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Chapter 8

Three-Body Problem: Humans, Enhanced or Mutated Bodies, and Technological Bodies as Feminised/Naturalised Others in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

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Abstract

Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) is a postmodern novel that propounds three-fold storylines in four parts with recurring characters and vicious cycles of human destructiveness. Amalgamating the traits of literary genres such as SF, cyberpunk, and historical metafiction, Winterson represents human and nonhuman bodies, specifically in the first and last parts of the novels, shaped by the dominant capitalistic systems that use and abuse technology, biogenetics, and propagate disembodiment in a twisted Cartesian manner. However, the bodies that serve their purpose or have agency are marginalised in these plotlines and pushed out of the centre. This chapter aims to discuss that Winterson's depiction of three types of bodies in this ustopian novel – natural human bodies, enhanced and fixed or mutated human bodies, and technological bodies – critiques the androcentric system's feminisation and naturalisation of bodies to marginalise and instrumentalise them and see them as uncanny and abject in a gendered way, through which the system turns them into disposable bodies. In the light of Donna Haraway's concept of cyborgs and Rosi Braidotti's becoming and nomadic subjects, the chapter discusses that these bodies, through their feminisation and naturalisation, turn into nomadic subjects as well as cyborg bodies, embedding themselves or through the intersectionality of the organic and the technological. Although all the storylines end in failure due to the androcentric exploitation of the planets, feminised bodies that defy the norms form an alternative to human destruction through co-existence and cohabitation, and offer a sense of hope.

Keywords Posthuman Feminism · Cyberfeminism · ustopia · Jeanette Winterson · The Stone Gods

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Introduction

Jeanette Winterson's 2007 novel *The Stone Gods* comprises four parts that recount three separate yet interrelated and cyclical timelines with the reappearance of similar or the same main characters and names, and mutual events that tie these stories together. Although Winterson is not considered a science fiction or cyberpunk author, it can be argued that this postmodern novel is an alternative cyberpunk story with its visions for the future, telling the stories of two different planets and different future timelines that deal with questions concerning androcentric transhumanist ideals, technology as the dominant and dominated force, enhancement of human bodies, exploitation or domination of "organic" and "artificial" bodies.

As Winterson's novel bends and manipulates genres, the title of this chapter manipulates the three-body problem[1] by ripping it apart from its literal meaning to argue that Winterson, in her three plotlines and timelines, represents humans, enhanced or mutated humans, and technological beings as three representations of feminised/naturalised bodies, while also, in line with the definition of the term, shows these three bodies moving, evolving, affecting each other, not through their respective gravity yet through their mutual subjugation by androcentric, transhumanist, capitalistic systems that reemerge in each part of the novel. It can be argued that Winterson delves into the problem of gendered bodies in each scenario; feminised bodies, organic or nonorganic, are seen as enhanceable, consumable and disposable, showing no hope for a change even in a technologically altered future, unless the destructive force of the androcentric order does not give way to alternative possibilities for coexistence. Thus, Winterson's bodies turn into posthuman bodies, to a certain extent Harawayian cyborgs or Braidottian examples of becoming, feminised or naturalised to be manipulated and controlled by the dominant androcentric culture, yet carrying a potential for change and hope.

In this context, the problem does not lie with the idea or fact of being female or being entangled and/or embedded with/in nature and technology, as Donna Haraway, in her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), also argues, it is to do with being feminised in a particular manner with a political/ideological agenda: "To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers … leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex" (Haraway, 1991, p. 166). Thus, the way Winterson chooses to represent the bodies of humans (mostly women) and robots can be seen as a critique of their feminisation and naturalisation for subordination, where our subjects are reduced to objects that can literally be "disassembled, reassembled", and rejected by the dominant system when they are not acquiescent or hospitable as desired. In the same vein, it can be argued that links are created between these bodies, all of which emerge as the body-other of each other:

"the technological body-other has both a metamorphic and a paradigmatic function in representing the human organism, it also fulfils the role of sexual metaphor. The technological or mechanical other is libidinally charged in that it represents a connection, a link or an in-between. Such transition zones are heavily genderized. (Braidotti, 2002, p. 218)"

Following Braidotti's discussion, it is also important to point out that Winterson does not only offer a criticism of the feminisation of the otherised beings, but she also aims to show that they are attributed with specific genders and gender roles and heavily sexualised by and for the male gaze. Following Haraway's and Braidotti's ideas, this chapter aims to discuss, by focusing mostly on the parts "Planet

[1] According to its *Encyclopedia Britannica* definition, "in astronomy" three body problem is "the problem of determining the motion of three celestial bodies moving under no influence other than that of their mutual gravitation. No general solution of this problem (or the more general problem involving more than three bodies) is possible, as the motion of the bodies quickly becomes chaotic" (*Britannica*, 1998). Although not used in its literal meaning, the term is chosen in this context as I see a connection between the problem and the positioning, movement, and interaction of the bodies represented in the novel.

Blue", "Post-3 War", and "Wreck City", that the novel criticises the way androcentric outlook and its use of progress in science and technology lead to the reproduction of binary oppositions through marginalising and feminising otherised human bodies and technological bodies, and pushes them outside of the centre, seeing them as abject, yet also paving the way for them to turn into nomadic subjects and cyborgs that challenge the established categorisations.

Ustopia, Posthuman Feminism, and Cyberfeminism

As Caroline Koegler argues "*The Stone Gods* is an archetypal example of historiographic metafiction and pictures a series of self-similar, repeating storylines in which humans migrate from one planet to another, always triggering ecological disaster and social unrest on a planetary scale" (Koegler, 2020, p. 218). However, it continuously changes genre traits by not adhering to one genre as it ranges between SF, Cyberpunk, historical fiction and rewriting of classical works such as *Robinson Crusoe*, yet also many others that are considered as dystopian literature:

> In *The Stone Gods* Winterson rewrites some of the literary motifs of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), or, more recently, Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (1989), among other sources, thus blending historical discourse and dystopia. (Villegas-López, 2015, p. 27)

The novel's blending of different characteristics of subgenres can be seen as a deliberate choice. Alina Preda argues that Winterson's technique is a form of "ebullition" that "enjoys dynamic connotations of positive outburst or sudden emergence of surprisingly new combinations that push literary works beyond the outer limits of genre delimitation" (Preda, 2019, p. 182). The "ebullition", following Preda's discussion, "also serves to intimate the futility of expecting literary works to fit into neatly defined categories, and to further the idea that embracing difference, boundary crossing and genre transgressions constitutes the only way towards a better understanding and a full appreciation of literature" (Preda, 2019, p. 182). Through "ebullition", Winterson creates a hybrid, alternative version of a tale that can be considered as a posthuman- and cyber-feminist "ustopia" that blends the cyberpunk traits of high-tech utopian/dystopian, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic worlds.

