

Article

The Female Body and the Environment: A Transnational Study of Mo Yan's *Feng ru Fei tun*, Murakami Haruki's *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, and Gabriel García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*

Yueying Wu

School of Modern Language, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK; y.wu127@ncl.ac.uk

Abstract: The female body is often depicted in parallel with the environment in many literary works. This article examines how the female body can prompt a rethinking of the environment by analyzing three literary works, Mo Yan's *Feng ru Fei tun*, published in 1996 Murakami Haruki's *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, published in 1994-1995, and Gabriel García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, published in 1985, which root in Chinese, Japanese, and Latin American cultures, respectively. This paper argues that, on the one hand, the female body parallels the environment by displaying non-human characteristics and relating to natural elements in these three works; on the other hand, it deconstructs the boundary between the environment and humans by playing a crucial role in constructing human identity. This paper draws on theories of posthumanism, material feminism, and ecofeminism to explore the depiction of the female body and its role in rethinking the environment. The cultural hybridity of local and non-local worldviews—a key reason for situating this study within a transnational comparative framework—serves as a crucial element in demonstrating how the female body bridges the environment and human identity across all three works. This analysis aims to deconstruct the anthropocentric perspective on the environment, thereby rethinking the role of the female body in this context.

Keywords: human–environment relationship; material feminism; posthumanism; ecocriticism; cultural hybrid; female body



Citation: Wu, Yueying. 2024. The Female Body and the Environment: A Transnational Study of Mo Yan's *Feng ru Fei tun*, Murakami Haruki's *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, and Gabriel García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*. *Humanities* 13: 128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13050128>

Received: 13 July 2024

Revised: 12 September 2024

Accepted: 25 September 2024

Published: 2 October 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

1.1. *The Female Body and the Environment*

This paper focuses on the bodily depiction of women because human corporeality, particularly the female body, is regarded as closely linked to the environment and as a tool for breaking the boundary between humans and the environment in recent studies. Material feminist Stacy Alaimo explores this 'interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures' in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* by focusing on the material aspects of humans and their connection with the environment (Alaimo 2010, p. 2). Alaimo proposes "trans-corporeality" to analyze 'the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature' and 'the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual' in a more appropriate way (Alaimo 2010, p. 3). She argues that, if we consider the human body as something constantly interacting with the outside world, with no valid or visible boundary between the human body and the environment, nature cannot simply be regarded as something outside human beings or human civilization (Alaimo 2010, p. 2). This suggests that the human body is one thing that deconstructs the boundary between humans and the environment. Furthermore, Alaimo recognizes the intersection between feminist and environmentalist concerns in this context, noting that '(S)ince biology, like nature, has long been drafted to serve as the armory for racist, sexist, and heterosexist norms, it is crucial

that feminists recast the norms, values, and assumptions that permeate this field' (Alaimo 2010, p. 5). By emphasizing these dynamics, Alaimo highlights the special position of the female body in the relationship between humans and the environment by noting that '(H)uman corporeality, especially female corporeality, has been so strongly associated with nature' (Alaimo 2010, p. 6).

Environmental feminist Astrida Neimanis also focuses on the material aspect of the human body, analyzing how this physical body constantly interacts with the surrounding environment in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. Neimanis argues that the human body does not end at the skin and is not an embodied system separate from the external environment (Neimanis 2017, p. 4). Neimanis highlights how water inside and outside the human body breaks the notion of embodiment, enabling elements to transfer between the body and the environment. This challenges the viewpoint of regarding the skin as the boundary between humans and the external environment. Neimanis demonstrates that there is a crucial role that the female body plays in deconstructing the boundary between humans and the environment (Neimanis 2017, p. 6). She raises up a girl as an example to show that a more important part about 'the transit of waters between bodies' is 'a matter of feeling, of memory, of gendered and sexual embodiment' (Neimanis 2017, p. 32). This suggests that engaging with the environment through water helps maintain one's human identity, whereas a complete separation from the environment could undermine it.

Environmental historian Linda Nash also believes that analyzing the human body can help identify the boundary between humans and the environment. Nash argues:

When we focus on the human body, however, the boundary between the human and the nonhuman world, the actors and their objects, becomes much fuzzier and the distinction much more tenuous. Where does the body end and "nonhuman nature" begin? When we recognize that human bodies are directly affected by their environments, we are forced to acknowledge that humans are not simply agents of environmental change but also objects of that change. (Nash 2006, p. 8)

Nash primarily focuses on the impact of disease on the human body, discussing disease beyond the physical level and outside the medical system (Nash 2006, p. 8). She aims to challenge 'the modern dichotomy that separates human beings from the rest of nature, a dichotomy that underwrites the very discipline of history' (Nash 2006, p. 6). Here, the bodily disease is regarded as a historically and culturally constructed notion and evidence of the close connection between the objective body and human subjectivity. Although Nash's statements offer limited descriptions of the female body, she provides an example in the first chapter, "Body and Environment in an Era of Colonization", where she notes that women are particularly sensitive to environmental changes (Nash 2006, p. 46).

