

## Posthuman Enquiry in the Grip of the Binaries in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*

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**Abstract:** Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (2019) draws analogies to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818), which is a protocyberpunk novel. The postmodern novel interweaves Mary Shelley's writing of *Frankenstein* in Switzerland and transgender Ry Shelley's acquaintance with artificial intelligence in Britain. *Frankissstein* also connects the tale of the Titan Prometheus, Professor Victor Frankenstein creating a cyborg in *Frankenstein* and Ry's beloved, Victor Stein, experimenting on cyborgs with artificial intelligence. Thus, the novel's narrative switches between the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries to depict the posthuman condition over the centuries. What it means to be human, the validity of grand narratives and all kinds of binarism are put into question throughout *Frankissstein* as a postmodern extension of the nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein*. The paper argues that the novel provides insights into the posthuman condition through technocultural discourses. A posthumanist reading of the novel indicates that *Frankissstein* contributes to the deconstruction of anthropocentric binaries in humanist thinking regarding the relationship between not only humans and nonhumans but also men and women. The study also reveals that despite the time lapse, the concerns related to the posthuman condition remain the same because transgressing dichotomies lead to ambiguity in human's life.

**Keywords:** posthuman, binaries, Jeanette Winterson, *Frankissstein*, *Frankenstein*

### PREAMBLE

The concept of posthumanism rejects all homocentric approaches by arguing that all the so-called binaries—including the human and nonhuman binary, nature and culture—exist in the same *précis*. The concept protests against humanism – which has prioritised the human

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and the human thinking as the centre of all entities regarding man, as in ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras's widely known words: "the measure of all things" (Baysal 2020, 211). In this aspect, posthumanism contradicts Cartesian dichotomies, accepted in the Western tradition. Braidotti (2013, 15) associates the emergence of posthumanism with the questioning and then collapse of Eurocentric dichotomies separating the Self, which signifies "consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulation," from the Other, representing "the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized." In this respect, posthumanism is regarded as a comprehensive term for various movements (including feminism, environmentalism and animal rights) relating to different areas rejecting any discrimination and exploitation of all species and the environment (Pepperell 2003, 11–12). The collapse of humanism has resulted in the evanescence concerning human morality, civilisation and idealism. This perspective leads to a reformulation of the sociocultural norms, which are produced as totalitarian executions in society.

The emergence of the posthuman condition is not abrupt but rather an old process initiated "with Prometheus or the discovery of fire by prehistoric 'man'" and formulated with science, technology, myth and imagination (Herbrechter 2013, 34). In time, scientific developments have brought a new dimension to traditional theories by transforming "the five hundred years of humanism...helplessly" into posthumanism (Hassan 1977, 843). Posthumanism disaffirms the superiority of the human to the nonhuman – which enables the human to set a hegemonic system on the nonhuman through science and technology, enabling robots, cyborgs and androids to prevail in a technocultural world. However, posthumanism does not invalidate the human condition; rather, it provides a new set of thinking to set the human free from binary dispositions to refrain from a dystopian future. In this context, the posthumanist approach does not propose the end of classical humanism as "a crisis, but entails positive consequences" (Braidotti 2013, 51). Conversely, the deconstruction of the dichotomies results in an enquiry to comprehend the changing human condition in a scientific and technological world. In this sense, as stated by Oppermann (2012, 326), what posthumanism attempts to do is to restructure the socioeconomic and cultural components of society in accordance with technological and scientific developments because humanism falls short in identifying the complex and ambiguous nature of the human concept and its relation to technology.

Narratives have a noteworthy role in representing the posthuman in technocultural terms (Hayles 1999, 22). Mythology provides narratives with various “what-if” scenarios set in an alternate world of possibilities, an imaginary space where technology was advanced to prodigious degrees” (Mayor 2018, 2). In this aspect, science fiction, reinforced through mythology particularly since the rapid industrialisation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and scientific and technological developments afterwards, reflects such scenarios. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is subtitled “the Modern Prometheus,” referring to The Tale of Prometheus in Greek mythology. Similarly, Winterson’s *Frankissstein* contains several references to mythological stories including The Tale of Pandora and particularly The Tale of Prometheus. Mayor (2018, 214) argues that “myths, legends, and lore of past cultures about automata, robots, replicants, animated statues, extended human powers, self-moving machines, and other artificial beings, and the authentic technological wonders that followed” supply a fertile resource to make out the relationship between the human and the nonhuman and the human beings’ constant attempt to become a superhuman, surpassing any physical and mental limitations.