Rather than falling under one literary category, the novel experiments with various subgenre traits as postmodern literary techniques. As Jaak Tomberg discusses "non-sf cyberpunk is a contemporary form of realism that takes the same representational energy that cyberpunk sf used to spend on projecting its extrapolative future worlds, and (inevitably) spends it on the mimetic description of the technologically saturated present" (2020, p. 85). In Winterson's novel, "Planet Blue" carries the elements of SF such as space travel and expeditions to or colonisation of planets. However, through its capitalistic and totalitarian corporational use of technology and genetic enhancement, which further enlarge the gap between the dominant ideologies and the marginalised others, the representation of Orbus, the Tech-City and Wreck-City, and their similarity to our own age, predominantly carries the traits of cyberpunk/non-sf cyberpunk as defined by Tomberg:

> Beyond the immediate reality of 'everyday objects,' more complex social and technological processes that these objects provide cognitive access to include the increasingly speculative and volatile nature of contemporary market capitalism ... thorough advances in genetic engineering and prosthetic supplementations to the body; exhaustive changes in the pop-cultural sphere; and so on. (Tomberg, 2020, p. 85)

Winterson's use of these tropes makes it possible to define the novel as feminist cyberpunk as she is very much concerned about how nature, (non-)human beings, and technology are interlinked and how subjects and identities are created in these visions of the future. As Lisa Yaszek indicates "[w]ith their depictions of environmentally devastated near-futures ruled by global corporations … women have long written stories that anticipate, dramatize, and extend the themes and techniques of cyberpunk fiction" (Yaszek, 2020, p. 32) and female authors "ultimately lean toward emphasizing the link between body and self" (Lavigne, 2013, p. 68). Winterson's novel, as a feminist cyberfiction, raises questions about the self, (dis-)embodiment, and the seemingly perfect order that carries in itself its horrifying other, and embraces the tropes of both utopian and dystopian literature[2] by bringing together repetitive anthropocentric destructiveness and the possibility of hope and change offered by characters that do also defy clearly defined categorizations by bending gender and crossing boundaries. Thus, the novel emerges, as Preda also argues, as a "ustopia" (Preda, 2019, 201). Coined by Margaret Atwood, ustopia offers a combination, an amalgamation of the presumably opposite subgenres:

> Ustopia is a world I made up by combining utopia and dystopia – the imagined perfect society and its opposite – because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other. In addition to being, almost always, a mapped location, Ustopia is also a state of mind, as is every place in literature of whatever kind. (Atwood, 2011)

As ustopia is structured upon the idea that everything contains its opposite, it can be argued that it also calls into question the ideologically constructed dualities. Winterson's novel, considered a postmodern feminist cyberpunk and ustopia, tackles these dualities by deconstructing these traditional categorizations and reconstructing them in such a way that makes it possible for a cyberfeminist or posthuman feminist approach. As Haraway indicates "The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically" (Haraway, 1991, p. 163) and "the actual situation of women is their integration/exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination. … The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (Haraway, 1991, p. 163). Winterson's characters as feminised others, like Haraway's women, are open to exploitation, and as will be discussed in detail, with the changing idea of bodies, they are also similar to cyborgs.

For Haraway "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (1991, p. 149). Thus, the concept of cyborg as "women's experience" becomes a feminist subject of study. Braidotti considers cyberfeminism as "the predecessor of critical posthuman feminism" because "it includes an intimate and productive relationship to the technological universe, which breaks from a tradition of either utopian hope for, or deep suspicion of, technology" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 145) and argues that "[t]he main tenet of posthuman feminism is that the notion of humanism needs to be reviewed and assessed critically but not thrown away entirely" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 17). In a similar vein, Winterson calls notions

[2] Irem Atasoy indicates in "The Concept of Dystopia: Historical Evolution and Contemporary Relevance," that utopian/dystopian narratives are self-reflective: "Utopian and dystopian narratives function as cultural artifacts that reflect collective aspirations, hopes and fears regarding future developments of humanity" (see, 2024a, p. 13). Thus, anthropocentric in essence, they can offer a criticism of the idea of human progress and achievements. On another note, Habib Tekin argues that the Adornian concept of Utopia is not an end that is aimed to be reached but a never-ending process of self-critical progress: "In Adorno's philosophy, utopia is not understood as a final state that is once attained and then considered as such, but rather as a continuous and ongoing process of critical reflection and constant improvement. In his philosophical framework, 'being' is described as a fleeting and transitory experience, revealed in moments of pure existence, unbound by further determinations or fulfillments" (see, 2024, p. 88).

attached to humanism into question by delving into the realistic as well as futuristic possible outcomes of exclusionary androcentricism in her posthuman feminist and cyberfeminist criticism of the system.

Unfixed and Unenhanced Bodies

The first part and the story in *The Stone Gods*, "Planet Blue", introduces the reader to Orbus, which, due to transhumanist ideals and progress in science and technology, gives the reader many different body representations. Humans, or the organic bodies of this plotline, do live in a severely evolved and technological realm where organic ties are nearly completely reduced to a form of counter-existence. Humans are mostly enhanced and fixed in terms of age and appearance in a way that stops ageing or erases the concept of ugliness, while also giving rise to the grotesque bodies as fetishised objects. Organic bodies live together with robots that dominate everyday life, Bots working as domestic or state workers, and Robo sapiens[3], the new species that combine machine, AI, and human traits[4]. In this future of Orbus, a perverse androcentric outlook is dominant and empowered by a technology-infused capitalistic system, and unfixed bodies, fixed and enhanced bodies of women, children fixed at a young age, and human beings from the Caliphate or the SinoMosco Pact turn into feminised others and seen as consumable others.

