

Survival Without Renewal: Abjection, Ecological Stagnation, and Suspended Futurity in Missouri Williams's *The Doloriad*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Missouri Williams's *The Doloriad* as a post-apocalyptic novel that reconfigures survival as ecological stagnation rather than renewal. While survival in post-apocalyptic fiction is often associated with endurance, futurity, and the possibility of reconstruction, Williams presents a damaged world in which life continues through bodily corrosion, reproductive enclosure, and temporal suspension. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality, and Claire Colebrook's reflections on posthuman temporality, the article argues that *The Doloriad* transforms survival into a compromised ecological condition. The Family's bodies appear as permeable and exposed sites where environmental damage becomes materially inscribed, while reproduction extends catastrophe across generations rather than opening toward ethical or ecological renewal. In the novel, children inherit the aftermath instead of representing a regenerated future, and narrative form mirrors this stagnation through repetition, fragmentation, and suspended progression. By reading abject embodiment, reproductive futurity, and narrative temporality together, the article shows how Williams challenges consoling accounts of survival after catastrophe. *The Doloriad* ultimately separates persistence from hope, suggesting that life after ecological collapse may endure as exposure, coercion, and damaged continuation. In doing so, the novel contributes to Environmental Humanities and post-apocalyptic studies by questioning whether survival itself can preserve the very conditions of harm it appears to overcome.

Keywords: *The Doloriad*; Missouri Williams; post-apocalyptic fiction; Environmental Humanities; ecological stagnation; abjection; suspended futurity; trans-corporeality; survival; posthuman temporality

INTRODUCTION

Post apocalyptic fiction often turns survival into a privileged sign of futurity. Even in literary worlds shaped by environmental devastation, scarcity, violence, and social collapse, the persistence of life frequently suggests the possibility of renewal. Survival may imply the rebuilding of community, the preservation of ethical relation, or the emergence of a future beyond catastrophe. Missouri Williams's *The Doloriad* unsettles this familiar logic by imagining a post-apocalyptic world where life continues in damaged, stagnant, and ethically compromised forms. Its characters inhabit a degraded environment marked by scarcity, bodily deterioration, incestuous kinship, reproductive coercion, and temporal suspension. Survival, in this context, becomes more than a response to collapse. It becomes an ecological and ethical problem. Life persists, yet its persistence carries the marks of damage rather than the promise of regeneration.

At the center of this article is the claim that *The Doloriad* reconfigures post-apocalyptic survival as ecological stagnation rather than renewal. Through abject embodiment, reproductive enclosure, temporal repetition, and narrative suspension, the novel challenges the consoling assumption that life after catastrophe naturally opens toward recovery or transformation. Williams's post-apocalyptic world occupies a disturbing middle condition in which bodies, environments, kinship structures, and narrative forms continue while remaining bound to the same damaged order. The novel's bleakness therefore emerges from its treatment of continuation itself as compromised. Survival remains active, but its activity reproduces exposure, coercion, and exhaustion. In *The Doloriad*, the persistence of life becomes inseparable from the collapse of meaningful futurity. This argument

matters because Williams revises the relation between apocalypse, embodiment, and ecological survival. In many post-apocalyptic narratives, the devastated environment functions as the background against which human endurance is tested. By contrast, *The Doloriad* places the body and the environment within the same field of damage. The bodies of the Family are produced through ecological ruin rather than positioned against it. Williams repeatedly presents embodiment as permeable, unstable, and materially entangled with the damaged world it inhabits. The body appears as “the sign of that greater corrosion” (Williams, 2022, p. 7), suggesting that ecological collapse enters the very conditions of bodily existence. Environmental degradation becomes flesh, sensation, perception, and relation. Through this logic, the novel moves beyond a simple account of human survival in a ruined world and imagines the human body as one of the sites through which ecological damage continues.

Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection offers a useful entry point into this condition. For Kristeva, abjection names what disturbs identity, order, and borders, especially the distinction between self and other, inside and outside, subject and object (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 1 to 4). Williams’s novel extends this model by transforming abjection into an ecological condition. The characters inhabit an abject material field in which bodily and environmental boundaries have already lost stability. The world of the novel is defined by mixture, permeability, corrosion, and saturation, as Williams’s description of “an incessant, deadly mingling” makes clear (Williams, 2022, p. 13). Abjection therefore becomes ecological as well as psychoanalytic. It names the condition through which bodies and environments remain bound together within a stagnant material order.

Bodily permeability makes this ecological abjection especially visible. Williams repeatedly dissolves the distinction between interior and exterior, organism and environment, perception and material exposure. One of the novel’s most striking images presents a body as a medium traversed by external forces: “she was the glass and the glass was in her; her head was a great flat plane and the sun slithered through her brain and received no alteration” (Williams, 2022, p. 8). The body becomes surface, passage, and exposure. Stacy Alaimo’s concept of transcorporeality helps clarify this entanglement, since it emphasizes that human bodies are materially intermeshed with the more than human world (Alaimo, 2010, pp. 2 to 4). Yet Williams gives this ecological insight a darker force. In *The Doloriad*, permeability produces exposure rather than renewal. Bodies remain connected to the world, but this connection deepens their implication within damaged conditions.

Reproductive survival intensifies the same refusal of renewal. The Family’s continuation depends upon kinship, reproduction, and biological persistence, yet these structures enclose futurity rather than expand it. The Matriarch’s desire to preserve human life appears to belong to the familiar post-apocalyptic impulse to continue the species after catastrophe. Williams, however, presents this project as coercive, incestuous, and ecologically exhausted. Reproduction becomes a mechanism through which damage is repeated. Children in the novel carry the weight of inherited catastrophe, being “born in the aftermath of the cataclysm” and belonging to “the only world they had ever known” (Williams, 2022, p. 32). Futurity is biologically continued but ethically emptied. The future appears as the extension of a damaged present. Through this reproductive logic, Williams detaches continuation from regeneration and presents survival as a closed circuit of inheritance, exposure, and repetition.

Temporality in *The Doloriad* follows the same stagnant logic. Catastrophe appears as an already established condition whose aftermath stretches into an extended present. Williams repeatedly figures time as duration detached from development. The phrase “life went on” registers the minimal persistence of existence, while the reference to “the necessity of this perpetual forgetting, the hiding of the past beneath the successive layers of the unchanging present” presents time as accumulation rather than transformation (Williams, 2022, pp. 13, 31). Such moments reveal a world in which the past loses its organizing force and the future becomes absorbed into the present’s repetition. Claire Colebrook’s account of posthuman temporality is useful here because it challenges human centered assumptions about progress, futurity, and historical direction (Colebrook, 2014, pp. 28 to 30). Williams extends this challenge by imagining temporality as endurance without emergence. The result is suspended duration rather than dynamic becoming.

Narrative form also participates in this suspension. *The Doloriad* formally reproduces the ecological stagnation it depicts. Scenes accumulate while resisting clear progression, revelation, or closure. Perception fragments,

memory disperses, and language slips into unstable association. Narrative movement therefore mirrors the movement of survival itself: it continues, but its continuation generates density rather than transformation. This formal pattern matters because it prevents the survival plot from becoming a redemptive arc. Williams resists the developmental movement usually associated with survival fiction, where suffering leads to moral knowledge, catastrophe produces renewal, or endurance becomes meaningful through closure. In *The Doloriad*, narrative continuation and ecological continuation follow the same structure of suspended persistence.

By reading *The Doloriad* through abjection, ecological embodiment, reproductive enclosure, and suspended temporality, this article contributes to Environmental Humanities and post apocalyptic literary studies in two related ways. First, it reframes survival as a compromised form of continuation rather than an implicitly hopeful sign of futurity. Williams's novel suggests that survival may preserve violence, reproduce damage, and extend ecological exhaustion. Second, it complicates celebratory models of ecological interconnection. Entanglement in *The Doloriad* becomes a condition of exposure, contamination, and stagnation as much as relation. The novel therefore raises a difficult question for contemporary ecological thought: what forms of life persist when futurity loses its transformative force?

