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Reimagining the Human: an Analysis of the Posthuman Turn in Mary Shelley, Kazuo Ishiguro and Jeanette Winterson

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Introduction

The posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image […],
a contaminated body, a techno-body; it is, as we shall see, a queer body.
The human body itself is no longer part of "the family of man"
but of a zoo of posthumanities (Halberstam, Livingston 1995: 3).

The posthuman discourse has become a source of great interest for scientific, philosophical and literary studies. Motivated by the present-day propensity to move beyond the dichotomies of anthropocentrism and humanism, the posthuman condition challenges us to rethink new forms of identity and corporeality as well as our relations with the other inhabitants of the planet and our place in the world. In other words, it urges us to rethink "what we are in the process of becoming" (Braidotti 2013: 21) prompted by the "technological outcomes of thinking through and beyond the human" (Sheehan 2015: 245). Indeed, nowadays many practices have entered the domain of scientific control. Examples are reproductive technologies, the digitalization of social relationships, digital monetary exchanges, but also the possibility that biotechnologies offer to reshape our bodies. In the posthuman predicament, the biological body is transcended so as to look more affirmatively towards new alternatives which couple "the human to some nonhuman order of being" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xi). As such, it contributes to a new understanding of what it means to be human. In particular, posthumanism challenges the dualism between human and machine, thus re-imagining human hybrid identities in a new condition in which humans and intelligent technology are increasingly intertwined. However, since it covers diverse viewpoints and approaches, the posthuman is often used to argue both for and against scientific and technological enhancements and it cannot be defined as a unitary process with a certain beginning, development and end point.

An important premise to the posthuman discourse is what Michel Foucault has provocatively defined as "the death of man". With this expression, Foucault refers to the crisis of the idea of man as an autonomous, independent and authentic subject. Rather, the subject is a fixed but malleable entity, in that it can assume different forms

depending on the different historical periods. Or, to use the words of Rosi Braidotti, the subject is a "normative convention. […] It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as *the* human" (Braidotti 2013: 26). These considerations are relevant since they contribute to challenging the divide between man and machine. On the basis of these issues, this dissertation investigates posthuman representations within three novels which question the relationship between human and nonhuman by means of forging forms of alterity including cyborgs and clones. These are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*. All these novels show alternative representations of posthuman subjectivities while urging us to rethink our relationship with technology and with the environment as well.

Specifically, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* narrates the story of the scientist Victor Frankenstein who, obsessed with generating life itself, fashions a new being. Rejected by its own creator and denied any human companionship, the creature destroys everything Frankenstein holds dear. Secondly, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* dramatizes the lives of a group of clones at the apparently idyllic Institute of Hailsham, retracing their past before becoming definitely aware of the appalling fate that has always awaited them. Eventually, Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* speculates about possible realities not too far in the future. Every chapter describes a different world coming to an end, although for its characters it is just a new beginning.

The aim of this thesis is to consider how these literary works have contributed to the advancement of the posthuman discourse. In order to do so, it is divided into four chapters which explore the relationship between humans and technology both theoretically and in relation to the selected novels. As for what concerns the theoretical definition of posthuman, this dissertation principally refers to the theories elaborated by Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Michel Foucault in order to analyse the posthuman condition within the selected novels.

In particular, the first chapter investigates the emergence of the posthuman both as a cultural and philosophical notion and in relation to its literary origins and development. Nevertheless, the aim of this chapter is not that of demonstrating the

existence of a "proto posthumanism" dating back to the Middle Ages onwards. Rather, it is meant to discuss primarily inherent concerns such as human language, human body and the networks established with the surrounding environment. As Karl Steel recognises, "posthumanism does not follow humanism; rather, it is inherent in its own claims" (Steel 2017: 3). In particular, this chapter underlines the privileged position science fiction narrative has acquired for speculative representations of the posthuman and posthumanism. In addition, the first chapter also investigates the shift from Humanism to Posthumanism, characterised by a rejection of unitary identities, while emphasising difference and diversity as constitutive aspects of subjectivity. Thereafter, it highlights the impact of the relentless technological advancement on the construction of new subjectivities. In other words, it investigates *how we became posthuman* (Hayles, 1999).

The second chapter discusses the representation of posthuman subjectivities in Marry Shelly's *Frankenstein*. In particular, although the novel was first published in 1818, the third edition of the novel published in 1831 is taken as reference for this work, which contains all her final revisions. Even though commonly associated with the Gothic horror tradition, Shelley's novel also paved the way for science fiction writing. After mentioning some interpretations which have contributed to enhancing its value and complexity, this chapter highlights how more recent representations of *Frankenstein*'s scenario have adopted a posthumanist approach so as to investigate the primacy of humans and what differentiates them from technology. Transgressing the boundaries of being human, the assemblage of Frankenstein's creature gathers both animal studies and posthumanism as well (Broglio 2017: 53) even though it takes the form of a grotesque creature. Indeed, being described as a monstrous, abhorrent creature from the very moment of its awakening, Victor's creature seems to depart from the progressive, enhanced dream of perfectibility and faith in technological innovation epitomised by the term posthuman. This leads us to consider the issue regarding the limits of humanity which is present throughout novel and warns against the atrocities and monstrous acts which humans may undertake in the name of scientific progress and which aligns Frankenstein with the Promethean quest for forbidden knowledge.

The third chapter explores Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go,* first published in 2005. The question of what it means to be human permeates Ishiguro's novel*,* which gradually discloses a dreadful reality in which clone groups provide disposal supply for organ's transplantation*.* The reference to genetic engineering and associated technologies is not meant to investigate the technological advancement as such, but rather the ethical and ontological implications they involve. This chapter also investigates the role of both literature and art within consumerist societies and how words may contribute to camouflaging a perpetrated wrong. Eventually, it discusses the representation of the clones as posthuman figures, as well as the ambivalent relationship they establish with the humans.

The fourth and last chapter focuses on Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods,* published in 2007. The novel's intertwined narratives occur throughout sixty-five million years which contribute to envisioning a posthuman story. In particular, it considers the implications of posthumanism in a dystopian world in which it becomes difficult to define what really differentiates humans from machines and vice versa. Jeanette Winterson orchestrates her novel through four discontinuous narrative strands in which the same characters recurrently reshape their bodies and subjectivities as well. Indeed, although the protagonist is a disenchanted scientist for most of the novel, she is represented as a male gendered young sailor in Part 2. Analogously the Robo *sapiens* Spike becomes a Dutchman sailor named Spikkers in Part 2 and is eventually reduced to a bodiless head in last part of the novel. Every boundary is transgressed, including those related to gender, the body but also time and space. The novel is both edifying and thought-provoking in that it aims to raise environmental awareness while also urging us to remedy the same ruinous mistakes made at a different, prior place and time. In summary, this thesis investigates the contribution Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* from their widely different historical perspectives provide to the posthuman discourse.

1. Toward the Posthuman

1.1 The posthuman Turn: an Overview

As Donna Haraway has famously claimed, in our time "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism- in short cyborgs" (Haraway 2016: 7). It seems that we are in the middle of what may be called a posthuman turn. Indeed, the posthuman state presumes an existence that transgresses the boundaries of being human while criticising the primacy of humans as a higher species in the natural order. In order to do so, it reconsiders the relationship between humans and the other inhabitants of the planet. As Rosi Braidotti puts it: "the posthuman […] [is] an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (Braidotti 2013: 21).

The notion of posthuman has developed in a proliferating era of "posts", as a response to new emerging currents of thought. Among these, the most relevant are postmodernist attitude to deconstruct fixed categories, the development of new biology the advancement of technological progress. Indeed, technology has assumed a fundamental role in everyday working and domestic life. One might think of the digitalization of social relationships, digital monetary exchanges, the indispensability of machineries and technological devices such as computers, mobile phones and so on, as well as the advancement of reproductive technologies. All these developments mark a progressive shift from the traditional status of humanity, toward a future characterization beyond being human, otherwise called 'posthuman'. Therefore, the history of posthumanism runs parallel to the emerging technological and biotechnological developments due to their tendency to manipulate human body so as to overcome its boundary limits.

Nonetheless, this concept cannot be either limited to an analysis on the nexus between human and technology or can be reduced to a philosophical interpretation of

technological progress. Rather "it must be more broadly described as part of a set of interconnected discourses and philosophical claims surrounding concepts of mind, body, nature and artifice" (Miah 2008: 98). It is not a coincidence that it started to flourish in our time, of parallel global threats including ecocides, air pollution and climate change, human and nonhuman extinctions. Historically speaking, it may respond to the Anthropocene (Crutzen, Stoermer 2000: 17), the current geological era in which humans extensively affect the ecological balance of the planet. As the very definition of Anthropocene as a geological era draws attention to the disastrous consequences of human impact on earth, similarly, the posthuman theory attempts to criticise the anthropocentric worldviews, values and tenets which determine our relationship with the other inhabitants of the planet. This implies a link between the humanistic emphasis on man as 'measure of all things' and the domination and exploitation of nature, fostered by the uses and abuses of science and technology as well. As such, Rosi Braidotti defines the posthuman as "a crucial aspect of our historicity" (Braidotti 2013: 3). Literature has also contributed to elaborating concerns regarding the future of humans. Indeed, the terms 'posthuman' and 'posthumanism' were first coined by the literary theorist Ihab Hassan within in the article *Prometheus as Performer; Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in five Scenes* (1977) in which he defines the characteristics of posthumanism. According to Hassan, because of its post-dualistic approach, the posthuman foreshadows new forms of identity as well as a new vision of the world.

> We need first to understand that the human form […] may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism (Hassan 1977: 843).

In similar terms, Alan W. France recognised in posthumanism a possibility of liberation from "traditional western binary logic and the dualism that underwrites it: body/mind; nature/culture; organic/machine" (France 2001: 177), man/woman, primitive/civilized; these dichotomies are all in question ideologically. In spite of its progressive stance,

Mas'ud Zavarzadeh acknowledges posthumanism within a context of "post-ality", including within this term all those practices which prefigure the advent of a new society "which is post-production, post-labor, post-ideology, post-white, and post-capitalist" (France 2001: 179), while always reproducing and preserving the adopted capitalist establishment.

Since the posthuman cannot be defined as a unitary process, there is no univocal definition that portrays a unified history of the term with a certain beginning, development and end point. Rather, the posthuman can be broadly defined as an 'umbrella term', epitomizing human transgression beyond being human, an attempt to look more affirmatively towards new alternatives and redefine what it means to be human in a context of advancing technological progress. These initial considerations are relevant in order to understand the posthuman as the result of important changes which affect our era and require a move toward a new way of thinking the human, its relation to 'others' and the environment as well.

1.2 The Literary Posthuman

Literature and fiction have always had a privileged role in the context of the posthuman and posthumanism. Indeed, they are "haunted by the ghosts of humans, nonhumans, and posthumans" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xv). According to Braidotti, literature has acquired an important role not only in the same definition of posthuman but also in order to advocate new literary forms. In this regard, the *Cambridge Companion to literature and the Posthuman* investigates the posthuman representations in literature, starting from the Middle Ages up to the present which this chapter aims to retrace. As far as Medieval literature is concerned, in his analysis Karl Steel concludes that "a great deal of medieval art and literature is indifferent or even hostile to any systematic effort to cordon humans off from other life" (Steel 2017: 3).

Thereafter, Kevin Lagrandeur recognises early modern representations of intelligent systems and artificial humanoids as anticipations of cybernetic posthuman of cyborgs and artificial intelligence. As he puts it: "if humans have never really been autonomous entities, but rather have always been intimately linked and interdependent

with their environments, then the seemingly modern idea of a reciprocal dependency upon mechanical devices is a variation of a much older theme" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xvi). In particular, he refers to the intelligent-servant networks embedded by William Shakespeare's Prospero in *The Tempest* and the protagonist of Christopher Marlow's *Doctor Faustus.* Indeed, Prospero can survive his period in the island inasmuch he maintains a distributed servant network. This system comprehends both his servants Caliban and Ariel, as well as his implements and natural environment. Analogously, in *Doctor Faustus,* the servant system includes spiritual intelligent entities (principally Mephistopheles), objects and the environment as well. In both cases, the systems are intended "not just as prosthetic supplements but as distributed systems extending their makers' selves" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xvi). Such hypothesize of an extension of the subject may be intended as anticipatory to the contemporary posthuman.

As Ron Broglio recognises, in the Romantic period the role of the artist shifts from being mirror of nature to employ it as mirror of his interiority. This tradition of thinking persists until the rise of new historicism in the 1980s, which scales down the privileged role of the Romantic poet. In this context it is relevant the publication of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (2005)*,* as will be discussed later on. However, the humanistic, Romantic-inspired ideals are not fully eradicated and continue to condition humans' perception of the world, influencing many disciplines. As evidence of this, our conception of history as a discipline which concerns only human history epitomises "how anything human or nonhuman shows up in our world" (Broglio 2017: 32). At the same time, Broglio considers Romanticism as a premise to posthuman predicament in its attitude to recognise diversity per se rather than for human utility. Revaluing all values, "posthuman Romanticism flattens the robust construction of interiority and exposes it to the outside. Rather than landscapes fashioned through an experience of overly powerful feeling reflected in tranquillity, humans are one of many elements in the land" (Broglio 2017: 39). Thereafter, Jaff Wallace recognises a posthumanist stance within modern literature because of the ideological ambivalence of fictional characters. Because of their higher consciousness, these characters overcome the Western moralities as well as a Manicheistic vision of the world. Rather, they reconsider issues of

ethics and social justice and "forge themselves or their literary proxies as would-be transgressors of human norms" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xvii). Finally, postmodernism

> Splinter[s] the humanist understanding of a unified self by, among other strategies, highlighting an existential or ontological plurality, a fragmentation of identity, and a breaking up of aesthetic norms, by mixing "high" and "low" elements of culture, liberally citing intertextual allusions, breaking up narrative continuity and teleology, and celebrating radical plurality (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xvii).

In the period ranging from 1880 and 1945 science fiction came to be recognised as a distinct genre with its proper authors, style and characteristics. Of course, science fictions have largely contributed to fashion images of the posthuman, even though, as Lisa Yaszek and Jason W. Ellis have argued, these are limited in their representations. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, science fiction stories

> explore what might happen if the human body was the base upon which to create new species. Since World War II, inspired by cognitive science and computational technologies, SF writers have explored the mutability and multiplicity of the human condition, treating the organic body as just one of several mediums for one or more re-engineered, posthuman species (Yaszek, Ellis 2017: 71).

From the second half of the twentieth century, the 'New Wave SF' comprehended stories of posthumanity intended as physical and cognitive transformation. In particular, by the early 1980s the beginning of the Information Age marked the emergence of cyberpunk and AI (artificial intelligence). These new genres interrogate "how human bodies are transformed, and artificial beings are created by late twentieth-century technologies including AI, artificial life, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and virtual reality" (Yaszek, Ellis 2017: 78). These narratives depart from the recurrent representation of the evil machines produced by the mad scientist (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xix), rather the image of the cyborg "is no longer a figure that instills fear or anxiety.

Instead, it points to profound desires for posthumanization through fusion with machines and their technologies" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xix).

1.2.1 Prometheus: the Mythological Posthuman

As mentioned above, the word posthuman first appeared in the article *Prometheus as Performer; Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in five Scenes* (1977) published as a performance script by the literary theorist Ihab Hassan. In Hassan *Prometheus*, the boundaries between man and machine, human and nonhuman are constantly changing and Prometheus, emblem of human destiny, epitomises a posthuman culture which moves beyond the dichotomies of humanism. Hassan underlines how we are accustomed to think in terms of divisions, conforming to ideology, religion, class, race, language, sex, and age. Even the subject is understood not as a unitary self, but as empty space in which series of selves come to mingle together. As Hassan puts it: "the earth splits into blocks, blocks into nations, nations into provinces, provinces into tribes, tribes into families, families into feuding individuals- and individuals, soon enough, alas, into random atoms" (Hassan 1977: 833). Throughout the myth, imagination and science, myth and technology coexist in transcending mankind's limits. In particular, "Prometheus is himself the figure of a flawed consciousness struggling to transcend […] divisions as the One and the Many, Cosmos and Culture, the Universal and the Concrete. […] Imagination and Science, Myth and Technology, Earth and Sky, two realms tending to one" (Hassan 1977: 838).

The possibility to read the myth of Prometheus throughout a posthuman perspective, reveals that it refers to issues that have always characterised human history and identity. Among these, the human instinct to always 'go beyond', exceed limits in a process of *perpetual becoming*. "So understood, posthumanism is a critical practice of understanding the kind of overreaching that seems characteristic of humanity" (Miah 2008: 92-3). Therefore, Prometheus embodies the perpetual evolution of humankind, which posthumanism contributes to advocate. "The figure of Vitruvian Man, arms and legs defining the measure of things, so marvellously drawn by Leonardo, has broken

through its enclosing circle and square, and spread across the cosmos" (Hassan 1977: 843). Eventually, for Hassan technology participates in the process of transformation, in the revision of the human. "One might even say that whether postmodern man is still *Homo Sapiens* remains to be seen" (Hassan 1977: 845).

A species that can fly is different from one that cannot. A species that can transport itself out of earth's biosphere to other planets is different from an earthbound species. a species that can transplant vital organs from one member to another, blurring the boundaries between this individual and that individual and between life and death, is different from a species whose members cannot do this. This means that the re-vision of human destiny must ultimately consider that destiny is a vast evolutionary scheme. Prometheus had also given men exact foreknowledge of their death (Hassan 1977: 845).

1.3 Technological Culture

Posthumanism comes along with the development of technology, which offers new possibilities to disassembly, reassembly, recraft human bodies and manipulate their limits. Accordingly, Braidotti claims that technologically-mediated subjectivities are post-anthropocentric in their possibilities to reinvent new forms of identities. One might think of the digitalization of social relationship, digital monetary exchanges as well as the advancement of reproductive technologies of creation (for instance through insemination) and destruction (through abortion), but also "the possibility of radical biological change [which] is afforded by new scientific discoveries" (Miah 2008: 98). All these practices, it seems, have definitely entered the domain of scientific control. In a way, human beings are no longer intended as God's creatures but downgraded to material bodies that can be examined and manipulated. In this respect, classic narratives such as Huxley's *Brave New World* or George Orwell's *1984,* alarm about the effects of technology on humans and in particular genetic revolution, showing its disastrous outcomes.

The historical and cultural understanding of technology produces different models of subjectivity as well as different definitions of posthuman. Posthumanism is

often used to argue both for and against scientific and technological enhancements. In this regard, it is worth noting the persistence of stereotypes regarding the representation of alive technologies in the domain of science fiction.

> Stories about the transformation of biology and the rise of machines are often imbued with narratives of fear and uncertainty, which intend to reveal the insecurity of humanity that arises from the prospect of having to share (control of) the world with the living machine, or the cyborg. Such alien beings are frequently represented as a threat to humanity, calling into question their identity and powers of domination. […] [There] is a recurring narrative about how the new being creates a problem for the humans around it (Miah 2008: 86).

Generally, the representation of cyborgs (or other technological beings) "has broken from the opposition that casts good technologies as controllable and subservient, on the one hand, and technologies that are out of human control as dangerous threats, on the other hand" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: 184). These two different attitudes respond to two different perceptions of technology: the first utopian one recognises technology as subservient to human needs; the second dystopian one perceives technology as threatening human dominance. Arguably, it is at the point where these definitions converge that the posthuman identities are modelled.

However, "if posthumanism involves an attempt to imagine what a nonhumanist or post-anthropocentric human identity might be, it also necessarily involves a reconceptualization of technology" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: 190).

> Humans have imagined for a long time that the ability to develop and control technology was one of the defining characteristics of our condition, something that assured us of our superiority over other animals and our unique status in the world. Ironically, this sense of superiority and uniqueness is being challenged by the very technologies we are not seeking to create, and it seems the balance of dominance between human and machines is slowly shifting (Miah 2008: 80).

In this regard it is worth mentioning the outstanding contribution of Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the late twentieth century* (2016)*.* Here technology and machines contribute positively to overcome human fixity and advance hypothesis of hybrid identities. As she puts it: "cyborg imagery […] means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories" (Haraway 2016: 67-8). Here resonates her most famous declaration: "by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (Haraway 2016: 7).

The notion of cyborg refers to a creature in which organic and electronic or mechanical components coexist. It renegotiates the boundaries between human and machine and revisits the concept of human as similar to autonomous, self-regulating, intelligent machine. Furthermore, Haraway proposes a new interpretation of cyborg, as a feminist, post-gender project which aims to redefine identity politics. Completely opposite is Alan France's recognition of a male connotation of technology. Indeed, he recognises "a gendered relationship between hackers and […] the cyber-system of rationality they 'penetrate': 'hacking' suggests an alternative mode of examination that learns, so to speak, how to enter, explore, and rework the basic systems and programs that have informed and regulated investigations of cyberspace" (France 2001: 178). Similarly, in *How we became Posthuman* Katherine Hayles supports the development of posthumanism as far as it does not exceed its limits:

> If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity (Hayles 1999: 5).

In spite of their differences, all these interpretations emphasise the biunivocal relation between culture and technology. Although technology is often used to exploit the planet

and its natural resources, it is also a necessary instrument in order to realise the posthuman project. Indeed, we should consider whether we, as humans, having fostered things such as organ transplantation or space travel, may be said to be remained the same species.

> Will artificial intelligences supersede the human brain [...]? We do not know. But this we do know: artificial intelligences from the humblest calculator to the most transcendent computer, help to transform the image of man, the concept of the human. they are agents of a new posthumanism (Hassan 1977: 846).

Eventually, while warning against the tendency of technological and scientific advancement to reinstate existing moral and social inequalities, posthuman theorists like Braidotti looks positively to contemporary sciences in their potentiality to create new alternative definitions of subjectivity.

1.4 Humanism, anti-Humanism, Posthuman

Secular in its orientation, Humanism "has supported on the liberal side of individualism, autonomy, responsibility and self-determination [...]. It has promoted solidarity, community-bonding, social-justice and principles of equality" (Braidotti 2013: 29). Nevertheless, at the very heart of humanism is the idea of humans as a superior and distinct species, benefiting unique rights. In *The Order of Things* (2005) Michel Foucault investigates and questions the meaning of being human for the first time, thus triggering a flow of new reflections and interpretations of what it means to be human. In particular, with the provocative expression 'death of man', he refers to the crisis of humanism. He argues that the subject is a fixed entity which assumes different forms according to different historical periods. Therefore, there is nothing 'natural' in the subject and the authentic, independent, autonomous subject does not exist. Historically and culturally constructed, man is hence susceptible to power manipulations. As Braidotti puts it:

> The human is a normative convention […], regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as *the* human. […] The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about 'human nature' (Braidotti 2013: 26).