Considering organic bodies as feminised ones, those who reject fixing and enhancement and those who choose to go through with it can be discussed as having different positions, yet they are both seen as exploitable objects rather than subjects. Billie Crusoe, who works at the Enhancement Services, is one of the few humans who rejects being fixed; her companion, Rufus, is most probably one of the last organic dogs, as robot pets have taken over companion species; and her farmhouse, where she continues living in a traditional manner, is also the last of its kind. Due to her choices, in a world where humans and specifically women are not given many choices under the guise of enhancement, she turns into a marginalised other that also threatens and terrorises this androcentric capitalistic system that abuses science and technology to manipulate and control people by enhancing them yet leaving them ignorant by replacing reading and writing with visuals, eventually leading to "the devolution (as opposed to an evolution) of mankind" (Preda, 2018, p. 26).

Billie's unfixed body, her life choices as well as her use of pen and paper in a completely changed civilisation are ways of crossing the boundaries set by the system, which in a twisted way promotes Cartesian duality, aiming to diminish the human mind while enhancing the body. While the fixed and enhanced ones abide by the system, they are also caught up in the images that manipulate them into believing in the hypocritical human progress and achievements. Billie, on the other hand, questions this hypocrisy by drawing attention to the human impact on the planet in her inner monologues or dialogues with Manfred, her boss. Although it can be clearly seen that there is a strong correlation between a body that is kept natural and the mind's capacity, these very traits deem Billie a threat to the Central Power. When Billie sees an old woman on the street, she experiences an encounter with the uncanny or abject other:

[3]The first usage of term "Robo sapiens" dates back to 2000, when Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluzio used it in their book *Robo sapiens: evolution of a new species*, in which they define Robo Sapiens as "[a] hybrid species of human and robot with intelligence vastly superior to that of purely biological mankind; will begin to emerge in the twenty-first century" (2000, p. 235).

[4]Although Winterson gives Robo sapiens human traits as well as human physical appearance in a highly technological body with AI, it is necessary to elucidate that Spike is not depicted literally as a cyborg, yet in this chapter Spike is discussed as a Harawayian cyborg due to the fact that her physical appearance, mental and limbic capacity for evolution and her entanglement with organic beings/life turn her into a hybridized, inbetween species as well as a feminized other.

> There was a woman in front of me, fumbling with her mask, coughing. I went to help her, and she grabbed my hand, 'Getting old,' she said, and I wondered if I had misheard because we don't use those words any more. ...
>
> Her eyes were bright and glittering, but her face was lined, worn, weathered, battered, purple-veined and liverspotted, with a slot for a mouth, garishly coated with red lipstick.
>
> I recoiled. I had never seen a living person look like this. ... in front of me, now, was a thing with skin like a lizard's, ... 'I am what you will become,' she said... (Winterson, 2007, pp. 37-38)

The way she focuses on her "lizard" like skin, the anger and fear the old woman causes in Billy underline the uncanniness of the encounter. As a matter of fact, Billie recognises her own self in the old woman who has similarly rejected being fixed and taken a political stance in the past. Now she prophesies what will become of Billie, as Annalisa Volpone inspiringly suggests, "[t]he glittering, mesmerizing, eyes of the woman, are evocative of those of the Coleridgean Ancient Mariner," she grabs Billie's hand to tell a story that will haunt her, thus "[e]ven her function seems to be analogous to that of the Mariner. Like him, she is the memory of the world, of the false and suicidal steps humans have taken so far" (Volpone, 2023, p. 115). As someone who knows the past or maybe who will be a reminder of the past, Billie also becomes an abjected body as she is sent to Planet Blue as the "others":

> Spike leaned forward, took my hands, and said, 'Billie, Handsome has orders to leave you behind on Planet Blue with the others.'
>
> 'What others?'
>
> 'There's a breeding colony. Class A political prisoners... they can breed.'
>
> 'No one can breed any more,' I said. 'It's womb-free.'
>
> 'Unless you have refused intervention.'
>
> (Winterson, 2007, pp. 59-60)

Although the word "others" is used to refer to the people who are placed on a space colony, it also underlines the fact that as unfixed and unenhanced ones, they are the others of the dominant system who rejected intervention and challenged the system. In a future where this refusal means ageing naturally as well as having wombs therefore natural reproduction abilities, the natural functions and processes of the organic bodies and their ideas are seen as a threat to the system and these bodies are marginalised and feminised in a way that they are being sent to a space colony to work and breed to build the infrastructure of the new colony to prepare it for an elect group of people who will migrate to Planet Blue. Thus, they are not only pushed out of the boundaries of their dwelling, turning into nomadic subjects, but they are also exploited in a way that the dominant power excuses as a form of punishment as they are seen as terrorists.

Billie, becoming one of these "other" people, finds herself on Handsome's spaceship to be taken to the colony and left with the others. The journey itself, as happens with all journeys in literature, changes our protagonist; it comes as an experience of crossing the boundaries not only of Orbus but also her own established ideas concerning Robo sapiens, Spike in particular, which pushes Billie to question her beliefs and fixed ideas concerning the meaning of being human or machine. She eventually accepts the similarities between her body and that of Spike as well as the Robo sapiens' capacity for evolution and gaining agency and subjectivity. This interaction introduces the first and only mutual and

consensual love and sexual relationship in the story as well as an inter-species love, hence a forbidden one. Through the use of her body and mind, thus as an embodied subject, Billie ends her story still as a marginalised other that defies rules. As Abigail Rine argues,

> ... she refuses to be 'Fixed', but continues to age naturally; she breaks the only sexual taboo still existing on Orbus – inter-species sex – by falling in love with the female Robo sapiens, Spike, and she seeks out relational intimacy rather than mere sexual pleasure. Queerness, for Winterson, is not simply non-heterosexuality, but that which intentionally challenges and exceeds the constraints of the normal. (Abigail Rine, 2011, p. 77)

The bodies represented in the "Post-3 War" and "Wreck City" parts of the novel introduce a different reality about human or organic bodies in general. Set in a post-Third World War near-future, Tech City emerges as a seemingly perfect and sterile place that exists in a vacuum. However, Wreck City and Red Zone were created by or came into being through the opposition they pose to the seemingly progressive, peaceful, and perfect order of Tech-City.