*Frankenstein* may be regarded as the pre-posthumanist production or a protocyberpunk novel dating back to the nineteenth century. Filas (2001, 40) considers Victor Frankenstein to be “a cyborg-maker” and his creature as “the Adam of cyborgs ... [which is s]uperior to non-cyborgs in strength, size and stamina.” The monster is the result of his attempt to reinforce human physical and mental endurance by animating organic material through electricity. The scientist’s utopian dream of life is accompanied with a dystopian future. Winterson projects similar concerns throughout *Frankissstein*, which has been long-listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction since its release in 2019 (“The Reader’s Room” 2019). *Frankissstein* affiliates Mary Shelley’s narrative of the writing and publishing her novel *Frankenstein*, alongside her relationship with Percy Byssche Shelley and concerns for Europe in the nineteenth century with Doctor Ry Shelley’s narrative about ongoing posthuman enquiry into human life regarding gender identity, and the scientist Victor Stein’s experiments on cyborgs and Ron Lord’s trade of sexbots in Brexit in the twenty-first century. Despite the differences in setting and characters of the two narratives, there is a strong cohesive relationship between them throughout the novel. As argued by Adıgüzel and Tekin (2021, 266),

“[b]y combining her knowledge of science with her authorial skills, Winterson appears as a trickster artist, making significant contributions to the creation of a culture in which generations of thinking, analyzing, and questioning will grow.” In this respect, this paper scrutinises posthuman questioning in relation to anthropocentric binaries throughout *Frankissstein* in the light of the assertions of some posthumanist theorists, including Donna Haraway, Francesca Ferrando, Rosi Braidotti and Katherine Hayles.

#### POSTHUMAN DILEMMA IN THE WEB OF THE BINARIES IN WINTERSON’S *FRANKISSSTEIN*

Among the Eurocentric dichotomies, put in question through a critical and destructive approach throughout *Frankissstein* are human/nonhuman, body/mind and man/woman. They are interrogated in a relation to each other without a clear-cut division throughout the novel. Therefore, the posthuman treatment of the novel examines the dynamic relationship between humans and nonhumans besides men and women.

*Frankissstein* contributes to the destruction of the human/nonhuman dichotomy through the posthumanist attempts of Victor Frankenstein in Mary’s story and Victor Stein in Ry’s story by referring to Prometheus’s creation of human beings as a new species and giving power to them. Like Prometheus who challenges Zeus’s authority by stealing fire from divinities to give it to the humankind, both Victors resist God’s power as the only source of creation by fabricating cyborgs with the purpose of introducing a new species using the human body, science and technology. In the novel, Mary describes her writing process of *Frankenstein*. The Shelley couples learn about Castle Frankenstein where an alchemist conducted experiments on corpses with concoction to resurrect his deceased wife. By refusing even to bury his wife’s body, the alchemist provoked concern among the villagers, who eventually bury the alchemist alive in the castle (Winterson 2019, 108–110). According to Percy Shelley, alchemists tried to discover the secret of “homunculus...a creature not born of woman...A made thing, unholy and malign” (Ibid, 110). The story of the alchemist inspired Shelley to create her protagonist Victor Frankenstein, who “seeks victory over life and over death” through science (Ibid, 111). She was also inspired by the myth of Prometheus “who steals fire from the gods and pays for it with his liver” (Ibid, 201). Shelley decided that Victor Frankenstein would create a species,

which would not be human but “more than a man” (Ibid, 112) referring to a cyborgian creature. Thus, the monster he creates is indeed a cyborg. In Haraway’s definition, it is a production of social reality and a fictional character (*Simians* 149). Moreover, following Hayles’s view, it is the hybridised form of technological material and scientific knowledge (1999, 22). In this aspect, considering Victor Frankenstein’s boundary-crossing monster as “the first cyborg” (Gray 2001, 5), Victor Stein’s creatures are its advanced versions. Both scientists’ transhumanist attempts undermine the belief that humankind is the single and utmost power in the world. Thus, “the continuation of the humanistic endeavor” (Ferrando 2020a, 4) encounters the posthuman condition that stands at the end of the transhumanist line because it leads to contradiction both for human beings and the scientists who struggle for them.

Braidotti (2013, 12) states that the posthuman condition provides “alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation,” thus entails critical and creative thinking about “who and what we are actually in the process of becoming.” The human attempts to keep pace with the stunningly fast advancement of technology in the modern world. In this aspect, science fiction depicts the posthuman condition through “the interpretation of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others” (Haraway 1992, 300). In *Frankissstein*, the posthuman condition is reflected through Mary and Ry’s enquiry about the potential capacity of human beings and artificial intelligence, which makes the dichotomy between the human and the nonhuman controversial. Mary’s posthuman questioning of artificial life versus the biological one “is in conflict with” nineteenth century-anthropocentrism, which is articulated by Byron as follows: “Man is the apex of creation” and cannot be replaced by any machines (Winterson 2019, 471). Mary’s treatment of the human in contrast to humanist thinkers around her asserts Robert Pepperell’s note in “The Posthuman Manifesto:” “It is now clear that humans are no longer the most important things in the universe. This is something the humanists have yet to accept” (2003, 177). Mary wonders whether automata could be considered alive if it had intelligence (Winterson 2019, 98). Mourning after the death of her three children, Mary contemplates what if they could be revived and what would happen to their spirit (Ibid, 34). Conversely, Percy Shelley’s doctor, William Lawrence proposes an argument against humanist thinking by claiming the human is made up of the body and does not own a soul (Ibid, 93).

