

## Posthuman “Meta(l)morphoses” in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*

Kerim Can Yazgünoğlu  
Hacettepe University, Turkey  
yazgunoglu@yahoo.com.tr

### Abstract



Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007) pictures a futuristic world in which every body is technologically, discursively, and materially constructed. First of all, *The Stone Gods* foregrounds the futuristic conceptualization of embodiment and posthuman gendered bodies in relation to biotechnology, biogenetics, and robotics, interrogating contemporary dimensions of the interface between the human and the machine, nature and culture. Secondly, the novel focuses on environmental concerns relevant to our present age. More specifically, however, drawing our attention to posthuman toxic bodies in terms of “trans-corporeality,” as suggested by Stacy Alaimo, *The Stone Gods* is an invaluable literary means to speculate on our “posthuman predicament,” in Rosi Braidotti’s words, and global ecological imperilment. In *The Stone Gods*, Winterson provides not only a warning against the dehumanization of the human in the process of posthumanization, but also a salient picture of posthuman trans-corporeal subjects through a discussion of the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on human-nonhuman “naturecultures.” On this view, looking at both human and nonhuman bodies through a trans-corporeal lens would contribute to an understanding of how material-discursive structures can profoundly transform human-nonhuman life on Earth.

**Keywords:** Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, posthumanism, trans-corporeality, material agency, naturecultures.

### Resumen

*The Stone Gods* (2007) de Jeanette Winterson describe un mundo futurístico en el que todo el mundo está construido tecnológica, discursiva y materialmente. En primer lugar, *The Stone Gods* pone en primer plano la conceptualización futurista de la materialización y de los cuerpos posthumanos provistos de género en relación con la biotecnología, la biogenética y la robótica, cuestionando las dimensiones contemporáneas del interfaz entre el humano y la máquina, naturaleza y cultura. En segundo lugar, la novela se centra en preocupaciones medioambientales relevantes en nuestra época. Más específicamente, sin embargo, haciendo notar los cuerpos tóxicos post-humanos en términos de “trans-corporalidad,” tal y como sugiere Stacy Aliamo, *The Stone Gods* es un medio literario que no tiene precio a la hora de especular sobre nuestro “dilema posthumano,” en palabras de Rosa Braidotti, y sobre la peligrosidad ecológica global. En *The Stone Gods* Winterson no solo ofrece una advertencia sobre la deshumanización del humano en el proceso de posthumanización, sino también una imagen destacada de los sujetos posthumanos trans-corporales por medio de un debate de los efectos beneficiosos y dañinos de la biotecnología y de las máquinas sobre las “naturaculturas” humanas-no-humanas. En este sentido, observando los cuerpos humanos y no-humanos a través de una lente trans-corporal contribuiría a comprender cómo las estructuras materiales-discursivas pueden transformar profundamente la vida humana-no-humana de la Tierra.

**Palabras clave:** Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, posthumanismo, trans-corporalidad, agencia material, naturaculturas.

The body has long been a social, cultural, political, and literary touchstone in the humanities and social sciences, not just as a discursive construction and a corporeal abstraction but also as a literary element of bodies politic. Recently, however, the understanding of the body has undergone a significant change in environmental theories with the advent of posthumanism(s)<sup>1</sup>. Posthumanist ontologies of the material body foregrounded by various figures from both the natural and social sciences, such as Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana, Stacy Alaimo, Vicki Kirby, and Jane Bennett, moved the postmodern discussions of the discursive body in a new direction, resulting in the emergence of a posthuman turn. This new focus on the materiality of the body also triggered a shift in the contemporary British novel, which is evident in Jeanette Winterson’s later work, such as her 2007 novel, *The Stone Gods*. In other words, although Winterson focuses on a postmodern understanding of the body as a textual entity in *Written on the Body* (1992), she demonstrates in *The Stone Gods* how both discursive and material practices affect and reconfigure human and nonhuman subjectivities as well as the physical environment. Firstly, *The Stone Gods* brings to the fore the futuristic conceptualization of embodiment and posthuman gendered bodies in relation to new technologies, such as biotechnology, biogenetics, and robotics, interrogating contemporary dimensions of the interface between the human and the machine, nature and culture by developing the debate about what posthumanness is. Secondly, drawing our attention to posthuman toxic bodies, *The Stone Gods* is an invaluable literary source to speculate on our “posthuman predicament,” in Rosi Braidotti’s words, and global ecological imperilment. Not only does Winterson provide a warning against the dehumanization of the human in the process of posthumanization, but also creates a salient picture of posthuman trans-corporeal subjects, artificial embodiment, sentient machines, and *Homo sapiens/Robo sapiens*, through discussing the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on the human-nonhuman. In this regard, looking at both human and nonhuman bodies through a trans-corporeal lens might contribute to the understanding of how material-discursive structures can profoundly transform human-nonhuman life on the planet.

