

TRANS-FORMING BODIES: TRANSGENDER AND TRANSHUMANISM IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *FRANKISSSTEIN*

Cuerpos en trans-formación: transgénero y transhumanismo en Frankissstein, de Jeanette Winterson

Claudia Martori
Universitat de Barcelona

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Abstract: Jeanette Winterson's novel *Frankissstein* (2019) discusses technological advances and the ethical boundaries in those, but she also uses technology to give gender a new dimension. She presents a transgender character, Ry, who is non-binary; Ry was born female, has a male appearance, got a mastectomy, and kept his female genitals, but most importantly, is comfortable with the doubleness in his body. Furthermore, in the novel Winterson links the trans* body with transhumanism. Despite presenting only one of the multiple realities of the transgender being — given that every experience is unique and, thus, it would be impossible to do so—, and referring mostly to the physical aspects of the transgender reality, Jeanette Winterson presents a character that represents the trans* part of the LGBTQ+ community, which had only been briefly mentioned in her previous novels. Through Winterson's narrative in *Frankissstein*, this article will aim at analysing her view of the trans* reality in a contemporary setting through the lens of transgender academic studies in order to put Winterson's thought in context, as well as comparing the depictions of the trans* body with those of the transhuman body.

Keywords: Jeanette Winterson, *Frankissstein*, transhumanism, trans*, English contemporary literature.

Resumen: En la novela *Frankissstein* (2019), de Jeanette Winterson, se examinan los avances tecnológicos y los límites éticos de estos, pero Winterson también usa la tecnología para darle una nueva dimensión al género. Así, presenta un personaje transgénero, Ry, que se identifica como no-binario; Ry nació de sexo femenino, tiene una apariencia masculina, se realizó una mastectomía y mantuvo sus genitales femeninos, pero, sobre todo, se siente cómodo con la dualidad de su cuerpo. Además, en la novela Winterson vincula el cuerpo trans* con el transhumanismo. A pesar de

presentar solamente una de las múltiples realidades de la identidad transgénero —ya que cada experiencia es única y, por ende, resultaría imposible hacerlo— y se refiere mayoritariamente a los aspectos físicos de la realidad transgénero, Jeanette Winterson presenta un personaje que representa la parte trans* de la comunidad LGBTQ+, un tema que solo había tratado fugazmente en alguna de sus novelas previas. A través de la narrativa de Winterson en *Frankissstein*, este artículo pretende analizar su perspectiva de la realidad trans* en un escenario contemporáneo a través de la lente de los estudios académicos sobre el transgénero con la intención de poner el pensamiento de Winterson en contexto, así como comparar las representaciones del cuerpo trans* con las del cuerpo transhumano.

Palabras clave: Jeanette Winterson, *Frankissstein*, transhumanismo, trans*, literatura contemporánea inglesa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* (2019) is a novel that delves into the notion that gender and sex are socially constructed. There is a general understanding that gender is constructed in that human beings are taught to perform in a certain way within the gender binary according to the genitals they are born with. On this idea, Judith Butler claims that:

‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance (1993, p. 95).

Butler is well known for her theory of gender performativity¹, which is relevant in this context as regards the questioning of gender in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*. Almost twenty years after Judith Butler's first use of the term ‘gender performativity’ in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Paul B. Preciado noted that, in this contemporary context, "it is not just a matter of signalling the constructed notion of gender, but primarily about reclaiming the possibility of intervening in said construction to such an extent that it creates somatic forms of representation which will come across as natural"² (2009, p. 6). Thus, as boundaries bend with socio-historical changes, there is a naturalisation of previously dissident forms of representation.

As regards sex, there is often the assumption that given that sex is related to the genitals one is born with, this is enough of a justification for the male-female sex binary as a biological element, even though it overlooks other biological realities that do not fit within the sex binary, such as intersex people. Judith Butler disagrees with the idea of sex as a merely biological element and claims that “the construal of ‘sex’ no longer [is] a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but [is] a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies” (1993, pp. 2-3), which Jeanette Winterson agrees with and

¹ See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004) for more insights on the notion of gender performativity.