Lawrence's posthumanism in the nineteenth century corresponds to Victor Stein's approach in the present day. Parallel to Lawrence, Stein claims that "[s]cience is no longer convinced that *Homo sapiens* is a special case." (Ibid, 127) His speech draws an analogy to Lawrence's speech. Victor, known for his technologically innovative notions around the world, delivers a lecture entitled "The Future of Humans in a Post-Human World" underlining that eternal life is possible by means of artificial intelligence providing an eternal life for the human, who carries mind in a nonhuman body, that is, a cyborg. He privileges artificial intelligence (AI) to biology. Considering Victor Stein's lecture, his scientific and biotechnological discourse is an attempt of "carving the future into a spectrum of alternative human embodiments, proposing a scientific revisit of mythological chimeras, in a generic and all-inclusive posthuman horizon" (Ibid, 223).

The Anthropocene refers to the recent geological period of the world when human beings have altered the ecological balance to a great extent since the Industrial Revolution. As Ferrando (2014b, 168) argues, in the Anthropocentric era, when human actions cause environmental changes, humans were not considered responsible for this noteworthy damage to the ecosystem. However, posthumanism displays criticism of humans' "anthropocentric premises, which are leading to a point of non-return in ecological and sustainable terms." In this context, Victor Stein argues that considering "[c]limate change, mass extinction of fauna and flora, destruction of habitat and wilderness, atmospheric pollution, failure to control population, extraordinary brutality, the daily stupidity of our childish feelings" (Winterson 2019, 127), the human being is not the one who can survive in today's world (Ibid, 120) and people have no other better choice than AI (Ibid, 396). Victor Stein's transhumanist initiative contradicts the binaries, which he states "belong to our carbon-based past" (Ibid, 117) and believes that AI will enable the collapse of other binaries related to human sex, skin colour and economy (Ibid, 129). Victor's ultimate purpose is to upload his consciousness to "a substrate not made of meat" (Ibid, 174). In this way, he plans to prolong his lifespan. Ry thinks that Victor is "a high-functioning madman" (Ibid, 179) and an "egomaniac" (Ibid, 232). Transhumanism's main purpose is "human enhancement" to become "posthuman" through some technological and scientific possibilities (Ferrando 2020a, 3). In this respect, Victor Stein takes Victor Frankenstein's transhumanist step further through advanced biotechnology. He contemplates enhancing

the physical and mental capacities of the human through small implants by uploading their minds to something inorganic (Winterson 2019, 180). He evaluates the body as a trap for the mind, so the body is useless to the mind. At this stage, biotechnology enables the separation of the mind from the body, thus from aging and any degeneration with the disease. Victor Stein evaluates the consciousness, thoughts and feelings as the data and the body as “a large meat-safe” in which the data is stored (Ibid, 397). For Victor, it will be difficult to distinguish between the human and the nonhuman thanks to embodied artificial intelligence (Ibid, 230). In his posthumanist context, as a transhuman production of AI, a cyborg can transgress all established binaries constructed by Western logocentric humanism.

Coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, the term “cyborg” refers to any entity combining the organism and technology in a single system (Hollinger 2009, 273). Cyborgs are posthuman images constituted by both organic and inorganic materials. They are the biotechnical combination of human and technology in one single entity. It is the eradication of all constraints and binaries in human life erasing the boundary between the human and the nonhuman, the living and the non-living. Advanced technology allows the integration of artificial parts into the human body providing it with superior abilities and making it surpass the ordinary human body. In this aspect, the anthropocentric world is replaced by a posthuman one inhabited by “humans heavily interconnected with technology and robots evolving into human-like bodies” (Çetiner 2021, 78). Thus, as Victor Stein argues, in the posthumanist approach people undergo a process of learning “to share the planet with non-biological life forms” produced through technology by them (Winterson 2019, 118). In this aspect, Haraway (1991, 152) asserts that technology, which requires human control no longer, has eliminated any distinctions ascribed to living organisms and machines such as the body and the mind, natural and artificial. More precisely, the line between the human and the nonhuman and any cultural norms attributed to them is blurred through technoscientific knowledge entailing a novel through technocultural discourses. As suggested by Braidotti (2013, 38), the posthuman condition entails reformulations in sociocultural norms which will not categorise the human and the nonhuman in terms of sex, gender, race or class. In a similar vein, Haraway (2003, 4) notes that cyborgs and companion species break the boundary between all the binaries “in unexpected ways.” Thus, in the posthuman context, cyborgs are not

confined to any limitations or categorisations rejecting dichotomies offering a new perspective about human-machine relations (Franchi and Güzeldere 2005, 109).