Posthuman feminist Rosi Braidotti draws from a different perspective by pointing out the problematic nature of the notion of "human", which centralizes itself from the other, including the environment:

Appeals to the 'human' are always discriminatory: they create structural distinctions and inequalities among different categories of humans, let alone between humans and non-humans. (Braidotti 2013, 2017 cited in Braidotti 2019, p. 35)

This indicates that "human" is not merely a designation of a species, but a fundamental concept underpinning most inequalities in modern society. Braidotti further connects this division between humans and the environment to the marginalization of women and other oppressed groups by analyzing how 'the classical definition of European identity in terms of Humanism, rationality, and the universal' keeps 'the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native), and the naturalized other (animals, the environment, or earth)' marginalized and subordinate (Braidotti 2013, pp. 25–27). This suggests that entities closely connected with the environment are often excluded from humanism and subjected to oppression.

Feminist philosopher Donna Haraway also examines the human body, but from a different perspective, focusing on its connections to both nature and technology. She

proposes the idea of the Cyborg, which ‘is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’ (Haraway 2013, p. 104). Through analyzing this notion of the Cyborg, which embodies both mechanical and organic elements, Haraway aims to challenge the dualism of humans and the environment and explore a new understanding of ‘who counts as ‘us’ in my own rhetoric’ (Haraway 2013, p. 107). Haraway critiques the oppression of both women and the environment within the ‘Western sense,’ arguing that there is a ‘plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature’ (Haraway 2013, p. 105). Through Cyborg feminism, which conceptualizes the female body as both ‘animal and machine,’ as both ‘natured and crafted,’ Haraway resists the marginalization of women and the environment (Haraway 2013, p. 104).

The above analysis of the close connection between the female body and the environment facilitates a rethinking of the environment through the lens of the female body. What role does transnational comparison play in this discussion?

1.2. Cultural Hybrid and Transnational Context

In *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography*, edited by feminists Linda McDowell and Joanna Sharp, the term “cultural hybrid” is used to refer to groups as a mixture of local and non-local influences (McDowell and Sharp 2014, p. 131). This notion of cultural hybridity provides a suitable framework ‘to replace the DUALITIES implicit in NATURE—CULTURE or nature-society by new hybrid representations and ethical considerations in which the human is decentred and no longer in opposition to the non-human’ (McDowell and Sharp 2014, p. 132). Environmental historian Linda Nash also argues that understanding the human body is closely connected to specific landscapes, making it unconvincing to discuss the body without considering local features (Nash 2006, p. 9). Nash proposes a method involving ‘the tension between local and trans-local knowledge’ (Nash 2006, p. 9). French anthropologist Bruno Latour argues that a key distinction between tradition and modernity is the separation of humans from the environment (Latour 2012, pp. 10–11). This suggests that differing perspectives on the environment represent one of the fundamental conflicts between local premodern worldviews and modern civilization. Thus, the tension between traditional and modern civilizations can provide a deeper understanding of the environment. Following this approach, I will incorporate local cultures and foreign civilizations into my textual analysis. According to previous studies, Mo Yan’s *Feng ru Fei tun*, Murakami Haruki’s *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, and Gabriel García Márquez’s *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* all involve rich descriptions of cultural hybridity (Liang 2017; Fisher 2000; Verzasconi 2017). The local and foreign worldviews in these novels can provide a deeper understanding of the binary oppositions of humans and more-than-human beings. This article will explore how the female body in Mo Yan’s *Feng ru Fei tun* (translated as *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*), Murakami Haruki’s *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru* (translated as *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*), and Gabriel García Márquez’s *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (translated as *Love in the Time of Cholera*) deepens our thinking about the environment by engaging local cultures with the theories of Alaimo, Neimanis, Braidotti, Haraway, and Nash.