² My translation from the original in Spanish: «No se trata simplemente de señalar el carácter construido del género, sino ante todo de reclamar la posibilidad de intervenir en esa construcción al punto de crear las formas de representación somáticas que pasarán por naturales» (Preciado, 2009, p. 6).

portrays throughout her work —and which is made especially evident in her novel *Frankissstein*.

Winterson has already explored and questioned the gender binary in previous novels such as *Written on the Body* (1992), *The PowerBook* (2000), and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (2011). However, the notion of gender and sex as socially constructed acquires a new dimension in *Frankissstein*: Winterson not only presents a character whose gender and sex are openly hybrid, but also compares such hybridity to the increasingly present reality of hybridised bodies modified by technology within a posthuman society and the growing presence of transhumanism. Thus, the novel not only delves into hybrid gender and sexuality identities in more depth than Winterson has ventured before, but also updates this idea to its contemporary reality given that our current society is in constant development and change. In levelling gender identities with modified bodies, she conveys the idea that gender identity is part of a bigger argument within contemporary society: the transition towards the end of binary categorisations and the turn towards a hybridity of elements which characterise the posthuman being.

Frankissstein is set a context that is socially and culturally similar to our current one, but in which technology is more developed. As Susana Onega claims about Winterson's *Frankissstein*,

the articulations of the posthuman subject transmitted through the parodic and enmeshed narrative of the novel provide an ethically charged, queer alternative to phallocentrism that reflects the definition of the subject as embodied and embedded in a nature-culture continuum postulated by critical posthumanists like N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, or Sherryl Vint, and is diametrically opposed to the transmodern goal of enhancing human beings artificially and transferring the mind to a disembodied medium (2023, pp. 97-98).

In Winterson's novel, posthumanism and transhumanism are dealt with in depth, as well as topics related to gender and sexuality, which are recurring themes in Jeanette Winterson's texts. This article focusses on Winterson's idea of the trans*³ body as similar to the transhuman body, which she presents in the novel. Winterson's comparison could sound like an oversimplification of those experiences, as Winterson associates trans* with transhuman bodies for they are both modified bodies —even though both trans* and transhuman experiences are more complex than merely their body modifications. Nonetheless, this article will analyse this analogy in depth in order to understand the reasoning behind this comparison as well as the elements taken into account to reach such a statement.

³ Throughout the text, the term that is going to be used is 'trans*', which is an umbrella term that serves "to open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance. [...] the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations" (Halberstam, 2018, p. 4). Further, "the term 'trans*' puts pressure on all modes of gendered embodiment and refuses to choose between the identitarian and the contingent forms of trans identity" (Halberstam, 2018, p. xiii).

2. FRANKISSSTEIN'S (NON-)BINARY

First, it is important to set the context within which the novel takes place; the society presented in *Frankissstein* is very similar to our contemporary one, and thus the notion of the posthuman being is the starting point for Winterson's hybrid beings. Ry, who is an example of hybridity, personifies a posthuman being, one that embodies the diverse and hybrid reality of contemporary human beings. Posthumanism is going to be one of the key concepts for this article and thus it is important to understand the origin of such concept. In *The Posthuman* (2018), Rosi Braidotti states that posthumanism develops from the need for an update on the definition of the human being, given that there had not been any updates on its definition since the Enlightenment, where the established definition was based on binary oppositions (p. 37). As society kept evolving with time, and especially with the growing presence of technology in interaction with human beings in their day-to-day lives, the term 'posthumanism' was born as a way to (re)define the contemporary human being (Braidotti, 2018, p. 37). Further, Francesca Ferrando defends that "Posthumanism is inextricably related to the studies of the differences, referring to the fields of research which developed out of the deconstruction of the 'neutral subject' of Western onto-epistemologies" (2019, p. 24), and establishes that "Posthumanism radically opens to alterity and extensions of diversity, and thus reflects on alternative human embodiments" (2014, p. 220). On the other hand, Braidotti highlights that "The posthuman is a work in progress. It is a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we are becoming. Who that 'we' is, and how to keep that collectivity open, multiple and non-hierarchical" (2020, pp. 1-2). In saying that the posthuman being is more multiple, Braidotti refers to the merging and co-existence of categorisations that were previously seen as mutually exclusive due to their binary nature. Thus, "The term 'posthuman' involves a leap to pondering the *future* of humanity or, more specifically, what comes after humanity as we know it" (Baelo-Allué and Calvo-Pascual, 2021, p. 5).