In the complex structure of the modern state individuals "can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns" (Foucault 1982: 783). This reveals how politics may be influential in the creation of culturally constructed identities. In a way, we can see the state as a modern matrix of individualisation. In this regard, Alan France recognises that there are two meanings attached to the word 'subject': one can be subject to someone else, by control and dependence; or subject in the sense of tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both these meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subjects to.

> Power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes the individual subjects (Foucault 1982: 781).

In *Posthuman Bodies* Judith M. Halberstam and Ira Livingston underline the role of language in creating constructed identities. Like a virus imposed from the "outside" to colonise our "inside", language "perpetuate[s] and replicate[s] itself" (Halberstam, Livingston 1995: 41).

Culturally and historically constructed groups also participate in the formation of subjectivities, that is to say in the formation of the "self", since they contribute to the identification process. These groups are based on processes of coalition and recognition, inclusion and incorporation on one hand, but also exclusion and marginalization on the other hand. Therefore, symbolic 'others' are defined on the ground of a negated

recognition within a membership, while reaffirming the role of those entitled to participate.

However, both identities and categories are externally established and imposed. "We are now accustomed to remembering that as objects of knowledge and as historical "race" did not always exist, "class" has a historical genesis, and "homosexuals" are quite junior. […] Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination" (Haraway 2017: 27). Indeed, categories such as gender, race and class oversimplify identities and camouflage their real nature, which is uncertain and incoherent, non-unitary and in perpetually in flux. Because they are culturally constructed (respectively resulting from patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism), rather than expression of a natural condition, our self-representation is based on a "self-knowledge of a self-who-is-not" (Haraway 2017: 24).

Since it is through the body that these practices of differentiation and classification take place, Alan France defines it as a "prison-house of signifying systems" (France 2001: 175). The subject is both divided internally and from others, exposed to what Foucault defines as "dividing practices", which objectivise and fragment him both as individual and in his social relations. On this point, Andy Miah recognises that "the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state's institutions but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state" (Foucault 1982: 785). In order to go beyond categorial division, it is necessary to deconstruct the historical and cultural notions of 'human' (intended as the Western, white, male, heterosexual, elitist model) and Humanism.

[The] universal Man, in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity, […] representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species whose centrality is now challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns (Braidotti 2013: 65).

In this regard, anti-humanism advances the possibility of a new dialectical scheme of thought. "Anti-humanists over the last thirty years questioned both the self-representation and the image of thought implied in the humanist definition of the human, especially the ideas of transcendental reason and the notion that the subject coincides with rational consciousness" (Braidotti 2013: 143). Anti-humanism constitutes an important premise for post-humanist thought, since it "consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting" (Braidotti 2013: 23). Anti-humanism rejects unitary identities, emphasising difference and diversity as constitutive aspects of subjectivity. Therefore, it questions the dichotomy between subjectivity and otherness, so that 'others' are no longer perceived as 'others'. In this perspective, Foucault's conception of the 'death of man' does not signal the end of humanity as a whole, but rather "it signals the end of a certain conception of the human" (Hayles 1999: 286). By means of displacing the human from his privileged position at the centre of world history, Foucault paves the way for the deconstruction of both individualism and humanism and he undermines the privileged interiority of the human subject inherited by the Romantic stance. The Vitruvian ideal is thus "literally pulled down from his pedestal and deconstructed" (Braidotti 2013: 23). Accordingly, for Braidotti the anti-humanist "death of Man" establishes the decline of those principles of reason and scientific rationality as functional to the progress of mankind.

Moreover, Braidotti underlines the inability of the contemporary humanities to respond properly to the current identity crisis enforced by multiculturality, inter-dependent and globalized structures and the increasingly recurrent usage of technological mediation. According to her, on a theoretical level, the posthuman calls for disciplinary hybridization and transversality, a boundary-crossing approach able to affect the disciplinary purity of the structures of thought.

> The monistic ontology that sustains this vision of life as vitalist, self-organizing matter also allows the critical thinker to re-unite the different branches of philosophy, the sciences and the arts in a new alliance. I see this as a dynamic contemporary formula to redefine the relationship between the two cultures of the 'subtle' (Humanities) and 'hard' (Natural)

sciences. They are different lines of approaching the vital matter that constitutes the core of both subjectivity and its planetary cosmic relation (Braidotti 2013: 171).

Along with this disciplinary hybridization, Braidotti underlines the necessity to displace the Man from the centre of scientific and human studies. "The posthuman is 'post' not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from another-will" (Hayles 1999: 4). Posthuman, it seems, remains suspended between practices of embodiment and disembodiment. Embodiment within the world we inhabit and disembodiment in order to transcend the limits imposed by corporeality.

1.4.1 The Posthuman and its Others

As previously mentioned, both the notions of "human" and "Humanism" exist within a system of inclusion and exclusion, aggregation and marginalization. The symbolic 'others' have functioned as markers of what may be considered human. Indeed, women, queers, non-whites, non-Europeans, animals, cyborgs embed such oppositional terms. "These are the sexualised, racialised, and naturalised others, who are reduced to the less that human status of disposable bodies" (Braidotti 2013: 15). As a result, instead of being an additional quality, difference has been assumed as a synonym of being 'less than', thus reducing 'others' to a sub-human status (Braidotti 2013: 28). Whenever difference is associated with inferiority, the implications for those labelled as 'others' are lethal. "The reduction to sub-human status of non-Western others is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization" (Braidotti 2013: 28).

Human enhancements and actions affected also nonhuman beings. "The worldview which equated Mastery with rational scientific control over 'others' also militated against the respect for the diversity of living matters and of human cultures" (Braidotti 2013: 48). As a move beyond anthropocentrism and the primary role of Man in the world, posthumanism also call into question the *species boundaries.* Indeed, it

raises questions about important issues such as animal ethics, which pave the way for further discussions concerning hybrid embryos, transgenics, but also cyborgs. Such an approach definitely rejects the fixity of biological distinctions represented by species categories.

Posthumanism is indebted to the reflections developed out of the "margins" of such a centralized human subject, which emphasized the human as a process, more than as a given. Indeed, the emergence of activist social movements such as feminism, anti-racism, de-colonizing and pro-environment movements among the many, greatly contributed to question the humanist ideal. As Braidotti underlines, what follows the crisis of the humanist ideology is the re-emergence of the oppressed minorities that is to say the culturally sexualised, racialised and naturalised 'other'. Indeed, posthumanism encouraged the emergence of movements whereby the negative others progressively reaffirm themselves, against the social norms imposed by the humanist thought. Difference and otherness acquire, therefore, a determinant role, inasmuch as they are considered a constitutive part of our identity. Thus, posthumanism calls for this 'vengeance' to be fulfilled, so that the historically 'others' (Black, Gay and Lesbian, Women and so on) can reaffirm themselves and claim their difference. As a result, the new emancipatory movements express both the crisis of the majority and the process of becoming of the minorities.

> More broadly and ambitiously, posthumanism asks us to decenter human thinking by imaging life, worlds, and thought outside of the human. As such it is often conjoined with radical forms of ecocriticism, animal studies, and object-oriented theories. Posthumanism asks us to imagine nonhuman phenomenology and in doing so engages in our limits of thinking outside of the human (Broglio 2017: 34).

1.4.2 What it means to be (post)Human

Throughout the centuries, philosophers have attempted to define humanness by means of distinguishing and separate it from other entities: that is to say machines, animals, cyborgs and even God (Miah 2008: 89). Complementing this, the reduction of the human

body to a material component which can be scientifically manipulated and recrafted, has accentuated the necessity to underline the differences between human and nonhuman entities, particularly between the late 19th century and early 20th century. Braidotti underlines that this dividing practice reproduces a polarised and hierarchised system of thinking which is based on exclusion and domination. On the contrary, the posthuman predicament transcends any dualistic construction, including the categorical divide between the manufactured and the natural, organism and machine. Indeed, what posthumanism tries to propose is an extended hybrid self, embodied in a nature-culture continuum, a process which Braidotti defines as "becoming animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine […] [grounded on] our being environmentally based, that is to say embodied, embedded and in symbiosis with other species" (Braidotti 2013: 66). According to Braidotti, this new, post-individualistic condition takes the name of 'nomadic subjectivity', "based on relationality and transversal interconnections across the classical axes of differentiation. […] Posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations" (Braidotti 2013: 96-100).

Whereas Francois Lyotard warns against the de-humanizing and alienating effects of a technologically dominated capitalism, Braidotti considers technology as indispensable for contemporary subjects in their effort to give a positive contribution in changing the world. "To be posthuman […] implies a new way of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or environmental inter-connections" (Braidotti 2013: 190). Becoming-posthuman implies a recognition of humans' attachment and connection to a common life-space "that the subject never masters nor possesses but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group or a cluster" (Braidotti 2013: 193).

As Hayles underlines, the mediation of technology is so determinant in the construction of identities that they can no longer be conceived as separated. In this respect, it is worth mentioning Haraway's Cyborg Theory. Her interest in cyborgs was not motivated by an attempt to enhance human capacities, rather "to disrupt uniform

ideas about what it means to be human and the social and political entitlements this might imply" (Miah 2008: 84). In particular, her "suggestion of a hybrid, partial, or non-unitary cyborg identity that would undo the "troubling dualisms" of the individual humanist subject – including the divisions of organic and technological, human and animal, self and other, male and female – remains suggestive for any attempt to envision a nonhumanist posthuman identity" (Rutsky 2017: 191). As Rutsky puts it:

> a cyborg or posthumanist identity is not just a matter of adding technology to an already human subject, nor – as Hayles has forcefully argued – of transferring a human mind or self to a computer or robot. Rather, a nonhumanist posthumanism challenges the assumption of an original or essential humanity to which technology necessarily serves as a prosthesis or supplement (Rutsky 2017: 192).

In *How We Became Posthuman*, the cultural posthumanist Hayles recognises a new way of being human by means of defining humans as non-material informational patterns. Body boundaries are therefore compromised, dismantled and reassembled as dispenser of information. In line with Hassan and Foucault, she claims that the era of Man has almost come to an end. In the posthuman state, the body is ruptured, deconstructed, dispersed and identities are affirmed beyond the boundaries and corporeal limits. In *Posthuman Bodies,* Halberstam and Livingstone challenge the coherence of the human body, appealing to the idea that there is no common basis to elaborate a definitive idea of human essence. They emphasise that "the posthuman does not necessitate the obsolescence of the human; it does not represent an evolution or devolution of the human. Rather it participates in re-distributions of difference and identity" (Miah 2008: 81). However, some theorists remain sceptical toward the posthuman evolution. Francis Fukuyama's definition of posthuman is founded on its supposed lack of humanism, its transgression of moral and ethical boundaries. In particular, he postulates the existence of a Factor X, a sort of human dignity, wherefore posthumanism is intended as a condition of its absence. According to Francis Fukuyama, Factor X is a determinant condition in order to be classified as humans. However, an improper use of technology can corrupt it. Therefore, rather than theorising posthumanism, he warns about the possible consequences of human enhancements. Accordingly, Francis Fukuyama

recognises that a possible 'collateral effect' of the relentless advancement of technology may be the commodification of human beings (one might think to the commercialization of biotechnological innovations not available to everyone). Fukuyama envisages a future in which "a situation where what is, today, regarded as normal level of health, might be seen as grotesquely inadequate from the perspective of a super-enhanced human and this will transplate into social pressure to become enhanced" (Miah 2008: 79). In order to avoid bad consequences of human enhancement, Fukuyama calls for the necessity to conceptualize the human, so that its corruption may be prevented.

> The human brain itself does not really know whether it will become obsolete – or simply need to revise its self-conception…. Will artificial intelligences supersede the human brain, rectify it, or simply extend its powers? We do not know. But this we do know: artificial intelligences, from the humblest calculator to the most transcendent computer, help to transform the image of man, the concept of the human. They are agents of a new posthumanism (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xi).

For Braidotti, the posthuman attempt to exceed the boundaries imposed by humanism and anthropocentrism is not only to be intended in a figurative sense, but also at the very skin level, so that the body becomes a prosthesis to be manipulated. By challenging the physical boundaries of the body, the posthuman therefore challenges the liberal humanist concept of the body as representative of the self and elicits the invention of new ways of representing and figuring the complexities of our subjectivities. "The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (Hayles 1999: 3). Despite its positive stance,

> the idea of the posthuman elicits elation in equal measure to anxiety and it stimulates controversial cultural representations. […] The posthuman predicament enforces the necessity to think again and to think harder about the status of the human, the importance of recasting subjectivity accordingly, and the need to invent forms of ethical relations, norms and values worthy of the complexity of our times (Braidotti 2013: 186).

24

2. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

2.1 *Frankenstein* as Science Fiction: the Imagined Unimaginable

The 19th century saw an acceleration in the production of science fiction stories, among which Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* ranks as one of the earliest examples. Like a myth, Mary Shelley's novel resonates with social significance, raising questions about our place in the world and our relations with others. Although commonly associated with the Gothic horror tradition, Shelley's novel may be admitted into the ranks of science fiction genre as well. She refers to the cutting-edge technology and scientific theories of her time, namely electromagnetic manipulation and modern surgical techniques, to depict such an outstanding scientific achievement as Frankenstein's creation is. Indeed, even though when the novel was published the very idea of creating a being as an assemblage of scavenged bodily parts was hard to conceive, in the preface of the novel Mary explained that "the event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed by Dr Darwin[1] and some of the physiological writers of Germany as not of impossible occurrence" (Shelley 1992: 11).[2]

In penetrating the deepest mysteries of creation, "the book resurrects and reclothes a number of humanity's deepest concerns about automata: for example, the servant-machine rising against its master, the fear of the machine reproducing itself, […] and the terror, finally, of humans realizing that they are at-one with the machine-monster"(Mazlish 2000: 143-44). The menacing aspect of their existence is not just due to the unnatural manner they take on their uncanny lives, but especially that they disown their own filiation, any assumed lineage to their creators. On this point, Rutsky underlines that the novel introduces the motif of the technology created by a human being, which at once imitates human life, but gradually escapes its creator's control and threatens to rebel against him/her, thus overturning the servant-master relation.

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[1] Shelley refers to Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) an illustrious scientist expert on physics, physiology, chemistry, botanic and engineering and grandfather of the more notorious Charles.
[2] All references to the novel will be quoted as (F: 22).

Indeed, in Shelley's novel the new-born technology rebels against its creator, unsettles the initially established master-servant relation, turning to be an out-of-control artificial being. Nonetheless, *Frankenstein* also intends to warn of the pitfalls and dangers lurking behind the progressist promises of scientific advancement.

Frankenstein is an example of Female Gothic considering its affinities with Shelley's own experiences of womanhood and childbirth. Raised without a loving nuclear family, she desperately seeks to create it both in life and fiction. Unfortunately, death and birth are hideously mingled in *Frankenstein* as they were in Shelley's life. Not only did her mother die in giving birth to Mary herself, but she also experienced an abortion as well as the premature deaths of her children Clara Everina and William. Moreover, "as a motherless child and a woman in a patriarchal culture, Mary Shelley shared the creature's powerful sense of being born without an identity, without role-models to emulate, without a history" (Mellor 1988: 45). As Maurice notices in the novel's Introduction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was reluctantly admitted into the domain of Gothic genre, because of its almost realistic style which departs from the traditionally refined sensibility of the Gothic horror (Hindle 1992: xxxix). Moreover, Frankenstein's use "of the new masculinist-made god, Science" with the purpose of "banish[ing] disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death" (F: 42), sets him apart from the plotter or villain of the traditional Gothic tale. Such consideration encourages reflections aimed to investigate further *Frankenstein'*s literary genre.

The novel shows affinities with the Gothic tradition though, because of the predominance of fantasy over reality, supernatural over natural, strange over the commonplace, "with one definite auctorial intent: to scare" (Moers 1979: 77). Furthermore, "giving birth" asexually to his creation, Frankenstein's repressed sexuality aligns the novel to the Gothic tradition.

> The Gothic novel deals centrally with paranoia, the taboo, and the barbaric, with everything that a given culture most fears and tries hardest to repress. The female-authored Gothic novel explores the cultural repression of all female sexual desire in the

name of the chaste, modest, proper lady- a lady confined within a patriarchal bourgeois domesticity and often menaced by a looming threat of incest (Mellor 2003: 12).

In the novel, Shelley's portrayal of Frankenstein's bourgeois family is negative in its representation of women as sacrificed, abandoned and silenced. Founded on exploitation and possession, the bourgeois family also mirrors a hierarchical ideology of domination. However, *Frankenstein* presents elements that break from the Gothic tradition as well. Being the product of an act of will rather than unknowable forces, the origins of the monster are not mysterious and his existence is never questioned; secondly, whereas Gothic novels imply that repressive customs and lack of knowledge may engender horrible situations, Shelly's novel seems to imply exactly the opposite. Thirdly, the protagonist is not a woman and the villainous character transcends the *topos* of a mischievous male character. Indeed, Shelley invented a new kind of literary terror, more sophisticated than that of feminine societal and sexuality of Gothic novel. No female victim nor any heroine is portrayed in the novel. Rather, she brought to fiction the archetypal myth of the mad "scientist who locks himself in his laboratory and secretly, guiltily, works at creating human life, only to find that he has made a monster" (Moers 1979: 80).

However, more recent representations of *Frankenstein*'s scenario have adopted a posthumanist approach so as to investigate the primacy of humans and what differentiates them from technology. The posthuman state presumes an existence that transgresses the boundaries of being human, and in Shelly's novel it takes the form of a grotesque creature. Similarly, Victor's scientific efforts are aimed to surge beyond human limits and acquire divine powers of creation, to manipulate and dominate over nature, giving life to the dead.

As Mary Shelley explains in the novel's introduction, the idea of the novel came to her mind in 1816, when she was only nineteen, during a permanence in villa Diodati, near Geneva in Switzerland, where she spent some time with notorious Romantic poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, George Gordon Lord Byron and a friend of his, John Polidori. She used to sit by during her companions' discussions about the advanced sciences of electricity, mesmerism and galvanism and after reading ghost stories

together they all agreed to try to write a horror story of their own. A waking nightmare that night inspired her to write her most notorious novel, first published in 1818.

The novel's embedded structure comprehends three stories with three different narrators: a Chinese box narrative which gives readers access to different points of view. The first narrator is Walton, who carries on the plot through his correspondence with his sister Mrs Saville. The second narrator is Frankenstein, whose narrative frames that of his own creature. These stories show parallels in the effect they produce on the narration. Indeed, the monster's moving narrative is a desperate plea for acceptance and recognition. Victor's narration likewise aims to convince the ship's captain and explorer Walton to end his journey and destroy the monster.

Frankenstein has had a striking impact on the literary world, testified by the variety of interpretations by critics, filmmakers, playwriters and novelists spawned after its publication. Far from children literature as it was said to be shortly after its publication, Shelley's novel has brought forth loads of interpretations (feminist and psychoanalytic ones, for example) which have enhanced its value and complexity, while paving the way for the emergence of science fiction writing. Its inheritance "is the freedom to imagine beyond the confines of contemporary social life and the restrictions of contemporary politics, and, like Mary Shelley, to dream a world into existence" (Shaw 2000: 178) and this is precisely what science fiction does.

2.2   Victor Frankenstein: from Human to Superhuman

As the eldest son of an illustrious family, Victor Frankenstein grows up in an enlightened, culturally inspiring environment. His curiosity motivates his scientific inquiries and reading of legendary stories longing for the elixir of life. Indeed, when he chances upon an outdated book of natural philosophy, he becomes absorbed in the study of giving life to inanimate matter. "Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, canonical figures in the Hermetic tradition are all mentioned as the hero's inspirations, but they are shown as Mephistopheles-like figures, leading him to perdition" (Mazlish 2000: 141). He leaves his family in Geneva to attend the University of Ingolstadt. There, he enrols in courses in natural philosophy and chemistry. He studies everything: mathematics,

chemistry, psychology and anatomy, with a special interest for "electricity and galvanism", but he nevertheless remains "discontented and unsatisfied". He claims: "I made some discoveries in the improvement of some chemical instrument […] [and] became acquainted with the science of anatomy, but that was not sufficient" (F: 52). As Van Der Laan points out, "not sufficient" epitomises the never-ending advancement of scientific research, inventions and innovation of the man of science who has no conscience and knows no bounds.

At Ingolstadt, his encounter with professor Waldman is significant, who convinces Frankenstein to persevere in his scientific studies. He taught Frankenstein to "penetrate into the recesses of nature and shew how she works in her hiding places" (F: 49). From Frankenstein's perspective nature is therefore conceived as the female Other, available to serve and gratify male desires for wealth, power and prestige. Indeed, Frankenstein's conception of nature contributes to perpetuate a patriarchal ideology based on values such as individualism, racism, sexism and egotism. Mellor notes that "construing nature as the passive Other has led […] to the increasing destruction of the environment and the disruption of the delicate ecological balance between humankind and nature. […] The scientist who analyses, manipulates, and attempts to control nature unconsciously engages in a form of oppressive sexual politics" (Mellor 1988: 111-12).

Not only is nature perceived as a possessable and passive female who can be enslaved, even penetrated so as to please male desire, but Victor also tries to usurp the female power of biological reproduction in his laboratory which stands for a male womb. "Frankenstein's apparent antagonist is God himself as Maker of Man, but his real competitor is also woman as the maker of children. […] In Shelley's view, man's hubris as soul maker both usurps the place of God and attempts -vainly- to sublate woman's psychological prerogative" (Spivak 1985: 255). As critic Mellor notices, from a feminist perspective the novel epitomises what may happen when a woman is excluded from procreation. In other words, the disastrous consequences in aspiring to emulate the natural forces of creation, to usurp the secrets of nature. Accordingly, Frankenstein's failure is caused by his wrongly chosen reproductive model and his pursue of nature's hiding places brings forth nothing but death. However, the representation of man's

reckless manipulation of nature and its resources, Shelley also criticises "a gendered definition of nature as female" (Mellor 1988: 89-90). At the same time, Frankenstein's "giving birth" asexually, is also symptomatic of feminine repressed sexuality. His recurrent homosocial relationships (with Walton, the Creature and Henry Clerval) and the universal passivity of female characters throughout the novel are meant to claim

> the perversity of denying female sexuality. Indeed, Victor's ambition to create a literally larger and more beautiful male object of affection has been read as a displacement of his repressed homoerotic attraction to the handsome Henry Clerval. The passion and admiration with which Walton regards Victor further extends this homosocial theme to the frame narrative (Mellor 2003: 13).