Ultimately, *The Doloriad* matters because it separates survival from consolation. Its post-apocalyptic world offers neither redemptive renewal nor final extinction. Instead, it imagines existence as a damaged continuity in which "the human project limped on" and "life clung to its rock" (Williams, 2022, p. 130). This vision is disturbing precisely because persistence becomes detached from hope. Williams shows that life after catastrophe may endure as compromised continuation, relationality may intensify as exposure, and futurity may continue biologically while remaining ethically and imaginatively closed. In this sense, *The Doloriad* transforms post apocalyptic survival into a theory of ecological stagnation: a form of life that goes on while remaining trapped within the damaged conditions of its own persistence.

I. **Object bodies and ecological exposure**

Ecological stagnation first becomes visible in *The Doloriad* through the body. Williams presents the Family as a small and isolated group whose survival takes place inside a degraded post-apocalyptic environment shaped by scarcity, exhaustion, and persistent violence. Their bodies register this environment directly. They carry signs of deterioration, instability, and exposure, so that embodiment becomes inseparable from the damaged world that sustains it. Survival, in this context, appears as a material condition rather than a heroic achievement. The Family persists, yet their persistence takes shape through bodily forms marked by ecological pressure. This pressure alters the meaning of embodiment in the novel. The body appears less as an autonomous structure than as a site where environmental damage gathers and continues. Williams repeatedly presents bodily life as permeable, unstable, and materially implicated in the surrounding world. Such embodiment turns ecological collapse into something intimate and physical. Ruin enters flesh, sensation, and perception. The body therefore becomes one of the primary surfaces through which environmental catastrophe remains active. Williams condenses this condition in the phrase "the sign of that greater corrosion" (Williams, 2022, p. 7). Corrosion here signals more than bodily decay. It marks the body as an expression of a wider ecological deterioration that has entered the very structure of life.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection helps clarify this condition. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the abject as that which disturbs identity, system, and order by threatening the boundaries that separate self from other, inside from outside, and subject from object (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 1 to 4). Abjection usually depends on a movement of exclusion through which the subject attempts to secure its own coherence. In *The Doloriad*, Williams reshapes this structure by making abjection ecological. The characters inhabit a world where the borders that usually organize bodily and environmental distinction have already weakened. Abjection therefore becomes an atmosphere, a material condition, and a mode of existence. It surrounds the body, passes through it, and organizes its relation to the world.

This ecological abjection appears most clearly through images of mixture and saturation. Williams describes existence as "an incessant, deadly mingling" (Williams, 2022, p. 13), a phrase that captures the collapse of stable separation between body and environment. Mingling here carries a disturbing force because contact produces exposure instead of renewal. Matter circulates across bodily and ecological spaces, yet this circulation

deepens implication within damaged conditions. The Family's bodies are shaped by the same ruined field in which they live. Their survival therefore becomes a continuation of ecological damage rather than a movement away from it.

Bodily permeability intensifies this logic. Williams repeatedly dissolves the distinction between interior and exterior, turning the body into a medium through which environmental forces pass. One of the novel's most striking images describes a body as both glass and flesh: "she was the glass and the glass was in her; her head was a great flat plane and the sun slithered through her brain and received no alteration" (Williams, 2022, p. 8). The image transforms the body from a bounded form into a surface of exposure. The sun passes through the brain, while the body loses the protective distance that would allow it to mediate the world. Experience therefore becomes direct, invasive, and materially destabilizing.

Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality is useful here because it emphasizes the material exchanges between human bodies and the more than human world. For Alaimo, the human body is always intermeshed with environments, substances, and ecological systems (Alaimo, 2010, pp. 2 to 4). *The Doloriad* shares this emphasis on bodily and environmental entanglement, yet Williams gives transcorporeality a darker form. In the novel, permeability produces exposure, corrosion, and constraint. Ecological contact deepens bodily vulnerability rather than opening a path toward ethical transformation. Bodies remain connected to the world, but this connection binds them more tightly to the damaged conditions that shape them.