As regards the object of study, Braidotti, claims that, for posthumanism,

the knowing subject is not Man, or Anthropos alone, but a more complex assemblage that undoes the boundaries between inside and outside the self, by emphasizing processes and flows. Neither unitary, nor autonomous, subjects are embodied and embedded, relational and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics (2020, pp. 45-46).

Further, she defends that the traditional notion of human, which "rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 3). Thus, posthumanism opens the spectrum of what it means to be human, reshapes its boundaries, and provides an egalitarian context which promotes multiplicity, interrelationality, and hybridity. Further, for Francesca Ferrando, "The onto-epistemological openness of Posthumanism is placed in a hybrid vision of humanity itself: through the cyborg, [...] Posthumanism has internalized the hybrid as its point of departure" (2019, p. 2).

In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), Donna Haraway already pointed out the destabilisation of binaries that was arising due to the increasing interaction of human beings with technology:

High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices.

In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice (for example, the homework economy in the integrated circuit), we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic (pp. 177-178).

However, given that these binaries are strongly rooted in society, even though society has been evolving towards hybridity and multiplicity in the last few decades, its social acceptance is still challenging. This is a consequence of the lack of updates to the definition of human being since the 18th-century definition set during the Enlightenment, which is still chiselled in the collective imaginary of contemporary society.

Especially as regards gender and sex, dissidence and non-conformity to the binary are perceived as a threat by the heteronormative hegemonic power, as “‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs [...] In other words, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time” (Butler, 1993, p. 1). Judith Butler presents the idea that if sex has to be imposed over and over it is because bodies do not fit completely with those binary categorisations; thus, sex is

a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled (Butler, 1993, p. 2).

Thus, in the same way that the gender binary is based on gender standards that are often impossible to attain, the norms within the sex binary are challenging for bodies to attain. That is because both gender and sex have culturally imposed elements that are expected to be portrayed through the body and physical appearance, whether it is through certain biological features, performative acts, behaviour, and other external factors such as clothing, hairstyle, makeup, and so on.

In contrast with this idea, Jeanette Winterson’s *Frankissstein* presents a trans* and non-binary character, Ry, whose pronouns are he/him. Ry’s body is hybrid; he got a mastectomy, so he has no breasts, but has female genitals, and claims to feel comfortable with his hybridity, that it is part of who he is. In the novel we find statements such as “I am what I am, but what I am is not one thing, not one gender. I live with doubleness” (Winterson, 2019, p. 89) which help portray this hybridity. Further, Ry’s lover, Victor Stein, talks discusses a certain “hesitation of [his] body” and says “Now male, now not quite, now quite clearly a woman who will slip inside a boy’s body, who will sleep on their back like a new-made sculpture with the paint not dry” (Winterson, 2019, p. 298). This refers to the everchanging quality in Ry’s body and the inability to place him inside the gender binary that is so deeply-rooted in society, something which Jeanette Winterson had already dealt with in her 1992 novel *Written on the Body*.

The hybridity embodied by Ry becomes complicated for the outsider who does not understand his position; as Rosi Braidotti claims, modified bodies can be perceived as monstrous given that they escape what society perceives as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. It is important to bear in mind that those concepts are set to establish a social norm that the hegemonic power can impose onto the population. Having roles and an established ‘normality’ gives a feeling of security to the population and a feeling of being in control to the hegemonic power. However, ‘normality’ and ‘naturalness’ are not qualities that are taken

into account when it comes to describing bodies within a posthuman context, as those concepts are also artificial and modified through time. Rosi Braidotti defends that “The automaton [as an example of a hybrid body] is monstrous because it blurs the boundaries, it mixes the genres, it displaces the points of reference between the normal - in the double sense of normality and normativity - and its ‘others’” (2002, p. 117).