Both Frankenstein and Walton perfectly epitomise the scientific ideologies of their time. "They have been taught to see nature 'objectively', as something separate from themselves, as passive and even dead matter, as 'the object of my affection that can and should be penetrated, analyzed, and controlled'. They thus accord nature no living soul or 'personhood' requiring recognition or respect" (Mellor 1988: 110). Unconcerned about the evolutionary progress of nature, Victor's decision to bypass parental reproduction in his creation of a new species advances a new conception of science as manipulative and commanding rather than limited to comprehend, describe, and revere nature (Mellor 1988: 100).

Accordingly, rather than created in God's world, the creature is spawned within a laboratory. Frankenstein crosses the boundaries of human terrain limits, clearly manifests his wish to elevate himself as supreme creator, ruthless monarch, motivated by an unquenchable thirst of knowledge and his compulsive desire to discover "the secrets of heaven and earth" (F: 39): "a new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (F: 55). As Mellor points out, "*Frankenstein* is our culture's most penetrating literary analysis of the psychology of modern-scientific-man, of the dangers inherent in scientific research, and of the horrifying but predictable consequences of an uncontrolled technological

exploitation of nature and the female" (Mellor 2003: 9). In this regard, Ellen Moers recognises affinities between *Frankenstein* and the literature of the overreacher:

> The superman who breaks through moral human limitations to defy the rules of society and infringe upon the realm of God. [...] All are overreachers, all are punished by their own excesses: by a surfeit of sensation, of experience, of knowledge, and most typically, by the doom of eternal life (Moers 1979: 802).

Frankenstein only desires to advance knowledge and emphasises the "enticement of science", the contentment which derives from it but remains blind and uncapable to foresee the ruinous outcomes of his ambitious research project. He himself defines his pursuit of knowledge as a "vice", a "passion or a transitory desire" which disturbs his tranquillity, his "calm and peaceful mind". The pursuit of knowledge at the heart of Frankenstein is manifest as both Victor and Walton devote their energies to egoistic dreams of conquest over nature or death. Indeed, the scientist Victor attempts to access the elixir of life whereas the ship's captain Walton aims to reach the North Pole. Like Frankenstein, Walton responds to the Romantic ideals of grandeur. His aspiration to "discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle" (F:15), his "prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole" (F: 16), his desire to tread unexplored places, to confront nature are akin to "Frankenstein's Promethean attempt to steal the principle of life" (Mellor 2003: 13).

However, if Frankenstein substitutes work for love, becoming oblivious to everything around him, ignoring the beauty of nature, his health, and interrupting any correspondence with his family, Walton, by contrast, tries desperately to find friendly companions who "participate my joy, [...] sympathise with me [...] approve or amend my plans [...] [and] have affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind" (F: 10-20). Furthermore, he learns from Frankenstein's example and consciously does not sacrifice the lives of his crew to his egoistic ambitions. Indeed, he is eventually convinced by his crew to give up his egoistical enterprise and return to civility. By contrast, Victor's obsessive research isolates him from humanity, his family and leads him to secrecy, ill-health, self-absorption. He admits:

My enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favourite employment. Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow-creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime (F: 57).

As far as the consequences of scientific research are concerned, it is also worth considering the same origin of the term "monster", a considerably relevant word in *Frankenstein.* The word had been first used in the 12th-century Old French referring to "prodigy" or "marvel", but its meaning shifted to that of a "disfigured person" or "misshapen being", both of which may be applicable to the novel's created being. Etymologically, the work derives from the Latin *monere,* meaning "to warn". "And this is where *Frankenstein* leaves us: with a portent and a warning about monstrous acts and atrocities undertaken in the name of scientific and technological progress and benefaction" (Van Der Laan 2010: 303).

It is no coincidence that the novel's subtitle refers to the myth of Prometheus, in that he embodies the aspiration to be a creative divinity. Both Prometheus and Frankenstein give origin to a new being, by means of their cunning, ambition and even theft. Moreover, with his enterprise Prometheus gave humans access not just to mere knowledge but also to prohibited knowledge, donating human beings sciences, arts and technology. Analogously, obsessed by his conviction of limitless power, Frankenstein transgresses against nature and steals the "spark of life" from the gods to bestow animation, thus becoming a modern Prometheus. In his pursuit of knowledge, he repeatedly refers to his enterprise as "dangerous", "unlawful" and as one he has desired with "exceeded moderation". In other words, he seems to recognise that the knowledge he seeks is or, at least, should be forbidden. Because of this, he is also "identified with the two greatest overreachers and usurpers […], Faust and Satan. Like Faust, Frankenstein has sold his soul in his endeavours both to generate a homunculus and to acquire forbidden knowledge" (Mellor 1988: 77), as he acknowledges "I seemed to have

lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (F: 55). Like Satan, Victor has usurped God of his creative power.

Frankenstein may be the literary example of terrible miscalculation and its protagonist the model of an irresponsible scientist. With the aim of creating a "new species", Victor assembles his creature from "collected bones from charnel-houses" (F: 55), whereas "the dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished" (F: 55) many materials, which he sticks together in what he calls "my workshop of filthy creation" (F: 55). Only when his grand project is eventually accomplished, does he become aware that its final product was nothing but a monster, far from the enhanced, strong ideal being he aimed to create: "now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (F: 58). Upon animating his creation Frankenstein, horrified by its awful aspect, flees aghast, abhorred from his repulsive creation, rushes to his room and tries to sleep, troubled by nightmares about Elizabeth's and his mother's corpses. As he wakes, he sees the monster looming over his bed, watching him with a grotesque smile.

Even if Frankenstein initially escapes from his creation and even if their confrontations are only a few, the Creature stands as a haunting, inescapable presence. Indeed, as Victor arrives at his apartment with Henry, he hesitates in opening the door "as children are accustomed to do when they expect a spectre to stand in waiting for them on the other side" (F: 62). Furthermore, as he agrees to accomplish its request for a mate, he is warned to expect constant surveillance and, after abandoning the project, he is even more encumbered by its presence.

Frankenstein considers his creature as innately evil, a devil, a vile insect. However, he never asks whether that malignity might have been prevented by parental care, a different appearance, or benefiting his creature of a female companion. Contrariwise, the Creature repeatedly claims that his nature was originally good but compelled into evil by others: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (F: 103); he even claims: "I had feelings of affection, they were requited by destination and scorn" (F: 172). Even though motivated by the desire to modify, improve the human body, the result of Frankenstein's technological experiment reveals to be only a triumph

of sorrow and death, rather than an elated enhancement for the human species. However, the lesson remains unlearned, since towards the end of his storytelling to Walton, he seems to be animated by the same feelings and intentions which had initially prompted his enterprise. He admits: "During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct […] nor do I find it blameable. […] I have been blasted in these hopes [science and discoveries], yet another may succeed" (F: 219-20). Frankenstein is stubbornly convinced of the rightness of his actions. Even on his death-bed he confesses to Walton:

> He shewed unparalleled malignity and selfishness, in evil: he destroyed my friends; he devoted to destruction beings who possessed exquisite sensations, happiness, and wisdom; nor do I know where this thirst of vengeance may end. Miserable himself, that he may render no other wretched, he ought to die (F: 219-20).

Convinced that his achievement may serve a higher cause, a superior good, Frankenstein never entirely acknowledges the Creature as his own fault, since this would imply a recognition of his responsibilities in the atrocities committed by his creature, namely the death of those he loves most. By the way, he refuses to acknowledge any responsibility towards his own progeny as well. He proves to be careless of his creature's appearance inasmuch as he selects larger-than-normal body parts in order to accelerate the process of creation, thus neglecting that its aspect was part of his responsibility as a creator.

Eventually, Frankenstein's abandonment of his offspring, "soon takes the extreme form of putative infanticide" (Mellor 1988: 42). "Here […] is where Mary Shelley's book is most interesting, most powerful, and most feminine: in the motif of revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (Moers 1979: 81). *Frankenstein* epitomises the trauma of after-birth. Maternal reactions to giving birth range from a sense of love, fulfilment, ecstasy to depression, hostility, insanity. Abandoned by its only parent, entirely isolated, the Creature desperately fails to obtain the sympathy it craves. Its attempt to establish an affectionate bond with the De Laceys dramatically fails. Indeed, whereas the De Lacey

family embrace the Turkish/Christian Safie, the racial other, they manifest repulsion towards the Creature.

The artificial being has also been interpreted as manifestation of man' deepest interiority. As Van Der Laan notices: "because the creature is made in the image of the creator, we discover that Frankenstein himself must be a monster as well, for the creature must necessarily reflect the image of the creator. […] In other words, the scientist/technologist is the real monster here" (Van Der Laan 2010: 301). Otherwise, Ellen Moers observes that the novel dramatizes the cleavage between idealism and rationality, feeling and reason; in other words, it is a parable of the divided self. During the final chase creature and creator are definitely indistinguishable. "Hunter and hunted blur into one consciousness, one spirit of revenge, one despair, one victim. […] By the end of the novel, we cannot separate the wretched, solitary Frankenstein from the wretched, solitary monster" (Mellor 1988: 135). Therefore, it is no coincidence if the name of Frankenstein tends to be mistakenly assigned not to the maker but to his creature.

2.3   Frankenstein's Creature: beyond the Human

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being in the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, any my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs (F: 58).

After months of labour, one stormy night Frankenstein accomplishes his act of creation. However, upon animating it, rather than celebrating his scientific triumph he remains horrified by his grotesque act. Victor repels "his yellow skin [which] scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; […] his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips" (F: 58) and abhors its tremendous size. Rejected by its only parent, nameless and

without any kinship, the Creature goes lonely and naked into the world and lives in close contact with nature, where its education takes place. Here Shelley refers to the philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau, who considers human life as potentially virtuous and pure unless it is corrupted by society.

> [The] creature is Rousseau's natural man, a creature no different from the animals, responding unconsciously to the needs of his flash and the changing conditions of his environment. He feels pleasure at the sight of moon, the warmth of the sun, the sound of bird-song, the light and heat of fire; pain at the coldness of snow, the burning sensation of fire, the pains of hunger and thirst. In the state of nature, man is free and unselfconscious (Mellor 1988: 47).

While Frankenstein, the virile male scientist enslaves and penetrates nature for his egoistical purposes and individual mastery, his creature thrives in the natural environment showing extraordinary strength, resilience and agility. It also seems intellectually superior to humans since it can learn to speak and read more easily than Safie, the Turkish woman hosted by the De Laceys. Indeed, fortuitously spying from a crack in the wall of the family's cottage, the Creature can learn the language, ideals, history and morals of the world:

> I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it. […] By great application, however, and after having remained during the space of several revolutions of the moon in my hovel, I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse; […] I cannot describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds and was able to pronounce them. I distinguished several other words without being able as yet to understand or apply them, such as 'good', 'dearest', 'unhappy' (F: 114-15).

In a way, the progeny seems to exceed its maker's capacities. More importantly, "the De Laceys not only stimulate the creature's emotions and arouse his desire to do good to the others (which takes the form of gathering firewood for them), but also introduce him to the concept and function of a spoken and written language" (Mellor 1988: 49). Initially a grotesque, uncanny, entirely physical being, the creature becomes eventually verbal, emotional, almost human. However, he rapidly finds out the limitations of living in a state of nature and of civilisation as well. In so doing, the Creature enacts Locke's theory of *tabula rasa*, since it gains all its ideas from sensorial experience or reflection, "seeking or avoiding the causes of sensation according to whether they produce pleasure or pain" (Hindle 1992: xxxiv).

Not only does Frankenstein repudiate his creation, but every human who beholds the creature is horrified by it. At once herald of destruction and victim of parental and social abandonment, the Creature epitomises the disastrous consequences of being raised without a nurturing and supporting family. He eventually cries: "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. […] I have murdered the lovely and the helpless […] I have devoted my creator […] to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin" (F: 224). Denied any possibility to see it, readers are less reluctant to sympathise with Frankenstein's Creature.

On this point, in the essay "The posthuman that could have been: Mary Shelley's Creature" (2016), Gonzales recognises the face as the site where ethics is located. In alignment with the scientific theories of her period, Shelley refers to the semiotics of the face to which Lavater's physiognomical theory, among others, is closely related. These theories held the existence of a direct relation between a person's physical characteristics and his/her innate soul and morality. The Creature is commonly described by the characters in the novel as gigantic, yellow-skinned, black-lipped, monstrous while its countenance is associated with that of an "ogre". An appearance which seems to indicate its evil nature. Significantly, the Creature covers Frankenstein's eyes with its hand in the hope of being accepted (or at least listened to) by Frankenstein, and it is not a coincidence that the only character who manifests sympathy to him is the

blind old De Lacey. Therefore, not only is the Creature seen as monstrous, but it is also defined and perceived as such. In this regard, Mellor underlines the ideological impact of such linguistic processes of imaging and naming, and its consequent implications.

> By consistently seeing the creature's countenance as evil, the characters in the novel force him to become evil. […] Mary Shelley strikingly shows us that when we see nature as evil, we make it evil. […] Moreover, because we can consciously know only the linguistic universes we have ourselves constructed, if we read or image the creature as evil, we write ourselves as the authors of evil (Mellor 1988: 134).

In the novel's introduction Mary Shelley compares the creature to a shapeless, chaotic substance which belongs to a new species and therefore embodies the unknowable universal elements. "Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded; it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself" (F: 8). Shelley thus anticipates Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in that conception of human knowledge as

> the product of invented and linguistically constructed forms of grammar which societies have imposed over time on an unknowable (or, as Derrida would put it, absent) ontological being. […] What we call knowledge, truth, or culture are only a collection of discourses, linguistic readings of what is essentially a chaos (Mellor 2003: 22).

Significantly, Frankenstein's creature remains unnamed and unnameable, thus alluding at the morally presumptuous habit of conferring meanings to what we cannot truly know. As Spivak puts it, "the absolutely Other cannot be selfed, […] the monster has 'proprieties' which will not be contained by 'proper' measures" (Spivak 1985: 258). Significantly, at the end of the novel it is "lost in darkness and distance", returning to his original place: the territory of the unknown. Shelley endows the Creature with qualities of sublimity, which are aimed to describe human reaction as approaching the unknown, the overwhelmed, the infinite. "She sets him free among the archetypal landscapes of

the sublime: among the Alps, in the frozen wastes of the North Pole. And like power itself, he has superhuman strength" (Mellor 2003: 22). On this point, Mellor notes a gendered distinction between Burke's definitions of beautiful and sublime: whereas the sublime is masculine, the beautiful is connoted as feminine. If the aesthetic of the beautiful is grounded "in a conscious sympathy between the human mind and a benevolent female nature" (Mellor 1988: 138), the sublime is associated with the "powerful, damaging, violent, unloving father" (Mellor 1988: 138). At the same time, the Creature's confinement in the domain of the categorical 'other', may even serve as an expedient to quieten the terrors of the unknown, the unidentified and the unfamiliar.

For Mellor, the animal and human parts collected by Frankenstein to compose the technological creation may be intended as tools, scientific instruments for his enterprise. From this perspective, the creature can be seen as the embodiment of the proletarian class, "dehumanized by the mechanized modes of technological production controlled by the industrial scientist and, in modern times, by the computer. […] All are potential monsters, dehumanized by their uncaring employers and unable to feel the bonds of citizenship with the capitalist society in which they live" (Mellor 1988: 112-14).

Mary Shelley's feminist novel portrays the vindictive consequences of raping nature, as a punishing force towards those who transgress her boundaries. Nature reveals not to be the as inert, passive, or 'dead' as Frankenstein imagines. Evidence of this is provided not only by the monster's rebellion, but also by Frankenstein's mental and physical illness and delirium which emerge whenever he tries to interfere with the natural order of things. Furthermore, the Creature reasserts its power over its own maker by seizing his technology of control as he states: "You are my creator, but I am your master, - obey!" (F: 172).

As Gonzales recognises, there are two moments of anagnorisis in the novel, that is to say of literal recognition in which Frankenstein's Creature acknowledges itself as Other. The first one occurs during its permanence nearby the De Laceys' dwelling as the Creature always finds itself wanting when trying to interact with the environment. Indeed, when it tries to emulate the song of a bird, its voice "comes out much hoarser,

and when he catches sight of his reflection on the water he fails to see the perfect human form he admires" (Gonzales 2016: 60).

> How was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification (F: 116-17).

Here, cognition becomes a matter of seeing one's own reflected image. In line with the 18th century philosopher Berkley, Shelley seems to admit that to be means to be perceived. The second, painful moment of anagnorisis occurs as the Creature learns about its origins in the journal he grabbed up from Victor's laboratory. "He now understands that he is, indeed, the only member of his species, and is horrified at learning that all the expectations with which his maker had conceived him came to nothing just because of his physical appearance" (Gonzales 2016: 60). The system is therefore incapable of granting its due recognition and acceptance. Indeed, as the creature leaves its state of nature and learns the language, the ideas and laws of society, it gains the consciousness of its position outside of society, the self-consciousness of its own isolation.

> I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches […] but […] I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; […] When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me… I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh, that I had for ever remained in my native wood, nor known or felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat! (F: 122-23)

Having learnt about its origins, the Creature, an abandoned child, blames Frankenstein for its miserable existence and wishes it had never been born. Nor does Frankenstein

ever ask himself whether such an abhorrent being could wish to be created. In this regard, the epigraph of the novel may serve as an answer to this never-asked question:

"Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mold me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?" (F: 1)

The orphaned Creature blames Frankenstein both for abandoning it in a relentlessly hostile world and for its horrible appearance Victor gave it. Referring to its social and parental rejection, the Creature desperately cries to its maker: "was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?" (F: 224). It was forced into a world where its presence has never been accepted or tolerated and rejected even by its creator. In this perspective, *Frankenstein* tells the story of a liminal creature who lives at once both outside and inside society. It is outside because it is denied the status of human being; it is inside because it feels affinities with human beings (Cimatti 2016: 20).

> I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. […] My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them (F: 131).

This places the reader of the novel (and even readers during Shelley's lifetime) in an interesting double position since we are within a human society that judges based on appearances, and yet because we are reading about the creature rather than seeing it, we are outside of society judging their judgment. What we realise in the social judgement against the creature is that what constitutes the human is a social decision" (Broglio 2017: 38). In this regard, nineteenth-century theorists showed analogies with the treatment the Irish received by the English as well as the treatment African slaves

received by Western society. Notably, the Creature is also racialised by Walton's recognition that he does not have the typical European features but is a "savage inhabitant" of some "undiscovered island". Affinities with the project of colonial imperialism are also evident in the enthusiastic declaration of Clerval's intention to join the East India Company:

> He came to the university with the design of making himself complete master of the oriental languages, as thus he should open a field for the plan of life he had marked out for himself. Resolved to pursue no inglorious career, he turned his eyes toward the East, as affording scope for his spirit of enterprise (F: 70).

As Mellor points out, Frankenstein's enthusiasm discloses Mary Shelley's concern for the scientific and cultural control over nature that the colonial enterprise would imply. Finally, another aspect worth considering concerns the elements of mundanity which the novel suggests.

> Mary Shelley comes honestly to grips with the dilemma of a newly created human being, a giant adult male in shape, who must swiftly recapitulate, and without the assistance of his terrified parent, the infantile and adolescent stages of human development. She even faces squarely the monster's sexual needs, for the denouement of the story hangs on his demand that Frankenstein creates a female monster partner, and Frankenstein's refusal to do so (Moers 1979: 87).

Another element of mundanity concerns the emotions evoked by child-parent and parent-child relationships. Indeed, the novel opens with a correspondence between a brother and his sister, both orphans. There is Frankenstein's semi-incestuous relation with Elizabeth, an orphan-girl his family adopt, reared as his sister. Then, Frankenstein's infant brother is drawn by the monster and an innocent young girl, Justine Mortiz, both victim of her mother's hatred and later wrongly executed because considered responsible for the murder of Victor's youngest brother. The novel is not exempt from manifestations of aberrancy and monstrosity regarding the parent-child tie, which

seems to justify (together with its notorious monster) Shelley's own reference to the novel as "my hideous progeny". Thus, as Ellen Moers puts it, "what Mary Shelley actually did in *Frankenstein* was to transform the standard Romantic matter of incest, infanticide, and patricide into a phantasmagoria of the nursery" (Moers 1979: 87).

2.4   *Frankenstein*: the Posthuman

Recent representations of *Frankenstein*'s scenario have adopted a posthumanist approach in order to analyse the relationship between humans and their technological creations. In a way, both Victor and his monster cross the boundaries of being human, but in deeply different ways. As a rational humanist and son of his time, Victor trusts in the possibilities of scientific progress, enforced by the education he received. His success is testified precisely by the contribution that his technological achievements represent for the progress of the human species by way of overcoming its limits and create a new species. On the other hand, Victor's offspring poses the ground for using those same technologies to transcend the limits of humanism and to postulate a new condition: the posthuman. In this regard, it is significant that Frankenstein's experiment comes along with a new understanding of the body, in particular of the corpse, which "became a map on which could be read the progress of the disease and of death. For the first time, it became possible to see death not simply as the negation of life, but as its continuation" (Shaw 2000: 181). Accordingly, the posthuman state presumes an existence that transgresses the boundaries of being human, even if in Shelley's novel it takes the form of a grotesque creature. Indeed, in *Frankenstein* the posthuman seems to be predicated on a sort of primitive, atavistic reawakening rather than embodiment of a progressive evolution and enhancement.

In his act of creation, Frankenstein does not seem disturbed by decomposing bodies. Indeed, he explains: "Darkness had no effect upon my fancy, and a churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm" (F: 52). Rather, what causes him repulsion is the assemblage of both human and animal bodily parts. As Ron Broglio puts it, "his human nature loathes the thought that we are animated flesh like any other

animal" (Broglio 2017: 36). In other words, Frankenstein is horrified by the very act of assembling across species, since this would implicitly mean to neglect humans their privileged position that places them above other creatures. However, in his very attempt to create a new species Frankenstein himself overturns, or at least questions, what it means to be human.

Despite their complementarity in that they both suffer from a sense of isolation and alienation and are equally obsessed with revenge and hate, Frankenstein proves unable to identify with his creature, thus making the monster a murder or an outcast, a rebel against society. Frankenstein's tragic flaw, it seems, is not so much his obstinacy in carrying out his scientific research, but rather his inability and refusal to understand and sympathise with his own creature. Because of its physical appearance, it is so visually repulsive that nobody is able to transcend the horror of its exterior, which becomes the only parameter for its social judgement. Arguably, what Mary Shelley has taught with her novel, is that "if we do not consciously embrace the unknown with nurturing affection, we may unconsciously construe it as the Other-alien, threatening, sublime" (Mellor 1988: 140). Analogously, as the historian Bruce Mazlish suggests, humans' insistence on their separateness from and superiority to machines (and animals as well), will bring about a state of alienation in which they are viewed as threatening new "species" rather than as part of man's own creation. Indeed, as a response to its rejection by society, the Creature, in turn, refuses to behave like a good humanist subject and "becomes another-than-human force exerting exterior pressures against humans and their social machinery" (Broglio 2017: 38). From a broader perspective, Lisa Yaszek and Jason W. Ellis state that the Creature's posthuman body "represents not just the mad dream of a single, egoistical scientist, but the horrifying madness of an entire society bent on military domination" (Yaszek, Ellis 2017: 72).