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<sup>1</sup>The term posthumanism ranges from “(a) an enthusiastic embrace of new ‘anthropo-technologies’ and the many new freedoms that they may bring us (known as *popular* or *liberal* posthumanism, or simply *transhumanism*), (b) the embrace of those technologies’ potential to dissolve ossified humanist pretensions of the human and the non-human (known as *critical*, *cultural* or *radical* posthumanism), (c) the insistence on the ubiquity of other, non-human forms of agency, which reframes the human as just one among many players in the game that is our life, and thus strips us of the exceptionalism that once set us apart from the rest of the world (*methodological* posthumanism), to, finally, (d) a deep skepticism regarding the desirability of all the changes in our condition that are already taking place or are being envisaged for the near future (*dystopian* posthumanism, or, rather disparagingly ‘*bioconservatism*’)” (Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell 6-7).

Through an examination of the fluid boundaries between the body, biotechnology, and the physical environment, I will argue in this article that Winterson brings *The Stone Gods* into new dialogue with critical posthuman discourses on the entangled relations between physical and social bodies, the material and the immaterial self, and the organic and the technologically-enhanced body. Drawing upon the arguments and concepts put forward by new materialist and critical posthumanist theorists, I will trace the relationship the novel insinuates between corporeality, gender, biotechnology, ecology, and toxicity with a particular focus on posthuman “trans-corporeality.” Before exploring bodily identity and material self with regard to changing technologies and ecologies, as illustrated in the novel, however, a brief introduction to the material turn is necessary.

Material feminists, such as Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo, currently theorize human and nonhuman corporealities by engaging with the porous boundaries between bodies and physical environments. In their theorization of the body, the material body is no longer regarded as a fixed, static, immutable, and encircled entity that is temporally and spatially confined to only one territory. Rather, corporeality, as Elizabeth Grosz reflects, “can be understood as a series of surfaces, energies, and forces, a mode of linkage, a discontinuous series of processes, organs, flows, and matter” (120). Parallel to suggestions made by a number of material feminists, the posthuman body undoubtedly emerges from the complex entanglements of nature and culture, which new materialist and posthuman theories emphatically highlight, arguing that not only biological entities, but matter itself, in its various manifestations, also possesses agentic capacities. Jane Bennett, for example, defends the idea that matter has “a vitality intrinsic to materiality,” and contests the older visions of matter as a “passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance” (xiii). According to Bennett, matter has agency or capacity to affect and be affected in its complex interactions with human and nonhuman factors. In a similar way, Serpil Oppermann remarks that the “old conceptions of matter as a stable, inert, and passive substance, and of the human agent as a separate observer always in control, are being replaced here by the new posthumanist models that effectively theorize matter’s inherent vitality” (465). This vision of matter as agentic, effective, and beyond human control is of great importance in understanding the “interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity” (Bennett 31). Material agencies, then, as new materialist theorists underline, can “aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us” (Bennett ix). As a result, the posthuman concept of “material-discursive” bodies (in Karen Barad’s sense) illustrates both positive and negative interactions of nature and culture.

Accordingly, human and nonhuman corporealities must be seen more as a site of intermeshment within the nonhuman world than as a pure material entity, thereby becoming “trans-corporeal,” which Alaimo identifies as “interchanges and

interconnections between various bodily natures” (*Bodily* 2). Trans-corporeality refers to the inseparability of human and nonhuman corporeality from the environment. Intertwining in toxic pollutants, viruses, chemical substances, and contaminated landscapes, the body, as Alaimo argues, is extremely “vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments” (*Bodily* 28). Therefore, the posthuman body becomes a trans-corporeal site of danger. Posthuman trans-corporeality of material bodies, as indicated above, regards the posthuman body as “vital,” “intra-active,” agential, toxic, relational, “porous,” and “vibrant.” Additionally, trans-corporeal bodies are material ontic agents in human entanglement with the nonhuman and the material world. In line with this understanding of corporeality, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, in *New Materialisms* (2010), propound the view that “[p]aying attention to corporeality as a practical and efficacious series of emergent capacities [...] reveals both the materiality of agency and agentic properties inherent in nature itself” (20).

On that basis, Winterson similarly suggests that all bodies are enmeshed within other material bodies, and she sees the posthuman gendered body as a pliable and fluid entity as well as a material actor. Winterson’s novels, as Jago Morrison notes, “carry out a genealogical investigation of flesh and its pleasures, tracing the processes by which sexed bodies are materialised over time” (174). Winterson’s contribution to the posthumanist discourse, then, is that she introduces material flexibility into gendered human and nonhuman subjectivities so as to support the idea of posthuman ontological difference, for she is against the transhumanist idea that “essence becomes non-essence, and uniqueness is converted into sameness” (Sheehan 254). She also introduces a “literary posthumanism” (Sheehan 246). *The Stone Gods* brings into focus literary posthuman issues regarding the theorization of (now technological) body, gender, embodiment, toxicity, sexual difference, and subjectivity, where corporeality is interpreted as a plastic material-discursive entity open to the physical environment. In this sense, *The Stone Gods* brings theory to life, giving shape to the posthuman.