It is also important to keep in mind that modified bodies are not only trans* bodies that have been submitted to surgery, but any body that has been modified through the use of technology, whether it is implanting a piece of technology to enhance its capacities or submitting it to cosmetic surgery. As Rosi Braidotti states, “with their silicon implants, plastic surgery operations and athlete-like training, the bodies of Dolly Parton, Michael Jackson, or Jane Fonda, Cher and many other ‘stars’ are no less cyborg, or monstrous, than anything out of the *Aliens* film series” (2002, p. 244). The reasoning behind this idea comes from N. Katherine Hayles’ notion that “the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born” (1999, p. 3). Jeanette Winterson updates this idea to the 2021 social context in which Artificial Intelligence has become a relevant argument as regards the reality of the human being: “I am sure that our future as *Homo sapiens* is a merged future with the AI we are creating. Transhumanism will be the new mixed race” (2021, p. 262). This notion of the ‘new mixed race’ appears within a context where de-humanisation and re-humanisation are on the rise, which, within a gender perspective, goes in line with Judith Butler’s idea that with “abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered [...] it is their very humanness that comes into question” (Butler, 1993, p. 8). Thus, living in a society that has strongly established patterns for sex —regarding the shape of bodies— as well as for gender, anything that escapes those limits becomes alien. Even though boundaries bend and expand —and sometimes even shrink— as society changes, there will always be an outsider to those established limits, an Other that does not fit the norm.

The novel plays with the socially established gender binary and, throughout the text, there are different instances where characters are confused by Ry’s hybridity because they assume that certain gender clichés are related to one’s gender identity. Hybridity as shocking is mainly presented through the characters of Ron Lord and Claire. Ron Lord is confused by Ry’s reality as a trans* non-binary man and claims “You look like a bloke [...]. Not a serious bloke, but a bloke. I wouldn’t have given you that interview at the Sexpo if you was a girl” (Winterson, 2019, p. 84). As for Claire, she is blinded by her Christian beliefs and says that “God makes us as we are and we should not tamper with it” (Winterson, 2019, p. 240). On the other hand, the assumption of gender through clichés is exemplified when Victor Stein tells Ry “you don’t have to look after me just because you were once a woman” (Winterson, 2019, p. 121). With this, Victor assumes that any other gender that is not female would never look after someone else and that doing so is a sign of being ‘a woman’ —that being a consequence of the imposition of the hegemonic gender standards.

3. THE TRANS* BODY VS. THE TRANSHUMAN BODY

Transhumanism is another key concept in this article, and it shares with posthumanism the desire for human development through the aid of technology, but acquires a different political perspective. Julian Huxley was the first to use the term in an essay he titled ‘Transhumanism’, which is included in *New Bottles for New Wine* (1957). In it, he stated that

The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself — not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature (Huxley, 1957, p. 17).

In a more contemporary context, Nick Bostrom, one of the most prominent figures of transhumanism, defines it as a movement that

promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology. Attention is given to both present technologies, like genetic engineering and information technology, and anticipated future ones, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence. [...] The enhancement options being discussed include radical extension of human health-span, eradication of disease, elimination of unnecessary suffering, and augmentation of human intellectual, physical, and emotional capacities. Other transhumanist themes include space colonization and the possibility of creating superintelligent machines, along with other potential developments that could profoundly alter the human condition (Bostrom, 2003, p. 3).

As presented by Nick Bostrom, technology is the key element for transhumanism to take place, which is also supported by Francesca Ferrando's statement regarding transhumanism:

Technology may allow humans to transcend the finitude of life by reaccessing their biological bodies, which are perceived as ongoing projects for potential progression. Technology is pivotal in the strive toward radical life extension and digital immortality; it is also indispensable in re-envisioning life as it is (2019, p. 35).

Thus, as can be guessed by the form of the compound word, transhumanism is based on transgressing the human boundaries in order to enhance its capabilities and be able to give superhuman abilities to human beings. In the words of Francesca Ferrando, transhumanism seeks "the goal of human enhancement, which is why the main online platform to discuss transhumanist ideas is called H+, where 'H' stands for 'Humanity' and 'Plus' refers to enhancement" (2019, p. 31), and claims that "Transhumanism problematizes the current understanding of the human not necessarily through its past and present legacies, but through the possibilities inscribed within its biological evolution, and in particular, its physical and cognitive enhancement" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 27).