Victor Stein's project titled "Type 3 Life: Fully self-designing" (Winterson 2019, 118) as the utmost type of life, is characterised by the power of artificial intelligence, which does not compromise the binaries body/mind and life/death. Accordingly, the indistinguishableness of the nonhuman from the human due to biotechnology brings about various posthumanist arguments. One of these arguments is related to the endeavour to go beyond the human eradicating the bodily limitations including aging and death. However, it brings about the question whether the mind, spirit and consciousness, which all encompass the human encapsulated by the body, are more privileged than the body in the posthuman context. Having elaborated on various theories of human consciousness, Marvin Minsky (2007, 13-15) improved the theory of artificial intelligence to present a new understanding of human intelligence and consciousness. He argues that the hundreds of constituents with which the human mind operates both simultaneously and perpetually make the nature of the consciousness complicated. Like a machine working through the simultaneous interaction of multiple mechanic parts, the human mind is a lump of meat or organic machine, and the body is home to this mechanism. Inspired by such an organic operation, biotechnology develops artificial intelligence. Percy Shelley's regarding bodies as the "caravans of tissue and bone" in the nineteenth century, and two centuries later, Ry's encounter with young people wearing t-shirt with the slogan "Give Up Meat" referring to the human body that is "a substrate made of meat" (Winterson 2019, 62-63) reflect the underestimation of the body in the posthuman context despite the elapsed time. Furthermore, the novel proposes a posthuman treatment of reconstructing the life/death dualism as in Braidotti's term "life-death continuum" (2013, 132) because life is contemplated as the continuous enquiry concerning the interdependent relationship between the human and the nonhuman cyborgs or robots throughout the novel.

In Mary's story, Percy Shelley asserts the superiority of the spirit to the body as it "shapes the word" through our intentions and feelings (Winterson 2019, 33) asserting that the soul survives the time in contrast to the fragility of bodies. Considering Mary's enquiry about the relationship between the body and the mind, soul or consciousness



wishing to revive her dead children and Percy Shelley's argument what if the mind is transferred to a nonhuman form indicates the posthuman questioning in the nineteenth century. In this aspect, mentioned in *Frankissstein*, "Frankenstein was a vision of how life might be created – the first non-human intelligence" (Ibid, 50). It draws an analogy to Ry's enquiry through Victor Stein's experimental studies on cyborgs with the human mind in the novel. The body is comprised of meat and redundant for the human mind which can also be transferred in today's scientific technology in the context of the twenty-first century arousing the debate on the binary of the body versus the mind. Mary's Frankenstein character who identifies himself with his monster also feels trapped in his "gross body" (Ibid, 325). He wishes to stop "fiendish, pitiless cunning" experiments causing harm to people as he did (Ibid, 326). His repenting for creating a cyborgian creature foreshadows Victor Stein's possible forthcoming regret undermining the human race because for him "humans will only programme the future once. After that, the intelligence we create will manage itself. And us" (Ibid, 130). Furthermore, as a response to Ry's reaction concerning the end of the human race, Victor draws attention to the already-collapsing way of life all over the world saying that "[h]umans will be like decayed gentry" in the future (Ibid, 233).

Considering both Frankenstein and Stein's situation, it is humans' inquisitorial and ambitious nature urging them to go beyond the human limits, thus allowing the nonhuman to surpass the human and even possibly prepare for the tragic end of the human like Prometheus. Both of the scientists steal the creation power of the gods as Prometheus does. Mary regards Frankenstein as "a modern Prometheus" (Ibid, 200) of the nineteenth century. In this regard, Stein may be considered "a post-modern Prometheus" elaborating on Frankenstein's cyborgian model through advanced science and technology of the twenty-first century; artificial intelligence. However, despite their success, there is an analogy between their possible ends with Prometheus, who pays for his interference with gods' power with his liver upon Zeus's punishment. Byron evaluates Prometheus's condition as "a serpent story-by which he suggests a reach for knowledge that must be punished" reminding the story of Eve eating the apple from the forbidden tree and Pandora's opening "her bloody box" (Ibid, 204–205). Although it is implied through these stories that crossing the limits benefit humans in contrast to their assumption, even Christian Claire, who condemns people's attempt in producing human-like

robots and accusing Ron of putting himself “in the service of Satan” instead of humankind (Ibid, 363) because of her religious faith in God as the single creator, collaborates in the sex-doll business for “the missionary, for the widower, for the boy tempted by the flesh” (Ibid, 360). She also becomes shocked when she learns that Claire is a transgender tampering with what God has created for her. Her opposition to the human stealing the Creator’s power reflects the posthuman condition, in Pepperell’s words, regarding the clash between “faith in scientific methods” and “faith in other belief systems” (2003: 181).