Billie, in these parts are depicted as a scientist living in Tech City and working for MORE Futures, she works on the first Robo sapiens, Spike. The conflict between the Central Power, SinoMosco and the Eastern Caliphate in Orbus, turns into a postwar tension aimed to be controlled through the suppression or elimination of emotionalism through the use of Robo sapiens by MORE, a global company that is now the ruler of the planet. Billie's story in this part gravitates towards a search for the lost mother as she is denied by her mother as a baby, thus, even before passing the threshold that separates Tech City from Wreck City, Billie appears as a nomadic subject, yearning for her roots and ties. As a scientist, she also reminds Dr Frankenstein, working on Spike, who might be seen as Frankenstein's monster, designed only as a head; however, as Spike's story will be different from the monster's, Billie also emerges as a mother figure, that aims to teach Spike subjects beyond the curriculum of MORE Futures. Thus, in a way, femininity, motherhood and ideas concerning caring and transferring knowledge are somehow associated with women, while men are seen as the epitome of cold, hard science who follow textbooks and manuals rather than emotions, senses, and literature. During an interview, a MORE Futures representative refers to Spike as a baby that should be "taken for walks" (Winterson, 2007, p. 143), thus turning Billie, who literally takes her out for walks, into a mother figure, a gendered role that is associated with women. Yet, while the dominant system forces these roles unto women to marginalise them through naturalisation, this unique relationship creates a harmonious alternative.

Billie, apparently feeling rootless in Tech City due to her search for roots, as well as the discrepancy between her and the seemingly sterile atmosphere of the labs, steps out of the boundaries of Tech City with Spike, and steps into the realm of Wreck City, which poses the exact opposite of Tech City. However, in this part of the country, Billie and Spike, who tries to learn and evaluate every bit of information, meet a life form that looks more rhizomic, as it brings together Dinosaur friendly, Lesbian Vegan Chick-Xs like Alaska and Nebraska, as well as the Holy Sisters of the Shining Mercy like Sister Mary McMurphy (Pink/McMurphy of the first part), and other organic bodies, such as a child and a dog, cats and squirrels and monkeys:

> Dogs and cats ran up and down, squirrels and monkeys swung from balcony to balcony. Chickens scratched in the dirt, and a donkey harnessed to a cart was waiting patiently to pull a fridge. A fat woman; in front of one of the houses, was cooking over a tin barrel, flames escaping from under the pan. The child next to her was wrestling with a baby leopard. (Winterson, 2007, p. 158)

Contrary to the first part of the novel, and most probably in contrast to the Tech City, Wreck City is the habitat of a variety of organic beings who do not conform to the body/beauty ideals of the dominant system. Rather than a sterile life that is homogeneous, what Wreck City offers is a heterogeneous one that is composed of beings that are either pushed beyond the boundaries of Tech City and/or those who prefer staying here rather than being subordinated by the system: "Friday pointed to the monkeys. 'They came from the Zoo – after the bombing. There were animals all over the place. Some were shot, some escaped. The ones who escaped came here, like everything else that didn't want to go back into a cage'" (Winterson, 2017, p. 159). Thus, while "wild" animals that were kept in cages in the Zoo choose to escape into Wreck City and No Zone, we also see a "fat woman" cooking while a child plays with a baby leopard. All of which prove the opposite of the standards expected or imposed on beings in Tech City. Thus, they live in the margins and are seen as a threat to the dominant order and face death, although they offer a solution to the recurring human destruction: co-existence.

Enhanced or Mutated Bodies

In terms of the representation of feminised bodies of organic beings, Winterson also shows how enhanced or mutated bodies, respectively, seen in the first and last parts of the novel, are marginalised, yet in completely different ways. "Planet Blue"s female bodies – excluding a few examples such as Billie or the old lady – are the ones that have gone through fixation and enhancement procedures. Ageing in Orbus is a forgotten concept, as most people are fixed at a certain age via the use of genetic enhancement. Although this transhumanist achievement looks like a step towards immortality and perfection that is made possible through technological advancement in a progressive society that seemingly offers choices to its members, the elimination of ageing and ugliness comes not only as a form of defying the limitations of the organic body, but it is also an ideologically constructed myth forced by an authoritarian regime, mostly on its female members. As İrem Atasoy argues in "Forever Young: A Multimodal Approach to the Dystopian Portrayal of Eternal Youth in *Paradise*," the connotations of youth or old age are socially determined and the ability to stop ageing is a form of mastery over (human) nature that is supposedly a utopian achievement:

> The social construction of age signifies a shift where the body transcends the individual and becomes a concept shaped by societal dictates. It is particularly relevant in hypothetical societies where humans exert absolute control over themselves and their environment. Nevertheless, such a scenario is only achievable within a totalitarian and dystopian framework, which is often disguised by utopian promises of a perfect life. (Atasoy, 2024b, p. 272)

The procedure of stopping the ageing process is named fixing, and the word is used with its many connotations. It not only carries the meaning of stabilising but also modifying and more importantly repairing, underlining the fact that the human body's natural processes are considered as a defect. As Billie recounts, while a group of them never age and always look beautiful in a similar, homogenised way, as a majority of people go through the same processes, this similarity leads to banality, and thus, responded by women with an attempt to get even younger, looking more like little girls, with further enhancement operations to look more like celebrities who have themselves fixed at the age of 12 or less.