The political implications of transhumanism are very different to those related to posthumanism. While posthumanism aims at a more equal, diverse, and relational society, transhumanism is fuelled by competitiveness, individuality, and power. As claimed by Sonia Baelo-Allué and Mónica Calvo-Pascual,

the same reality is seen very differently by transhumanists and by critical posthumanists. What the former see as human enhancement, the latter see as further intensification of what is wrong with the human. While transhumanists see the fourth industrial revolution as empowering and human-centred, critical

posthumanists champion instead the change of our anthropocentric viewpoints (2021, p. 11).

While both movements have the common goal of human progress and overcoming the ideals of the Enlightenment to create a more advanced society, the ethical values behind those goals are antagonistic.

Bearing these ideas in mind, the reality with which readers are presented in *Frankissstein* is one where technology is increasingly evolving, and the scientific and technological discourses are present throughout the novel. Victor Stein, who is a scientist specialised in Artificial Intelligence, tells Ry at one point in the novel how he believes that the body modifications that people who change their bodies to fit their own gender identity go through are equivalent to those in transhumanism. The reason he gives for claiming that is that people who change their bodies in this way are ahead of their time. He talks about transhumanism as being the next big step to achieve and says to Ry about being trans*: “Weren’t we just saying that in the future we will be able to choose our bodies? And to change them? Think of yourself as future-early” (Winterson, 2019, p. 119). Concerning what Winterson presents, Donna Haraway defends the idea that all bodies are constructed when she says that:

Bodies, then, are not born; they are made [...]. Bodies have been as thoroughly denaturalized as sign, context, and time. Late twentieth-century bodies do not grow from internal harmonic principles theorized within Romanticism. Neither are they discovered in the domains of realism and modernism. One is not born a woman, Simone de Beauvoir correctly insisted. It took the political-epistemological terrain of postmodernism to be able to insist on a co-text to de Beauvoir's: one is not born an organism. Organisms are made; they are constructs of a world-changing kind. The constructions of an organism's boundaries, the job of the discourses of immunology, are particularly potent mediators of the experiences of sickness and death for industrial and post-industrial people (1991, p. 208).

However, the current debate and social rejection towards the construction and hybridisation of bodies stems from the fact that the construction of organisms has become more evident due to the heavy presence of technology, even though the denaturalisation of bodies is not exclusive to the present time.

Although the comparison between the trans* body and the transhuman body may seem like an oversimplification of these experiences, one should bear in mind that Winterson is only focussing on the body modifications of both the trans* body and the transhuman body. It is the same type of consideration that Jack Halberstam makes in his book *Trans** when he compares the trans* body to a lego (2018, p. 130) because it is fragmented and constantly under construction. N. Katherine Hayles makes the same reflection on the posthuman body in the following statement: “The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles, 1999, p. 3). Thus, within a current society that is facing the transition from the old binary-based society towards one that is more multiple and diverse, hybrid identities are slowly becoming more common as a reflection of the posthuman convergence⁴. As human beings increase their level of

⁴ Rosi Braidotti coined the term ‘posthuman convergence’ as she understands “the posthuman condition as the convergence of posthumanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other, within an economy of advanced capitalism” (2020, p. 2).

interaction with technology, the two inevitably start to become hybridised. Neil Harbisson reflects on that and claims:

We foresee that these new identities will become more common in the twenty-first century. We have seen normalization of transgender identities, and now we will have more people defining themselves as trans-species, because of having senses and organs belonging to other existing species or to completely new species (Harbisson in Alcaraz, 2019, p. 65).

Jeanette Winterson, on her part, briefly touches on social unacceptance—as has been discussed previously as regards the characters of Claire and Ron Lord—and sexual abuse, especially with a very violent rape scene that there is in the novel. In that scene, Ry makes the following claim:

This isn't the first time. It won't be the last. And I won't report it because I can't stand the leers and the jeers and fears of the police. And I can't stand the assumption that somehow I am the one at fault. And if I am not at fault, then why didn't I put up a fight? [...] And I don't say, is this the price I have to pay for...? For... For what? To be who I am? (Winterson, 2019, p. 244).