Therefore, Frankenstein's Creature embodies the destructive power of technology, manipulated nature, whose disastrous consequences turn against men like a heinous atomic bomb. As evidence, the creature kills those women and children dear to its creator's life. Indeed, although depicted as monstrous and abhorrent from the very moment of its creation (or assemblage), the Creature becomes terrible just as its hopes

of being accepted in human society have definitely vanished. Rather than an intrinsic part of its creation, its monstrosity therefore turns out to be a consequence of humans' inability to accept it.

By means of contrasting the humanist ideal, like a cyborg, the Creature's physical diversity, its artificial origins and its ambiguous gender force it into a posthuman state. It is a fluid entity that subverts categorical fixities. It is neither male nor female, neither animal nor human, neither machine nor man. Rather, it is human, technology and animal all at once. As a result, Frankenstein's abhorrence and the rejection of his creature may epitomise the loathly aversion to any overhaul of humanist assumptions. On this point, Rosi Braidotti argues that to a large extent, how one feels about the posthuman depends on how one relates to the human. Arguably, the Creature embodies the anti-humanist struggle to become posthuman, by way of provoking several questions about what it means to be human and what makes us human.

However, while questioning our anthropocentric assumptions, the creature cannot be said to be fully posthuman. In this regard, the Italian philosopher Felice Cimatti has noticed that "even if the "creature" is stronger than us, even if it properly needs neither mother nor father, even if its body heralds for us a future of mixture between flesh and technology, it is still too human to endure this new condition" (Cimatti 2016: 22). Its posthumanity is achieved only from a biological perspective and its failure resides in its attempts to become human rather than fully superseding and overcoming this definition. Moreover, designated as a monstrous, abhorrent creature from the very moment of its awakening, Frankenstein's creature seems to depart from the dream of perfectibility and faith in technological progress which the posthuman predicament encloses. Only at the very beginning of its life, when its body is not yet contaminated either by language or by envy of other humans, another possible way of living is presented, in which "the creature is simply part of what is taking place" (Cimatti 2016: 23), a perfect literary representation of Rosi Braidotti's monistic philosophy.

> Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started
> up and beheld a radiant form [the moon] rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind
> of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path, and I again went out in search of

berries. I was still cold when under one of the trees I found a huge cloak, with which I covered myself, and sat down upon the ground. No distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. I felt light, and hunger, and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rang in my ears, and on all sides various scents saluted me; the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure (F: 106).

3.   Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

3.1 *Never Let Me go* between Science Fiction and Bildungsroman

The question of what it means to be human permeates Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go,* a novel which gradually discloses a dreadful reality in which clone groups provide disposal supply for organ's transplantation. Published in 2005, it is the sixth novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, a Nobel-prize winning British novelist, short story writer and screenwriter. *Never Let Me Go* is a suggestive dystopian novel which explores the dramatic consequences of dehumanising practices as well as the clones' self-discovery process to comprehend the significance of their personhood. Moreover, it being set in an alternative Britain of the late 1990s, it is commonly defined as science fiction.

Significantly, Thacker defines this literary genre as "a contemporary mode in which techniques of extrapolation and speculation are utilised in narrative form, to construct near-future, far-future or fantastic worlds in which science, technology and society intersect" (Thacker 2001: 156). He also makes a distinction between two types of science fiction. Firstly, the science fiction designed to model the future, or actualise science. Secondly, the science fiction whose primary intention is to criticise or comment upon the cultural and ethical dimension of the history of the present. As Debra Benita Shaw has underlined, not only has science fiction contributed to overcome the boundaries of the real world, but also calls it into question, by means of a socially and politically critical approach. Science fiction "is concerned with imagining how scientific theory, if that theory is applied and assimilated into society, may affect the future development of that society. It is fiction concerned with the impact of contemporary knowledge and its extension into the future of human behaviour" (Shaw 2000: 2).

Never Let Me Go also departs from traditional science fiction narrative since Ishiguro's counterfeit reality is set into a recent past rather than into a speculative future. Because of its difference from historical reality, Ishiguro's dystopian England

unsettles the readers while underlining the continuity between the present and the debates alluded to within the novel. Among these, one of the most relevant regards the advancement of genetic engineering and associated technologies. However, what science fiction writing tries to investigate is not advanced technologies as such, rather the ethical and ontological implications they involve. As evidence of this, the novel's main concern is for questions which characterize humanity as a whole whereas developments in biotechnology and gene technology constitute only the backdrop of Ishiguro's novel. In the early 2000s, when the novel was published issues such as cloning, biotechnological developments and their implications were highly debated. Legalised in the UK in 2002, cloning was a lawful practice when the novel was written, "but only for therapeutic purposes, meaning in order to produce stem cells that could provide tissues to replace damaged organs without the increased risk of immune rejection" (Griffin 2009: 648). In the novel, the relevance of these scientific developments is not confined to the importance of science as such, rather it engages with their significance and effects. On this point, in his review titled 'Clone Alone' (2005), M. John Harrison has underlined the absence of any scientific discourse within the novel. Accordingly, in her novel's review, Margaret Atwood has stated: "All this is background. Ishiguro isn't much interested in the practicalities of cloning and organ donation" (Atwood 2005). This is demonstrated by the fact that Ishiguro never mentions either scientific procedures or interventions. Nor does he resort to a scientifically specific vocabulary. "Instead, ordinary or everyday language is made strange in order to hint at the scientific and medical context which permeates the narrative" (Griffin 2009: 651). However, although science in not a primary concern for Ishiguro, it is in this context that his novel should be understood.

As far as the genre of the novel is concerned, in his article entitled "Human Rights Storytelling and Trauma Narrative in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go"*, Titus Levy investigates Ishiguro's novel as an example of Bildungsroman or rather what Joseph Slaughter defines as "dissensual Bildungsroman" (Levy 2011: 1), that is to say a subgenre that constitutes "a variation of the classical coming of age story that narrates the individual's assimilation into the social order, while simultaneously protesting the

oppressive social conditions that the state forces on its subjects" (Levy 2011: 1). Ishiguro's novel falls into the genre of the Bildungsroman as the novel's protagonist, Kathy, retraces her individual growth from childhood to maturity and adulthood, while presenting the process through which the desires and needs of the individual and the perceived societal responsibility are eventually reconciled. Indeed, "Kathy's narrative is part memoir and part rights claim, demonstrating the ability of autobiographical narrative to communicate stories of exploitation and injustice by giving voice to marginalized social groups struggling on the fringes of supposedly democratic societies" (Levy 2011: 1). Establishing herself as a single voice that speaks for the clone community as a whole, Kathy's autobiographical narrative epitomises a subversive means of self-expression, an action of protest and individual struggling aimed to undermine the rightfulness of an exploitative system. In other words, her narrative "works to emancipate the individual by introducing their voice into the public sphere while also advancing the interests of the oppressed minority group. In this way, the [...] story serves as a form of witness that draws attention to the brutal atrocities perpetrated against marginalized community" (Levy 2011: 8). However, within the novel the reconciliation between society and the individual is not realised as a mutually benignant and harmonious process, rather as an unjust capitulation to the social responsibilities required by the oppressive state (Levy 2011: 4).

3.2 The Clones: a Pawn in 'their' Game

The clones are central characters to the novel, which alludes not just to the conditions in which they are reared, but especially their undeserved futurity. The veiled and appalling truth about their destiny is revealed subtly and gradually as the novel unravels, so that lies and deceit remain constant presences all throughout the novel. In particular, Ishiguro's novel is narrated by its main protagonist, the thirty-year-old carer Kathy H. Albeit a young adult, Kathy has outlived most of her Hailsham companions and is preparing to become a donor herself. The use of an internal, first-person narrator is ambivalent in the effects it produces. On one hand, Kathy's abilities as a careful observer, her capacity to comprehend the feelings of those around her, as well as her

subjective account which enforces us to look at her world through her eyes, create an emphatic affinity between the reader and the character and make her a convincing narrator. On the other hand, our identification with Kathy in particular, and with the clones, more in general, is destabilized by our proximity to those who perpetrate and benefit from the system of donation. On this point, the historian Dominick La Capra uses the expression "emphatic unsettlement" to describe

> a mode of identification that avoids the appropriation of victims' painful experience, while it can also confront the possibility in ourselves of behaviours that might bear analogies or resemblances to those of perpetrators; […] the importance of such complex, uneasy, and mobile modes of identification […] is not that they are directly or straightforwardly productive of altruism or of good world-citizenship, but rather that they self-reflexively and performatively discomfort and perplex readers, in order to open up, *and to hold open*, central ethical questions of responsiveness, interpretation, responsibility, complicity, and care (Whitehead 2011: 58).

Complementing this, Kathy consciously tells her story to an internal addressee ("you"). Although this device is commonly used to enhance sympathetic connection, in Ishiguro's novel it raises questions regarding the reader's position both in relation to the novel's dystopic world and to Kathy as well. As Whitehead points out, that 'you' is referred to clones like her. "Kathy's assumptions speak of her paucity of imagination and also of the insularity of her life; how can she imagine difference when she has known only others like herself?" (Whitehead 2011: 74). Therefore, she assumes a readership who comprehends what it means to be a clone, the only one she is able to envisage.

Being based on her recollected memories of the lost people and places, Kathy's narration remains as unreliable as memory itself, which is incomplete and episodic. She frequently states that she may have forgotten some details, she does not follow a strict chronological order and she probably tries to guard her own feelings. Moreover, the narrative expedient of flashback through which Kathy rereads her past acquires disturbing significance due to the fact that memory becomes a symbolic reproduction, clone for experience. For the readers her "memories become more substantial than the

original experiences they document (to which we have no direct access)" (Black 2009: 799). Throughout her narration, her memories retold, Kathy tries to cope with everyone and everything she has lost in life. She preserves the memory of her dead companions, of her shuttered infancy home. Therefore, the novel suggests that only the inhuman, the replica, the simulacrum "has the power to offer her a non-exploitative sense of her life as a person" (Black 2009: 803).

Labelled and well aware of being copies, the clones also seem to assume and reproduce the behaviour expected from this definition. In the second part of the novel, Kathy describes her permanence to the Cottages, a farm where the students live before becoming carers. Here, not only does Kathy notice that her companions mimic gestures and mannerisms from television programmes, but she also realises that Ruth's description of her "dream future" is copied from an advertisement in a magazine. Even though these observations seem to confirm that their lives are nothing but a counterfeit, the novel speaks for their individuality and distinctive personality. Arguably, their mimic from television gestures may by symptomatic of their social exclusion and isolation. On the other hand, Tommy's intricated drawings of imaginary animals are a counterpoint to the gestures of copying that Kathy has noticed at the Cottages. His intricate drawings are highly compelling and difficult to interpret. Similarly, Kathy's narrative is a complex and compelling account of her personal experience. His automatic, contorted, intricate way to draw imaginary animals provides an alternative to the humanist, soul-based art which the novel aims to criticise. Although their artworks prove useless to demonstrate the clone's genuine creativity, this is ironically revealed by their same ability to create. The students' creativity lies in the narratives of possibility that they relate to themselves and each other and the myth of deferral, which allows them to imagine new possible futures, establish affective commitments, underpinned by their affective needs and desires. Even if the clones seem to fall into the category of the nonhuman, they are the only identities portrayed throughout the novel. While in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* it is the creature who remains unnamed, in *Never Let Me Go* the identities of the clones, the created entities, are well-defined, while the 'creators' are neither mentioned nor explicitly identified. Ordinary humans figure only as reflected images: these include

actors to watch on videos, "individuals observed through plate-glass windows, pictures in porn mags or in advertisement. They are the 'unreal' real that haunt the clones" (Griffin 2009: 652).

At the very beginning of the novel, the world "carer" is repeated several times as Kathy ruminates on her career. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* the world designates a "family member or paid helper who regularly looks after a child or a sick, elderly, or disabled person. […] Although the word "carer" hence designates a category of labor, it nevertheless slides between paid employment and the work of those obliged through familiar responsibility to look after those who can no longer meet their own needs'" (Whitehead 2011: 59). Care work is often provided by noncitizens or migrants, that is to say those workers who, despite their lack of status or benefits, represent a decisive part of labour force (Whitehead 2011: 62). From a broader, more global perspective, the students' condition epitomises the situation of postcolonial and migrant laborers whose work serves to maintain the privileges of First World economies. On this point, Shameem Black reflects that

> First World economies desire labor without the inconvenient presence of human laborers (whose needs and wants complicate the seamless functioning of modern industrial life), the instrumental bodies of Kathy and her classmates offer the logical and terrifying realization of such a view. These similarities may help to explain why the novel resembles not a fantastical future, but instead the period in time noted for accelerating economic imbalances worldwide: its epigraph reads "England, late 1990s" (Black 2009: 796).

Whereas Ishiguro's novel cannot be said to be entirely about such issues, these latter may contribute to bring forth reflections on the historically constructed distinctions between humans. Indeed, from the very beginning of the novel a distinction is established between human beings and clones, or carers, or donors through the opposition of a 'we' and an unspecified 'they'. This issue of difference and sameness is central to the novel and raises ethical questions:

are the clones another, indeed a lesser, class of being compared to those who receive their organs? Does that organ reception 'contaminate' the boundaries between those two groups, and are the clones in their service function human? In other words, do they represent a difference of degree or kind, or are they, in fact, the same? (Griffin 2009: 652).

3.3 A System of Exploitation: Hailsham

Throughout the novel, Kathy reminisces about her past days at Hailsham with an intense feeling of nostalgia. She describes the school as an idyllic place where the students could grow and improve themselves in a relaxed and comfortable environment. Even long after the students have left the institute, "it still remains an important element of the clones' life as a place that bind them together over space and time" (Levy 2011: 5). However, despite Kathy's idealization of Hailsham, within such exclusive institute the clones grow up as in a command-and-control system, isolated from human society because removed from the world inhabited by human beings. Although the boarding school-like institute of Hailsham, where the clones are brought up, is constructed to provide them protection, the guardians reduce the students to categories of sameness and difference. Indeed, they reiterate the same conceptual limitations as those whom they want to oppose, namely those who would rear the clones in battery-farm conditions because of their supposed lack of soul and therefore humanity. Whereas the experiment of Hailsham institute tries to requalify clones as humans, it nevertheless maintains their marginalised, dehumanised position. Within the institute they are recurrently described through animalized imagery and sometimes abhorred by guardians themselves. As evidence of this, during one of her few visits, the headmistress of Hailsham Madame repulses the students when she unexpectedly encounters them, as if they look like spiders. This reflex is repeated when years later Kathy and Tommy approach her to request a deferral. However, Madame's is not just a personal response, as much as symptomatic of how they are viewed by society. Indeed, when Kathy and her boyfriend Tommy eventually hunt out Madame and Miss Emily, this last acknowledges: "We're *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you almost

every day I was at Hailsham" (Ishiguro 2005: 264)[3]. This felling of fear itself "offers competing interpretations, however, and is ambivalently suspended between a natural repulsion toward the clones themselves and a denial of the illness and mortality that they *represent*" (Whitehead 2011: 64). Therefore, the guardians may abhor them not only because at heart they are considered as less than human, but also because their destiny perpetually reminds humans of their own mortality.

> The clones, destined to be killed off through or in the process of donating their vital organs, and reflective in their very existence of the fact that humans are prone to disease and mortality, remind the others in the novel of their ontology as mortal beings. They are in a sense 'the living dead' and as such need to be regarded as other, as non-human (Griffin 2009: 654).

Being clones, Kathy Ruth Tommy and the others have not been created *ex novo*, but copied from ordinary humans, which in a way acquire the function of parents. However, in the novel no reference is made to their birth and parentage. The clones do not have either a proper surname, or a proper family, they have no parents and they can't even have children. In this marginalised context, Kathy's relationship with her companions may function as surrogate of her complete lack of family affinities. Indeed, the clones demonstrate their affective capacities through reciprocal caring relationships and the network of kinship they are able to create. The institute of Hailsham represents their only experience of normality, relationality and family. Without any kinship or natural affinity to others, the clones speculate about their past relations and connections. This is made evident by Ruth's enthusiastic travel to Norfolk to search for her possible which, in the end, acquires a melancholic tone as it shatters her dream for a different future. Likewise, Kathy speculates about her past as she tries to find answer to her relentless sexual desire. Whereas Ruth's search for her possible seems more motivated by her hopes for the future she has envisioned for herself, Kathy's, on the contrary, emerges as an attempt of self-discovery and self-knowledge, a necessity to find a legacy with her

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[3] All references to the novel will be quoted as (NLMG: 264).

past, an unattainable maternal bond. Even though the initial premises were different, Kathy's and Ruth's searches for possible both end up with a disenchanted realisation of the inequality between them and humans. In the end the institute of Hailsham is shut down, along with any hope to escape death through organ donation and any possibilities of deferral. This last exemplifies human aspirations to postpone death, while also reinforcing the inevitability of loss and death. Indeed, a deferral grants only a brief extension on life, a temporary diversion that puts off an atrocious destiny instead of changing it. Ironically, it is precisely this desire for more time which motivates the donation programme because it guarantees people in the outside world an extension of their lives.

Despite their impending suffering and imminent death, the clones neither revolt nor question the legitimacy of the system in which they are confined, thus producing a melancholic effect. Even when they explicitly become aware of the horrors awaiting them, they passively accept their fate, sometimes even "eager to carry out what they perceive to be their responsibility to society" (Levy 2011: 3). Only Tommy seems to reveal his anger, even though sporadically and partially. Indeed, he is "the only character in the novel who subconsciously intuits the agony of his fate, [and] significantly refuses to collaborate in the process of art-making at Hailsham" (Black 2009: 800). Significantly, Kathy notices: "maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always knew" (NLMG: 270) and Tommy agrees. Because of his lack of artistic ability, in the boarding institute of Hailsham he becomes an outcast among his peers. He manifests a violent temper as a response to his peers' mocking. It seems that "if artistic capability reveals humanity, then lack of artistic capability provides a license for exploitation" (Black 2009: 795). Significantly, his tantrums and violent reactions stop as Miss Lucy reassures him about his unsatisfactory works of art. He reports to Kathy:

What she said was that if I didn't want to be creative, if I really didn't feel like it, that was perfectly all right. Nothing wrong with it, she said. [...] I realised she was right, that it wasn't my fault. Okay, I hadn't handled it well. But deep down, it wasn't my fault. That's what made the difference (NLMG 28-9).

Dedicated to supressing anger and agitation, Lucy's reassurance becomes the voice of the welfare state which the novel aims to criticise. "The welfare state, so the moral would go, is the institution that bribes us with minor restitutions and supplements so as to divert us from deep and systematic injustice, which is to say from our legitimate causes for anger" (Robbins 2007: 297). In other words, a system which perpetrates its deep injustices while making false promises of happiness.

Moreover, since artistic abilities are necessary in order to demonstrate the clones' equality of feelings, Miss Lucy's reassurance seems more to shut up Tommy's future hopes and aspirations along with his anger. Through her statement she implies her resignation, her recognition that the students have nothing which they can aspire to.

> She knows the habits of aspiration inculcated by the school are intended merely to distract the students from the dark truth of the impending donations. Yet her straightforward logic leads to a devious conclusion. For if her articulation of the "no fault" philosophy is a way of soothing Tommy's anger, it simultaneously asks to be construed as a way of adapting his feelings to the terrible truth of his situation (Robbins 2007: 298).

His anger eventually returns once he discovers the deferral is only a myth. As he drives back to return to his clinic, he and Kathy stop in an open field where she sees him "raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out" (NLMG: 269). As Robbins notably argues, "what his anger expressed […] was a preconscious knowledge of a collectively blocked future, knowledge of a general social injustice to which anger was an entirely appropriate response" (Robbins 2007: 298). The clones are therefore imposed absolute acquiescence and passivity, since they have been created for the only purpose of organ harvesting. In this perspective, the institute of Hailsham becomes emblematic "of Nazi-era incarceration […]. Such a space strips its inhabitants of their claims to any forms of political identity; denuded of citizenship and culture, they represent a form of life that challenges traditional definitions of what it means to be human" (Black 2009: 789).

Instead of agitating against the system, Kathy writes a confessional narrative, an account of her life which, moreover, positions her reader as a fellow victim and passive

observer. The clones' passive acceptance of their unfair destiny may also be understood as referring to our own society. Indeed, our approach to sufferance, injustices, constraint may not be more different than theirs. In his review for the Guardian, M. John Harrison states:

> This extraordinary and, in the end, rather frighteningly clever novel isn't about cloning, or being a clone, at all. It's about why we don't explode, why we don't just wake up one day and go sobbing and crying down the street, kicking everything to pieces out of the raw, infuriating, completely personal sense of our lives never having been what they could have been (Harrison 2005).

"Never let me go" is the only declaration of resistance within the novel, the only real sentence which speaks for the students: it epitomizes the subject's symbolic, unheard cry as he/she faces the unknown on the operating table after a fourth donation.

In the first lines of the novel Kathy poses her attention on minor fallacies within the care system compared with the much more sinister mechanism which governs it. She is even proud of her abilities as carer, to keep her patients calm, far from being "classified as agitated, even before the fourth donation" (NLMG: 3) by making them accept their destiny: "My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated/ even before the fourth donation" (NLMG: 3). However, all this empathy, it seems, has only one purpose: to make patients accept their atrocious suffering and imminent death. In spite of her positive account about her career as a carer, the recovery centres "are clearly run at minimum cost and maximum profit […] A profit-driven culture of "care" disconcertingly underpins, legitimates, and makes possible the creation of the donation system itself" (Whitehead 2011: 62). Indeed, the system which confines them, establishes a series of rewards which encourage the clones to work hard. An example is the "gallery" where the most beautiful artworks are presumed to be exposed. It therefore contributes to make the students believe in the fundamental rightness of the authorities since through the galley the merit of what they do will be

recognised and rewarded. These minor compensations or benefits, it seems, serve only to divert the clones' attention from systematic injustice perpetrated against them.