The idea of staying young and beautiful in a particular way is dominantly something that affects mostly women as the dominant system is still based on an androcentric one that glorifies the male gaze and desire. Thus, there is a huge difference between the idealised body for women and men. Mrs Mary McMurphy, or as Billie refers to her Pink McMurphy, had herself fixed at a young age yet she wants to be enhanced and look like Little Señorita as her husband is obsessed with this celebrity, "a

twelve-year-old pop star who has Fixed her-self rather than lose her fame. She sees no point in growing up..." (Winterson, 2007, p. 16). Although men are also fixed and, in a way, forced to look in a particular way as women do, the age span they fix themselves is not as young as women's. While they are valorised when they are fixed, women are pushed to further enchantments to remain in the system:

> ...there are no women who Fix past thirty. 'The DNA Dynasty', they called us, when the first generation of humans had successful recoding. Age is information failure. ... For centuries we couldn't fix that - and now we can. Science can't fix everything, though - women feel they have to look youthful, men less so, and the lifestyle programmes are full of the appeal of the older man... (Winterson, 2007, p. 9)

While most women, like Pink McMurphy, continue enhancing themselves to attract male attention, others choose to completely change the anatomy of their bodies for similar male perverse fantasies; as Billie also indicates, "we're all perverts now" (Winterson, 2007, p. 19) as these fantasies range from children to genetically and anatomically altered bodies. Women, the fixed and enhanced ones, are no longer able to reproduce or needed for reproduction as it is undesirable, yet this change not only is another intervention with the nature of the organic body – so not actually leaving it to choice, it also does not help with their liberation yet further marginalises them as they are no longer seen as indispensable. The others are also favoured because hey offer drastically altered bodies that are based on the removal of body parts or chemical and genetical changes made to the body. Thus, "being enhanced" is ironical in a way that it actually diminishes and turns these bodies into absent referents (Adams, 2025, p. 23), feminised and naturalised beings, they are used for sex, they are instrumentalised and backgrounded (Plumwood, 2002, p. 17) and actually are in the margins, though it helps, especially women and children, to survive in this androcentric system:

> Translucents are see-through people. When you fuck them you can watch yourself doing it. It's pornography for introverts ...
>
> All women are tight as clams below and inflated like lifebuoys above. ... So, sexy sex is now about freaks and children. If you want to work in the sex industry, you get yourself cosmetically altered in shape and size. Giantesses are back in business. Grotesques earn good money. Kids under ten are known as veal in the trade. ...
>
> an enormous woman with one leg, hopping along on a diamond-studded crutch. I am on a level with her impressive breasts — more so, because where I would normally expect to find a nipple, I find a mouth. Her breasts are smiling, and so is she. ...
>
> '... Come to the Fun Room. I can take four men at a time — front, rear, here and here.' She pats her accommodating breastmouths, or is it mouth-breasts?
>
> She puts her crutch down and swings off. The one leg is for easier access.
>
> (Winterson, 2007, pp. 19-20)

The way humans are engineered to satisfy male fantasies leads to the commodification of the body in unalterable ways. As Abigail Rine also argues, "on Orbus, women's bodies are changed to accommodate men's desires and needs" (Abigail Rine, 2011, p. 76). This desire to accommodate male desire is related to the male gaze, and as Haraway argues "[t]he eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity – honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy – to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power" (Haraway, 1991, p. 188). Inevitably, the alterations of the body, which can be seen as a form of perverse "Frankensteinian fantasy" achieved through "the proliferation of transplants and implants,

in the 'spare-part' surgery or prosthetic body-technologies" (Braidotti, 2001, p. 223), are made to satisfy the male gaze and thus reclaim its supremacy.

However, when bodies are in question, the marginalisation is not limited to the women of the Central Power. Children from the Eastern Caliphate are referred to as veal and used as a commodity in the Central Power's Pecadillo, a perverts' bar which literally means a little mistake or sin, therefore describes and evades the perversity as a tiny mistake. Their so-called democracy that surpasses the otherised Caliphate does not commodify its own children, yet colonises the bodies of the Caliphate children by commodifying and exploiting them. This happens to such an extent that they are referred to as veal, as Carol J. Adams (2025) also argues in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that they turn into absent referents, as their bodies are referred to as a piece of meat, which is a questioned and criticised idea in itself:

> Today at the Peccadillo it's a Veal Special so I'm not surprised to see a blond-haired guy, who looks like a golden retriever, heading for the Jacuzzi with a ten-year-old boy on his shoulders and a ten-year-old girl in his arms. Both of them are Caliphate kids. We buy them. We wouldn't do it to kids born in the Central Power because (a) it's illegal and (b) we're civilized. (Winterson, 2007, p. 19)

The dehumanising process and the ties created between nonhuman animals and human animals' mutual degradation empty them of their real meaning and enable the dominant power to refer to them as a piece of meat and as "vagina" due to the slang meaning of the veal, thus turning them into feminised bodies. The same can be argued for queer bodies, although in the Central Power "there is no queerness in the sense of tabooed, perverse, non-reproductive sexuality" (Rine, 2011, p. 76), the way queerness is almost always referred to in relation to toy boys, or Pecadillo in the Central Power, prove that queer bodies are also feminised and exploited, as a genuine love and understanding is not existent between same sex or opposite sex couples until Billie and Spike form an interspecies and same sex sincere bond with each other.