The novel associates Victor Frankenstein’s disappearance with his desperate posthuman condition in Mary’s narrative with Victor Stein’s disappearance with a blackout in the whole city, the lost vast of data, records, all gadgets, experimented animals, robots. Nothing is left behind except for his signet ring on the floor in the laboratory. The ring has a symbolic imprint on it, a snake swallowing its own tail. This ancient symbol is called “Ouroboros” meaning “tail devourer” in Greek. It originated in Egypt and represents “the infinite cycles of nature; birth and death, time passing, and of creation and destruction” (Bekhrad 2017). Victor explains to Ry: “We come full circle. Whether we know it or not” (Winterson 2019, 320), suggesting the notion of the human’s endless endeavour to become immortal thus simultaneously creating and destroying the humankind from the beginning of humankind.

A posthuman approach to the human/the nonhuman binarism arouses another debate on the body/the mind dichotomy in *Frankissstein*, it is the question of the consciousness with/(out) the human body. It is consciousness that makes the human more complicated than the nonhuman no matter how developed it is. The decision mechanism of the human is formulated by consciousness. According to Pepperell (2003, 13), consciousness is composed of disparate parts including thought, feelings, memory, awareness and intelligence, each of which is essential to make an understanding of the human. They constitute primarily the interaction with each other, between the human body and the mind, and between the human and society; thus, they make the human a human being in all terms contributing to his/her existence as both an ontological and a sociocultural being. Moreover, Samuel Butler puts the limits of consciousness into question and argues the impossibility of identifying the consciousness precisely for all beings. Nevertheless, he notes that

considering the “self-regulating, self-acting power” of machines, “[i]n the course of ages we shall find ourselves the inferior race” (Butler 1863, 182) because the humanist subject is replaced by cybernetic posthuman in time. As argued by Hayles (1999, 3), the posthuman subject is in the constant process of becoming, a superseding “material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction.” In this regard, the cybernetic posthuman adapts technological enhancements to surpass the limitations of the classical human model. Posthumanism deconstructs the humanist perspective, which considers the body as an inseparable part of the human, by handling the body as a merely physical embodiment of knowledge and not as essential to cybernetic posthuman.

Victor Stein, who sees the body as merely “a life support system for the brain” (Winterson 2019, 285) deconstructs the idealised human model and plans to create a cyborg with a robotic body and a human brain. He wants to replace the human body with the robotic body which serves without aging or disease. His transhumanist project suggests human beings’ transcendence annihilating anthropocentric premises through singularity, thus challenges the posthuman thinking which, as Ferrando (2013, 30) notes, “dismisses the centrality of the centre in its singular form” and embraces “pluralistic, multilayered” perspectives. Victor attempts to make an experiment through his mathematician fellow Jack’s head by scanning his cryopreserved brain. Jack was clever enough to decipher the code on the Enigma machine (Winterson 2019, 409). He promised Jack to revive his mind after his death. Accordingly, the human heart stops and the body dies, but the brain does not. When the blood and oxygen stop flowing, the brain no longer functions. Victor aims to achieve providing eternity in human life as opposed to God. He attempts to take God’s power of creation as Prometheus and Victor Frankenstein did. He exclaims: “Once out of these bodies we can handle any atmosphere, any temperature, lack of food and water, distances of any kind, providing we have an energy source” (Ibid, 425). He tries to go beyond the point of manufacturing robots as slaves of human as Ron does through sex robots. He attempts to enhance the human beings’ capacity to the extent in which they can compete with God and turning them into mythological gods who “have our appetites and desires, our feuds and feelings, but they are fast, strong, unlimited by biology, and usually immortal” (Ibid, 442). Thus, the novel also depicts the destruction of supremacy in theological

terms because as Ferrando (2020b, 649) argues, “[t]he deconstruction of the human [in the framework of body, mind, consciousness and body] leads to the deconstruction of any anthropocentric assumptions in technology and theology,” so almighty God’s superiority.

Another point deconstructed in the novel is the anthropocentric association among the body, gender identity and love in the posthuman context. The dichotomy of women and men is based on the hierarchal pattern associating men with rationality, objectivity and culture, and women with emotions, subjectivity and nature. Identity is a part of human culture, so not naturally given but culturally constructed. Gender identity, constructed by society, is exposed to changes through experiences and social relations. Gender’s being performative is elaborated following Simone de Beauvoir’s argument that “one is not born a woman, but becomes one” (1952, 249) revealing that gender is socially and culturally constructed by being associated with the body. However, Western technoscience enables “the implosion of gender in sex and language, in biology and syntax” (Haraway 1991, 128). *Frankissstein* depicts that regardless of biotechnological advancements which enable the human cross the sexual boundaries resulting in fluidity in gender roles, the dichotomy between the man and the woman is maintained in sociocultural terms in a way. In the novel, Mary Shelley’s life is based on anthropocentric heterosexual norms. Her husband believes that not the French Revolution but “a strong man” can provide people with what they need as humans (Winterson 2019, 25). Moreover, his friend Lord Byron asserts that “woman is from man born” even though he does not believe in God (Ibid, 29).