The novel also links permeability to impurity. Environmental forces pass through bodily and material surfaces while carrying degradation with them. Williams writes that "what emerged on the other side was altered and impure" (Williams, 2022, p. 10). Alteration here suggests continuous modification, yet this modification produces neither renewal nor stable transformation. The body changes, but change remains trapped inside a stagnant ecological order. Impurity accumulates as a condition of survival. Life persists through exposure to forces that continually weaken coherence.

As bodily boundaries lose stability, perception also begins to fragment. Dolores "was not able to distinguish between fear and desire" (Williams, 2022, p. 6), a moment that presents affective experience as unstable and undifferentiated. This confusion reveals more than psychological disturbance. It shows how ecological exposure reshapes the structures through which sensation becomes meaningful. Fear and desire blur because the body can no longer organize experience from a secure position. Perception, like embodiment, unfolds inside a damaged field where distinction has lost its stabilizing power.

Agathe's experience develops this dispersal further. She attempts to steady herself "to the damp mulch of the forest floor" (Williams, 2022, p. 7), yet the gesture places her more deeply inside the degraded environment. The forest floor offers contact rather than escape, immersion rather than stability. Movement through ecological space therefore becomes a form of enclosure. The body travels across the world while remaining materially bound to it. Williams extends this logic through the image of Dolores as "nothing more than a huge pupa with her cocoon trailing behind her, wriggling toward safety" (Williams, 2022, p. 24). The body absorbs the textures of its environment until human form begins to appear as another concentration of ecological matter.

Such images also disturb the category of the human. Williams's bodies are neither secure human subjects nor productive hybrid forms. They appear as unstable formations caught inside ecological damage. The children are described as existing "closer to those animals who thought in sensations and simple images" (Williams, 2022, p. 33), while life itself appears as "a mass of life, straining at its edges" (Williams, 2022, p. 14). These descriptions weaken the human as a stable category of perception, relation, and ethical identity. The novel presents embodiment as a threshold condition in which human and nonhuman registers bleed into each other while remaining trapped inside the same exhausted material order.

This point matters for the article's broader argument because ecological exposure in *The Doloriad* creates stagnation rather than becoming. Many ecological theories treat interconnection as a way to rethink human exceptionalism and to imagine more responsible forms of relation. Williams takes this insight seriously while removing its consoling force. Entanglement in the novel produces implication, vulnerability, and enclosure.

The body's openness to the world reveals the intimacy of ecological relation, yet that intimacy appears as damage carried forward. Abjection therefore becomes the form through which ecological stagnation holds.

By presenting bodies as corroded, permeable, and environmentally saturated, *The Doloriad* transforms survival into an abject ecological condition. The Family continues to live, but their bodies do not testify to recovery or adaptation. They register the persistence of catastrophe inside the material structure of life itself. In this sense, Williams shifts post-apocalyptic survival away from the language of endurance as resilience. Survival becomes the continuation of exposure. The body remains alive, yet life carries the marks of a world that has already entered it.

II. Reproduction without futurity

Reproduction in *The Doloriad* deepens the novel's critique of survival by separating biological continuation from meaningful futurity. In many post-apocalyptic narratives, the survival of children often carries symbolic weight. Children may suggest renewal, historical continuity, or the possibility of rebuilding after catastrophe. Williams revises this expectation by presenting reproduction as a closed ecological circuit. The Family continues, yet its continuation extends damage across generations. Biological persistence therefore becomes inseparable from coercion, inheritance, and ecological exhaustion.

At the center of this reproductive order stands the Matriarch, whose authority rests on the demand that life continue after catastrophe. Her project appears, on the surface, to preserve the human species in a ruined world. Yet this preservation takes shape through incestuous kinship, reproductive control, and the repetition of damaged life. Survival becomes a command rather than an opening. The Matriarch's insistence that "we have to keep on going" gives continuation the force of obligation (Williams, 2022, p. 70). The phrase carries the pressure of survival stripped of ethical renewal. Going on becomes the organizing principle of the Family, while the future appears only as the extension of the same enclosed order. This reproductive logic transforms kinship into a structure of ecological stagnation. Family relations in the novel fail to generate difference, care, or social renewal. They produce enclosure. Bodies remain bound to one another through dependency, violence, and reproductive necessity, forming a survival system that sustains itself by repeating its own conditions. The Family's isolation intensifies this closure because relation turns inward. Kinship becomes a circular structure in which life reproduces itself through the same damaged bonds that already organize the present. Under these conditions, reproduction continues the Family biologically while preserving the social and ecological disorder that shapes it.