While the enhanced and fixed bodies of Orbus are actually turned into exploitable others, the mutated bodies of "Wreck City" are the abject Other. Wreck City borders or merges with No Zone, the Red Zone, and the Dead Forest, a radioactive forest that houses mutant bodies of organic beings that are affected by the nuclear Post-3 War. The forest is "radioactive" (Winterson, 2017, p. 159) and the living beings in the forest, including human beings, are mutated in such a way that Billie's encounter with them reminds the reader of Billie's reaction to the old lady in "Planet Blue". While that encounter was more of an uncanny one in nature, with the mutants it is more like an encounter with the abject. As Kristeva argues "[e]ssentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar" (1982, p. 5). Thus, this uncanny and more abject encounter shows the mutant bodies as beings pushed out of Tech City as abject. Seeing the mutated bodies, in a way, replicates Billy's encounters with different people in "Planet Blue", while the perpetrator or the Otherising power is the same androcentric power, the marginalisation works in a different manner:

> Coming in on all fours, coming in on crutches made from rotten forest wood, coming in ragged, torn, ripped, open-wounded, ulcerated, bleeding, toothless, blind, speechless, stunted, mutant, alive — the definition of human. … They lived in the Dead Forest. They were the bomb damage, the enemy collateral, the ground-kill, bloodpoisoned, lung-punctured, lymph-swollen, skin like dirty tissue paper, yellow eyes, weal-bodied, frog-mottled, pustules oozing thick stuff, mucus faces, bald, scarred, scared, alive,

> human. They bred, crawled out their term, curled up like ferns, died where they lay, on radioactive soil. ... A woman, breasts open, the nipples eaten by cancer, the soft inside exposed, raw pink. Her eyes bright blue from a better time. There were men, skin so burned that the muscles underneath were on show like an anatomy textbook: deltoid, rhomboid, trape-zius, veins leaking like a crucifixion. (Winterson, 2007, pp. 195-196)

The woman with cancerous breasts and blue eyes is a distorted and twisted mirror image of the "enhanced" one-legged giantess as well as the old lady who grabs Billie's arm. This detailed description parallels the enhanced bodies of Orbus yet tells a completely different story by showing that there are many different ways of marginalising bodies. In "Wreck City" it turns into the naturalisation of these bodies as they are pushed to the radioactive forest, thus the nuclear catastrophe leads to a devolution, from which Tech City separates itself:

> Nuclear radiation, as well as a range of contaminations that are viral in structure and environmental in their expressions, cause human evolution to regress. The human organism implodes under the strain, exposing the vulnerability of the species. An explosive link is thus established between the human, technology, the natural environment and the evolutionary traits of humanity, enhanced and challenged by the new technologies. (Braidotti, 2002, p. 221)

Thus, the forest also serves as the suppressed memories or the subconscious of Tech City's civilization. The Dead Forest and its inhabitants pose both the history that they want to bury and their monstrous others that reflect the species' "vulnerability", and to escape the encounter, they are naturalised in a way that pushes them to the margins and out of sight. However, as happens with the return of the repressed, these marginalised beings, the mutants are the ones who come to fight against Tech City's Peace Force, the "well-armed humanoid" soldiers, with the Wreckers, resonating with what Kristeva indicates considering the abject:

> A certain 'ego' that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2)

Although, Wreckers and mutants unite and remind the possibility of coexisting in a harmonious way and fighting back seems to be the only solution for them, as they are seen as a threat and attacked by Tech City, Billie draws attention to the problem that comes with violence, which leads to vicious circles of human destruction. Violence leads to the reconstruction of these systems that are based on binary oppositions, thus, redefining and recreating marginalised and exploited or disposable bodies.

Feminised Technological Bodies: Bots and Robo sapiens

Winterson's Techno bodies, robots or the more evolved Robo sapiens provide fertile ground to scrutinise the feminisation and naturalisation of technological others who are positioned in a deliberate hierarchy in three different parts of the novel. While in "Planet Blue", the Central Power's technologically advanced life is regulated by Bots such as "LoBots" and "BeatBots", what is mutual in this part and the last two parts is the existence of Robo sapiens, who are designed in human shape, yet smarter than human beings and very few in number as they are too expensive to produce.

Bots replace nearly every job in the realm of the Central Power, from traffic polices to domestic helpers, human beings are replaced by these bots who are referred to as tin boxes by Billie. These

technological bodies are not created in the image of humans, yet they replace humans and even companion species such as dogs. Billie's encounters with these bots also create tension and frustration as they are depicted not only as simplistic machines but also as machines that do not have sympathy or understanding as they do their assigned jobs as automatons. This kind of a replacement of the work force will eventually lead to the displacement of groups that are already marginalised and lead to the further marginalisation of these people who are mostly coming from racially and sexually otherised groups. Yet another problem is the fact that a similar hierarchy is also established between the technological bodies. These bots are considered inferior to Robo sapiens and mostly work in jobs that are seen as mechanical and inferior; thus, they are also exploited in an androcentric system that sees technology as its new slave.

Although, Robo sapiens are superior robots, they are also designed for the purposes of serving humanity. Even Billie's reaction to Robo sapiens, to put it correctly, Spike, is ambivalent. Robo sapiens are created in the image of humans, they look like humans' technological body others with an uncanny similarity as they also have the ability to evolve:

> Robo sapiens.
>
> As far away from a BeatBot as Neanderthal Man is from us.
>
> ...
>
> Meanwhile, the Robo sapiens is evolving.
>
> The first artificial creature that looks and acts human, and that can evolve like a human — within limits, of course. (Winterson, 2007, p. 14)

With these lines, Billie not only positions bots as Neanderthals, so as "primitive" species, she also draws the connections and similarities between humans and Robo sapiens, which also intrinsically are proofs of the impossibility of not being human-centred, if humans continue defining other species based on their relations or similarities to the human (Plumwood, 2002, p. 129). Billie also sees Robo sapiens as neural and not limbic, thus mechanical and incapable of emotions until her interplanetary spaceflight with Spike, although she is amazed by their capacity:

> They remember everything—faces, information, numbers, conversation — and they can make connections. These are robots who join the dots. Ask them for advice, and they will give it to you: impartial advice based on everything that can be known about the situation. (Winterson, 2007, p. 14-15)