At Hailsham Ruth dabbles in make-believe games such as riding imaginary horses with Kathy and her most elaborate invention of the "secret guard", a group established with the purpose of protecting Miss Geraldine from a supposed plot. Throughout her fantasies Ruth seems to nurture the dream of hopeful prospects. Moreover, the attention she devotes to Miss Geraldine reflects her strong desire for affection from a caring adult. Her hopes for a different future, or what she refers to as a "dream future" are also embedded in her hopes to find her possible. Ruth's open search for her model as well as Kathy's finding of her favourite tape, take place in Norfolk, a "lost corner" which the students imagine as the place where all lost propriety is supposed to be found. Whereas the existence of Norfolk as a place which annihilates eternal loss was reassuring during their childhood, this feeling vanishes as they grow older and begin to experience human loss. Significantly, shortly before becoming a donor and a few weeks following Tommy's death, Kathy returns to Norfolk one last time to indulge in the fantasy of recovering what she has definitely lost. In a way, the Norfolk field designates the novel itself: like the wire which surrounds it, Kathy's narrative encloses everyone and everything she has lost throughout her life.

It was like the debris you get on a sea-shore: the wind must have carried some of it for miles and miles before finally coming up against these trees and these two lines of wire. Up in the branches of the trees, too, I could see, flapping about, torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags. That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood has washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call (NLMG: 282).

In this last part, "the haunting beauty of Ishiguro's prose […] recreates the rubbish-strewn field as epitaph, in the same way that Kathy's narrative has caught and held the lives of what society designates as trash, using art to redeem and regenerate what has so thoughtlessly and carelessly been thrown away" (Whitehead 2011: 80). Moreover, the closing paragraph has a performative effect on the reader (Whitehead 2011: 81). Kathy eventually leaves Norfolk behind her and all what it represents as well, her companions, her home, her hopes: "I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I supposed to be" (NLMG: 282). Similarly, the reader's final act of closing the book reiterates Kathy's final gesture: leaving the past behind, moving on somewhere she too is "supposed to be", even though the novel's title demands precisely the opposite. Between a plea and a demand, *Never Let Me Go* alludes both to the desire to hold on and to maintain affective bonds. Analogously, "The reader is made to occupy an uneasy position, caught between staying and leaving, holding on and letting go, and is thereby confronted with a powerful and unresolved dilemma of care or empathy" (Whitehead 2011: 58).

3.4 The Ambivalent Role of Literature

During her permanence at the Cottages, the students often entertain themselves by reading "nineteenth-century stuff", among which Kath's reading of George Eliot's novel *Daniel Deronda* seems emblematic of their condition. Indeed, "many works of Victorian fiction concern orphaned children, and Daniel Deronda is no exception" (Whitehead 2011: 71).

> The eponymous protagonist is not only ignorant of his true parentage but also feels that his ill-defined family background deprives him of a clear future direction. In Daniel's case, his state of ignorance and uncertainty is abruptly ended by the arrival of a letter from his mother, informing him that both of his parents were Jewish. Following this revelation, Daniel begins to see the world anew, and we are informed, "It was as if he had found an added soul in finding his ancestry" (Whitehead 2011: 71).

While trying to "humanize" clones, the reading of Victorian novels also encourages the possibility of social advancement (alternatively embedded in the myth of deferral) thus raising hopes in a society which, on the contrary, denies them any possible future. Indeed, the clones cannot resolve questions of origin and parentage, nor can they aspire to any individual advancement. Ishiguro seems to suggest literature's complicity or, at least, implication in raising consoling but false aspirations in a society that denies them any prospect of advancement. It is no coincidence that the only novels they are allowed to read, are those provided by the guardians.

> Reviewed in this light, the humanities education at Hailsham is at best a deception or lie, and at worst, complicit with the system of political oppression to which the clones are subject. Reading literature, like the activity of care itself with which it is closely paralleled, is seen to offer minor compensations at the expense of broader political vision, and therefore to restrict rather than enlarge the imaginative capacities of its readers (Whitehead 2011: 57).

Ishiguro shows how both literature and care work can paradoxically function to endorse social inequalities. "The apparently innocuous activities of reading and care work […] although not "bad" in or of themselves, can nevertheless provide distraction and diversion from activist agendas ("agitation"), by enabling us to feel good about our actions without interrogating too closely the power structures and relations that underpin them" (Whitehead 2011: 73). Discovering that there is no possibility for deferral, that their drawings are almost useless, the clones acknowledge that the redemptive power of art is nothing but an illusion. Significantly, in her failed attempt to disclose the untold to her students, the subversive teacher Miss Lucy reveals:

> None of you will be going to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-

aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me (NLMG: 80).

However, even though art cannot serve to the clones in a utilitarian way, it contributes to raise questions of ethics. Ishiguro's novel suggests that art has an important role in contemporary culture.

Arts, and especially literature, […] [are] central to the functioning of a healthy democratic society, first because they underpin skills of reasoning, argument and critique and secondly because they cultivate imaginative, caring and emphatic citizens. […] Literature is seen to be valuable because it can help doctors and other health-care practitioners to nurture an empathetic response to the suffering of those who are in their care. […] Imaginative engagement and identification with works of fiction can help us to become more sensitive and altruistic individuals (Whitehead 2011: 54-5).

These considerations may imply that the humanistic education imposed at Hailsham might be functional not just to demonstrate their humanness, but even to develop their caring capacities as they become carers. However, Ishiguro does not offer a unique answer to the role of literature in a consumerist society. The novel itself constitutes an example of the importance of literature, being a "displaced version of our own social environment that confronts us not only with relations of empathy but also with less comfortable questions of implication and complicity" (Whitehead 2011: 64).

3.5 Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as Dystopia

Ishiguro's totalitarian society may epitomize the exploitation enacted by a capitalist system in order to guarantee its citizens wealthy and healthy conditions. Materialism is brought to its extremes to the point that humans are produced for merely utilitarian purposes, commodified as a collection of organs, or bodily parts. However, if we as readers are supposed to empathize with the clones, the oppressed others, we are also asked to acknowledge our complicity, to recognize ourselves "as implicated in the social

forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront" (Whitehead 2011: 75). This system is made possible partly "because those involved as both donors and recipients blinker their awareness and turn their heads away" (NLMG: 76). Ishiguro's novel profoundly criticises this political stance of denial.

> In evoking the history of the Holocaust as a reminder of the dangers inherent in looking away, preferring not to know, […] its relevance is primarily to *contemporary* political concerns: the practice of organ harvesting, which is, in the words of McDonald, a largely unspoken but widely recognized fact of life; the cluster of biotechnological developments […] and the range of issues […] arising out of a profit- driven culture of care (Whitehead 2011: 76).

In a crucial passage regarding those who benefit from donation practices, Miss Emily notes:

> Their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease. So for a long time you were kept in the shadows and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us (NLMG: 258).

The true horror of the novel's dystopian reality is therefore disclosed: it is revealed to be founded on the selfless attitude of relations of care. In the care system we tend to privilege the needs of our family and friends, that is to say of those who are closest to us. "We paradoxically enact a "selfish" inability to see beyond them and to recognize that their well-being often comes at another's (or others') cost" (Whitehead 2011: 77). This entails a lack of social cohesion and likewise contributes to perpetuate existing social inequalities. The growing inequality between disadvantaged and advantaged people is functional to guarantee these last their privileges. At the same time, this system emerges out of a desire not to directly confront the uncomfortable questions that these inequalities arise: "the privileged don't like to be reminded of their privileges—if these carry morally dubious connotations" (Whitehead 2011: 77). In

Ishiguro's brave new world these involve ignoring that a group of individuals is raised in social isolation, their organs are excised to prolong the lives of humans. Even though everyone is aware of the existence of the clones' organ-donation gulag, of this system of creation and extermination, since everything remains unseen and unheard, no one seems to care about it. On this point Robbins recognises that life in a welfare-state is based on a bittersweet compromise. The ideology of collectivity and that of individual freedom seem to be inversely proportional since the former one involves a refusal in admitting collective responsibilities. During his final meeting with Kathy, Tommy pronounces the novel's most explicit criticism of care work, the antithesis of Kathy's initial praise to the importance of being a good carer. Whereas she defends her activity, Tommy argues that the harshness of their reality remains unchanged in the end: "The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they'll complete" (NLMG: 276). As a consequence, Ishiguro urges us to reflect on the exploitations and atrocities upon which our welfare system is raised and hopes for a reaction against them. On this point, Levy notices that "the behaviour of the normal human population in Ishiguro's world reflects a disturbing social phenomenon in our own society known as the "bystander effect", a term that refers to ways in which ordinary people ignore or remain indifferent to blatant human suffering" (Levy 2011: 13). In other words, bystanders pretend to ignore atrocities or horrific events by convincing themselves that they are actually inevitable. Arguably, even more disturbing than this denial of moral responsibilities is the very idea that people actually benefit from other's suffering.

Even language has its significant part in this process of denial. Indeed, in *Never Let Me Go* language serves both to normalise and disguise atrocious crimes. The use of words such as "carer" or "donation" camouflage the sinister truth which they insinuate in the novel's dystopian society. As Whitehead points out, "the bureaucratized ordinariness of the terms to which Kathy refers unavoidably calls to mind Hannah Arendt's well-known description of the "banality of evil," embodied during the Holocaust in such euphemistic phrases as "evacuation," "transport," and "Final Solution"" (Whitehead 2011: 76). In this regard, it is worth mentioning Lyotard's concept of *differend*, "in which a damage is claimed but refused recognition. […] [A]lthough

judgment is called for in the *differend*, there is no shared ground or language from which the judgement can be made" (Whitehead 2011: 67). In the *differend* the injustices are enacted within language because of its inability to describe the perpetrated wrong. In other words, the *differend* masks injustices perpetrated on those who cannot express their needs or wants or, more in general, their situation because the structures of language do not allow to express them (Held 2005: 76). Indeed, the clones are unaware of their looming destiny basically because the guardians' language remains somehow obscure to them. Accordingly, in Ishiguro's novel the operations are defined as "donations" as if they implied a voluntary and benevolent act. On the contrary, they inevitably entail sufferance: most donors "complete" or, otherwise, die after the first or second donation, inevitably by the fourth. They suffer pain, mutilation and eventually death. At the same time, Ishiguro's narrative entirely omits any reference to gory details. Even towards the end of the novel, when the violated bodies start to appear more frequently, "there are no grisly descriptions of mutilated bodies, no explicit descriptions of organ removal- only vague hints of suffering, implied and insinuated, but never rendered in plain view" (Levy 2011: 14). Therefore, Ishiguro's rhetorical prose alludes to suffering while resisting the inclination "to fetishize the pain of the oppressed" (Levy 2011: 14). As Black notices, the totalitarian repression which dominates the clones' lives evokes Giorgio Agamben's theory of 'homo sacer'. Like homo sacer, Ishiguro's clones can be killed without committing homicide, "their deaths by organ removal create no source of transcendent meaning for them or for their community" (Black 2009: 789).

Eventually, Ishiguro's novel raises also important questions regarding the relationship between science and power. Science has a primary role in the clones' lives since they are created, manufactured, exploited through scientific manipulation. While advancing the possibility of new post-anthropocentric identities, in Ishiguro's novel science is therefore reflexive of humans' exploitative attitude and dominance over nature.

3.6 Ishiguro's Art: between Human and Inhuman

According to Shameem Black, "the act of identifying with someone else's experience is deeply tied to our everyday understanding of what it means to be human" (Black 2009: 786). The capacity to empathize with others has been linked to ethical action and has become part of the aesthetic pursuit. In his aesthetic manifesto Percy Bysshe Shelley asserts:

> A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others. The pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause (Black 2009: 787).

In Victorian fiction, the concept of empathetic compassion emerges as a necessary response to others' suffering. This is evident in many nineteenth-century novels, which George Eliot's *Adam Bede* may be emblematic of. Opposing to this, in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* the positive ethical value of literature is challenged since "the novel suggests that looking at a work of art can inhibit rather than encourage generous identification with the lives of others" (Black 2009: 788). The Romantic-inspired combination of empathy, art and human ethical development is therefore questioned. Accordingly, in Ishiguro's novel, art is denied any possibility of empathy and it becomes deceptive and misleading. It functions both to keep Hailsham's students unaware of their conditions and to make them accept a life of exploitation. Symbolically, art prefigures the process of organ donation which becomes eventually literal in the very act of organ transplantation. As Shameem Black puts it, art inserts itself as "a form of extraction that resembles forced organ donation" (Black 2009: 785). Arranged four times a year, the frequency of the Exchanges is reminiscent of the four donations which the clones are subject to.

In the process of dehumanisation, the clones are not given any possibilities to manifest themselves to anyone in charge of deciding about their destiny. As Griffin observes: "This foreclosure of opportunity constructs them as objects rather than

subjects and forestalls the possibility of empathy. They are merely their bodies" (Griffin 2009: 655). Since the clones are destined to be killed along with the process of organ donation, they are therefore reduced to and conceived as non-human entities, dehumanised to merely material corpses. Indeed, what the students eventually learn "is the harsh truth that their artwork is significant not for *who* it reveals but for its proof of *what* they are" (Whitehead 2011: 66).

For Madame and Miss Emily art serves to convince others of their students' right to be humanely considered. According to them, art should invite people to identify with the students in order to recognize their ethical responsibilities toward them. This theory reproduces the Romantic relationship between art and moral action. As Black underlines, the Exchanges are instrumental to the system for several reasons. First, they "encourage students to think instrumentally about the worth of their peers, thus preparing them for an acceptance of their own instrumental lives. […] Most cruel, the Exchanges encourage students to believe that they actually partake in a real exchange" (Black 2009: 795-96).

However, whereas the exchange of works of art is reciprocal, in the case of organ donation, they will be donated nothing to replace the donated organ. Analogously, the Sales enable students to purchase things from the outside world. While the Exchanges and the Sales initiate the students to an economy of circulation, they actually mask an economy of extraction, which deprive them of their organs to guarantee egalitarian circulation. As Black puts it, "*Never Let Me Go* can be said to offer a metaphor for the inequalities and predations of national and global economic systems" (Black 2009: 796). Significantly, the clones are never elevated to heroism. Nor are they pitied for their self-sacrifice. Ishiguro's novel offers a new, alternative understanding of inhuman art as a possibility of "identification with the bare lives of others […] with a mechanized version of homo sacer, a form of life that eludes traditional sympathy" (Black 2009: 790).

The guardians' incapacity to interpret the students' artworks strengthen their distance, their lack of commonality and capacity to understand each other. This motif becomes manifest as Kathy listens to her favourite of Judy Bridgewater's album, *Never Let Me Go,* from which the title of the novel derives. Holding tightly to an imagined child,

for Kathy the song represents her longing for motherhood and for an intimate bond with a mother. Contrarily, Madame can only see an unfulfillable vision of a kinder world she aspires to. For this reason, Whitehead recognises an *aporia* between Kathy's future projection of whom she might be and "Madame's myopic preoccupation for her own political cause or agenda of demonstrating that if the clones were raised in a humane and cultivated environment, they would become fully human" (Whitehead 2011: 67). As a consequence, the guardians' "reading of the students' artwork […] assumes that its value is purely utilitarian (it can provide ontological "evidence" that will then be used to secure the guardians' own political ends or gains); for them, it serves no higher or more redemptive purpose" (Whitehead 2011: 66). The song expresses also Kathy's fear of loss. Significantly, when the tape itself disappears, Kathy has her first experience of loss that foreshadows the many losses she will have to experience on a much larger and more human scale.

> As *Never Let Me Go* becomes a copy within itself, and even (with the found cassette) a copy of a copy, it offers Kathy a way to mourn the unspeakable tragedy of her own condition. In Kathy's childhood, the replica of the novel's title allows her to grieve for her losses without realizing it; for like the imagined singer, Kathy never expects to become a mother. Her inner life is best expressed not through the extraction of her soul, but through the power of a replica (Black 2009: 803).

3.7 Posthuman Representations in *Never Let Me Go*

The question of what it means to be human and its relative reflection on the status of the clones, pervade Ishiguro's novel. By leaving their status suspended, unspecified, Ishiguro questions the absoluteness of the categories of human and nonhuman, also reshaping and redefining their relationship. Eventually, the boundary between these two categories is definitely bedimmed or broken by the fact that the organs of the clones (the supposed nonhuman species) will continue to live within human bodies. Intertextually, Ishiguro's novel

is part of the same critical tradition as the work of […] Donna Haraway. It challenges conceptions of difference as absolute categories and contests the ethical imperatives underlying the insistence on such absolute difference. […] The products of this process therefore warrant ethical consideration in the same way as human beings or companion species, as Haraway terms them (Griffin 2009: 653).

Their desire for self-knowledge and belonging manifest throughout the novel, as well as their capacity to build up affective relationships, contribute to render them what Haraway has defined as companion species, which release them from the lower status of a hierarchized system, denying the notion of categorical other. Significantly, in the essay "The Promise of Monsters: a Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" (1992) Haraway remarks that bodies as well as objects do not pre-exist as such, rather they emerge from discursive and historically specific processes. This reveals the artificiality of nature and of bodily production. On this point, Haraway also makes a distinction between artificialism and productionism. This last comes down "to the story line that man makes everything, including himself, out of the world that can only be resource and potency to his project and active agency" (Haraway 1992: 297). Artificialism departs from productionism in that it constitutes 'interference patterns' rather than reflecting images. Even more significantly, she employs the expression "inappropriate/d others" to indicate those who are excluded from Western narratives of politics and identity, that is to say those who can assume the mask of neither 'self' nor 'other'. These inappropriate/d others encourage rethinking our relationality with artificial nature. Consequently, they proliferate in science fiction writing.

Science fiction is generically concerned with the interpretation of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience. […] SF- science fiction, speculative futures, science fantasy, speculative fiction- is an especially apt sign under which to conduct an inquiry into the artifactual as a reproductive technology that might issue in something other than the sacred image of the same, something inappropriate, unfitting, and so, maybe, inappropriated (Haraway 1992: 300).

These subjects define their conditions as 'cyborg subject position'. Because of their liminal existence due to the impossibility to locate them into fixed categories, these new-born inappropriate/e others shift the image of the same and utter new responses about our relationship with science, our corporeality and reproductive methods. The clones seem to call the inescapable necessity to build new relations, new collectives capable of extending ourselves to what we create. Rather than a comforting, happy ending, that of *Never Let Me Go* is a non-ending, unclosed image of what may be coming.

Eventually, whereas the notion of inhuman is often used a synonym for unethical or evil, in Ishiguro's novel it invokes precisely the opposite. "Ishiguro's inhuman style suggests that only by recognizing what in ourselves is mechanical, manufactured, and replicated—in a traditional sense, not fully human—will we escape the barbarities committed in the name of preserving purely human life" (Black 2009: 786). Therefore, our empathetic connection with the novel's protagonists rather than being based on a realisation of the clones' humanness is based on our recognition of our inhumanity. "To be most human, in the world of the novel, is to recognize oneself as inhuman" (Black 2009: 801).

Ishiguro's understanding of a mechanical, anti-humanist culture resounds in Haraway's famous declaration that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway 2016: 7). Our identification with Kathy boosts a new kind of empathetic connection which is proper of a posthuman age: we are therefore encouraged to side with Ishiguro's and Tommy's inhuman art, rather than the humanist art imposed at Hailsham.

Being genetically engineered, the cloned body is inevitably posthuman. In Ishiguro's fable thanks to cloning technology the human bio-renewal has become a reality. As Sheehan puts it: "although afforded less prestige than those other posthuman figurations, the zombie and the cyborg, the clone has come to represent the most clear-cut posthuman body of all (Sheehan 2015: 253). However, even though Ishiguro's clones are endowed with mind or consciousness, more in general they are defined precisely by what they supposedly lack, as they have no proper individual identity. In other words,

as genetically perfect copies, they seem forced to live a life that is not their own. In this regard, Jean Baudrillard refers to human cloning "as the end of the body as a singular and indivisible entity, and its refiguration as a 'message', a 'stockpile of information … for data processing". As such, the clones transcend their bodily confinements as they fluctuate between diverse embodiments. Indeed, not only are they created from copied genetic coding, but they are also designed to be disassembled, their organs being used to prolong humans' lives. As a result, they envision new possibilities for the evolving techno-body.

4. Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

4.1 Jeanette Winterson: "The Novelist Who says If It Doesn't Shock It Isn't Art"

In the subtitle of her short interview, Nicci Gerrard defines Jeanette Winterson as "The Novelist Who says If It Doesn't Shock It Isn't Art" (Onega 2011: 270). Such definition reflects the importance this writer ascribes to experimentation as a formal expedient to shock readers into reflexive thinking and affective participation (Onega 2011: 270). In this regard, her recent novel entitled *The Stone Gods* perfectly achieves such purposes. Drawing on dystopian and science fiction, the novel is about a speculative, apocalyptic but not too distant future world replete with many conventional story elements such as cyborgs, spaceships, aliens, futuristic technology, robot cops, mind reading practices, attractive androids and faster-than-light travels (Dolezal 2015: 95). The novel is both edifying and thought-provoking in that it aims to raise environmental awareness and warn against the doom-laden fallout of human mistakes. Indeed, the large variety of themes it concerns as well as its complex framework narrative, render the novel difficult to be classified. Some reviewers relate its original characters either to the unparalleled political concerns, or to the stylistic humane interest and brilliance which the novel displays. Yet, others see it as a satiric dystopia, or describe it "as an alluring, yet unorthodox, or amateurish and unconvincing attempt to try her hand at science fiction" (Onega 2011: 274). As Luna Dolezal suggests, the literary genre of science fiction often elucidates recurrently disregarded aspects of our reality as it allows to explore current social conventions, by means of taking the vantage point of a future, hyperbolic, apocalyptic setting. Analogously, in the essay "The Trauma Paradigm and the Ethics of Affect in Jeanette Winterson's The Stone Gods", Susanna Onega explains that the importance of experimental fiction resides on its potentiality "to shock the reader out of habituation and numbing and into affective participation and sensorial understanding

of trauma, that is, its capacity to produce […] empathic unsettlement" (Onega 2011: 269-70), and it is precisely with this intention that Jeanette Winterson writes. In spite of these considerations, when asked whether *The Stone Gods* could be defined as science fiction, Jeanette Winterson answers: "Well, it is fiction, and it has science in it, and it is set (mostly) in the future, but the labels are meaningless. I can't see the point of labelling a book like a pre-packed supermarket meal. There are books worth reading and books not worth reading. That's all" (Barnett 2009).

