before the *undeniable* of this response (yes, they suffer, like us who suffer for them and with them), before this response that precedes all other questions, the problematic changes ground and base. (397)

To this Haraway concedes that she “would not for a minute deny the importance of the question of animals’ suffering and the criminal disregard of it throughout human orders,” but she still insists that Derrida has got the decisive question wrong:

The question of suffering led Derrida to the virtue of pity, and that is not a small thing. But how much more promise is in the questions, Can animals play? Or work? And even, can I learn to play with *this* cat? Can I, the philosopher, respond to an invitation or recognize one when it is offered? What if work and play, and not just pity, open up when the possibility of mutual response, without names, is taken seriously as an everyday practice available to philosophy and to science? (22-23)

Derrida’s lecture and Haraway’s response are of course wide-ranging and highly complex in their separate and conjoined ways; my reason for bringing them into the discussion of this article is ‘simply’ the centrality of compassion to the disagreement between them. It is curious that Haraway berates Derrida for *only* getting to the point of pity. My suggestion is that not pausing over the question of how actually to define pity is a missed opportunity for both philosophers. It is perhaps because Haraway leaves Derrida’s unilateral pity unquestioned—a pity that stems from a human response to the animal, but not the other way around—that she finds insufficient promise in his questions. She proposes an alternative set of questions—can animals play or work?—that she finds more promising for the possibility of “mutual response”. But this, I would argue, fails fully to recognize the potential mutuality of compassion. In other words, neither Derrida nor Haraway inverts the perspective to ask not if humans should pity animals but if animals can pity humans.

As I have tried to demonstrate, thinking about animals as compassionate can be a productive route to unsettling ingrained patterns of thought about humans and animals, and the early modern period offers a rich ground for

pursuing this course. I would argue that the early modern texts I have looked at in this article ask questions about compassion that are not part of Haraway's response to Derrida. That is, if animals can pity humans does that not cross a line where the animal's subjectivity potentially even overrides that of the human, so that, in fact, the human turns out to be the object? On a fundamental, even if farcical, level this question is implied by poor Lance in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* with respect to Crab's behaviour. Because if we read Crab's behaviour as characteristic, not of dogs or animals in general, but of his particular dog personality, which I would argue is what Lance is telling us, it is no longer the case that animals are incapable of pity, only that *this* animal, Crab, is pitiless. Which might explain why Lance laments his behaviour instead of taking it as a matter of course. Moreover, Lance clearly craves becoming the object of Crab's pity. Failing that, he takes on, as Brian Alkemeyer also notes, an abject position in relation to Crab, by taking the punishments for Crab's various 'crimes' upon himself.⁸ In other words, Lance suffers for Crab, but not in the sense implied by Derrida. Which is to say, paying close attention to pity—what it is and what it does—is an instance where early modern 'posthumanist' discourse might productively return the gaze on contemporary critical positions.

I have so far looked at two of Shakespeare's early plays, *Richard III* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, but the conjunction of humans, compassion and the nonhuman is a concern of Shakespeare's throughout his career. In fact, Shakespeare's most explicit example of nonhuman compassion engenders a turning point in the plot of *The Tempest*. Describing the afflictions of the shipwrecked party under Prospero's charm, Ariel dwells on old Gonzalo, whose "tears run down his beard like winter's drops / From eaves of reeds" (5:1:16-17), and suggests that if Prospero could see them, his "affections would become tender" (5:1:18-19), to which Prospero replies:

Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL

Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO

And mine shall.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling

Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,

(One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,

Passion as they), be kindlier moved than thou art?

(5:1:16-23)

⁸ As Alkemeyer notes, "Lance regularly claims responsibility for Crab's misdeeds: 'I have sat / in the stocks for puddings he hath stolen, otherwise / he had been executed. I have stood on the pillory for / geese he hath killed, otherwise he had suffered for't (4:4:29-32)'" (39)

Prospero is reminded of his moral obligation towards his own species. The obligation comes, as his response to Ariel indicates, from a sense of kinship sealed by an emotional commonality—Prospero and his fellow humans feel emotion (or passion in early modern terms) in the same way—from which Ariel is apparently excluded. But it is still the nonhuman Ariel who, by deploying humanist rhetorical devices in the vivid depiction of old Gonzalo’s sorrow, re-educates Prospero, which, given classical rhetoric’s stipulation that a speaker must experience the emotion they seek to induce in their audience, begins to contradict that human monopoly. In this sense, the passage, like the exchange between Lady Anne and Richard in *Richard III*, is potentially stranger than it looks. The answer to the question of why Lady Anne would imagine a beast to be capable of compassion is not just that Richard is so exceptionally—or *inhumanly*—cruel that even a beast is more compassionate than he is. Nor is it that Richard’s cruelty makes him stoop to beastly levels. Instead, as we have seen, Lady Anne’s compassionate beast can be read along an early modern line of thought that allows both human and nonhumans to share in compassion as an emotional phenomenon. This also means that compassion discourses which rely on a distinct human-animal binary should be read with care.

Reading the nonhuman in early modern compassion discourse thus encompasses examples of humans learning their compassion lessons from animals to the invention of a nonhuman creature, who, if not directly capable of compassion, is decidedly capable of teaching it to humans. The human/nonhuman binary arguably separates Prospero and Ariel quite unequivocally. There is less species confusion or reversal at play here than in some of the other examples in this article. But while Prospero’s compassion *seems* to be what sets him apart as human, other compassionate discourses in the period do not privilege his species in this way, which makes it more complicated to accept compassion as the dividing factor between him and Ariel. By contrast, we might think about compassion discourse as a means to question and ultimately expand the notion of kinship in this passage. Including posthumanist approaches into historicized accounts of emotion, then, helps to detect alternative accounts to the ones we might take for granted and to accept nonhuman compassion as one of these accounts, strange though it may be.

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