In Ry’s private life, the woman is also secondary to the man as she was in the nineteenth century. Percy Shelley marries Marry after an unhappy marriage with Harriet, whom he writes: “I felt as if a dead and living body had been linked together in loathsome and horrible communion” (Ibid, 40). Although Mary enjoys feeling the warmth of Shelley’s body “rest[ing] on his narrow chest, listening to his heart” (Ibid, 99), his living body does not provide harmony in their relationship because she is aware that he deceived her several times, and he maintains a relationship with her friend, Jane Williamson. Thus, like Harriet, Mary, feeling lonely and witnessing the death of her three children, is victimised by patriarchy. Mary is not different from Victor Frankenstein’s cyborg, who also suffers from loneliness and otherness, therefore, urges his creator to create a female companion for him to go away with her to the vast wilds of South America by setting both

themselves and the people around themselves free from misery (Ibid, 197). On the other hand, Mary's and Victor Frankenstein's alienation in the nineteenth century is associated with Ry's alienation in the present day reflecting the posthuman condition estranging the human from his/her own product, even his/her body or identity. When posthuman subjects are involved in the process of becoming "too far or too fast and a line of transformation disappears or loses power," they become alienated (Williams 2018, 29). In this context, Mary becomes alienated from the character Victor Frankenstein, whom she creates, Victor Frankenstein loses the distinction between himself and his monster while becoming alienated from society, and Ry undergoes alienation through rapid surgery and transgenderism and becomes more and more lonely in society which is technologically advanced but still biased in gender issue.

*Frankissstein* problematises the gender identity within the framework of nature/culture binarism as sex is related to nature including one's genes, nervous system, hormones and morphology, whereas gender is constituted by culture. In this aspect, as Haraway (1991, 133) states, a man or woman is a human gendered through cultural manipulation of nature. Such a heterosexual approach in man and woman relationship is deconstructed by the relationship between Victor Stein and Ry. Ry is a transgender doctor; both a woman and a man without two breasts, a penis or a hairy body in appearance with surgery and testosterone injections. Thus, Ry crosses the gender boundaries by becoming neither a man nor a woman precisely, but both of them through surgical intervention. It asserts Haraway's note that biotechnology is among significant "tools recrafting our bodies," thus "embody[ing] and enforc[ing] new social relations for women" (1991, 164). In this aspect, Ry can be referred to as neither "he" nor "she" but singular "they" to refrain from the gender limits of pronouns as suggested by grammarian Dennis Baron (1986, 189-192), who argues that usage of singular "they" enables human beings to avoid sex-based reference in the English pronoun system.<sup>1</sup> Ry says to their lover Victor that they are both a woman and a man in the body, they prefer (Winterson 2019, 193). They note that the medical surgery has helped them approach what they feel. It enables them to "make"

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<sup>1</sup> Singular "they" is a pronoun reflecting the person's non-binary gender identity. In this context, Ry will be referred to as "they" in singular form instead of gender-specific pronouns "he" and "she" to represent their sex-free and gender-fluid identity.

themselves (Ibid, 370) getting rid of “the wrong body” they have felt squeezed within (Ibid, 457–58) indicating that they have experienced a clash between their body and gender identity. As they introduce themselves to Ron as “a hybrid” (Ibid, 135),<sup>2</sup> Ry’s both body and gender identity are fragmented and hybrid. They fit well in androgynous identity which, as Yılmaz (2017, 87) notes, “embraces both male and female categories” through the changes in their body and the fluidity of their gender, trespassing the rigid boundaries between male and female, masculinity and femininity. Despite their free preference, they suffer from some attacks because of their penisless body. When they are attacked by a man in the bar lavatory, they imply that they have lived the same situation several times before and considers that they will experience it several more times. They do not even report it to the police and call any help to avoid the police’s prejudice against them and notes: “And I don’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” (Winterson 2019, 369–70). In this regard, Ry eliminates biological determinism from their body through technoscience; nevertheless, they are obstructed by the gender dilemma in human relations. Their blurred sex causes the blurring in their gender identity. It asserts Braidotti’s note that the concept of woman is not biological, but biocultural (2011, 162). Ry’s condition reflects how a transgender is othered in the posthuman world and advanced technology enabling people to cross the gender boundaries does not help them to get rid of the boundaries set by the cultural norms.