In this extract Winterson inserts the idea that there is also psychological trauma as a consequence of the social unacceptance linked to the trans* experience, as much as there is with other minority groups. However, although those are a relevant part of the hybrid experience, especially as regards gender—given that it is a context where the hybrid being can be sexualised and even fetishised—, those are not the main ideas discussed in the novel.

Further, the reason behind the modification of these bodies is also different. While the driving force of the modification of the trans* body is the desire to match one's gender identity with their physical body features, there can be a variety of reasons behind the modification of the transhuman body. On the one hand, the desire to become transhuman can derive from the eagerness to overcome a physical limitation of the human body—or several. But it could also be due to the newness of having a new gadget, to contribute to the development of transhumanism and technology, as an artistic project—as is the case of Neil Harbisson, Moon Ribas, and Manel de Aguas, among others—and even to fit a certain aesthetic. Yet, both the trans* body and the transhuman body connect with the possibility of matching one's exterior self to their interior identity.

Jeanette Winterson already delved into this idea in *The Stone Gods* (2007) with the modification of bodies through technology, although she did not explore gender hybridity in that novel. In that instance, she mainly focussed on the modification of bodies due to the social pressure for the body to fit into certain parameters which are seen as attractive, as well as the notion that technology is leading to a certain denaturalisation—or even a resignification of the meaning of 'natural': "I'm a Natural Nutrition man," he said, meaning he eats only the most expensive synthetics, protein- and mineral-balanced for optimum health" (Winterson, 2007, p. 43)—to the extent where natural bodies are a rarity—"I had seen archive footage of how we used to age, and I had seen some of the results of medical experiments, but in front of me, now, was a thing with skin like a lizard's, like a stand-up handbag" (Winterson, 2007, p. 37). Thus, from 2007 when she published *The Stone Gods* to 2019 when she published *Frankissstein*, Jeanette Winterson's worries and arguments regarding the shift of our society towards an over-dependence on technology have moved from the idea of de-naturalisation of humanity to a re-naturalisation of the hybrid posthuman and transhuman body.

When Winterson explores the similarities between the trans* body and the transhuman body, she sees hybridity—or doubleness, as she says—in both. As regards such hybridity, Winterson claims that “We create worlds – inner worlds and outer worlds – and we need to live in both those worlds because we are born hybrids. We are already hybrids. We always were” (2021, p. 260). The transhuman reality deals with the hybridity between human being and technology, while the trans* reality deals with the hybridity between that which is stereotypically male and that which is stereotypically female.

Winterson raises the idea of wanting to bring out one’s true self to the outer layer of one’s being and argues that, by modifying one’s body, one can portray in their body all the features which they think are part of them but are not presented in the outer layer of the body, and it is that step further that these people take which makes them ‘future-early’, as Jeanette Winterson phrases it in the novel. This is illustrated in the text when Victor delivers the following words:

Don’t most people have body-mind disconnect? Most people don’t recognise themselves in the mirror. Too fat, too old, too changed. The mind is often disconnected from its host. In your case you aligned your physical reality with your mental impression of yourself. Wouldn’t it be a good thing if we could all do that? (Winterson, 2019, p. 188).

Then, according to Winterson these body modifications are related to matching one’s interior self with their physical (re)presentation.

Winterson already hinted at this in *The PowerBook* (2000), but not in such detail. In *The PowerBook* she presents a gender-fluid character who, at one point, asks themselves: “But what if my body is the disguise? What if skin, bone, liver, veins, are things I use to hide myself? I have put them on and I can’t take them off. Does that trap me or set me free?” (Winterson, 2000, p. 5). In the 17th century—the moment in time when the narration in *The PowerBook* is set— body modifications were not a widespread procedure, which is why, in this case, the character feels like the body they inhabit does not fit their inside. However, in the society that Winterson presents in *Frankissstein*—similar to our present one but with a slightly higher technological development—, science and technology are already capable of modifying one’s body according to their preferences and it gives people the chance to feel more comfortable with their body physical features. For that reason, when told about the confidence he shows with his body, Ry answers that it is “Because it really is my body. I had it made for me” (Winterson, 2019, p. 122).