Furthermore, despite the recurrent use of common tropes and motifs which characterise science fiction narrative, *The Stone Gods* seems to mock this literary genre. Indeed, Winterson's story is satirical, sardonic, using irony, exaggeration and humour which, in a way, contribute to ridicule the genre itself while providing a message which is deadly serious (Dolezal 2015: 95). As Ursula LeGuin explains: "despite the gaspy bits, the purple bits, and the lectures, *The Stone Gods* is a vivid, cautionary tale - or, more precisely, a keen lament for our irremediably incautious species" (LeGuin 2007). Accordingly, Winterson remarks on her webpage:

I have said many times that I believe our time to be unique in the history of the world. Either we face our environmental challenge now, or many of us will perish, and much of what we cherish in civilisation will be destroyed. I am sorry to sound apocalyptic, but this is what I believe. Stone Gods isn't a pamphlet or a docu-drama or even a call to arms, it is first and foremost a work of fiction, but I am sure that change of any kind starts in the self, not in the State, and I am sure that when we challenge ourselves imaginatively, we then use that challenge in our lives. I want the Stone Gods to be a prompt, but most of all, a place of possibility (Onega 2011: 275).

As Onega contends, Winterson aligns her writings to the anti-mimetic tradition which she claims was originated by Romanticism and resumed later on by Modernism. On this point, she claims that "like Romanticism, Modernism was a poet's revolution, the virtues of a poetic sensibility are uppermost (imagination, invention, density of language, wit, intensity, great delicacy) and what returns is play, prose and experiment. What departs is Realism" (Winterson 1995; 30). In her essay 'Imagination and Reality' (1995) Jeanette

Winterson reveals her conception of art as an upheaved kind of knowledge which aims to comprehend the human condition on the whole.

> There is no limit to new territory. The gate is open. Whether or not we go through is up to us, but to stand mockingly on the threshold, claiming that nothing lies beyond, is something of a flat earth theory. The earth is not flat and either is reality. Reality is continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible. The imagination alone can fathom this and it reveals its fathomings through art. The reality of art is the reality of imagination (Winterson 1995: 151).

Referring to the divide between the reality of experience and the reality of art, she claims that this latter is meant to "open to us dimensions of the spirit and of the self that normally lie smothered under the weight of living" (Winterson 1995: 136-37). Accordingly, in *The Stone Gods* Jeanette Winterson articulates four discontinuous narrative strands which occur throughout sixty-five million years, thus authenticating Mikhail Bakhtin's declaration that the novel "reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making" (Sheehan 2015: 255). Significantly, she also states:

> I see no conflict between reality and imagination. They are not in fact separate. Our real lives hold within them […] the inspiration to be more than we are, to find new solutions, to live beyond the moment. Art helps us to do this because it fuses together temporal and perpetual realities (Winterson 1995 :142-43).

Winterson's fictions are evidently "intertextual and parodic, and written in a highly personal poetic prose built in the accumulation of rhetorical, narrative, structural and symbolic devices producing a characteristic baroque effect of repetition and excess, aimed at heightening the emotional and affective impact on readers" (Onega 2011: 272). *The Stone Gods* is no exception. The "warped relationship" or discrepancy between Winterson's baroque literature and the contemporary age, establishes a continuous feeling of loss, nostalgia and elegiac emphasis (Onega 2011: 273). At the same time, these stylistic expedients serve to overcome all possible boundaries, whatever these

may be. Indeed, as Sonya Andermahr suggests, *The Stone Gods* 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" (Andermahr 2005: 108). The employment of discontinuous but intertwined narratives in Winterson's novel contributes to envision a posthuman story. Indeed, Winterson's experimental fiction, according to its own author, tries to envision what she calls "a place of possibility", referring both to the coexistence of diversified worlds inhabiting different dimensions in the perpetual time-space continuation, and to the necessity to envision new possible configurations of our polluted, overexploited and diseased planet. Such attitude may be indicative of her rejection of spatio-temporal limitations, of any kind of closure and representation of sameness in favour of a more audacious and benevolent openness to the other and diversity as well (Onega 2011: 273). As Sonya Andermahr interestingly notices, in her novels Jeanette Winterson frequently recurs to the "motif of flight as an image of escape which signifies freedom from the prison house of realist representation" (Andermahr 2007: 29). It likewise symbolizes "the search for existential freedom: Winterson's heroes and heroines constantly seek to transgress boundaries and free themselves of constraints of various kinds" (Andermahr 2007: 29).

In order to do this, Winterson orchestrates her novel following a multi-layered structure in which characters, worlds and stories are deeply intertwined and repeat themselves. Such recurrences and juxtapositions characterise her narrative and point out the circularity of its basic structure. Indeed, the three stories which the novel unravels, play out different incarnations of the same characters while showing the same exploitative and devastating practices of the planet. In other words, it is "a repeating world - same old stories" (Winterson 2007: 59).[4] In each Part of the novel the protagonist, our guide throughout the novel, is always the same: Billie/Billy Crusoe (reminiscent of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*'s eponymous character), a disenchanted female scientist for most of the novel while represented as a male gendered young sailor in Part 2. Like a "wandering Odysseus" she/he travels "across time zones and ontological

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[4] All references to the novel will be quoted as (TSG: 59).

boundaries in order to shock the readers […] into an awareness of the disturbed and complex world around them" (Onega 2011: 277). As Onega recognises, Billie/Billy's intertwined journey through different worlds, reveals a pattern of repetition which may be understood as a squandered opportunity of remedying the same ruinous error made at a different, prior place and time (Onega 2011: 278).

In this complex and intertwined multiverse of potentialities and alternative possibilities, the fact that Billie/Billy can cross the time zones, travel through separated worlds and overcome ontological boundaries, just as he/she can be female or male, "reveals her/him as an archetypal quester and, as such, as a rebel against systems" (Onega 2011: 278), while envisioning alternative possibilities of being. In this regard, Jeanette Winterson recognises: "I use both Nietzsche and Ouspensky and the idea of eternal return – not in the Buddhist sense, but in the sense of endlessly making the same mistakes" (Andermahr 2007: 131). Nevertheless, Winterson's characters are not doomed to the perpetual redundancy of the same tragic mistakes. On the contrary, through repetition Winterson tries to avoid and question the futility of human endeavour and the irreversibility of history. Indeed, the novel allocates its characters the possibility of beginning anew in such a manner that they are granted the possibility of correcting their past sins and errors. As the Robo *sapiens* Spike claims: "This is a quantum universe […] neither random nor determined. It is potential at every second. All you can do is intervene" (TSG: 75). Thus, rather than randomness, determinism, and repeating forms, Winterson opens up forward-looking potentialities.

4.2 *The Stone Gods*: a Dystopian Parable

The novel shows four successive narratives, corresponding to four historical phases and parallel worlds running out of resources and experiencing the outcomes of drastic human-induced climate change as a consequence of imperialist, nationalist and capitalist values. As all the stories spiral to their ends, each of them closes with representations of destruction, separation, lost love, and eventually death (Dolezal 2015: 93). Therefore, the novel stands for an existential parable which explores

humankind's self-destructive impulses, by way of repeating histories in which "we keep making the same mistakes again and again" (TSG: 68).

The first part, entitled "Planet Blue", opens with the hopeful and amazing discovery of Planet Blue, a brand-new planet (which eventually proves to be Earth) by the citizens of the Central Power, a dystopian government which aims to colonise it for its wealthy inhabitants. Indeed, despite technological achievements, planet Orbus has almost become impossible for humans to live since its inhabitants are confronting an apocalypse caused by the drastic climate change, overpopulation and environmental devastation. Set in a completely different time and space, the second part of the novel ("Easter Island") turns back to 18th century Earth and describes James Cook's 1774 expedition on Easter Island and the consequent encounter with the Polynesians. Devolved into two warring factions, the native inhabitants have depleted the island's forest after harvesting all its trees to honour their stone god idols. Again, the main character is Billy Crusoe, now male gendered and accidentally left ashore on the island, where he meets a male Dutchman sailor named Spikkers, who eventually dies in his admirable attempt to obtain the control of the island. They reluctantly witness feuding tribes of natives tearing down the last palm tree, thus rendering the island definitely barren. Not only is this episode reminiscent of Orbus' story of destruction told in Part 1, but it also foreshadows what Planet Blue's destiny might be. Moreover, the analogies between this faraway island and the newly discovered Planet Blue are evident as the island is said to have "at some time boasted forests and groves" (TSG: 122), and to have been "a pristine and abundant environment, a balanced micro-system until humans arrived" (Onega 2011: 276).

In the last two parts of the novel, "Post 3-War" and "Wreck City", the narration comes back to a post-war future era in Orbus. Because of the nuclear war, all democratic governing structures have been eradicated, thus enabling the MORE Corporation to gain control over the whole population by renting rather than selling life's necessities to the citizens. In particular, "Wreck City", the final section of the novel, describes the post-nuclear holocaust, the dehumanization of toxic mutants in a nightmarish post-apocalyptic, heterotopian society. The concept of heterotopia was elaborated by Michel

Foucault to describe a site which has a precise function within society. Heterotopias are "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (Foucault 2017: 167). In short, they are worlds within worlds, which mirror, designate or reflect what is outside.[5] As such, Wreck City is an out of control outland of nuclear radiation and torn apart forests surrounded by a protective perimeter barrier defined as the Front. Such area is defined as "a No Zone- no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police. It is 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" (TSG: 179). Its inhabitants are the outcasts rejected and disavowed by the neoliberal state. In addition, in The Unknown, there are the "ultimate others," the awe-inspiring, deformed survivors of a nuclear explosion, and therefore transformed into toxic, malformed or monstrous radioactive mutant beings isolated from those in Tech City. These bodies seem to mirror the monstrosity all around us, referring both to the climate of fear which designates the new century and the likewise remarkable limits which a technology-driven future may entail.

> "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" (TSG: 203).

In *The Posthuman* Rosi Braidotti warns against the inhuman practices of contemporary necro-politics. The term comes from the essay *Necropolis,* by Achille Mbembe and it designates the capacity to dictate over life and death as a constitutive attribute for one's sovereignty. Michel Foucault defined it as *biopower:* that is to say "that domain of life over which power has taken control" (Mbembe 2003: 12). It is precisely quoting Achille

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[5] For a further exploration of the topic see Foucault, M. (1984) *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.*

Mbembe that Rosi Braidotti reflects on the modern technologies of destruction: the ultimate expression of a state's power to dominate its citizens' bodies and lives.

> Urban militias; private armies; armies of regional lords; private security firms and state armies, all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill […]. As a political category, populations are then disaggregated into rebels, child soldiers, victims or refugees, or civilians incapacitated by mutilation or massacred on the model of ancient sacrifices, while the "survivors", after a horrific exodus, are confined to camps and zones of exception (Mbembe, 2003: 32-4).

Such a scenario perfectly resembles that of Winterson's novel, since the inhabitants of planet Orbus are among the survivors of a supposed Third War. In particular, the toxic bodies bear the signs of the state's violence despite the fact that their suffering is disavowed by public ignorance. What is significant is their encounter with Billie, whose gaze emphasises the vulnerability of the body to perpetrated practices of violence. "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" (TSG: 232). By way of identifying these bodies as "human", Billie extends the recognition for valuing life. Although Billie recognizes that the toxic bodies "can say nothing", she is eventually unable to directly confront the state's violence. Indeed, instead of joining the rebels that sheltered her, she tries to escape the direct conflict as the "Peace" forces enter the area. As the battle starts, she laments:

> I should be safe in the city, watching the news in my flat, watching the troubles happening elsewhere, a regrettable and unavoidable clean-up operation; insurgents, rule of law and order. I shouldn't be here, fugitive, lost, but time has become its own *tsunami*, a tidal wave sweeping me up, crashing me down. You can change everything about yourself - your name, your home, your skin colour, your gender, even your parents, your private history - but you can't change the time you were born in, or what it is you will have to live through. This is our time (TSG: 236-37).

This passage defines collective history as an inevitable "field of conflict to which everyone ("You") is collectively exposed" (Bradway 2015: 193). Nevertheless, although she laments for "the planet […] these wars, and all this loss", she finally rejects to "open the door", that is to say, to recognise her past and future responsibilities. Her subsequent death, however, reveals that "history hurts no matter how far one seeks to escape it" (Bradway 2015: 193). Nevertheless, the monstrous bodies stand in clear contrast not only "to the splendid variety and beauty of the naturally grown hybrids in Planet Blue" (Onega 2011: 286), but also to the artificially perfect bodies of the citizens of Tech City. Indeed, the area ruled by the Central Power is dominated by a commodity culture in which humans' aspirations to artificiality are realised through technological or engineering manipulation of the body. As such, the biological bodies no longer exist since biotechnological innovations such as biogenetics, genetic tinkering, genetic replication and genetic engineering have become a culturewide commonplace. However, not only natural bodies but even organic food is regarded with suspicion. Significantly, Manfred, Billie/Billy's boss, tells her/him: "a world that clones its meat in the lab and engineers its crops underground thinks natural food is dirty and diseased" (TSG: 9).

Both in the area ruled by the Central Power and in the futuristic Tech City the recurrent manipulation of the body has contributed to the creation of a pleasure-seeking, alienated society in which even though the robots are constitutive, if not a fundamental part of the private and public life of its inhabitants, they are actually regarded with no respect and represent the exploited labour force. Echoes of other dystopian worlds resonate throughout the novel. In Part One, The Central Power, the Easter Caliphate and the SinoMosco Pact are three governmental institutions contending for world control, reminiscent of the tripartite geo-political structure in George Orwell's *1984.* However, in the last two parts of the novel, such regimes "have been swallowed up by globalisation under the aegis of MORE" (Onega 2011: 276) along with the ideologies they respectively represent: that is to say democracy, religious fundamentalism and nationalism. Without any real opposition to this unlimited, profit-making global corporation, Orbus is therefore recognisable as both a post-apocalyptic

dystopia and a duplicate of the forthcoming destiny pending on our own overexploited planet.

In Part 1, Billie is a scientist who works for the Enforcement and Enhancement Services, that is to say she helps the people of the Central Power to improve their lives. As she says, her work consists in "explain[ing] to people that they really do want to live their lives in a way that is good for them and good for the Community" (TSG: 11). However, she reluctantly belongs to and works in the system she actually hopes to subvert, and she wryly observes the society she inhabits convinced that the relentless technological advancement and increased commercial interests have definitely endangered the quality of human life (Dolezal 2015: 94). Nostalgic for a time in which the world was not dominated by technology, she lives in the last remaining farm in Tech City, a sort of utopian enclave within the dystopic society ruled by the Central Power, but dismissively defined by her boss Manfred as "that bio-bubble thing". This is a museum land and farm complete with wild animals, pastureland and a stream; a place like "an ancient ancestor everyone forgot". Billie refused genetic Fixation and other biotechnological practices aimed to modify her body. Moreover, in a state which approves mass-illiteracy ("voice and pictures yes, written words no"), she uses a notebook and pencil rather than her "SpeechPad" and she reads books as well. Because of this capacity, not only is she able to read subtle meanings into the official propaganda, but also, and most significantly, books allow her to envisage other and even better worlds (Onega 2011: 289). Her involvement in an underground rebel movement and her general unwillingness to conform to the rules she is herself expected to impose (especially her campaign against Genetic Reversal), are understood by the establishment as "Acts of Terrorism", and Billie is ultimately sentenced to transportation to the new colony on Planet Blue where she is expected to be left (Onega 2011: 282). Such planet seems perfect for human life, except for the presence of dinosaur-like creatures which inhabit it and hence impede the human settlement. Indeed, one of the aims of the colonising expedition organised by MORE is to destroy the dinosaurs by causing an asteroid to impact on the planet itself. For this project to be fulfilled, the corporation programmes to build more Robo *sapiens.* Since "they don't have a heart"

(Onega 2011: 283) they may provide objective information about the situation, without the menace that emotions or feelings may interfere in the calculated results. However, their attempt to eradicate the dinosaurs from Planet Blue "was doomed to failure, as […] the relation of self and world cannot be based on reason alone" (Onega 2011: 283). As a result, the Robo *sapiens* mistakenly calculates the effects of the impact, and this happens before the crew have actually time to flee and, sooner than expected "a mini ice-age" is caused, which triggers off not only the destruction of the dinosaurs but also of the whole eco-system of any living forms on the planet. Again in the novel, such an approach provides an example of misguided human intervention that shows the Orbus people repeating the same fatal mistake they had committed by exhausting the natural resources of their own planet and transforming their erstwhile benign habitat into a dystopian "brave new world", based on scientific knowledge, unlimited profit-making and the banning of affects (Onega 2011: 238). Overall in the novel, human intervention has proved either lethal or useless for the environment. As the protagonist Billy/Billie puts it:

> While we were all arguing about whether it was Christian or Pagan, Democratic or Conservative to save the planet and whether technology would solve all our problems, and whether we should fly less, drive less, eat less, weight less, consume less, dump less, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere rose to 550 parts per million, the ice-caps melted, and Iran launched a nuclear attack on the USA. The policy wonks had miscalculated. We got blown up (TSG: 158).

Therefore, beyond the utopian stance of 'beginning again' it is the established governmental structures that perpetuate destruction, "the ever-present chance for a becoming that would counter the violence of the present" (Bradway 2015: 191).

4.3 Representation of Bodies in *The Stone Gods*

Whereas Frankenstein assembled his creation with disregard of its physical appearance, by contrast, Spike was designed with a fascinating body. This, however, is aimed to

accomplish a despicable practical purpose, that is to grant sexual relief to the spaceship crew during their first three-year journey in the outer space in search for a new planet (Onega 2011: 284). However, during the journey, Captain Handsome falls in love with Spiky and woos her by reading love poems to her. Among these, significant is John Donne's "The Sunne Rising", which Spike is unable to understand in its entirety, in spite of her exceeding capabilities to process information. Indeed, the line "She is all States, all Princes I, nothing else is" remains obscure to her. However, thanks to this she unexpectedly starts to feel. She recognises: "I thought I was experiencing system failure. In fact I was sensing something completely new to me. For the first time I was able to feel" (TSG: 81).

Spiky's desire for affective relationships, unattainable by determinist and positivistic thought or reasoning, motivates the interspecies love affair between her and Billie. This will end up with the tragical death of the two lovers after the beginning of the Ice Age, in the cold and dark prehistoric cave, where they had taken refuge with a sort of hog-hippo hybrid with three horns, arguably a further, even if implicit, allusion to the necessity to eradicate paired opposites (Onega 2011: 285). Here the most profound drama of the novel occurs. Sensing the exhaustion of her solar batteries and unable to recharge them under the toxic cloud that is quickly shrouding Planet Blue, Spike askes Billie to detach her limbs and torso, thereby being literally reduced to a Beckettian thinking head, or rather, as Billie puts it, "to what she said life should be – consciousness" (Onega 2011: 285).

In Part Four, "Wreck City", the Resistance, the anti-system movement created in Part One, has now developed into "twenty alternative communities ranging from the 1960's Free Love and Cadillacs, to a group of women-only Vegans looking for the next cruelty-free planet" (TSG: 207). Yet another equally ineffectual and grotesque response is that of the group formed by Mary McMurphy (the "Pink" of Part One), this time an Irish nun who lives on the border with five other members of the Holy Sisters of the Shining Mercy (Onega 2011: 289). The leader of these anti-system groups is called Friday, a disillusioned man who had worked as an economist for the World Bank in Tech City until he resolved to "put the world to rights" (TSG: 204).

Just as the opposition between the hybrids living on Planet Blue and the mutants in Wreck City epitomises the difference between natural evolution and misguided human interventionism, Spike's process of humanisation sharply contrasts the process of dehumanisation represented in Part One by Mrs Mary McMurphy, "Pink for short", a grotesque, doll-like woman always wearing pink clothes and living in a likewise pink, robotised house that resembles "a Hall of Fame" (Onega 2011: 286). Therefore, the satiric figure of Mrs Mary McMurphy can be said to be Spike's counterpart. While Spike is artificially created and gradually questions her nonhuman condition, by contrast, not only does Pink undergo processes of genetic manipulation to fix herself at the age of twenty-four, but she even wants to face reversal genetic modification so as to please her paedophiliac husband. Respect for one's body remains, it seems, a crucial issue neither the Orbus society nor the global corporation are willing to address (Onega 2011: 287).

The third part of the novel, "Post-3 War", presents again Billie and Spike, this latter designed with the form of a bodiless head. Billie has to instruct Spike about humanity, so as to improve the Robo *sapiens'* capacities to make rationally objective decisions for MORE. Significant is Spike's encounter with Alaska, one of the Alternative Community girls, whose all-loving Buddhist philosophy influences Spike to the point that they contribute to "her evolving from Ouspensky's stage of "Reasoning" to that of "Self-conscious and cosmic consciousness"" (Onega 2011: 288).[6] As Alaska observes: "I like it that Spike has a spiritual understanding […]. Why shouldn't a robot be spiritual?" (TSG: 214).

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[6] For a further exploration of the topic see Ouspensky (1999) *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution,* available on: https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Ouspensky-The-Psychology-of-Mans-Possible-Evolution.pdf.

4.4 Eternal Recurrence

You dreamed all your life there was somewhere to land, a place to lie down and sleep, with the sound of water nearby. You set off to find it, buying old maps and listening to travellers' tales, because you believed that the treasure was really there. (TSG: 30)

As Onega notices, such a passage epitomises the *Leitmotif* of the novel in that it encloses a strong "feeling of lack and incompleteness expressed in archetypal images like the search for buried treasure, the Philosopher's Stone, the Holy Grail, that which cannot be found, or death" (Onega 2011: 296). Accordingly, what is at stake is the pursuit of a remembered harmonious, amenable and pristine world, able to sustain human life. The sporadic, floating messages fished up throughout the novel represent the only possibility for Planet Blue/Orbus/the earth to understand the mistakes made in the precedent cosmogonies and of prefiguring new possible harmonious and ethically based realities (Onega 2011: 292). Both Captain Handsome and Spike reveal an animistic and holistic conception of man and cosmos, spirit and matter, thought and feelings, based on the idea of oneness between man and world. As the Robo *sapiens* finally acknowledges, "true humanness does not reside in the brain, but in the heart, or […] in the capacity to move beyond rational knowledge of self to the "cosmic" knowledge of self and world provided by the higher emotions and intuitions" (Onega 2011: 281). This encourages the institution of a "universal harmony, of the harmonious relationships between man, the microcosm, and the greater world of the universe, the macrocosm" (Onega 2011: 290-92). Such a world-view stands in sharp contrast with the mechanist, exploitative, nature-loathing outlook of the Orbus rulers. Significantly, at the end of Part One, as Billy and Spiky are approaching death, feeling the snow falling on their bodies, Spike eventually states: "Snow is covering us. Close your eyes and dream. This is one story. There will be another" (TSG: 113). As this statement suggests,

> at the moment of their physical deaths, the souls of Billie and Spikkers, like Handsome's books, have transcended the material world and become one with the cosmos, where they will stay in harmonious unison until the next cosmogonic cycle, when they are dreamed/imagined into another story of love and desolation (Onega 2011: 293).