Considering both Victor Frankenstein and Victor Stein’s creation of cyborgian species and Ry’s biotechnological surgery on their body assert, in Fernando’s terms (“The Body” 223), “blurring the traditional divide nature/culture” through “tools.” Their attempt of transgressing the boundaries may be evaluated as an abuse of nature in scientific and technological terms. As mentioned, it entails conflicts leading to questioning the connection between the body and identity in society. Victor, who asserts the uselessness of the body and wants to cross the human limit of both biology and gender, race, ethnicity, faith and sexuality issues (Winterson 2019, 305), contradicts his transhumanist perspective by problematising the doubleness of Ry’s body. Ry

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<sup>2</sup> Ry says to Ron that *they* is not a woman and adds: “I am a *hybrid*,” (135, my emphasis) implying their transgender identity.

realises that if they had a penis instead of a vagina, Victor would not prefer having a sexual relationship with them (Ibid, 241). On the other hand, he also asserts that he finds their hybrid body mysterious and attractive (Ibid, 446). Victor's contradictory approach to their body indicates the ambiguity resulting from Ry's collapse of binaries in contrast to the expectation of a man from the patriarchal background.

According to Ferrando (2014b, 169-170), “[f]eminism is embedded in the genealogy of the posthuman” because speciesism and sexism are interrelated. Therefore, in the posthuman context, Winterson deconstructs and subverts culturally-created analogy between gender roles and the body and opens up new cultural spaces to propose alternative performance celebrating queer desires (Kaya 2021, 94–95). *Frankissstein* draws an analogy between two Shelleys and their gender identities putting the dichotomy of the man and the woman into question in relation to man-woman relationships in the posthuman context. Mary Shelley, whose husband dies and whose fictional Victor Frankenstein disappears, and Ry Shelley whom Victor Stein deserts are left alone just like Harriet, who is departed by her husband Percy Shelley. The two protagonists are othered because of their gender, and they are unhappy in their ambivalent relationships with their beloveds. The novel is subtitled “A Love Story” suggesting in the first hand the man-woman relationship between Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley besides Ry Shelley and Victor Stein, in the other hand the place of love in the human-nonhuman relationship.

In the novel, the use of sexbots contributes to the enquiry about gender issue transgressing various binaries in relation to love and body in the posthuman context. In the event called “Tec-X-Po on Robotics”, Ry meets Victor Stein's business partner Ron Lord, who is a capitalist manufacturer of sexbots. Ron is “a sexbot king” (Winterson 2019, 364) introducing his products to Ry. He tells them how the sexbots meet men's emotional and sexual needs. Sex dolls in human size are robots, sexualised as female both in the body and gender identity. They are machines which are so similar to women that the only thing differentiating them from women is their lack of soul. They have even “[t]op-grade silicon nipples” (Ibid, 74). They are merchandised with the choice of hair in different colours, clothes in different styles and distinct scents (Ibid, 64–69). Ron's expressions indicate that no matter how the women's economic and social life is, when exposed to change depending on technological and scientific advancement in the posthuman order of life, their gendered responsibility for sexuality

remains permanent. A man who cannot meet his sexual needs with a female human applies to Ron's sexbots. Such a sexual interaction between men and robots confirms Levy's claim that humans may marry robots in the near future (2007, 28). Sexbots serve men's desires without hesitation or refusal. They are more convenient, safe and affordable which makes them preferable to women. Regarding Ron's approach to sex robots, he is depicted as a patriarchal and capitalist merchant benefitting from commodification feeding on incessant technological production and anthropocentric consumption. As asserted by Braidotti (2013, 59), capitalism reduces life to the capital which is constructed through different types of technologies and fields of science. From the posthumanist approach, robots, cyborgs and machines can function like humans even though they depend on the human administration. As Moravec (2000, 130) argues, competitive business is gradually making up the gap between machines and the human day by day because technology has become an essential part of human life. Therefore, in the posthuman context, sexbots are the outputs of capitalist purposes serving the growing consuming societies concerned with obtaining control over human life through science and technology.

Sexbots are the embodiment of male sexual fantasies. Thus, as mechanic sexual creatures, they fuse the ontological borderline between the human and the nonhuman, the organism and the machine besides the reality and fantasy. In this aspect, the fluidity and transgressive nature of robots and androids make them an alternative to the essentialist binarism set on the female body by the West. Nevertheless, they represent Cartesian dualism as objectified and sexualised bodies. As Gonzalez (2000, 60) argues, this is a way of confining ontologically complicated creatures into the female body like a prototype clock which is "complex, mechanical, serviceable, decorative." The beautiful sex robots, commodified by men combining science, technology and industrial production for their capitalist and patriarchal ends, work like a clock causing no problems for men. In this context, Ron's sex robots fit well with male fantasies. They are devoid of typical human characteristics such as love, jealousy, hatred or avarice, which may complicate men's lives. Although sexual life with sex robots is not profitable in consumer cultures, in which relationships are based on materialism requiring expensive gifts or dinners as Ron mentions (Winterson 2019, 121), the human finds solace through the "unconditional love" of companion species such as