4. THE BENDING OF LIMITS

Socially established boundaries change over time as culture and society develop, which is why boundaries are constantly bending, morphing, expanding, and also shrinking. In the first two decades of the 21st century society has shifted towards a questioning of many of those established boundaries and a fragmentation of old concepts into a multiplicity of pieces. This myriad of options is increasingly being portrayed in the outer layer of bodies, and trans* bodies are a clear example of that. Taking this context into account, Jack Halberstam’s *Trans** presents the trans* body as fragmented, unfinished, and always under construction (2018, p. 4). Similarly, the transhuman body can always be changed, modified, and updated according to one’s needs and desires. As Jeanette Winterson claims in her essay book *12 Bytes*, “We are a sum of parts – like a machine” (2021, p. 125), and thus in having a body that is already machine-like in some ways, technology serves as a tool to enhance certain

features in the body and its capabilities at the person's own preference. Further, the transition of the body that the person goes through is not the final form of a person, just as non-modified bodies also continue to change over time —although in that case it is due to the natural degradation of the body. Thus, physical changes in the natural body derive from natural degradation, while in the case of modified bodies, physical changes originate from the will to enhance the body and avoid its natural physical limitations.

With transhumanism and body modifications, the line between human and machine becomes blurred, just as we find with Ry's gender, as Ry breaks the boundary of the gender binary. Ry's body is perceived as fragmented, which confuses people, as they do not seem to find a good way to label Ry according to the imposed social stereotypes. Therefore, Jeanette Winterson presents the notion that, while society is evolving, there is a majority of people who are ideologically stuck within the gender binary and cannot comprehend hybrid features in human bodies.

In *Frankissstein*, both gender and sex are questioned and presented as a spectrum, not as binaries. Instead, there is a wide spectrum of possibilities for identity and bodies. Winterson had questioned the gender binary many times before, but the questioning of the binary of sex identity is less common in her narrative. However, she does have a line in *Art & Lies* in which she does point this issue out: "Thanks to the blessed absence of technology, it was impossible to make sure of the sex of the child" (p. 179). Here, like in *Frankissstein*, Winterson presents us with a hybrid body which, given its nature, is not perceived as something that fits the norm.

Further, given that society imposes certain norms as regards gender and sexuality — that gender and sex should correlate and that it is assumed that everyone fits into the heterosexual scheme—, moving beyond them implies a certain discomfort for those who endorse the heteronormative discourse. This implies an extra effort for those who do not fit those patterns. As portrayed in *Frankissstein*, Ry, as a trans* and non-binary person, tries to educate and make people understand his reality, as it is a society that has not been educated on the possibility of existing outside the established pattern. As claimed by Judith Butler, "The efforts to denaturalize sexuality and gender have taken as their main enemy those normative frameworks of compulsive heterosexuality that operate through the naturalization and reification of heterosexist norms" (1993, p. 93). Some of these efforts are fruitful — which does not mean it is not hard for those people to think outside the box at times—, as it is the case of Victor Stein, while some of them are not, as it is the case of Ron Lord. This is Winterson's way to portray that there will always be people who do not see the established social system as problematic and hermetic, and are not willing to update their knowledge.

Thus, within this context of collision between the new and the old, Winterson's *Frankissstein* depicts the fragmented nature of the trans* body as well as that of the transhuman body, and destabilises gender and sex in the novel. Through this depiction, the author questions those limits and bends them so that the reader realises how much one has internalised the social constructs of gender, sex, and even of what it is that makes one human

5. THE HUMAN BEING AS MULTIPLE

In *Frankissstein*, the dividing line of socially established binaries is broken as this posthuman narrative overcomes the idea that human beings are just one thing. As if Walt Whitman was foreseeing the future back in 1855, in *Leaves of Grass* he wrote about the idea that the human being is 'multiple', that it contains multitudes: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)" (Whitman, 1976,

lines 1314-1316). That is, in being multiple, the self becomes contradictory, as it would be to meet both sides of the gender-sex binary. The reality of trans* and transhuman people is multiple and thus apparently contradictory, which Winterson represents through the character of Ry in *Frankissstein*. As J. R. Latham claims, a gender identity is not completely male nor completely female (2016, p. 195), and a modification of one's sex is simultaneously "becoming singular and becoming multiple" (Latham, 2016, pp. 187-188). Trans*, thus, is a multiplicity of sex expressions and representations, and even "a clash of certain sex-objects" (Latham, 2016, p. 190).