*The Stone Gods* is comprised of three time zones in which the gendered corporeal entities are transformed in relation to the physical environment. In the first section, Billie Crusoe works for a corporation called “MORE” in the near future and goes on an expedition to Planet Blue with Spike, a female robot Winterson calls “Robosapiens,” because Billie’s world is on the verge of total collapse, and the future clearly belongs to the posthuman cyborg. By means of new technologies, such as DNA enhancement, human bodies are reconstituted as a kind of cyborg. In such a post-technological environment, human and nonhuman bodies have also become totally toxic since they are exposed to extreme toxicity due to pollution on the land and in the water and air. The second section is set in the 1770s on Easter Island, where people have literally destroyed all the forests in the course of constructing their stone idols. The protagonist is again Billy Crusoe, whose gender

role here changes into that of a male subject. In the last two sections of the novel, after a nuclear war, the entire planet is polluted and divided into Tech City and Wreck City. Tech City is a hyper-technologized society where human bodies are technologically constructed, whereas in Wreck City human bodies are exposed to nuclear waste and toxicity. People live in toxic landscapes in Wreck City, and are regarded as outcast bodies—as the ultimate “others.” Winterson’s posthuman novel, in this light, illustrates bodily natures in relation to nuclear waste, toxicity, and the interactions between corporeal and trans-corporeal bodies.

Winterson’s work, as Sonya Andermahr points out, is “well known for its multiple border-crossings and fantastic journeys through space, time, genre, and gender. Her fictional universes blur the boundaries between masculine and feminine, past and present, material and magical worlds” (“Cyberspace” 108). *The Stone Gods* posthumanizes a futuristic and post-technological world in which every boundary is not only deconstructed but also biotechnologically, discursively, and materially reconstructed. In a hyper-technologized society in the first part, Planet Blue, of *The Stone Gods*, a mixture of ecological science fiction and cyberfiction, posthuman techno-embodiment and gendered selves are entwined with biotechnology and machinery. The narrator/protagonist of the novel, Billie/Billy Crusoe, as a scientist in Enhancement Services who is androgynous and bisexual in her/his temporal and spatial adventures throughout the novel, helps people of the Central Power to enhance their lives. The Central Power is one of three governmental institutions, together with the Eastern Caliphate and the Sino-Mosco Pact in Orbus. The technologically advanced one is the Central Power, with “twenty-two geo-cities” (6), which stands for “a visible and invisible sign of progress and power” (5). Inhabitants of the Central Power are biogenetically fixed, and they are controlled through the use of biopolitics by the ruling elite. Biotechnologies, such as genetic replication, genetic tinkering, genetic engineering, and biogenetics, permeate the lives of the inhabitants of the Central Power. For instance, Billie/Billy’s boss, Manfred, says: “a world that clones its meat in the lab and engineers its crops underground thinks natural food is dirty and diseased” (9). It is significant to note that “natural” bodies, human/nonhuman, are seen as “dirty” in this post-technological community. Nevertheless, Billie/Billy is against the technologization of life, bodies, and selves. Unlike her, most citizens are drawn to genetic fixing. People want to be young and beautiful, and the material-discursive relations affect everybody except for a minority who do not favor this trend in this society.

Manfred is one of those confident men who have had themselves genetically Fixed as late-forties. Most men prefer to Fix younger than that, and 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. The body loses fluency. Command stations no longer connect with satellite stations. Relay breaks down. The body is designed to repair and renew itself, and most cells are only about a third as old as our birth years, but mitochondrial DNA is as old as we are, and has always accumulated mutations and distortions faster than DNA in the nucleus. For centuries we couldn’t fix that - and now we can. (Winterson 10-11)



In this posthuman society, fixing DNA, as Manfred mentions, opens up new spaces for body modification. The body is both discursively and materially reconstructed. The genetically modified bodies are by all means inseparable from “naturecultures” (in Donna Haraway’s words) in *Orbus*. What stands out as their trans-corporeality is that human and nonhuman bodies are imbricated with each other. As Alaimo clarifies, “the material self cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial” (“New Materialisms” 282). In *Orbus*, these factors have a great impact over the bodies of men and women and children, for these naturecultures and the material world of *Orbus* are part of the “Phenomena” suggested by Karen Barad. In her article entitled “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” Barad highlights the fact that “Phenomena are entanglements of spacetime matter, not in the colloquial sense of a connection or intertwining of individual entities, but rather in the technical sense of ‘quantum entanglements,’ which are the (ontological) inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components’” (125). This complex of agential phenomena is depicted through the use of discontinuous but interrelated narratives in Winterson’s text, creating a “post-generic” posthuman story (Sheehan 255). In the posthuman story, trans-corporeal subjects encompass multiple identities that are malleable, depending upon the temporal and spatial conditions. Nevertheless, in this biotechnological society, the aforementioned fixity is seen as a way of “normalizing” the body, although “Winterson,” as Sonya Andermahr notes, “continually returns to the idea that the self is not fixed” (*Jeanette* 29). She destabilizes the fixity of the gendered self, and what’s more, she displays the posthuman ontological flexibility and fluidity of subject positions in terms of transgressing Cartesian dualisms and boundaries. Indeed, *The Stone Gods* “promotes ontological relativism and a subjective understanding of the world [space], rejecting the idea of a fixed self” (Andermahr, *Jeanette* 28-9).