This article situates the discussion in a transnational context because Japanese, Latin American, and Chinese local traditions all hold the idea that there is no division between the human and the environment, though from differing analytical lenses (Parkes 2003; Bruun 2014; Maruyama 2000; Viveiros de Castro 2015). The Japanese local religion Shinto holds that ‘humans and nature are blood relatives’ and ‘they have different appearances but they have a common essence’ (Maruyama 2000, p. 27). Thus, there is no clear distinction between humans and the environment in Japanese local tradition. In the Amazonian worldview, humanity is not a special feature of humans but is shared by every being, as ‘animals and other nonhumans having a soul see themselves as persons and therefore are persons’ (Viveiros de Castro 2015, p. 56). This indicates that humanity is a standpoint or viewing perspective that distinguishes oneself from others, a quality possessed by every

being. Chinese local notions can be seen in Fengshui theory, which ‘is often translated as geomancy, though the two graphs that comprise the term simply mean wind and water respectively’ (Parkes 2003, p. 187). Bruun states that ‘Fengshui operates exactly on the borderline between society and nature’ (Bruun 2014, p. 157), and everything about nature fully reflects human social life. This also challenges the boundary between nature and culture. Engaging Japanese Shinto, Chinese Fengshui theory, and Amazonian Indigenous cosmology not only reflects local thinking about the relationship between humans and the environment, but also relates to the female body in the three novels. I will discuss this further in the textual analysis.

However, the above discussion about the blurring boundary of humans and the environment in local worldviews does not directly align us with Alaimo, Braidotti, Neimanis, Haraway, and Nash. It is only when these local worldviews encounter non-local civilizations that they transcend traditional notions and foster deeper thinking about the relationship between humans and the environment. As the female body is central to the depiction of cultural hybridity in these stories, the following analysis will focus on it.

1.3. Outline

This analysis is split into three parts, each focusing on a different novel. Part one is about Kanō Kureta’s and Kanō Maruta’s female bodies in *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*. These female characters experience a magical division between their bodies and their inner minds, eventually regaining self-awareness by reconnecting with their bodies. This discussion will incorporate concepts of nature and the body in the Japanese local worldview, as well as theories from Alaimo and Neimanis. Part two is about Fermina Daza’s and Bárbara Lynch’s female bodies in *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*. Their bodies are presented in a supernatural manner, transcending corporeality. The analysis will be based on the Latin American Indigenous notion about human and more-than-human beings and Nash’s interpretation of the human body. Part three is about the female body in *Feng ru Fei tun*, especially about Shangguan Lushi’s and Long Qingping’s bodies. These female characters’ bodies are depicted to show the conflict between traditional and modern civilizations. I will engage the conception of nature and the body in Chinese tradition in this analysis. Additionally, I will also explore how foreign civilization and modern technology influence traditional Chinese perspectives on humans and the environment by engaging Haraway’s statement.

2. The Female Body in *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*

Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru revolves around the male protagonist, Toru, who searches for his wife, Kumiko, after she suddenly leaves him. During this time, Toru meets Kanō Maruta, who possesses a special body structure, and her sister, Kanō Kureta, who experiences a disconnection from her body.

Kanō Maruta’s female body embodies supernatural powers from birth, enabling her to predict future events and sense lost items (Murakami 1994a, p. 160). However, her parents regard her magical power as strange (Murakami 1994a, p. 160). To maintain inner peace, Kanō Maruta leaves her family and travels the world to find her own lifestyle (Murakami 1994a, p. 162). She discovers that water greatly enhances her supernatural powers, allowing her to make the relationship between her body and magical ability more harmonious (Murakami 1994a, p. 162). She emphasizes the crucial influence of water on both her spiritual and physical self by noting that the composition of water greatly influences human existence (Murakami 1994a, p. 162). Maruyama suggests, in a comparative study on ecofeminism and Japanese Shinto, that in Japanese Shinto, there is ‘no opposition exists between human and non-human’ (Maruyama 2000, p. 29). Kanō Maruta’s body reflects Japanese Shinto’s notion of the environment, with the water in her body erasing the boundary between human and environment. Water, as an element outside the realm of human beings, is also crucial in constructing her human body. This explains her ability to help others find lost items, as the surroundings are part of herself.

However, the water condition soon becomes insufficient for Kanō Maruta, compelling her to travel the world in search of special water that can purify her body. This hints that attaching her body to the local environment is problematic. The water in the local area is interpreted under Japanese traditional thinkings among the environment, and this cannot fulfill Kanō Maruta's self-exploration. This quest leads her to the island outside of the local place named Maruta, where this special water can be found. This water significantly helps her confront the supernatural power within her body. Here, a symbol of non-local culture appears. Inside Kanō Maruta's body, the water from Maruta Island interacts with the water from Japan, resembling a cultural hybrid between local and non-local. Only in this way can Kanō Maruta embrace herself, as she notes that she finally discovers the water that is beneficial for the body's composition (Murakami 1994a, p. 71).