Robo sapiens are both robot-like and human-like, yet they are not humans or bots. However, with their image and mind that surpasses human capacity, they are better than humans. As Braidotti discusses, "the robot is actually better than the human; the copy is superior to the original. This superiority is defined not only in aesthetic but also in moral terms. The machine-like body-double has been perfected: it is the artifice elevated to the highest possible degree of sophistication" (Braidotti, 2002, pp. 219). These anthropomorphic machines, in this context Spike, are engineered in such a way that they surpass human beauty and understanding. While, specifically in Spike's case, the capacity of her mind is superior to that of men, which is the destined aim of her creation, her face and body are designed deliberately for the male gaze, as Braidotti argues, "this technophilic anthropomorphism has two side-effects: the eroticization of the technological other as a sexual surrogate and the Oedipalization of the human-machine interaction" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 215). The aim of creating Spike is to use her for intergalactic expeditions. However, she is not created as an AI without a body or with purposes that only highlight the mind's capacity but created as a female body, and as an eroticized one for that matter,

very beautiful and attractive in a way that amazes Billy, turning this encounter into an uncanny one as Billy sees something very familiar yet better in Spike in terms of mind and body: "Spike, you're a robot, but why are you such a drop-dead gorgeous robot? I mean, is it necessary to be the most sophisticated machine ever built and to look like a movie star?" (Winterson, 2007, p. 28). However, this choice of a "gorgeous body" is more to do with satisfying the male gaze and fantasies:

> 'They thought I would be good for the boys on the mission.'
>
> I am pondering the implications of this. Like a wartime pin-up? Like a live anti-depressant? Like truth is beauty, beauty truth? 'How good? I mean, I'm assuming you're not talking sexual services here.'
>
> 'What else is there to do in space for three years?'
>
> 'But inter-species sex is illegal.'
>
> 'Not on another planet it isn't. Not in space it isn't.'
>
> 'But you were also the most advanced member of the crew.'
>
> 'I'm still a woman.'
>
> ...
>
> 'So you had sex with spacemen for three years?'
>
> 'Yes. I used up three silicon-lined vaginas.' (Winterson, 2007, p. 28)

As Braidotti argues, "the female features of the robot: it is the other, like woman and nature, firmly under male control and fully subjected to male desire. As virgin-mother or prostitute-vamp, the robot recycles basic male fantasies about woman" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 219). Thus, Spike as a RoboSapiens, a technological body in human shape, is doubly feminised and naturalised as she is designed in a very particular manner to serve humanity, and although she is the "most advanced" member of the crew, she is still seen as men's inferior as a female and a robot, and her exploitation and the use of her body for the sexual needs of the spacemen are normalised.

Another important point is the way Handsome, the captain of the ship, who supposedly fell in love with Spike during their expeditions and saved her from disassembly by requesting her for the trip to Planet Blue – as well as a piece of land – as his prize, calls Spike "My new-found land" (Winterson, 2007, p. 66), borrowing a line from John Donne's "To His Mistress Going to Bed".[5] Spike thinks that it causes a system failure as she cannot process poetry, an instance that makes her realise the shortcomings of her understanding that she will eventually overcome. Yet, the very same reference may also reveal the problem of how, from an ecofeminist perspective, a bond between nature and the female body, and feminised and naturalised mechanic body in this context, is created and paves the way to a justification of the domination and exploitation of all parties included. As Donne's poem also naturalises the female body by referring to it as a piece of land, a land that was being exploited and colonised by the dominant power. Billie, on the other hand, refers to her in a matter-of-fact way:

> My lover is made of a meta-material, a polymer tough as metal, but pliable and flexible and capable of heating and cooling, just like human skin. She has an articulated

[5] "...O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd,
My Myne of precious stones: My Emperie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be..." (Donne, 1669/2001, p. 121)

> titanium skeleton and a fibre-optic neural highway. She has no limbic system because she is not designed to feel emotion. She has no blood.
> She can't give birth.
> Her hair and nails don't grow.
> She doesn't eat or drink.
> She is solar-powered.
> She has learned how to cry. (Winterson, 2007, pp. 67-68)

During their journey towards and while they are on Planet Blue, the relationship between Billie and Spike also evolves into one that forms a real love and mutual understanding that offers an alternative to the possessive or exploitative ones formed between Spike and other human beings.

Near the end of this part, Handsome's plan to trigger an asteroid crash to indirectly cause the extinction of dinosaurs goes completely wrong and quickly sets off an ice age by leaving Planet Blue in complete darkness. Thus, while the story shows the human exploitation and destruction of the new planet, it also underlines how, in times of emergency, who is left behind as a proof of the intrinsic values and hierarchiess in society. It is actually Spike who proposes that the others should leave, and she should stay behind to save them energy and to be able to send help signals for them to Orbus. Although Handsome is forced to leave without her, we still see that the technological other, created in the image of woman and for man, sacrifices herself and stays behind. It is only at the last moment that Billie decides to stay with her, and to preserve energy, Spike begins to disassemble her body piece by piece, as she is no longer able to recharge herself through solar power. As if to draw attention to the centuries-long Cartesian duality, Spike is only a talking head at the end of the story. As Braidotti argues, our technological others are bodies with detachable parts and somewhat monstrously uncanny compared to the human idea and aim of disembodiment:

> Like the Frankensteinian body-double, the automaton is a mixture of detachable parts and organs, a collage or montage of pieces. As such it is deceptively functional: the product of the imagination as much as of reason, the automaton is marked by ambiguity and polyvalence. It appears to go as far as humans in its imitation of living matter, and yet it is only a rationalistic scheme, closed upon itself and basically useless. It is linked to the monstrous through the mixture of fascination and horror which it provokes by being such a liminal borderline figure. (Braidotti, 2002, p. 216)

Thus, Spike also emerges as a "Frankensteinian body double" through her bodily and non-bodily, organic and inorganic existence that makes her a cyborg. She is created to be functional in many forms, yet as she loses energy that cannot be replaced and starts losing body parts, she begins to lose functionality as well. Interestingly enough, she, like human beings, needs sunlight to survive and her disembodiment, although her body parts seem to lack functionality, turns Spike's feminised body into a discarded body with spare parts that consumes itself.