But while Winterson criticizes the fixity and sameness of corporeality, she also questions the dominance of new technologies. In the Central Power, having been bio-technologically modified, people are transformed into posthuman beings who are not at all transgressive, as would be expected of the posthuman corporeality. In this sense, new technologies construct a posthuman trans-corporeality by breaking down the boundaries; that is, the posthuman trans-corporeality challenges the interface of human/machine, the natural/the postnatural in relation to the physical environment. “Every human being in the Central Power,” writes Winterson in the novel, “has been enhanced, genetically modified and DNA-screened. Some have been cloned. Most were born outside the womb. A human being now is not what a human being was even a hundred years ago. So what is a human being?” (77). In Neil Badmington’s words, posthumanist thought “emerges from a recognition that ‘Man’ is not the privileged and protected center, because humans are no longer – and perhaps never were – utterly distinct

from animals, machines, and other forms of the ‘inhuman’”(374). Obviously, posthumanist discourse disrupts the anthropocentric understanding of “Human” as central actors and interrogates what counts as “human” or “nonhuman” by blurring the boundaries between human, machine, nonhuman animals, and more-than-human naturecultures. Likewise, as N. Katherine Hayles argues in *How We Became Posthuman*, “the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (3). In other words, “we are not who ‘we’ once believed ourselves to be. And neither are ‘our’ others” (374). In *The Stone Gods*, this kind of “we”/“others” binary opposition is disrupted and eliminated, but it is reconstructed anew in the Wreck City in the novel, pitted against the Tech City. In the Wreck City, posthuman cancerous people are hidden from the inhabitants of the Tech City, and these cancerous people are regarded as “others.” Otherness has to do with the fact that “the posthuman is the *other than human*, where otherness is defined by the principle of transformation” (Sheehan 246). Enmeshed in the physical environment, the human body cannot be thought to be separable from other nonhuman bodies. As Ollivier Dyens argues, “when the body is transformed, whether naturally or artificially, its relationship to the environment is affected, and it can no longer exist exactly as before” (55). It is through three post-generic narratives that the boundaries of human and nonhuman corporealities have become malleable and transformative in line with biotechnological changes and transformations in ecology in advanced technologized societies in the novel. In this context, Winterson not only celebrates transgressive politics of the posthuman, but also clearly warns her readers against a posthuman futurity controlled by new technologies in *The Stone Gods*.

The posthuman is beyond any entrenched notion of what “human” is, for the posthuman entails human and nonhuman bodies that can at once become real or virtual, organic or inorganic, natural or postnatural. As Barad states, all bodies are apparatuses in this re-configuring intra-active phenomena (*Meeting* 148-149). Corporealities in *Orbus* are apparatuses that are intra-acting with other naturecultures, biotechnology, robotics, and information technologies. Genetically engineered bodies become posthuman through biotechnological transmutations. As Patricia MacCormack points out, the posthuman, “like the queer, is the materially incarnated agency emergent from an alteration of paradigms of humanism” (113). The novel’s posthuman bodies certainly emerge from such alterations when they become sexually queer after genetic fixing:

Celebrities are under pressure, no doubt about it. We are all young and beautiful now, so how can they stay ahead of the game? Most of them have macro-surgery. Their boobs swell like beach balls, and their clicks go up and down like beach umbrellas. They are surgically stretched to be taller, and steroids give them muscle-growth that turns them into star-gods. Their body parts are bio-enhanced,

and their hair can do clever things like change colour to match their outfits.  
(Winterson 19)

In fact, this genetically modified corporeality is also gendered according to the ideals of fashion promoted by the Central Power society. Male and female corporealities in this posthuman society are still objectified, sexualized, medicalized, programmed, controlled, oppressed, and technologically engineered. It is worth mentioning that male and female bodies here are seen as malleable things, easily fashioned according to a cultural ideal. Although transgressions of corporeal boundaries are significant for Winterson, “sameness” and “non-essence” of bodies might create a fixity depending on a false ideal. In this society, the cultural icon is a child, Little Senorita, who is a pop star. Little Senorita, who is twelve years old, is also fixed, and just like other children transforms nearly into a freak. Fixity is both an obsession and a fashion. For instance, Mrs. Mary McMurphy’s husband wants her to be younger so as to have more enjoyable sex with her, and Billie/Billy goes to speak to her about genetic reversal. However, Billie/Billy is very cautious about genetic reversal: “Genetic reversal has strange effects on the body. The last time it was done, the reversal couldn’t be contained, and the girl got younger and younger until she was a six-foot-tall six-month-old baby” (20). The narrator continues to reflect upon the situation: “I guess she has been Fixed at twenty-four. Now that everyone is young and beautiful, a lot of men are chasing girls who are just kids. They want something different when everything has become the same” (21). The sexualization of culture and children is widespread in this community where human corporeality turns out to be highly perverted, which the narrator underlines: “we’re all perverts now” (22). When Billie/Billy visits Peccadillo to see Mr. McMurphy, she encounters “translucents,” who are “see-through people” (22). The global crisis people witness is the genetic fixing:

All men are hung like whales. All women are tight as clams below and inflated like lifebuoys above. Jaws are square, skin is tanned, muscles are toned, and no one gets turned on. It’s a global crisis. At least, it’s a crisis among the cities of the Central Power. The Eastern Caliphate has banned Genetic Fixing, and the SinoMosco Pact does not make it available to all its citizens, only to members of the ruling party and their favourites. (Winterson 22-23)

The narrator is against genetic fixing and cosmetic surgery, because it is through genetic tinkering and cosmetic surgery that bodies are modified according to the male gaze and posthuman desires. The modified corporealities of the perverts in Peccadillo are posthuman in this sense, since biotechnology is intermeshed with other bodies. It is noted that “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” (23). The gendered “monstrous” bodies of women are constructed according to the controlled biopower formations in this society. Female bodies become trans-corporeal, but they are by no means



subversive or transgressive in the feminist sense. Billie/Billy relates how he comes across a giant-woman as follows: “As I hurry across the floor, my way is barred by 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” (23). This biogenetically enhanced woman has a monstrous posthuman body, bringing the issue of sexuality to the surface in the novel. However, as an empowering tool for women, as Rosi Braidotti suggests, “[s]exuality [should be] simultaneously the most intimate and the most external, socially driven, power-drenched practice of the self. As a social, symbolic, material, and semiotic institution, sexuality is singled out as the primary location of power in a complex manner that encompasses both macro and micro relations” (“Meta(l)flesh” 243). The sexual power of women, however, is diminished in *Orbus* through genetic reconstruction of women’s bodies. As Luciana Parisi argues, “the bio-technological engineering of the body, the genetic design of life accelerates the recombination of different elements and the mutations of the body–sex by disclosing a new set of urgent questions about the relation between feminine desire and nature” (12). Winterson elaborates upon this argument of embodiment through a posthumanist narrative platform where Billie/Billy reflects upon the predicament of women:

So this is the future: girls Fixed at eight years old, maybe ten, hopefully twelve. Or will they want women's minds in girls' bodies and go for genetic reversal?

The future of women is uncertain. We don't breed in the womb any more, and if we aren't wanted for sex ... But there will always be men. Women haven't gone for little boys. Women have a different approach. Surrounded by hunks, they look for 'the ugly man inside'. Thugs and gangsters, rapists and wife-beaters are making a comeback. They may smile like beach-boys, but they are pure shark. So this is the future. F is for Future. (Winterson 26)

The ambiguous situation of women is recontextualized by Winterson in her posthumanist scenario. For example, the desire to transgress the boundaries and limits of the flesh is unsatisfactory, for the system sees woman and children as fetishized and commodified objects, thus making female bodies quite “docile.” Billie/Billy observes: “I am beginning to feel justifiable paranoia. I look around for the cameras, not that you can ever see them. I am being watched, but that isn't strange. That's life. We're all used to it. What is strange is that I feel I am being watched. Staked out. Observed. But there's no one there” (29-30). This kind of biopower oppresses and controls various corporealities through surveillance, that is, “the satellite system that watches us more closely than God ever did” (31). Nevertheless, in the posthuman world of *Orbus*, human and nonhuman bodies do not lose their agential performativity, effectivity, and vitality in their ongoing new materializations. Yet, even Billie/Billy cannot escape from posthuman materialization. She, for example, reveals her own corporeality when she talks about chip implantation: “my data-chip implant. Everything about me is stored just above my wrist” (33). This material-discursive practice has great impact on the posthuman subjectivity of Billie/Billy. Her flesh is not at all separable from the

material implant. They are co-constitutive, making her body truly posthuman, but not entirely robotic, as is the case with Spike, who is identified as a “robo sapiens” in the novel.

As a robo sapiens, Spike is evolving as a posthuman cyborg, thus “representing the hybrid natural-cultural, organic-technological, authentic-artificial nature of the contemporary subject” (Hollinger 274). His material body is agential in terms of how it affects each body in trans-corporeal exchanges with other apparatuses, for “[t]he body is an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous, and affective or unconscious nature” (Braidotti, “Meta(l)flesh” 243). In the novel, posthuman bodies of people and robots alike are what Braidotti describes: “shot through with technologically-mediated social relations” (*Metamorphoses* 228). The posthuman body Winterson envisions is, thus, similar to Braidotti’s description. The posthuman is “positioned in the spaces inbetween the traditional dichotomies, including the body-machine binary opposition. In other words, it has become historically, scientifically, and culturally impossible to distinguish bodies from their technologically-mediated extensions” (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 228). The posthuman body is not a fixed entity, but an interface of intensities, flows, exchanges, and movements through iterative intra-actions within the material world. “The textualized flesh,” Domna Pastourmatzi points out, “is abstract clay in the hands of writers and it is this very abstraction of the actual organic body in the creative but controlled lab-environment of fiction that permits the bloodless transition of human consciousness into a technologically contaminated posthuman existence” (213).