This idea corresponds with the interpretation of water's movement inside and outside the human body and its interaction with the environment in Neimanis's *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. Neimanis explains how water links humans with the natural world:

(b)odies of water undo the idea that bodies are necessarily or only human. The bodies from which we siphon and into which we pour ourselves are certainly other human bodies (a kissable lover, a blood-transfused stranger, a nursing infant), but they are just as likely a sea, a cistern, an underground reservoir of once-was-rain. Our watery relations within (or more accurately: as) a more-than-human hydrocommons thus present a challenge to anthropocentrism, and the privileging of the human as the sole or primary site of embodiment. (Neimanis 2017, p. 2)

According to this, water can move inside and outside the body, making the skin not a concealed boundary between oneself and the other. Thus, the body cannot be regarded as an embodied system but is constantly exchanging elements with the external world. For humans with material bodies, external things are not just influences; they can become part of us, entering our bodies and becoming part of them. This notion is also supported by Braidotti:

(w)hile 'we' might be more like other animals than our Enlightenment forefathers would like us to think; while 'we' might be part of, rather than separate from, the mud at our feet and the rain whipping our faces; and while 'we' might have become 'a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet' in the Anthropocene. (Braidotti 2013, p. 5; cited in Neimanis 2017, p. 14)

Kanō Maruta's body and her attitude towards it reflect the statements of Neimanis and Braidotti. They all highlight how the female body acts as a bridge linking itself with the environment, challenging the notion of humans as closed systems or concealed spaces separate from their surroundings.

Kanō Kureta's female body is presented differently. She is born with unbearable physical pain that cannot be explained or treated medically (Murakami 1994a, pp. 166–69). When she attempts suicide to escape this pain, she senses a disconnection between her physical body and feelings (Murakami 1994a, pp. 174–75). Surviving a car accident, Kanō Kureta loses sensation in her body, allowing her to distance her inner world from her material body (Murakami 1994a, pp. 176–77). This reflects the interpretation of the physical body in traditional Japanese Shinto:

(i)n Shinto. . . There is, though, a belief that something eternal can survive beyond natural death. It is called Tama, Mono, or Mi (all these are quite similar to the English "soul", but they are distinguished from each other. Tama can be revered as Kami, but other souls do not have such possibilities). People believed that they sometimes left the body even during its lifetime. (Maruyama 2000, p. 26)

This indicates that, in Japanese Shinto, the physical body is not an essential component of a human being, so bodily death does not stop the spiritual existence of oneself. In this

perspective, the body is excluded from the scope of human existence and is seen as part of the environment. Under this local worldview, bodily death can enable an individual to transcend their objective existence. Through suicide, Kanō Kureta attempts to fight against bodily restriction and the endless pain associated with the body, protecting her inner spirit. Kanō Kureta later becomes a prostitute, her body objectified by clients who view her as if they were looking over merchandise or examining the goods (Murakami 1994b, p. 231). However, despite her body being reduced to mere flesh in the eyes of clients, Kanō Kureta maintains her human identity by shielding her inner self from external influences. To escape the painful experiences of the human mind or damage to the inner world, Kanō Kureta learns 'how to control my new self and how to divide the body from the spirit' under the guidance of her elder sister Kanō Maruta (Murakami 1994b, p. 244). This shows that, although the female body is closely connected with natural elements, as Kanō Kureta learns from her sister Kanō Maruta, who benefits from connecting her body with water, there is still something like the inner spirit that enables humans to stand out from the surrounding environment.

However, this thinking is challenged when Kanō Kureta meets Toru. Toru, representing a non-local perspective on the relationship between humans and the environment, expresses confusion when Kanō Kureta tells him she can reject bodily perception and feelings. Toru does not see the body as Kanō Kureta does. As previously analyzed, Kanō Kureta's body reflects Japanese Shinto's conception of the environment. Toru's reaction indicates he represents a notion beyond local culture. Encountering Toru and his non-local thinking of the body, Kanō Kureta begins to realize that escaping from the body is not the proper way. Even though she could protect her human identity by liberating her mind from the material body, she should not abandon her body just to protect herself from pain or external abuse. She comes to understand that she lost her identity long ago and may never have truly lived as a human being (Murakami 1994b, p. 254). This is a crucial turning point for Kanō Kureta, as it marks the moment when she is finally ready to embrace her body and the pain attached to it. She begins to recognize the importance of the physical body. Detaching from it is like concealing herself inside a dark box, disconnected from the external world. This separation from the surroundings does not help her through the crisis of self-identity.