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Notably, at the very end of the novel, just as death is approaching, Billie has a vision in which she sees her mother's face longing for her on the other side of the gate. This dream-like vision prefigures her new beginning from the Edenic garden "pregnant with possibilities for those who, like Captain Handsome, believe in the power of the imagination to create new worlds" (Onega 2011: 297).

Despite its predominantly futuristic projection, the novel also explores the equally dramatic origins of its protagonist. The traumatic narration of Billie's life story is that of the impossible love between a teenage mother and an unwanted child. In this sense, whereas Billie's description of her meeting with the mutant children "is rendered in a fluid and excessively sentimental language that begs for the overidentification of the reader, the difficulty in addressing the subject of her mother's enforced desertion is haunted by an unspeakability […] that works to produce the readers' empathic unsettlement" (Onega 2011: 295). In the life story of Billie Crusoe, what is evident is her nostalgia for the safe and joyful time in her mother's womb and also the twenty-nine days spent with her mother before she was given to the orphanage. She calls to her mind her mother's loving voice "made out of hills" (TSG: 151), the cotton mills in Manchester, and their walks together, with Billie "walking inside her" (TSG: 155), along a track leading to "an enclosure with a winding stream and an old stone farmhouse with an apple tree at the front" (Onega 2011: 295). "There's a gate between the house and the track, and we lean on the gate very often, and she says, 'This is our house', and I can smell the woodsmoke from the fire" (TSG: 156). As we know, this utopian dream materialises when, in Part One, we discover adult Billie living on the last remaining farm in Tech City.

Analogously, on Easter island Spikkers' fantasies about the Amsterdam his Dutch father used to tell him stories about, provide a utopian and equally nostalgic alternative to his desolate reality. Indeed, his only desire is to flee the desolate Easter island and settle in Amsterdam, his father's great sailing city, "much wood, many houses" (TSG: 128). More broadly, if both the farm and the city of Amsterdam represent utopian alternatives to Billie and Spikkers' personal feelings of deprivation and loss, at the same time Planet Blue materialises the collective dream of a whole society. Supporting this,

the talk on the radio about the new planet which Billie listens to, reminds her "of a description of the Golden Country in terms that grant reality to dreamed of, imaginary worlds and her own role as archetypal quester" (Onega 2011: 296). Nevertheless, the elegiac style of Billie's final declaration seems reminiscent of humans' incapability to develop a cosmic consciousness which would allow them to disrupt the fixedness of eternal recurrence (Onega 2011: 297).

> And my tears are for the planet because I love it and because we're killing it, and my tears are for the wars and all this loss, and for the children who have no childhood, and for my childhood, which has somehow turned up again, like an orphan on my doorstep asking to be let in. But I don't want to open the door (TSG: 239).

By means of showing what the tragic outcomes of our bad living on the planet might be, Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* calls for a reconfiguration of our being-in-the-world, so as to offer positive alternatives to our deeply dehumanised and awful reality (Onega 2011: 298).

4.5 *The Stone Gods:* a "Ustopian" Novel

Although the planet is close to destruction, the citizens of the Central Power are beautiful, young, technologically savvy and celebrity-obsessed, beguiled by shopping, sex, reality television and genetic modification. Their lives are imbued with commodity technologies, released from poverty, aging, illnesses and labour. Nobody seems reflexive and longer, nor is anybody unsatisfied. Indeed, the only day-to-day life problems which people seem to be concerned with are traffic and parking. Iconic symbols have thoroughly replaced words and illiteracy predominates; books no longer exist; nature is obsolete; "babies are born womb-free; meat is grown synthetically in labs and animals are all verging on extinction" (Dolezal 2015: 93). In such a highly technological society, it is not so obvious, it seems, to realise what is wrong within the system.

> Following the ideologies of contemporary neoliberalism—capital acquisition, private property, commodification, the eternal growth of the free market—the Central Power, in fact, constitutes a version of a "perfect" society: all social ills have been eradicated, there is economic abundance, limitless consumption, and everyone is eternally healthy, young, and beautiful (Dolezal 2015: 95).

In her essay, Luna Dolezal borrows Margaret Atwood's term "ustopia" referring to "an unresolvable tension between utopian and dystopian visions" (Dolezal 2015: 95). As Margaret Atwood puts it, the term refers to "the imagined perfect society and its opposite [...] [as] each contains a latent version of the other" (Dolezal 2015: 95). In other words, Winterson's novel can be said to be utopian and dystopian all at once. Indeed, a hideous reality lies behind the counterfeit perfection of Orbus' society. The "perfect" reality under the Central Power turns out to be an appalling representation of mastery, global devastation and oppression, thinly controlled by a private corporation named MORE. As such, MORE figures as "an anonymous big brother that regulates life down to the smallest details" (Dolezal 2015: 93). People are seduced rather than explicitly compelled to live in a regulated society. "They are, indeed, happy slaves with a slavish happiness" (Fukuyama 2002: 6).

Finally, it is worth mentioning Judith Butler's brief essay entitled "Uncritical Exuberance" (2008), published shortly after Barack Obama was elected as President. In the essay Butler manifests her fear that "progressiveness would succumb to the seduction of positive effects" (Bradway 2015: 183). Referring to the newly elected present she muses:

> The election of Barack Obama is historically significant [...] but it is not, and cannot be, a redemption, and if we subscribe to the heightened modes of identification that he proposes ("we are all united") or that we propose ("he is one of us"), we risk believing that this political moment can overcome the antagonisms that are constitutive of political life [...]. There have always been good reasons not to embrace "national unity" as an ideal, and to nurse suspicions toward absolute and seamless identification with any political

leader. After all, fascism relied in part on that seamless identification with the leader, and Republicans engage this same effort to organize political affect (Butler 2008).

Analogously, in Winterson's dystopian society behind the façade of a wealthy, liberal, technologically advanced society there is actually an oppressive totalitarian regime which manipulates its citizens' minds and bodies and, most importantly, a dying planet in which red dust storms regularly threaten the lives of its inhabitants. As Billie/Billy Crusoe observes,

> there'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 (TSG 30).

Through her ustopian depiction of life under the Central Power, a technologically mediated system, Winterson's satirical novel encourages reflections on the possible implications of the twenty-first century's "technological dream/nightmare". Central to the functioning of the totalitarian system that has been set up by The Central Power was the technological revolution, in particular that of biotechnology, for it allowed the government to monitor every action. Such totalitarian rule is based on the government's monopoly over information. "The citizens of the Central Power are micro-controlled and under constant surveillance; they are habituated to a Foucauldian panoptic gaze that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere in particular" (Dolezal 2015: 94). As 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 (TSG: 29-30).

As such, it precisely suggests that the biotechnological advancement seems to combine benefits and harms all at once. This kind of biopower oppresses and controls through surveillance, that is, "the satellite system that watches us more closely than God ever did" (TSG: 30). Winterson's novel therefore provides a fictional landscape which calls into question the role of contemporary technologies under neoliberal economic, cultural, and political structures, some of the issues even raised by emerging posthuman predicament. Eventually, that of the Central Power is a homologating society; as Billie explains, "the Central Power is a democracy. We look alike, except for rich people and celebrities, who look better. That's what you'd expect in a democracy" (TSG: 23). Instead of being used to challenge human fixity, technology precisely reinforces it, creating ageless, dehumanised and normalised citizens. Indeed, by means of routinely employed biotechnological practices such as surgery, robotic enhancement and genetic manipulation, everyone can achieve prefigured standards of beauty. As Spike reveals: "Every human being in the Central Power 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" (TSG: 77). Moreover, they are also "genetically Fixed", that is to say they undergo a genetical intervention based on DNA-modification so as to remain genetically frozen at a particular age. Therefore, "time passes, but the body- in its capacity as a worker-spectator-consumer- does not change" (Dolezal 2015: 98). This practice sustains the "illusion that our urgent daily lives are permanent, and not just transient things" (Dolezal 2015: 98). Such an illusion is also restated by the fact that the celebration of the G-day, that is to say the day corresponding to one's genetic Fixation, has definitely replaced the celebration of birthday. As Billie puts it: "In the past, people had birthdays, […] Now birthdays don't matter because they mark the passing of the years, and for us years don't pass in the same way that they once did. G is the day and year you genetically Fix. It's a great day to celebrate" (TSG: 18). Even though Planet Orbus represents an imagined future, it is a society not so impossible to recognise, "a hyperbolic version of our own reality" (Dolezal 2015: 93). As such, this dystopian world that the novel depicts

serves as a critique of "the utopian imaginaries implicit in our neoliberal system" (Dolezal 2015: 95).

As far as the technological advancement is concerned, Rosi Braidotti's declaration is significant: "The pride in technological achievements and in the wealth that comes with them must not prevent us from seeing the great contradictions and forms of social and moral inequality engendered by our emerging technologies" (Braidotti 2013: 42). Indeed,

> the system is rife with bureaucratic control, inequality, environmental devastation, oppression, ignorance, and social injustice. Indeed, it is through these utopian tensions that Winterson's description of life under the Central Power reads as satire and commentary on the excesses and superficialities of modern life. Her use of the "ustopian" science fiction narrative, so self-consciously trope-laden, is a device to deliver a witty parable about the perils of technology, consumerism and narcissism, showing us where existing trends, if left unchecked, might take us (Dolezal 2015: 95-6).

4.6 The Self and the Body

Although ritualistic and cultural practices of body modification have always connoted societies, "in the twenty-first century the body operates under an unprecedented set of ideologies and practices" (Dolezal 2015: 91). In particular, the free market economy and the consumerist system which characterise the capitalist society, have contributed to change lifestyles, work practices and the very perception of our body, which has therefore assumed a diverse role. As Luna Dolezal remarks, "it is an entity not only to be adorned, but to be worked on and transformed through self-reflexive body projects" (Dolezal 2015: 91). Now more than ever, such projects proliferate within the domain of biomedicine, motivated in part by the newly advanced technologies and the financial profit of what Dolezal defines as "the biomedical-beauty complex" (Dolezal, 2015, 91). As a result, one's appearance or lifestyle are deemed as medical concerns and aesthetic practices which include anti-aging operations, cosmetic surgery and body modifications, currently functioning as normalizing medical projects.

Among the other things, *The Stone Gods* warns against the consequences which a consumerist conception of the body may bring forth. Biomedicine and biotechnologies work for an aesthetical enhancement of the human body under the logic of the "normative narcissism" which systematically characterise modern societies. In the first part of the novel, Winterson's scepticism toward the progressive stance of technological achievement is made evident. However, she does not oppose technology as such, but its legacy with "human propensity for vanity, selfishness, and self-destruction" (Dolezal 2015: 91). The merging of biomedicine and the beauty industry has contributed to normalize the latter's tendencies. In other words, the medicalization of appearance and aging is intended as a sort of "psychological cure" (Dolezal 2015: 92).

> If the outer body is not an adequate visual manifestation of our inner "truth," then changes can be—and increasingly should be—made to the body in order to uncover and reveal the inner authentic self. As a result, the body is seen as a "project," as something which should be worked on in a constant process of self-realization and becoming (Dolezal 2015: 101-02).

As far as the body is concerned, beauty and biomedical discourses, on the whole, suggest that the aging, raced, overweight, or unattractive body demands medical intervention, thus equating it to a pathologized, unhealthy body. Such practices prompt to pursue a normalized or standardized appearance, which is precisely the trend Jeanette Winterson aims to criticize in her imagined reality under The Central Power. As Billie explains: "I already look good – we all look good. […] [W]e all look more or less alike, and there are only two sizes, Model Thin and Model Thinner […]. I look wonderful in a normal sort of way" (TSG: 27-28). Indeed, as Pink's story displays, caught up in the logics of the free market, "the body will never be enough- never good enough, fit enough, young enough, attractive enough, stylish enough. New procedures, products, and services are incessantly invented: calf implants, vaginoplasty, leg-lengthening, bioidentical hormone therapy, dry needling, laser skin rejuvenation" (Dolezal 2015: 99-100).

Their body parts are bio-enhanced, and their hair can do clever things like change colour to match their outfits. They are everything that science and money can buy. […] 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 (TSG: 19-26).

As Winterson's novel demonstrates, there are no limits to the expectations and the possible changes that can be made to the body. Her novel draws attention on the drawbacks that the normalization of such aesthetic practices may bring forth. In particular, the relentless changing expectations on how a body may appear will inevitably afflict future generations. As Billie tragically explains: "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?" (TSG: 26). At the same time, physical signs of getting older become intolerable and therefore pathologized. In this regard, it is significant Billie's encounter with a woman who has refused to be genetically Fixed:

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 […]. "Getting old," she said again. Then she pulled off her mask. Her eyes were bright and glittering, but her face was lined, worn, weathered, battered, purple-veined and liver-spotted, with a slot for a mouth, garishly coated with red lipstick. I recoiled. I had never seen a living person look like this […]. "I am what you will become," she said. "I know you haven't been Fixed." (TSG: 44-45).

Because it impresses visible signs on the body, ageing is therefore conceived as an inexorable decline in such youth-oriented society. It involves atrophy, shrinking, loss of mental capacity, it is a taboo which people do not want to look at. Considered a pathologized condition which makes the death process evident, in psychoanalysis the fear of ageing is displaced into the fear of death. On this point, Kathleen Woodward has supposed the existence of a second 'mirror stage' occurring in old age, corresponding to the moment in which one confronts oneself as other in the mirror. A self-encounter in which becomes evident the 'objective certainty of our transformation' (Barry 2015:

159). Accordingly, Billie's encounter with the old woman perfectly fits such sort of epiphany, strengthened by the fact that the former has refused genetic Fixation.

Nevertheless, since the perfected media or commercial images stem from digital manipulation, showing people who have undergone surgical enhancement, they therefore solicit expectations associated with one's own body which are inevitably "unreal". However, this seems not to be the case in Winterson's novel, where such presumably unreal expectations for the body becomes real, "pushing the limits of normalized narcissism to new heights" (Dolezal 2015: 106). The only means of salvation and hence redemption for humanity seems to be the power of poetry and love. Indeed, it is only after Spike is introduced to poetry by Captain Handsome that she becomes definitely capable of expression and authentic emotions; that is to say, only after experiencing an "alternative to the stark logic of rational computations" (Dolezal 2015: 108). As she explains: "I was sensing something completely new to me [...]. For the first time I was able to feel" (TSG: 81). Her newly acquired capacity for love and abstract thought emerges as an alternative to the current narcissism which the social structures aim to encourage and this is precisely where Winterson suggests our hopes for the future should be placed. Throughout her love for Billie and understanding of poetry, Spike "becomes a utopian microcosm for the human world" (Dolezal 2015, 108). In this regard, in her overall positive review of the novel, Ursula Le Guin remarks that "the love stories in the book are distressingly sentimental [...], asked to carry far too much weight" (Le Guin 2007) compared with the novel's depiction of the human abuse of the world. Yet, in *The Stone Gods,* love is not intended as an answer to political conflict. Rather, it symbolises relations that oppose the structures of contemporary biopower. As Spike puts it: "*love is an intervention*. [...] Not romance, not sentimentality, but a force of different nature from the forces of death that dictate what will be" (TSG: 217).

4.7 Representation of Gender in *The Stone Gods*

Overall, in *The Stone Gods*, the body, sexuality and gender remain fluid, interchangeable and ambiguous. In particular, the gender norm is reduced to a "human concept" as

arbitrary as the divide which opposes Robo *sapiens* and Homo sapiens, and Spike clearly epitomises Winterson's stance as she claims: "Gender is a human concept […] and not interesting" (TSG: 76). Analogously, throughout the novel the body is disentangled from pre-existing, culturally inscribed gender and sex categories. Indeed, the novel's protagonist is a lesbian dissenter with a male name who has an affair with a genderless but female-shaped robot named Spike. She/he also "lives in a post-gay society where the gender of one's sexual partner is socially irrelevant" (Dolezal 2015: 96).

In Part 2, Billie becomes a male sailor named Billy, stranded on Easter Island where he encounters a Dutch man called Spikkers, who inevitably becomes his lover. They eventually morph again in the last two parts of the novel, as Billie returns and Spike is represented as a bodiless, disembodied head, but "female" gendered robot. The protagonist's sexuality, which remains undefined throughout the novel, calls for the deconstruction of fixed binary oppositions such as male/female and heterosexuality/homosexuality. Her/his androgyny and bisexuality are reminiscent of the complexity and fluidity of subjectivity, which cannot be confined to fixed categories. Eventually, Winterson rejects the idea of the fixity of the gendered self, and what's more, she displays the posthuman ontological flexibility, malleability and fluidity of subject. In particular, in *The Stone Gods* it is the cyborg which above all challenges the fixity of sexual categories and gender as well.

Although Winterson's attempt to deconstruct fixed gender categories is manifest, the role of technology in such a project seems move ambivalent. Indeed, masqueraded as natural procedures, biomedical practices restate, it seems, current gender-based stereotypes and cultural standards, rather than being employed to postulate a post-gender ideal society. This is expressed particularly through the use of biomedicine in order to control the women's remodelled bodies, in that it effaces their autonomy, abnegates their desires, annihilates their power. Although in this post-gender, post-gay, post-feminist utopian society women are not either saddled with child bearing or domestic responsibilities (robots called "Flying Feet," "LoBots," and "Kitchenhands" run errands and do housework), nor do gender inequalities seem to exist any longer in the professional sphere, the patriarchal control of women through

technology has intensified. Indeed, the use of technology allows to maintain a high level of gendered control and disempowerment, particularly with respect to those technologies which work on the body and appearance (Dolezal 2015: 92). Significantly, Billie notices: "women feel they have to look youthful, men less so" (TSG: 11). More in general, Winterson's novel questions whether the relentless advancement of technology actually intensifies individual and social freedoms as it was promised by the neoliberal ideology or, otherwise, whether it in fact homogenizes society by way of strengthening the inherited patriarchal structures as well as the extant societal and cultural inequalities.

It is particularly significant Billie's visit to Mrs. Mary McMurphy, or "Pink," a woman who wants to return to early adolescence though a genetic procedure called genetic reversal since she aspires to look like a twelve-year-old pop star called Little Señorita, who has Fixed herself as a pre-teen so as to maintain her fame indefinitely. As Billie explains: "I have an appointment today with a woman who wants to be genetically reversed to twelve years old to stop her husband running after schoolgirls. It's possible, but it's illegal" (TSG: 14). Her primary concern is therefore to cherish her disloyal, paedophilic husband: "My husband likes girls," she says to Billie, "I don't want to lose him […] We don't have sex anymore. He says I'm too old" (TSG: 20). Indeed, the employment of biotechnologies in practices of aesthetic cosmetic surgery such as vaginoplasty and breast implants is part of Winterson's wide cultural critique, since its primary purpose is that of fulfilling the fantasises of male (hetero)sexual desire (Dolezal 2015: 99-100). In the system, women and children are commodified and fetishized objects and Pink expresses

a deadly serious, life-denying hate of the female body that is in keeping with the general dehumanisation of Orbus and of our own contemporary world. Significantly, Billie tries to dissuade Pink from undergoing genetic reversal with the argument that it has nothing to do with the liberty of choice, as Pink argues, but with unethical corporative greed (Onega 2011: 287).

Therefore, in such dystopic society, biotechnologies reproduce the negative patriarchal heteronormative, noting that women are represented as docile, passive and submitted whereas men are dynamic, determined and productive. For this reason, Pink is but a parody of normalized femininity. On this point, Dolezal notices that:

> Not only are these stereotypes reinforced when considering women's motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery, but they are also realized in the surgeon-patient relationship, which is overwhelmingly a male-female dynamic: although women are by and large the primary recipients of cosmetic surgery, eight out of every nine cosmetic surgeons are male (Dolezal 2015 :100).

Accordingly, Virginia Blum adds that "insofar as conventional heterosexual male and female sexualities are experienced psychically and represented culturewide as the relationship between the one who penetrates and the one penetrated, surgical interventions can function as very eroticized versions of the [hetero]sexual act" (Dolezal 2015: 100). Such cultural stereotype of "dominant-passive/penetrator-penetrated" is also revealed in Winterson's representation of Spike. Although she is admittedly the most "advanced member of the crew" (TSG: 34) commissioned to explore the new planet, she is also designed as "drop-dead gorgeous" (TSG: 33), and "absurdly beautiful" (TSG: 33), in order to perform sexual services for the men of the crew on board, because it was "good for the boys on the mission" (TSG: 33). As a consequence, both Spike and Pink epitomise what Winterson considers one of the main problems "with the patriarchal employment of biotechnology: its objectifying and cavalier attitude towards women" (Dolezal 2015: 99-100). Eventually, in Winterson's novel female bodies are represented as trans-corporeal, but they are not in any way transgressive or rebellious in the feminist sense.

As Dolezal underlines, such reflections reintroduce the body and mind dualistic logics. Under this model, the "true" self is an immaterial entity that resides within the physical body, and the body itself is merely some sort of physical avatar, private property to be designed and displayed within the social realm. Fulfilment is achieved when the "inner" self is expressed successfully through the "outer" body or, conversely,

changing the "outer" body will result in a positive change to the "inner" self. Rachel Hurst has termed this phenomenon "surface imagination," referring to "the powerful fantasy that a change to the exterior can enhance or alter the interior" (Dolezal 2015: 101). Whereas in the Christian and Humanist traditions it has been seen as a mere transitory and auxiliary vehicle to the transcendent self, recent scientific, medical and philosophical developments have contributed to advance a new understanding of embodiment, where "the body is in fact constitutive of what we call the self" (Hillman, Maude 2015: 1). However, all these understandings are both limited or prove inadequate as the body is resistant to theoretic definitions. Even though literary texts rarely advance straightforward answers, they always supply "nuanced representations that question the reductive categorizations that embodiment necessarily resists" (Hillman, Maude 2015: 1).

4.8 The (post)Human Body: a Contested Site

The advent of the posthuman predicament has largely contributed to the emergence of a new understanding of the body. This is evident in Winterson's novel as she "demonstrates […] how both discursive and material practices affect and reconfigure human and nonhuman subjectivities as well as the physical environment" (Yazgunoglu 2016: 145), while advancing the debate about what the posthuman is. Nevertheless, while postulating new forms of subjectivities, the relationship between humans and sentient robots depicted in the novel is also emblematic of how machines are constantly marginalized, excluded and differentiated, despite their paramount role within society. Accordingly, in her Cyborg Manifesto, Haraway presents the existent relation between man and machine in Western society as an opposing one. As she puts it:

> In the traditions of "western" science and politics -the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the

reflections of the other- the relation between organism and machine has been a border war (Haraway 2016: 7).