pets, cyborgs or robots (Haraway 2003, 33). In the same vein, Samuel Butler identifies the race of artificially intelligent machines' characteristics as follows: "No evil passions, no jealousy, no avarice, no impure desires will disturb the serene might of those glorious creatures. Sin, shame, and sorrow will have no place among them. Their minds will be in a state of perpetual calm, the contentment of a spirit that knows no wants, is disturbed by no regrets." In this aspect, men prefer machines' "state of perpetual calm" (Butler 1863, 182) to various intrigues of human accompaniment. Ron exemplifies the increasing rate of the sexbot market in China where the one-child policy is initiated, and men prefer sexbots to independent modern Chinese women because "they like the submissive type" (Winterson 2019, 86). In this aspect, sexbots present sexualised, femininised and gendered codes of patriarchy through their robotic body traits. More precisely, their robotic features make no changes to the otherness attributed to the woman. They are not other than the mechanical product representing gendering norms. The critic Ferrando (2020c, 147) evaluates sex robots as "a vivid example, as they go beyond the anthropocentric appeal, by shifting the sensual and sexual interest towards the non-biological; and still, they reaffirm some of the most sexist stereotypes and habits, such as unagential passivity, implicit servility and non-reciprocity in the pleasure exchange." Considering Ferrando's argument for an understanding of Ron's gendered sex robots, it confirms that despite the advanced technology and passing time, the gendered perspective about women remains the same. Technology enables men to have idealised female companions by blurring the line between the fantasy and the real. Ron says that sexbots are the product of "fantasy life, not real life" (Winterson 2019, 81). In this aspect, having fantasy in real life makes the limit between them obscure.

Besides the dichotomies of the human and the nonhuman, the fantasy and the real, the binaries of nature and culture are also juxtaposed through sexbots. In the posthuman context, designed to replace women, Ron's sexbot project fits well with Isaac Asimov's basic laws related to robotics, called "Asimovian Laws." According to these laws, a robot may not harm the human even when it protects itself. A robot must obey the human being's instructions (James and Mendlesohn 2013, 166). Considering these established traits of robots, which are employed in narratives, Ron's sex robots are in line with Asimovian Laws. They present men with more than sexuality. Ron's

sexbot called Deluxe “has a big vocabulary,” listens without interruption and can talk about various topics including politics, education, football and climate change (Winterson 2019, 80). Ferrando (2014a, 9) notes that “even if sex will have no biological or physiological significance for robots, gender – its cultural apotheosis – will still be valuable for humans.” In the posthuman context, thanks to technology, the nonhuman becomes civilised indicating that it is not merely the human who is civilised with education by suppressing its wild nature. Thus, in the posthuman approach, technology appears to compensate for the civilising impact of education to fill the gap between the human and the nonhuman. Furthermore, both gender and sex robots are human-made, and their attributed features are not natural. On the other hand, what Victor Stein proposes through artificial intelligence is to get rid of the body, thus of any dualities set on human life under the title of race, gender or ethnicity and to go beyond enslaved machines. In posthuman sense, they are all linked up with the common anthropocentric binary to be transgressed; the human versus the nonhuman.

## CONCLUSION

In the epoch when human beings are no longer simply humans, but transhuman, posthuman or secondary to the technological devices in the technocultural society, it is a considerable impetus to implement any norms that were once associated with being human. In this respect, the way out of the dystopian future awaiting human beings is the collaboration of all disciplines including biology, history, physics, anthropology, sociology, economics and psychology with technological and scientific improvement. Therefore, posthumanism studies all responses of the human to this irreversible and irresistible alteration in the world. Posthumanism deconstructs the anthropocentric approach of humanism.

The posthuman reading of Winterson’s *Frankissstein* indicates that it contributes to the deconstruction of the established dichotomies within anthropocentric humanist thinking. The binaries such as the human/the nonhuman, the body/the mind and the man/the woman are put into question in a posthuman context. Mary and Ry’s posthuman enquiry throughout the novel indicates that the interaction between the human and the machine creates ambiguity about the future, which is reflected by the ambiguous end of the novel for the main characters in the novel. Furthermore, it reveals that love transcends the body and

gender through the relationship between transgender Ry and transhumanist Victor Stein. The suggestive subtitle “A Love Story” proposes that love of eternal life and love in human and nonhuman relationships sustain the posthuman condition of humankind for ages asserting that it is merely love that can surpass each established limit in human life every time. Considering the deconstruction of the humanist dichotomies in the novel, the posthumanist reading of the novel indicates that although technoscience enables the human to transgress the anthropocentric boundaries, it does not result in their annihilation while creating hybridised forms. However, the novel paves the way for deconstructing the contradictory nature of the dichotomies through technocultural discourses in the context of speciesism and sexism.

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