Creating a “literary posthumanism,” Jeanette Winterson, in *The Stone Gods*, dexterously deals with such enfleshments in a circular text showing how posthuman “meta(l)morphoses” can take place in a changing world. What remains to be asked, then, is whether the posthuman is “a utopian aspiration, a cautionary critique, [and] an evolutionary end-point” (Sheehan 245). The answer to this question is hidden in the environmental problem of toxicity in *Orbus*, where planetary toxicity is visibly intra-acting with human and nonhuman bodies. As a palpable example of trans-corporeal space, the posthuman body represented in the novel is also toxic. Trans-corporeality here signifies “the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors” (Alaimo, *Bodily* 282). The ramifications of these actions can be beneficial or deleterious, creating liminal spaces for human and nonhuman bodies. The “space-time of trans-corporeality,” as Alaimo and Hekman contend, “is a site of both pleasure and danger – the pleasures of desire, surprise, and lively emergence, as well as the dangers of pain, toxicity, and death” (14). As Billie/Billy Crusoe observes, “[t]here’s a red dust storm beginning, like spider-mite, like ants, like things that itch and bite. No one has any idea where the red

dust is coming from, but it clogs the air-filtering systems, and since it started about two years ago, we are obliged to carry oxygen masks. This one might blow over or it might not” (30). The dust storm has an agency of its own, intra-acting with human bodies negatively. The “trans-corporeal subject,” as Alaimo puts it, “is not so much situated, which suggests stability and coherence, but rather caught up in and transformed by myriad, often unpredictable material agencies” (*Bodily* 146). The flows and exchanges between human bodies and more-than-human environments manifest quite negatively in the dust storm, because it is through the red dust storm that human and nonhuman bodies become toxic. However, this is not the sole factor in reconfiguring human corporeality in relation to the physical environment in the narrative. Oxygen masks, for example, are vital prostheses for human bodies in Orbus, where there is always a “red-alert pollution warning” (37). Even though, as Manfred says below, technology has done so much for the benefit of the society in Orbus, the end-result could not be prevented:

“We have the best weather-shield in the world. We have slowed global warming. We have stabilized emissions. We have drained rising sea levels, we have replanted forests, we have synthesized food, ending centuries of harmful farming practices,” he glares at me again, “We have neutralized acid rain, we have permanent refrigeration around the ice-caps, we no longer use oil, gasoline, or petroleum derivatives.” (Winterson 37)

This is significant in the sense that no matter how advanced technological solutions may be in interfering with the planetary life support systems, technology alone cannot save a dying planet that is on the brink of destruction, ironically by technological tampering with its ecosystem. Stacy Alaimo’s trans-corporeal theory makes it clear that we intra-act with more-than-human natures positively and negatively by resorting to naturalcultural practices. In the age of the environmental crisis, with accelerating global warming, increasing levels of pollution, toxins, and radiation in landscapes, air, and water, it is crucial to highlight the idea that *The Stone Gods* reflects our posthuman predicament and global ecological imperilment. The focus in the novel is on the fact that “[w]e made ourselves rich polluting the rest of the world, and now the rest of the world is polluting us” (Winterson 37). The material self turns out to be irreversibly toxic under the trans-corporeal effects of poisonous substances killing the planet. So significant are the toxic, synthetic, and chemical substances that are an inseparable part of posthuman trans-corporeality that Billie/Billy observes pollution on the very streets: “On the streets everyone was wearing their pollution filters. Everyone had the glassy-eyed, good-looking look that is normal nowadays. Even in an air-mask, people are concerned to look good. The State gives out masks on demand, but the smart people have their own designer versions” (44). Toxicity engulfs all forms of life in Orbus in a manner that leads to the destruction of the planet. Ecological imperilment, accordingly, frightens everybody in Orbus:

The red dust is frightening. The carbon dioxide is real. Water is expensive. Bio-tech has created as many problems as it has fixed, but, but, we’re here, we’re alive, we’re the human race, we have survived wars and terrorism and scarcity and

global famine, and we have made it back from the brink, not once but many times. History is not a suicide note — it is a record of our survival. (Winterson 47)

Although biotechnology can partially solve the problems people encounter in their quotidian lives, they cannot prevent the toxic atmosphere of Orbus from affecting everyone and everything lethally. Therefore, Orbus becomes destitute, and the Central Power starts searching for a new colonizable planet. Subsequently, the Central Power finds verdant Planet Blue, which is suitable for human life. As Sonya Andemahr suggests, “the novel is informed by Winterson’s concerns about our relationship with the environment. It develops her major themes of ‘displacement, searching, and longing’ in a new social context” (*Jeanette* 151). Billie/Billy, Spike, as a female robo sapiens, and Mrs. McMurhpy, are sent to Planet Blue with captain Handsome, who likens it to Orbus. He calls it the “white planet”:

“The white planet was a world like ours,” said Handsome, “far, far advanced. We were still evolving out of the soup when the white planet had six-lane highways and space missions. It was definitely a living, breathing, working planet, with water and resources, cooked to cinders by CO<sub>2</sub>. They couldn’t control their gases. Certainly the planet was heating up anyway, but the humans, or whatever they were, massively miscalculated, and pumped so much CO<sub>2</sub> into the air that they caused irreversible warming. The rest is history.” (Winterson 67-68)

In a way, the author highlights what Val Plumwood poignantly suggests: “It seems increasingly possible that many of those now living will face the ultimate challenge of human viability, reversing our species’ drive towards destroying our planetary habitat” (32). The situation of the destitute Orbus displays the concern. Vital as it might be, human beings make the same mistake continuously throughout *The Stone Gods*. In the second part of the novel, Easter Island, the islanders also do so. The islanders destroy their once pristine and verdant environment to construct stone gods. In the third and fourth parts, Post-War 3 and Wreck City, after the nuclear destruction, the corporate states make the same mistake, which Plumwood touches upon. The mistake is recurrent everywhere irrespective of ecosystems. The text, hence, highlights the posthuman predicament of humans who have become experts in turning their bodies and the environment into toxic places.

Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, argues that she “would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life?” (17-18). In order to answer such a question, one has to identify, first, who or what can be regarded as “human” or “nonhuman” or “inhuman” or “posthuman” or “subhuman” or “pre-human.” The question is so problematic that Winterson scrutinizes it throughout *The Stone Gods*. In this context, posthuman toxic bodies emerge in the fourth part, Wreck City. Wreck City exemplifies the radioactive situation of Post-3 War, the post-nuclear holocaust, the deleterious effects of atomic bombs, and the dehumanization of toxic mutants. In the third part of the novel, Tech City, like the one in Orbus, is seen as safe, for it is also technologically advanced. Tech City is

governed by a global corporate named MORE. Billie and Spike in Orbus spatially and temporally re-emerge in Post-3 War and Wreck City. Billie visits Wreck City: “Wreck City is a No Zone — no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police. It's not forbidden to go there, but if you do, and if you get damaged or murdered or robbed or raped, it's at your own risk. There will be no investigation, no compensation. You're on your own” (179). Obviously, Wreck City is highly risky. The community in Wreck City is rendered as a “trans-corporeal risk society,” since it is difficult to live without being exposed to the poisoned environment. As Billie observes, “[t]he fires never go out, smouldering with a molten half-life, the wind blowing ash and flakes of metal into your clothes and hair” (180). Billie and Spike come across a man called Friday, who lives in Wreck City as a trans-corporeal subject. The trio talk about The Unknown: “‘What’s in the Unknown?’ ‘If I could tell you that, it would be Known, wouldn't it? It's radioactive. It's re-evolving. It's Life after Humans, whatever that is, but you know what? It can't be so much worse, can it?’” (188). In The Unknown, there are “ultimate others,” mutant beings isolated from those in Tech City. So, there is a conflict between mutated/toxic beings and those who are unaffected. In Wreck City, Billie experiences the toxicity first hand:

In front of me, barring my way, was a petrified forest of blackened and shocked trees, silent, like a haunted house. I moved towards it, frightened of what I would find, with an instinct for danger that only happens when there really is danger.

I moved through the first rows of trees. Their bark had a coating — like a laminate. Further in, deeper, I could see that these trees were glowing. Was this place radioactive?

Underfoot was soggy, not mossy soggy, not waterlogged, but like walking on pulped meat. It wasn't only that the forest was silent — no bird noise, animal sound, tree cracking, it was that I had become silent. (Winterson 191)

Due to the poisoned environment, the forest is putrefied and totally radioactive. It is obvious that “[t]he soil itself was poisoned” (201), making the flows between human and nonhuman bodies completely toxic. As Friday points out, you are

[p]art of it. They don't patrol it here because they hope it will kill us all. If you can't nuke your dissidents, the next best thing is to let the degraded land poison them. But it's not quite happening like that. A lot of us have been sick, a lot of us have died, but it's changing. Something is happening in there. I've been in with a suit. There's life - not the kind of life you'd want to get into bed with, or even the kind of life you'd want to find under the bed, but life. Nature isn't fussy. (Winterson 192)

Billie enters the Dead Forest, which is “like walking into a corpse, only the corpse wasn't dead” (200). In such a “trans-corporeal landscape,” to quote Alaimo, the body of Billie and the forest become material-discursive sites where “institutional and material power swirl together” (*Bodily* 48). The trans-corporeality of the forest is of great significance in understanding the nature of posthuman toxic bodies, which are both alive and dead. In her encounter with toxic mutants, Billie observes:

Here I am, and the wood is glowing. Ahead of me there's something moving. I speeded up to follow it, cutting through the lines of black trunks, and after about ten minutes, I came to spaces where the trees had been cleared or cleared



themselves, and pushing out of the ground were small, stunted leaves with anaemic yellow stems. Feeding on the leaves and stems were five or six rabbit-like animals — hairless, deformed, one with red weals on its back. They ran away when they saw me. Movement again. I turned, followed further, and then I saw it — saw them. A boy and a girl. Perhaps. Holding hands, barely dressed, both with rags tied round their bodies. The boy was covered with sores, the girl had no hair. (Winterson 201-2)