Such an attitude restates our deeply-rooted understanding of the humanist and anthropocentric utilitarian ideology that neglects "others", including animals, women, queer and coloured people. Accordingly, this categorical differentiation is reproduced in Winterson's novel as the robots and machines are part of cultural commodities to maintain the existing structures of power, created and destructed with no regard for them but human interest, thus entering the category of "disposable others". This association, or corporate discrimination, is accentuated as Jeanette Winterson associates Spike, the Robo *sapiens* in Part One, with a racially other man on the "Easter Island". At the same time, Jeanette Winterson's questioning of our mindset and devastating actions calls for the need to challenge and reconfigure the relationship between man and machine. On this point, in his reflections on *The Inhuman* (1991), Jean-François Lyotard significantly contributes to such discourse. Indeed, he argues that 'technology wasn't invented by us humans. Rather the other way around. […] Any material system is technological if it filters information useful to its survival" (Sheehan 2015: 255). Thus, the day-to-day technology that inhabits the world of the novel also corroborates Lyotard's precept, in that it further bridges the extant gap between machine and man. As such, Winterson's novel represents a posthuman, post-technological, futuristic reality in which boundaries are not only deconstructed, but also materially, discursively and biotechnologically reconstructed" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 148). More specifically, she defies the notion of humanism both by completely rejecting representations of the biological body and by creating the character of Spike. As she argues in her novel, "every human being in the Central Power, 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?" (TSG: 77). Accordingly, the character of Spike inevitably recalls Haraway's definition of cyborg as she designates a non-naturalist hybrid of organism and machine. As Haraway herself explains: "the cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers

structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (Haraway 2016: 7). In the posthuman, there are neither absolute distinctions nor essential demarcations between the cybernetic and the biological mechanism. Thus, since the human is no longer distinguishable from the machine, the animal and other forms of nonhumanity, in the posthuman discourse the entrenched anthropocentric understanding of Man is therefore questioned, "for the posthuman entails human and nonhuman bodies that can at once become real or virtual, organic or inorganic, natural or postnatural" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 150). Likewise, as 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". In other words, "we are not who 'we' once believed ourselves to be. And neither are 'our' others" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 150). Accordingly, disregard of the opposition between human and nonhuman allows Spike to re-evaluate human life in reference to what she believes to be the fundamental quality shared by both thinking species, namely self-consciousness (Onega 2011: 280). Analogously, Susana Onega refers to Samuel Beckett's *Unnamable* in that it "may be said to incarnate the essence of Spike's conception of humanness as solitary mental life" (Onega 2011: 281). In particular, at the end of Part 1 in the novel, Winterson poses her crucial question: "Is human life biology or consciousness? If I were to lop off your arms, your legs, your ears, your nose, put out your eyes, roll up your tongue, would you still be you? You locate yourself in consciousness, and I, too, am a conscious being" (TSG, p. 76). Thus, not only does Winterson's novel tackle the issue of what it means to be human, it also requires subjectivity to become more inclusive toward different forms of being. In order to do so, the novel perfectly shows "the shifting boundaries between human and machine cognition and the increasing roles that machines play in cognitive constructions" (Hayles 2006: 161). As Hayles notices, "what we make and what (we think) we are co-evolve together" (Hayles 2006: 164).

Creating a "literary posthumanism," in *The Stone Gods* Jeanette Winterson dexterously deals with such enfleshments in a circular text showing how posthuman

metamorphoses can take place in a changing world. Yet, even Billie/Billy cannot escape from posthuman materialization as, for example, she reveals when talking about her chip implantation: "my data-chip implant. Everything about me is stored just above my wrist" (TSG: 33). This material-discursive practice has great impact on the posthuman subjectivity of Billie/Billy. Indeed, in the posthuman predicament it has become almost impossible to separate physical bodies from their technological extensions. Her flesh cannot be conceived as separable from its material implant, making her body truly posthuman, but not entirely robotic, as is the case with Spike, who is wittily identified as a "Robo *sapiens*" within the novel. Spike embodies the natural-cultural, biological-technological hybrid aspects of the contemporary subject. Significantly, Rosi Braidotti describes the posthuman body as "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" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 153). In other words, both the organic and the technologically-enhanced bodies constitute a sort of human-cybernetic integration resulting from the interweaving between nature and culture. The posthuman body Winterson envisions is, thus, not too distant from Braidotti's description. In the novel, posthuman bodies of people and robots are what Braidotti describes: "shot through with technologically-mediated social relations" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 153).

Nevertheless, these posthuman bodies show the fluidity of boundaries and the likewise intertwined relationship both between technology and the body, and in relation to the environment as well. Indeed, not only does Winterson's novel suggest that all organisms are entangled with other material bodies, but also that these are transformed in regard to the environment. In this context, Alaimo's definition of trans-corporeality as interconnections and interchanges between human and nonhuman corporeality and the environment is also relevant. Enmeshed in the physical environment, the human body cannot be thought to be separable from other nonhuman bodies. Therefore, "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" (Yazgünoğlu 2016:

150). In other words, "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" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 149). In this sense, 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. Significantly, reversely associated with the novel's techno-bodies are the grotesque and monstrous bodies, figures associated with viruses, mutations, plagues, infections legible through their corporeal disfiguration. Both these instances represent the posthuman as "other than human", whereby otherness is designated by the principle of transformation. Intertwining in toxic pollutants, viruses, chemical substances, and contaminated landscapes, the body, as Alaimo argues, is extremely susceptible to the flows and substances of the environments. As such, in the radioactive landscape exemplified by Wreck City, it is almost impossible to live without the risk of being contaminated by the poisoned environment. As Billie observes, "the fires never go out, smouldering with a molten half-life, the wind blowing ash and flakes of metal into your clothes and hair" (TSG: 180). Due to the poisoned environment, the deleterious effects of atomic bombs, the forest is putrefied and totally radioactive and Billie experiences such 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 (TSG: 191).

Corporeality is therefore intended as a both physically and discursively malleable entity correlated with the physical environment. 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" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 153). The red dust storm which constantly threatens the human survival on the planet, is a nonhuman agent which interacts negatively with humans. "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" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 158). 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" (TSG: 37). As Alaimo explains: "trans-corporeality means that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them" (Alaimo 2016). Winterson's contribution to the posthuman discourse, then, is that she brings theory to life, introducing "material flexibility into gendered human and nonhuman subjectivities so as to support the idea of posthuman ontological difference" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 147). In other words, *The Stone Gods* reveals that there are no fixed humans, we are creatures in constant modification.

However, Winterson questions the sameness and fixity of corporeality, while criticizing the technological domination. Indeed, although the citizens of the Central Power have undergone bio-technological modifications, they are reshaped into posthuman beings who are not transgressive at all, "as would be expected of the posthuman corporeality" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 149). Secondly, the grievable lives, awe-inspiring bodies which inhabit the Unknown, epitomize the dehumanization of the (post)human that the destructiveness of nuclear weaponry may elicit. Eventually, although Winterson disrupts and eliminates the binary opposition between "we" and "others", this seems to be reconstructed in the oppositional representation between Wreck City and Tech City in the novel. Indeed, the cancerous inhabitants of Wreck City are hidden from the enhanced citizens of the Tech City, and consequently regarded as "others".

> 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 (TSG: 232-233).

What remains to be asked, then, is whether the posthuman is "a utopian aspiration, a cautionary critique, [and] an evolutionary end-point" (Sheehan 2015: 245). The answer to this question is hidden in the environmental problems in Orbus, where planetary toxicity is visibly intra-acting with human and nonhuman bodies. The novel reflects our ecological imperilment in that it represents the current environmental crisis. The focus in the novel is on the fact that "we made ourselves rich polluting the rest of the world, and now the rest of the world is polluting us" (TSG: 37). As Manfred contends, technology has done so much for the benefit of the society in Orbus, nevertheless the tragic 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 (TSG 37-8).

This is significant in the sense that no matter how technological solutions may interfere 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. Although it seems that Winterson attaches greater importance to the "human" in the novel, the very notion of human is always already posthuman.

Eventually, not only does Winterson warn against the dehumanization that the process of posthumanization may entail, but she also creates a remarkable picture of artificial embodiment, trans-corporeal posthuman subjects and cyborgs by way of "discussing the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on the human-nonhuman" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 145).

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on posthuman representations in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods.* Although produced in different periods, all these novels have creatively and critically contributed to envisioning new forms of self-representation while questioning what it means to be human in a context of advancing technological and biotechnological progress. Indeed, the unfolding of modern technology is inevitably affecting our understanding of ourselves and our bodies, marking a progressive shift from the traditional status of humanity, toward a future characterization beyond being human, otherwise called 'posthuman'. In other words, as Paul Sheehan puts it: "the posthuman is the *other than human,* where otherness is defined by the principle of transformation" (Sheehan 2015: 245). Not far from Hayles's and Haraway's prominence to embodied materiality, Cary Wolfe's definition of posthumanism "names the embodiment and the embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms" (Sheehan 2015: 252).

Nevertheless, the posthuman predicament cannot be merely confined to the need to revise humans' relationship with their invented technologies. Instead, motivated by the present-day propensity to move beyond the dichotomies of humanism and anthropocentrism and the necessity to call into question the *species boundaries* which have all contributed to bring forth the current geological era of the Anthropocene, the posthuman questions the primary role of man in the world. In addition, Rosi Braidotti underlines the inability of contemporary humanities to properly respond to the current identity crisis enforced by multiculturality, inter-dependent and globalized structures and the increasingly recurrent usage of technological mediation as well. Of course, technologies are functional to implement such project, since they offer new

possibilities to disassembly, reassembly, recraft human bodies and manipulate their limits. Notably, the figure of the cyborg epitomises the posthuman predicament as it refers to a hybrid creature in which organic and electronic or mechanical components coexist. Indeed, the cyborg renegotiates the boundaries between human and machine and revisits the concept of human as similar to autonomous, self-regulating, intelligent machine.

After providing a general overview of what the posthuman is, this thesis has tried to investigate Mary Shelley's, Kazuo Ishiguro's and Jeanette Winterson's novels from a posthuman perspective. All these novels are to some extent dystopic and may be admitted into the ranks of science fiction genre as well. Such literary genre has largely contributed to figure out new possible and alternative representations of corporeality, whereby the altered human body establishes an intimate relationship with the machine in order to embody an enhanced, superior albeit threatening being (Smelik 2017: 152). In science fiction narrative "the cybernetic posthuman is sometimes portrayed as an inevitable future, or in a manner continuous with transhumanist visions" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xv).

In this regard, Ursula Le Guin has famously claimed: "all fiction is metaphor. Science fiction is metaphor. What sets it apart from older forms of fiction seems to be its use of new metaphors […]. Space travel is one of these metaphors; so is an alternative society; an alternative biology; the future is another. The future, in fiction, is a metaphor […]. A metaphor for what?" (Le Guin 1979: 159). Such question remains unanswered or, at least, each literary work can elaborate a proper one, since "the truth is a matter of the imagination" (Le Guin 1979: 159). As far as this thesis is concerned, all the three novels seem to encourage reflections upon the corrupting forces of power and greed by way of showing the disastrous outcomes of a perpetrated humanist ideology while also questioning the ideologically and corporeally boundaries constructed around man.

As Paul Sheehan notices, although modern and contemporary literature is scattered with representations of monsters, mutants and hybrids, it is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* "that provides the richest source for mythological posthumanism" (Sheehan 2015: 246). Indeed, not only did Shelly's novel inspire both the science fiction

genre and the Gothic horror tradition, but it has also contributed to establishing a pattern for the posthuman body. In this regard, Sheehan's distinction between what he defines as technological posthumanism and mythological posthumanism is also relevant. Whereas this latter is founded on the atavistic propensity for the biological reversion of the human body, on degeneration and evolutionary decline, technological posthumanism, by contrast, predicates human progressive enhancement and evolution. Such distinction may epitomise the divide between Mary Shelley's novel and contemporary ones by Kazuo Ishiguro and Jeanette Winterson. Indeed, whereas these latter depict genetically modified, hybrid techno-bodies which pursue the course that promises a bright future, in *Frankenstein* the representation of the posthuman "is predicated on atavistic re-awakening, on the human body's propensity for biological reversion" (Sheehan 2015: 251). As such, Victor's creature takes the form of a grotesque creature reminiscent of undeveloped and primordial corporeal forms. In this regard, the Italian philosopher Felice Cimatti has noticed that "even if the "creature" is stronger than us, even if it properly needs neither mother nor father, even if its body heralds for us a future of mixture between flesh and technology, it is still too human to endure this new condition" (Cimatti 2016: 22). Its posthumanity is achieved only from a biological perspective and its failure resides in its attempts to become human rather than fully superseding and overcoming this definition.

Although commonly afforded less prestige than other posthuman representations such as the cyborg and the zombie, the clone can be said to be the most explicit posthuman figuration of all because based on DNA technology, thus suggesting a new type of essence. However, this technology may also be perceived differently "since the process of coding also suggests replicability, and hence loss of singularity; essence becomes non-essence, and uniqueness is converted into sameness" (Sheehan 2015: 254). Thus, although created as genetically perfect copies of human beings, ironically Ishiguro's clones reveal "sameness to be a form of monstrous otherness" (Sheehan 2015: 253). As Sheehan notices, like Shelley's monster but in reverse, in *Never Let Me Go* the posthuman bodies of the clones are disassembled so that their vital organs can be "used to prolong life in the human-body economy"

(Sheehan 2015: 256). Likewise, Winterson's *The Stone Gods* provides a fictional landscape which calls into question the role of contemporary technologies under neoliberal economic, cultural, and political structures. Instead of being used to challenge human fixity, technology precisely reinforces it, creating ageless, dehumanised and normalised citizens throughout practices of aesthetical enhancement under the logic of the "normative narcissism" which systematically characterise modern societies. Therefore, in all the novels, lurking behind the progressist promises of scientific advancement, are the pitfalls and dangers which each author aims to warn against. As Maurice Hindle significantly asks in his introduction to Mary Shelley's novel: "is Mary Shelley then asking us to think more carefully about a society which values appearance above a 'seeing' that should take into account the Other's feeling and needs?" (Hindle 1992: XXXV).

In the novels the posthuman characters also figure out new possible ways of living on the planet. As the Robo *sapiens* finally acknowledges, "true humanness does not reside in the brain, but in the heart, or […] in the capacity to move beyond rational knowledge of self to the "cosmic" knowledge of self and world provided by the higher emotions and intuitions" (Onega 2011: 281). Accordingly, when its body is not yet contaminated either by language or by envy of other humans, Frankenstein's creature envisions another possible way of living, in which "the creature is simply part of what is taking place" (Cimatti 2016: 23), a perfect literary representation of Rosi Braidotti's monistic philosophy. Finally, Ishiguro's clones demonstrate their affective capacities through reciprocal caring relationships and the network of kinship they are able to create in sharp contrast with the exploitative practices of the outside world which manipulates them.

Furthermore, all the novels advance new possible configurations of the human, while also urging us to rethink our relationship with technology. Indeed, only if we supersede our dualistic way of thinking our relationship with technology, can we become truly posthuman. Otherwise, humans' insistence on their separateness from and superiority to machines (and animals as well), will bring about a state of alienation in which they are viewed as threatening new "species" rather than as part of man's own

creation. Indeed, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go,* the clones seem to belong to an another, lesser group of beings as compared with those who benefit from their organs (Griffin 2009: 652). Although the boarding school-like institute of Hailsham is constructed to provide them protection, it actually proves to be part of a command-and-control system which isolates the clones from human society. Materialism is therefore brought to its extremes since humans are produced for merely utilitarian purposes, commodified as a collection of organs or bodily parts. Nevertheless, since we as readers are supposed to empathize with the clones, we are also asked to acknowledge our complicity, to recognize ourselves "as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront" (Whitehead 2011: 75).

Analogously, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* Victor's tragic flaw, it seems, is not so much his obstinacy in carrying out his scientific research, but rather his inability and refusal to understand and sympathise with his own creature because of its appearance. Moreover, not only does the creator reject the creation as a monster, but all the humans who see the creature revolt against its existence. As a consequence, what we realize in the social judgment against the creature is that what constitutes the human is a social decision. Eventually, what Mary Shelley has taught with her novel, is that "if we do not consciously embrace the unknown with nurturing affection, we may unconsciously construe it as the Other-alien, threatening, sublime" (Mellor 1988: 140).

From a broader perspective, the posthuman body of Frankenstein's creature "represents not just the mad dream of a single, egoistical scientist, but the horrifying madness of an entire society bent on military domination" (Yaszek, Ellis 2017: 72). Such scenario of contemporary necro-politics perfectly resembles that of The Unknown, namely the devastated, torn apart forest lying outside Tech City. Here the toxic, malformed, monstrous bodies which inhabit it are reminiscent of the outcomes of nuclear war and of the dehumanization of the (post)human that the destructiveness of nuclear weaponry may elicit. In other words, the toxic bodies bear the signs of the state's violence despite their suffering is disavowed by public ignorance. Nevertheless, if mutants imply a posthuman limitation on one hand, "they also embody the climate of fear that is the hallmark of the new century" (Sheehan 2015: 258). In this regard, Achille

Mbembe reflects on the modern technologies of destruction as the ultimate expression of a state's power to dominate its citizens' bodies and lives.

In all the novels the authors rework the boundary between human and nonhuman into visionary forms, thus opening up new possibilities of representing the body. This is definitely bedimmed or broken, so that, as Hayles notices, "what we make and what (we think) we are co-evolve together" (Hayles 2006: 164). Generally speaking, the representation of the posthuman in literature commonly occurs through animal assemblage or technological one. Exceptionally, Frankenstein's creature realises both. Indeed, it is human, animal and technological all at once. As such, Victor's offspring poses the ground for using technology to transcend the limits of humanism and to postulate a new posthuman condition. In addition, Frankenstein's experiment comes along with a new understanding of the body, in particular of the corpse: rather than definitive negation of life, in *Frankenstein*'s paradigm the corpse is intended as its continuation (Shaw 2000: 181). More importantly, in his very attempt to create a new species Frankenstein himself overturns, or at least questions, what it means to be human by way of assembling together both human and animal bodily parts, thus overcoming species boundaries. Due to this, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* implies that humans are animated by the same flesh which animates other living beings likewise, without privileging humans. Accordingly, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* the organs of the clones (the supposed nonhuman species) will continue to live within human bodies, thus "contaminating" the boundaries established between these two groups (Griffin 2009: 652).

Eventually, in *The Stone Gods*, Jeanette Winterson dexterously shows how posthuman metamorphoses can take place in a changing world. The character of Spike inevitably recalls Haraway's definition of cyborg as she designates a non-naturalist hybrid of organism and machine. As Haraway herself explains: "the cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (Haraway 2016: 7). Yet, even Billie/Billy cannot escape from posthuman materialization as, for example, she reveals when talking about her chip implantation. This material-discursive practice has great

impact on the posthuman subjectivity of Billie/Billy. Indeed, in the posthuman predicament it has become almost impossible to separate physical bodies from their technological extensions. Her flesh cannot be conceived as separable from its material implant, making her body truly posthuman. In other words, in Winterson's novel both the organic and the technologically-enhanced bodies constitute a sort of human-cybernetic integration resulting from the interweaving between nature and culture.

Furthermore, in *The Stone Gods* the physical bodies are also trans-corporeal because of their interconnections and interchanges with the environment. Therefore, the human body cannot be thought to be separable from whatever surrounds it. In the radioactive landscape exemplified by Wreck City, it is almost impossible to live without the risk of being contaminated by the poisoned environment. As Stacy Alaimo explains: "trans-corporeality means that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them" (Alaimo 2016). 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" (TSG: 37). Winterson's contribution to the posthuman discourse, then, is that she brings theory to life, introducing "material flexibility into gendered human and nonhuman subjectivities so as to support the idea of posthuman ontological difference" (Yazgünoğlu 2016: 147). In other words, *The Stone Gods* reveals that there are no fixed humans, we are creatures in constant modification.

Whereas the notion of inhuman is often used as a synonym for unethical or evil, in Ishiguro's novel it invokes precisely the opposite. "Ishiguro's inhuman style suggests that only by recognizing what in ourselves is mechanical, manufactured, and replicated—in a traditional sense, not fully human—will we escape the barbarities committed in the name of preserving purely human life" (Black 2009: 786). Therefore, our empathetic connection with the novel's protagonists rather than being based on a realisation of the clones' humanness is based on our recognition of our own inhumanity.

Finally, all the novels seem to urge us to think over our improper, exploitative way of living on this planet. Indeed, they all contain an important warning that we may ignore at our peril. The causes of our violation of the environment may be found in the craving for scientifically "penetrating" the "secrets of nature", without reflecting on the damaging aftermaths "that 'theory' might have for 'practice'" (Hindle 1992: xlvii). As Hindle recognises in his Introduction to Mary Shelly's novel: "a nuclear-weapon-infested globe poised to destroy itself does all too well seem like a threatening fulfilment of Mary Shelley's prophetic "Frankenstein Idea"" (Hindle 1992: xlvii). The same applies to Winterson's Planet Blue/Orbus/Earth, as they altogether represent the current ecological imperilment. Similarly, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go,* the clones are manufactured, exploited and eventually destroyed by means of scientific manipulation. While representing a valuable stimulus for the evolving techno-body, the clones and the cyborg also features the motif of slavery or servitude as they all annihilate themselves for the sake of humans' will to prolong their own lives. As Hindle perfectly acknowledges: "we should perhaps hope that the 'sexy' lure of scientific penetration need not have the cold kiss of death waiting behind it. We should perhaps ensure that alternative attitudes are realized" (Hindle 1992: xlvii).

As this thesis has tried to demonstrate, all the novels provide sources for discussing the posthuman predicament. Although it has accompanied the technological development starting from the twentieth century, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* anticipates some of the most relevant concerns about the posthuman. As such, Sheehan has defined Shelley's novel as "the richest source for mythological posthumanism" (Sheehan 2015: 246). However, while clearly dealing with some of the most recurrent posthuman issues by alluding to relevant topics about automata, in the novel the posthuman is predicated on a sort of primitive, atavistic reawakening rather than on a progressive stance and Victor's creature is featured as an undefined, unnamed monstrous being, resulting from equally monstrous schedules. On the contrary, both *Never Let Me Go* and *The Stone Gods* seem to envision more definite posthuman, hybrid subjectivities, namely the clones and the cyborgs. In addition, both Ishiguro's and Winterson's novel seem to depart from the recurrent representation of the evil

machines produced by the mad scientist which Mary Shelley's novel has contributed to establishing. Rather, techno-bodies such as cyborgs and clones do not instill either fear or anxiety any longer. Instead, they seem to embody a "desires for posthumanization through fusion with machines and their technologies" (Clarke, Rossini 2017: xix).

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