This corresponds with 'the material turn in feminist theory' put forward by Alaimo (2010, p. 6). She argues that 'the material world vanishes into a humanly made, abstract calculus of power and identity' without concern for the physical body (Alaimo 2010, p. 10). This fully explains Kanō Kureta's threat of losing self-identity without interacting with the external world through her material body. Alaimo shifts our attention from the cultural, historical, or mental aspects of the human body to emphasize its materialization (Alaimo 2010, p. 10). This shift aligns with Kanō Kureta's attitude towards her female body. Influenced by Toru's non-Japanese conception of humans and the environment, Kanō Kureta changes her intention to abandon her body. This turning point strongly challenges traditional Japanese thinking about excluding the human body within the environment and underscores the importance of the female body in constructing human identity.

The descriptions of female bodies in *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru* align with the perspectives of Alaimo and Neimanis on humans and the environment. Kanō Kureta initially intends to separate her mind from her body, reflecting a local worldview that emphasizes this separation. Toru, representing a non-local symbol, saves Kanō Kureta from losing her identity by reconnecting her inner spirit with her physical body. Kanō Maruta, as a symbol of supernatural power, maintains her power by connecting with the environment, distancing herself from local tradition. The interaction between local and foreign worldviews shows that the female body is the anchor connecting humans and the environment through both its material and spiritual features.

3. The Female Body in *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*

The reflection of local conceptions about humans and the environment in *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* differs significantly from *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*. Unlike the perspective in *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, where the female body is seen as belonging to the environment, *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* highly values the female body for its role in distinguishing humans from their surroundings according to the Latin American worldview. This distinction is evident in the depictions of Fermina Daza's body.

Fermina Daza is the object of Florentino Ariza's undying love and later the wife of Dr. Juvenal Urbino. She rejects Florentino's idealistic love and marries Dr. Urbino, a wealthy and respected physician. Dr. Urbino comes to know Fermina because she may have contracted a disease (Márquez 1985, p. 72). Their initial meeting is framed within a doctor–patient relationship, specifically as an interaction between a medical practitioner and a subject of clinical research. This view is from Dr. Urbino's perspective, as he assumes his identity as a doctor—a symbol of modern medical science and an authority on bodily health—when he first meets Fermina. However, things are significantly different from Fermina's standpoint. She feels ashamed of exposing her body to Dr. Urbino and tries to cover it up (Márquez 1985, p. 73). Fermina perceives Dr. Urbino as a man, rather than merely a medical instrument capable of assessing the human body and evaluating health conditions. This perspective reveals that Fermina does not regard her body solely as an objective indicator of illness. Instead, she experiences feelings of shame or nervousness when exposing her body to others, recognizing it as a vital aspect of her selfhood and a significant component in shaping her human identity.

However, Dr. Urbino shows no reaction to Fermina's body and acts like a rational machine without any emotion. This lack of response humiliates Fermina. When Dr. Urbino views her body simply as an objective entity, she feels objectified and stripped of her human identity. From Fermina's perspective, the rejection of her body's allure signifies the erosion of her subjectivity and a refusal to regard her as a human being. In the Latin American traditional worldview, the most crucial difference between humans and animals is not the inner soul but the outer appearance:

Within Western cosmologies, there is physical (corporeal) unity between humans and nonhumans (we are organisms made of the same particles or atoms) and a metaphysical (spiritual) differentiation (humans are unique because they have a soul/spirit whereas animals, plants and objects don't). In contrast, within Amazonian Indigenous cosmology, there is a metaphysical unity (humans, animals, plants, and spirits all have a soul, intentionality, and subjectivity) and a physical differentiation (humans, animals, plants, and spirits have different bodies and therefore different points of view). (Manzi 2020, p. 22)

This underscores the importance of the human body in shaping identity in Latin American culture, where physical differences enable humans to distinguish themselves from their surroundings. The contradictory worldviews between the West and Latin America are fully captured in Dr. Urbino's and Fermina's attitudes towards the body. Clearly, the female body is an essential marker of Fermina's human identity, whereas, from Dr. Urbino's perspective, it is merely a medical indicator.