As if to take up the subject from where it ended in the first part, the new character, Spike, in the last two parts, is depicted and exists only as a talking head, who is, again, impossibly beautiful, "[s]he looks amazing — clear skin, green eyes, dark hair. She has no body because she won't need one. She is a perfect head on a titanium plate. She's like a prophet, she's like a thing out of Dante, she's Oz, she's Medusa, she's Winnie, she's God" (Winterson, 2007, p. 132). On the one hand, Billie depicts her as a being that is a product of imagination, a literary or legendary being. Yet, on the other hand, these references also reveal another fact about her existence: she is like the literary works and characters mentioned here, either not human and/or marginalised, although she is seen as a very powerful and precious creation. Specifically, the parallelism between her and Medusa is significant as Medusa is

depicted in cultural and artistic works as a severed head that still poses a threat to men, although she herself was the victim of patriarchal mentality. Thus, Spike, as a Medusa head, raises similar ideas about her existence and her technological gaze. As the technological and uncanny body [head] other, she is disembodied and created to be exploited by and is also seen as a threat by men or patriarchal mentality, which suffers from technophilia/phobia, both needing and fearing the intervention of robots, thus replicating the exploitation of and the fear from the female body. Thus, she is feminised and naturalised to serve hu/man civilization and programmed to say, "I am in the service of humankind" (Winterson, 2007, p. 145).

Another problem is that she is programmed by men to "not to overmasculinize data" as "that has been a big mistake in the past. And detail matters — even the tiniest detail can influence a Decision" (Winterson, 2007, p. 145). Thus, she asks Billie the colour of her lipstick, revealing a masculine ideology that is implemented in her as paying attention to little details, and in this context, lipstick colours is seen as the opposite of overmasculinisation of data, which is a form of further marginalising women and pushing emotions and details to feminised margins by reflecting them as strictly female traits. Spike in "Post-3 War" is also reduced to gender roles and archetypes that are defined for women. Men refer to her as a baby as she needs assistance, while her need for sleep and not needing food to survive are compared to super models (Winterson, 2007, p. 143). Thus, in a sense, she is denied free will or agency as well as seen as men's inferior, yet again, eroticised as she is attributed with female qualities.

However, as mentioned above, Billie, similar to Dr Frankenstein, is a scientist that works upon Spike, yet she is more like a mother figure that feeds her mind, contrary to the assigned reading given by male scientists, with literary works and long conversations. So, Spike, as a talking head, not only emerges as a programmable head but also forms a unique relationship with Billie through which she reveals her ability to evolve and feel as well as of making choices. Although it can be argued that with no roots, no background, and no body or limbic pathway, Spike is also a nomadic subject in "Post-3 War", as it happens with Billie, this becomes more obvious in "Wreck City", as Spike somehow wanders off from Spike to experience more with Alaska and Nebraska, and she "disables *her* Mainframe connection"[6] and has "chosen to live as an outlaw" (Winterson, 2007, p. 176). Thus, while she cuts her ties with MORE and Tech City and becomes rootless, she is also aware that now she is completely an Other because she no longer serves the androcentric system. Her ability to make a choice for herself proves that she is not just a programmed technological body other as masculinised science aims her to be. As an outlaw, the first thing she does is "performing cunnilingus on Nebraska" (Winterson, 2007, p. 175), opening herself to new experiences to learn more from her environment. Thus, her choice to live in this manner, going against the expectations of the dominant system that created her circuited head, makes her a cyborg, which also means being doubly marginalised and disposable.

What is more, Spike's journey and encounters in the Wreck City and her relationship with Billie, with whom they form an entangled existence, as Billie carries Spike around with her, help her evolve in a way that eludes the limitations of the nonexistence of a limbic pathway. She begins to feel emotions such as being sad or missing someone, and together they evolve into beings that can cohabit and coexist, crossing the boundaries of oppositions and restrictions created by the dominant system. However, although Winterson underlines the hope for an alternative future where species can peacefully and harmoniously exist together, due to the repetitive nature of human destruction, the last part ends with the failure of this alternative, possibly with the death of Billie and Spike staying behind in a chaotic and unpredictable Wreck City.

[6] My italics.

Conclusion

Through the depictions of Billie, Spike and other characters in this three-fold story, Winterson, in an alternative narrative technique, offers a view into the never-ending process of human exploitation of the planet as well as marginalised others, specifically women and gendered bodies. Thus, she also draws a connection between the feminisation of nature and the naturalisation of feminised bodies. As Stacy Alaimo argues, "Feminism has long struggled with the historically tenacious entanglements of 'woman' and 'nature.' Mother earth, earth mothers, natural women, wild women, fertile fields, barren grounds, virgin lands, raped earths" (2000, p. 2). In her "futuristic" and interplanetary stories of different possibilities, Winterson tackles these entanglements through examples of embeddedness, embodiment and intersectionality between the organic and the technological, and different species.

Even though Billie is a recurrent character that symbolises the organic and natural female human body, with her marginalised state in each part, as well as her entanglement with Spike, she turns into a cyborg in the Harawayian sense. Spike as a Robo sapien, with her robo-human body or head, with the ability to evolve and claim agency, is a cyborg that represents embeddedness and heavily gendered and eroticized by the male gaze, which she eventually escapes. The same is applicable to the enhanced bodies and mutants of the Central Power, Wreck City and the Dead Forest as they also represent an entangled form of existence and bodies that are exploited or disposed of. However, these different forms of cyborg existences offer a sense of hope, as Haraway argues, the image of the cyborg may "suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. ... It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories" (Haraway, 1991, p. 181). Winterson, in different planets, zones, and timelines, by assembling and reassembling her character's bodies, literally and figuratively, offers an alternative to a life based on androcentric dualisms.

Winterson contends that, "Humanity is going to have to grow out of friction. It is co-operation, not competition, that will save the planet and redirect human energy to better ends than personal wealth" (Winterson, 2021, p.170). Although each part of the novel ends with the failure of the possibility of establishing an alternative life form based on the co-existence and interdependency of species, she both warns against the vicious cycle of human destruction and exploitation and calls attention to the ways that this circle can be broken. Her critique of this cycle is strictly presented through the way she represents different types of beings and how she shows the feminisation and naturalisation of their bodies. Her focus on feminised bodies as non/human beings while exploring how technology affects the reception of organic and machine beings roam freely between fiction and reality. Her ustopian approach offers, in the midst of her post/apocalyptic worlds, a potential for rhizomic coexistence and entanglement that can be achieved by these feminised, cyborg-like beings that make her work, to a certain extent, a cyberfeminist and posthuman feminist fiction.

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