Bearing in mind that every trans* experience is different, what *Frankissstein* tries to highlight for the reader is that gender is a spectrum. Ry's experience as a non-binary trans* man is one where hybridity is portrayed in his body. However, Ry does not represent the whole trans* community—which is something impossible to achieve in a novel, given that every trans* experience is different, and something unrealistic for someone to aim to do. However, Jeanette Winterson does represent a trans* experience and attempts to circumscribe the trans* body within the contemporary socio-historical context in its current development state.

Moreover, as Latham claims, medicine views sex as "singular and binary" (2016, p. 199), and that is why sex change goes from one side of the spectrum to the other, because there is no in-betweenness nor multiplicity within the gender-sex binary for science. Furthermore, Lucas Cassidy Crawford defends that the body is based on a hetero-normative structure, which influences the body transition of trans* people and, thus, creates the notion that bodies are something fixed, not mutable, which is actually far from the truth in the contemporary social context (2010, p. 527).

As regards the trans* experience, it is important to bear in mind the problems there might be with social acceptance and legal acceptance, which is true for both trans* and transhuman people. Social acceptance is dealt with in *Frankissstein* through characters such as Ron Lord, Claire, and the rapist, as mentioned before. As regards legal acceptance, the forementioned artist Neil Harbisson, who has an antenna implanted in his brain which allows him to hear colour frequencies, is an example of that. He was the first cyborg person in the world and he had issues when updating his passport because there was a piece of technology in the picture which was legally not allowed. He claims that when he went to renew his British passport

The photo was rejected. I replied to the passport office that the device was an extension of my body and therefore a part of my image. I had to provide letters from my doctor and Adam [Montandon] to help me prove that the eyeborg was part of my body (Harbisson, 2008, pp. 71-72).

Neil Harbisson is an example of the hybrid nature of the human being as much as Ry is in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*, and these are identities that are paving the way of the reality which society is heading towards, and thus need to be given the visibility they deserve, whether they are real or fictional identities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* presents an interesting reflection on the trans* experience, transhumanism, the body, and boundaries. As she very often does in her novels, she questions established norms and roles and tries to bend those limits so that the reader

realises the importance of not basing one's identity on the hegemonic standards that have been imposed on them. *Frankissstein's* Ry not only serves as a representation of diverse trans* bodies but also represents hybridity, non-conformity, progress, and posthumanism. Further, Jeanette Winterson presents, through this work of fiction, the current reality, issues, and benefits of both posthumanism and transhumanism in this contemporary context. Winterson sets hybridisation as the central topic of the novel and explores the idea of the hybrid body in the 21st century through both gender and technological perspectives.

For the last couple of decades, Winterson has been discussing the impact of technology on human beings, but it was not until the publication of *Frankissstein* that she clearly presented the current social issues derived from the hybridisation of human beings and technology. For this reason, *Frankissstein* allows for dialogue with current philosophical approaches such as posthumanism and transhumanism. In this way, Winterson portrays the hybridisation of dualistic categories which were previously perceived as antagonistic: masculine-feminine for transgender and human-technology for transhumanism.

The interest in the novel not only lays on the contemporaneity of the topics discussed, but also in Winterson's ability to question and debate techno-human hybrid bodies together with other ways in which bodies can be hybridised in contemporary society, as in the case of trans* hybrid bodies, such as that of Ry in *Frankissstein*. In this way, Winterson puts gender and post/trans-humanism side to side in order to explore, debate, and question the tendencies, developments, and values of humanity in the present as well as the near future.

Winterson's novel is innovative for comparing and reflecting on trans* and transhuman bodies and how they are examples of the hybrid turn that society is taking within the context of posthumanism. As society bends and extends its boundaries, new realities are coming to be. Posthumanism offers a multiple and less hierarchical society where in-between identities are integrated and treated as equals instead of Others; it is within this context that ever-evolving hybrid bodies find a way to represent their inner self on their external layer.

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