Nash puts forward two contradictory notions of the body: the 'ecological' body, which states that the body is constantly interacting with the external environment and that embodiment never exists in isolation, and the 'modern body', which is composed of discrete parts and bounded by its skin (Nash 2006, pp. 11–12). Nash indicates that the 'modern body' separates humans from the environment, while the 'ecological' body emphasizes how humans are built through interaction with the external world (Nash 2006, pp. 11–12). Dr. Urbino and Fermina hold opposing views of the human body, the former aligning with the 'modern body' notion and the latter with the 'ecological' body. Nash emphasizes that the conception of 'health' follows the 'modern body', a feature of an embodied system where health becomes a quality possessed (or not) by an individual body rather than a

dynamic relationship between a body and its environment (Nash 2006, p. 12). Dr. Urbino's view of Fermina's body aligns with Nash's 'modern body', as he regards her body as an isolated element from its surroundings, fundamentally accepting the gap between humans and the environment.

Dr. Urbino's view of humans as fully separated from the environment is challenged when he meets Bárbara Lynch. She is a beautiful woman with whom he has an extramarital affair. She threatens Fermina and Dr. Urbino's marriage and challenges Dr. Urbino's rationality and belief in modern science. Her body possesses a supernatural attraction. Similar to his initial meeting with Fermina, Dr. Urbino first meets Bárbara due to a diagnostic request. However, he cannot regard Bárbara's body merely as a clinical object, and his attitude towards the female body changes when encountering hers. This encounter marks a significant moment for him, as he perceives the allure of her body (Márquez 1985, p. 152). Dr. Urbino, symbolizing advanced technology and modern science, momentarily forgets his identity as a doctor when facing Bárbara's body. This suggests that the allure of the female body cannot be quantified by modern science. The attraction Dr. Urbino feels towards Bárbara's body challenges the authority of medical science and suggests the existence of elements beyond the evaluation systems of advanced technology. Dr. Urbino, a symbol of advanced culture, yields to the perfection of Bárbara's body. Her magical attraction shakes Dr. Urbino's belief in modern science, and he loses the authority to view her body from above or evaluate it under medical criteria.

Dr. Urbino's changing attitude towards the female body casts doubt on the dualism of human/environment. Fermina's and Bárbara's bodies represent a strong link between the physical body and human identity. Initially, female bodies are naturalized and materialized under modern medical science. After meeting Bárbara, the female body transcends physical corporeality, functioning as an irreplaceable part of human identity.

The depictions of Fermina's and Bárbara's bodies in *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* show an interaction of Indigenous and foreign notions about humans and the environment: Fermina's aging body challenges Florentino's romanticized belief in eternal youth related to Indigenous culture, whereas Bárbara's appealing appearance disrupts Dr. Urbino's modern perception of the body as purely an object. This leads to a similar understanding of the representation of the female body in *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru* as both a physical and metaphysical entity.

4. The Female Body in *Feng ru Fei tun*

Compared to the female body in *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru* and *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, which navigates the space between humans and the environment, the female body in Mo Yan's *Feng ru Fei tun* disrupts the boundary between human social life and the natural environment by embodying both natural land and cultural traditions. The following analysis focuses on two female characters: Shangguan Lushi and Long Qingping.

Shangguan Lushi is born in a rural Chinese village in the early 20th century and grows up in a traditional Chinese family, surrounded by poverty, superstition, and patriarchal values. Her primary role is as a protector and caretaker for her children and grandchildren. Her physical attributes, symbolized by her large breasts and wide hips, serve as metaphors for fertility, sustenance, and maternal care. From her son Jintong's perspective, her body is viewed merely as food or a beautiful object. Jintong regards her breasts not as part of a human being but as objects that exist independently of the person behind them. This portrayal reduces the female body to an object devoid of personal identity, making it a mere resource.

To evaluate Shangguan Lushi's status, we can consider the traditional Chinese world-view of nature, particularly through the concept of Fengshui. Fengshui, as Parkes explains, is used to interpret how natural elements influence human social activity and individual fate (Parkes 2003, p. 187). Bruun elucidates Fengshui as follows:

The basic logic of fengshui is straightforward—when the landscape is rich and healthy, humans may prosper; when the landscape deteriorates, people suffer. (Bruun 2014, p. 176)

This implies a relationship between humans and nature that resembles a producer–user dynamic, where nature serves as a primary source of sustenance. This connection underscores the importance of protecting nature, yet it is viewed primarily as a resource for social progress, aligning with the idea that ‘the great part of the world that matters is made up by humans and human society’ (Bruun 2014, p. 175). In this worldview, nature is constructed from a human perspective, and there is no concept of nature existing independently of human activity. Within this framework, Shangguan Lushi’s body functions as a producer of sustenance, particularly through her breasts, which provide milk that Jintong relies on.