Both human and nonhuman animals are affected by destructive radioactivity. When Billie meets deformed beings, “ultimate others” in the Dead Forest, we are reminded of the crucial significance of what Alaimo defines as “the movement across – time, across place, across species, across bodies, across scale,” and “the human as a site of emergent material intra-actions inseparable from the very stuff of the rest of the world” (*Bodily* 156). This enables us to think about our responsibility and accountability towards other human or nonhuman naturecultures in the world. The novel’s questioning of our destructive practices and mindset opens up a new space for challenging the deep-rooted understandings of humanist utilitarian ethics that leave behind “others,” including women, people of color, nonhuman animals, and queer people. MORE tries to hide the truth from the “normal” people of Tech City. Friday talks to Billie about this issue:

“You’ll get sick if you go in there,” he said.

“People are sick in there,” I said. “I saw two children. We have to help them.”

He shook his head. “We can’t. They’re *toxic radioactive mutants*. They won’t live long. It’s Tech City’s big secret, one of them anyway. The incurables and the freaks are all in there. They feed them by helicopter. A lot of women gave birth just after the War finished. No one knew what would happen to the babies — well, now we do. Those are kids from nuclear families.” (Winterson 203; emphasis added)

The text asks repeatedly who can be counted as human or inhuman. Can we consider these toxic radioactive mutants human beings? As Butler asks, are these lives grievable? In the light of posthuman environmental ethics, whether they are human or nonhuman does not matter at all. As Andermahr remarks, “all Winterson’s work revolves around this central tension between responsibility and freedom, weight and weightlessness, commitment and restless desire” (*Jeanette* 29-30). In this context, Winterson puts a great emphasis on accountability and culpability. Although it seems that Winterson attaches greater importance to the “human” in the novel, the very notion of the human is always already posthuman. Hence, Winterson’s attitude is ambiguous. However, MORE, which does not see itself as responsible for what it has done, perceives them as subhuman. In this sense, radioactive mutants are dehumanized. Crucial to their dehumanization is the description given in the narrative:

They lived in the Dead Forest. They were the bomb-damage, the enemy collateral, the ground-kill, blood-poisoned, 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. Some could speak, and spat blood, each word made out of a blood vessel. [...]

There were children holding hands — or what stumps and stray fingers they had for hands — limping club-footed, looking up from the hinge or their necks, uncertain of their heads, wrong-sized, misshapen, an ear missing, a nose splayed back to a pair of nostril holes. Some no holes at all. Breathe through your mouth like a panting animal — pursued, lost, find a hole, live there, rot there.

There were women, traces of finery, traces of pride, a necklace saved from the smash, the sleeve of a blouse, fastened on one arm. A woman, breasts open, the nipples eaten by cancer, the soft inside exposed, raw pink. (Winterson 232-233)

Their cancerous bodies, materially intra-acting with other nonhuman ones, are part of the newly evolving phenomena of radioactive toxicity here. They are not at all independent. Enmeshed in the toxic landscape, their bodies are transcorporeally inseparable from other toxic naturecultures. Indeed, they are both postnatural and posthuman becomings. These grievable lives show us the destructiveness of nuclear weaponry and dehumanization of the (post)human:

There were men, skin so burned that the muscles underneath were on show like an anatomy textbook: deltoid, rhomboid, trapezius, veins leaking like a crucifixion. A man with skin to his knee and not beyond — a skeleton walk, a thing dug up from the grave, but not dead, alive. Human. (Winterson 233)

Winterson draws our attention to the fact that regardless of what they are or who they are, these radioactive mutants are “Human.” She is concerned with anthropogenic devastations of not only environments but also human beings: “What if we really do keep making the same mistakes again and again, never remembering the lessons to learn but never forgetting either that it had been different” (105). In every part of *The Stone Gods*, the mistake is recurrent. What is considerable is that “[p]erhaps the universe is a memory of our mistakes” (106). Winterson also indicates how human mistakes pose varied risks that might have irreversible effects on our daily lives. From global warming to nuclear destruction, human beings are part of the problem caused by their irresponsible behavior towards the environment and all life forms. This predicament raises striking questions about politics, biotechnology, society, and bodies in the narrative. The text itself aims at raising ecological awareness about the environment and the hazardous repercussions of human mistakes. Indeed, *The Stone Gods* undergirds “a posthuman environmentalism of co-constituted creatures, entangled knowledges, and precautionary practices” (Alaimo, *Bodily* 146). In this regard, the novel is both edifying and thought-provoking. As Alaimo and Hekman suggest, “thinking through the co-constitutive materiality of human corporeality and nonhuman natures offers possibilities for transforming environmentalism itself” (9). *The Stone Gods*, in this sense, would open up novel avenues for reconfiguring the prevalent orthodox views about the material world and bodily natures.

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