Unlike Kanō Kureta from *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, Shangguan Lushi does not seek to separate her mind from her body. Her identity and actions are deeply intertwined with her physical form. In the traditional Chinese worldview, the distinction between humans and the environment is not emphasized (Bruun 2014, p. 175). Thus, there is no distinct subjectivity separate from the material body, explaining why Shangguan Lushi does not attempt to distance herself from her physicality. She values her body not for constructing human identity like Fermina Daza, but because it is integral to her role as a resource provider.

However, the objectification of the female body does not inherently lead to the subordinate status of the environment as well as women. The traditional view of humans and the environment as interconnected is challenged by the impact of modern civilization. This is exemplified by Long Qingping.

Long Qingping’s body is depicted differently from Shangguan Lushi’s and Shangguan Xiangdi’s. As a leader of national industrialization, she is profoundly affected by modern civilization. Her female characteristics are less prominently featured. Her greatest anguish stems from the lack of recognition of her identity as a woman (Mo 1996, p. 433). Compared to being acknowledged as a hero, she yearns to be recognized as a woman. She attempts to assert her female identity by coercing Jintong into sex (Mo 1996, p. 432). When Jintong refuses, Long Qingping becomes desperate and ultimately commits suicide (Mo 1996, p. 433). In her final moments, Jintong, moved by sympathy, has sex with her (Mo 1996, p. 434). This interaction leads to Jintong’s imprisonment (Mo 1996, p. 434). From Jintong’s perspective, Long Qingping’s breasts, made of iron, are technologically advanced but still serve the natural function of producing children (Mo 1996, p. 480). This suggests that, despite the industrial influence on Long Qingping’s body, its natural reproductive function persists. Her body reflects her desire to maintain her female identity and the pain of unmet desires. For Long Qingping, maintaining her female identity is essential to avoid being excluded from humanity.

In contrast to Shangguan Lushi’s body, which is viewed as a mere object, Jintong perceives Long Qingping’s highly industrialized body as a threat. The iron-covered breasts evoke a sense of danger rather than security, symbolizing a predator rather than a source of sustenance. This shift highlights how modern technology affects perceptions of the female body and challenges traditional views of human–environment relationships. The influence of modern civilization creates a new hierarchy, marginalizing those who are excluded from the human category.

This subversion of traditional views regarding the female body and the environment aligns with Donna Haraway’s notion of cyborg feminism in *A Cyborg Manifesto*:

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality. . . . Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. (Haraway 2013, pp. 104–5)

The above indicates that the cyborg concept diminishes gender differences within the human body because machines lack inherent gender traits. Long Qingping’s body,

fully integrated with artificial machines, cannot be assessed within the binary gender system. Her body challenges Jintong's perception of the female body as merely a beautiful object meant to serve him. Long Qingping's body, with its iron-covered breasts, disrupts traditional gender dichotomies and challenges the objectification of female bodies and patriarchal structures. Her body, made of iron and no longer a natural source, transcends traditional views of nature and culture. This suggests that Long Qingping's female body represents a shift in the local conception of the nature/culture relationship, influenced by foreign civilization. This influence challenges the status of female characters as mere providers of sustenance and natural resources, amplifying the role of nature in cultural construction and blurring the line between environment and human.

In *Feng ru Fei tun*, while the female body is traditionally viewed as a natural resource and servant in local culture, modern civilization constructs a boundary between humans and more-than-human beings, creating a hierarchical system that marginalizes those excluded from the human category. Braidotti points out how the division between humans and others establishes a hierarchy rooted in colonial domination:

This Eurocentric paradigm implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism. Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of 'difference' as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. (Braidotti 2013, p. 15)

This suggests that the division between humans and the environment serves to prioritize certain groups over others, reflecting a colonial sense of dominance. Braidotti's observation that "the notion of difference" becomes a tool of suppression aligns with the tension between local and foreign civilizations. Shangguan Lushi's and Long Qingping's female bodies illustrate this conflict, transcending traditional roles to challenge the dualism of humans and more-than-human beings. This dualism, associated with modernity and colonialism, is only challenged by influences that bypass Eurocentric limitations (Braidotti 2017, p. 25). Examining these conflicting worldviews provides a deeper insight into the relationships between humans and the environment.

5. Conclusions

In these three works, the female body is depicted as being closely connected with nature. In Haruki Murakami's *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru*, Kanō Maruta's body can discern differences between water from various regions and derive power from special water. In Gabriel García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, Fermina Daza's body is viewed through a modern medical lens as vulnerable to local diseases. In Mo Yan's *Feng ru Fei tun*, Shangguan Lushi's body functions as a natural resource. The natural characteristics of the female body are emphasized, revealing its emergence within the surrounding environment. Bridging the gap between humans and the environment by positioning nature as an integral part of daily life is one approach that challenges the perception of nature as something external. Alamino proposes that "'nature" is always as close as one's own skin—perhaps even closer' (Alaimo 2010, p. 2). Neimanis further narrows this gap by stating that 'as bodies of water we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation' (Neimanis 2017, p. 2). In this sense, the female body becomes an ecological entity, indistinguishable from the environment. However, when the female body is equated with nature, women face the risk of marginalization alongside the environment. This is evident in Mo Yan's *Feng ru Fei tun*, where Shangguan Lushi's body is reduced to a source of sustenance, perceived by her son as little more than food.

One significant aspect of the depiction of the female body in these novels is the moment when it transcends its materiality and its inherent connection with nature. Kanō Kureta cannot fully embrace her self-awareness without connecting with her body. Fermina Daza experiences humiliation when her body is perceived as separate from herself and treated as an object, highlighting its crucial role in her self-identity. Long Qingping's body is cyborg-like, blending nature and machine, yet she seeks self-acknowledgment through her bodily experiences. Thus, the female body in these works transcends its mere connection to nature; while retaining its natural features, it plays a vital role in constructing human identity. The female body serves as a bridge between the environment and humans, challenging the subordinate status of both women and the environment by breaking down boundaries between them.

What drives the female body to move beyond its natural ties? It is the encounter between local and non-local cultures. For instance, it is only when Kanō Kureta encounters Toru, a Westernized male character, that she recognizes her body as a fundamental component of her identity. Similarly, Fermina Daza becomes aware of the critical role her body plays in sustaining her human identity only upon meeting Dr. Urbino, a representative of modern medical science. In the case of Long Qingping, it is the transformation of her body through modern technology that instills in her a profound fear of losing both her body and her identity.

The cultural hybrid of local and non-local civilizations plays an important role in deconstructing the marginalization of women and the environment. In Japanese Shinto, Chinese Fengshui theory, and Amazonian Indigenous cosmology, this integration with the environment does not necessarily imply a subordinate status, as these cultures often do not establish a strict hierarchy between humans and nature. However, influences from external civilizations that prioritize human superiority over the environment have introduced a different perspective. The interaction between local and non-local traditions has thus resulted in a dynamic reshaping of the boundary between humans and the environment.

Funding: This research is administered by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and funded by The Nippon Foundation.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Alaimo, Stacy. 2010. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Oxford: Wiley.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2017. Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism. In *Anthropocene Feminism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2019. A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities. *Theory, Culture & Society* 36: 31–61.
- Bruun, Ole. 2014. Fengshui and the Chinese Perception of Nature. In *Asian Perceptions of Nature*. Edited by Arne Kalland and Pamela J. Asquith. London: Routledge, pp. 173–88.
- Fisher, Susan. 2000. An allegory of return: Murakami Haruki's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. *Comparative Literature Studies* 37: 155–70. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Haraway, Donna. 2013. A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 103–18.
- Latour, Bruno. 2012. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Liang, Xiaohui. 2017. Different Conceptual Blending with Different Cultural Frames: Goldblatt's (Mis-)Construal of Mo Yan's Metaphor in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*. *Comparative Literature Studies* 54: 771–94. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Manzi, Maya. 2020. *More-Than-Human Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America*. São Paulo: Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America (Mecila).
- Maruyama, Masatsugu. 2000. Deconstructive Ecofeminism: A Japanese Critical Interpretation. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 4: 20–46. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Márquez, Gabriel García. 1985. *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*. Barcelona: Bruguera.
- McDowell, Linda, and Joanne Sharp. 2014. *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mo, Yan. 1996. *Feng ru fei tun*. Beijing: Zuojiachubanshe.
- Murakami, Haruki. 1994a. *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru—Dai 1 bu Dorobō Kasasagi-hen—*. Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko.

- Murakami, Haruki. 1994b. *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru—Dai 2 bu Yogen suru Tori-hen—*. Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko.
- Nash, Linda. 2006. *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Neimanis, Astrida. 2017. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Parkes, Graham. 2003. Winds, Waters, and Earth Energies: Fengshui and Sense of Place. In *Nature Across Cultures: Views of Nature and the Environment in Non-Western Cultures*. Edited by Helaine Selin. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 185–209.
- Verzasconi, Alicia. 2017. Magic Realism and the Theme of Love in Love in the Time of Cholera. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* 8: 127–33. Available online: <https://www.the-criterion.com/V4/n2/Raj.pdf> (accessed on 24 September 2024).
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2015. *Cannibal Metaphysics*. Translated by Peter Skafish. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.