Williams makes this inherited enclosure especially visible through the children. They are "born in the aftermath of the cataclysm" and inhabit "the only world they had ever known" (Williams, 2022, p. 32). These descriptions detach childhood from the conventional promise of futurity. The children arrive after catastrophe, yet their arrival offers no movement beyond it. Their beginning already belongs to aftermath. The future, embodied in the next generation, emerges inside the same damaged horizon that governs the present. Childhood therefore becomes a sign of inherited exposure rather than renewal.

The language of taint further intensifies this point. Williams describes the children as having "been tainted so absolutely that a subsequent poisoning could make no difference" (Williams, 2022, p. 32). This sentence presents ecological damage as a condition already absorbed into the structure of life. Additional harm loses dramatic force because exposure has become ordinary. Reproduction therefore transmits a world already saturated by catastrophe. The children inherit more than biological life; they inherit an ecological condition in which degradation has become the ground of existence. Futurity continues, but it carries the same poison forward.

Through this structure, *The Doloriad* challenges the assumption that survival naturally belongs to hope. The Matriarch's reproductive project preserves life while emptying preservation of redemptive value. Her desire to continue the human line becomes a form of ecological repetition. The Family produces descendants, yet these descendants remain enclosed within the damaged conditions that produced them. Biological continuity therefore intensifies stagnation. Life extends across generations, but this extension reproduces the same scarcity, exposure, and coercion. This point also complicates common associations between reproduction and

futurity. In dominant cultural narratives, reproduction often promises succession, renewal, and historical direction. Williams transforms that promise into a disturbing form of repetition. Children mark the continuation of the species, yet they also reveal the collapse of transformative possibility. Their existence proves that life persists, while their conditions of life reveal the poverty of persistence alone. In this sense, the novel separates futurity from mere biological succession. A future exists only when continuation opens toward difference. In *The Doloriad*, continuation circles back into the same damaged present.

The Family's reproductive enclosure also reshapes the meaning of ecological relation. Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality emphasizes that bodies and environments are materially intermeshed, constantly exchanging substances, forces, and vulnerabilities (Alaimo, 2010, pp. 2 to 4). Williams extends this insight into the reproductive sphere. Bodies transmit ecological damage across generations because the environment has already entered flesh, kinship, and inheritance. Reproduction becomes transcorporeal in the darkest sense: the damaged world moves through bodies into future bodies. The Family's children therefore embody ecological continuity as exposure rather than renewal.

Abjection sharpens this reproductive condition. For Kristeva, the abject disturbs identity and order by threatening the borders through which the subject secures coherence (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 1 to 4). In Williams's novel, reproductive kinship itself becomes abject because it collapses distinctions that usually organize familial, bodily, and social order. Incestuous reproduction turns the family inward until kinship loses its generative openness. The family, usually imagined as a structure that connects past, present, and future, becomes a stagnant biological enclosure. Abjection therefore operates through reproduction as well as embodiment. It marks a survival system where life continues through relations that corrode the very idea of futurity. Temporal repetition reinforces this reproductive stagnation. Williams's phrase "life went on" appears deceptively simple, yet it captures the novel's bleak account of continuation (Williams, 2022, p. 13). Life goes on as persistence, habit, and compulsion. The phrase gives survival a minimal form, emptied of progress and transformation. Reproductive life follows the same pattern. It extends existence while keeping it enclosed within inherited damage. The future becomes a repetition of the present, and the present carries the unresolved weight of catastrophe.

Claire Colebrook's work on posthuman temporality helps clarify the stakes of this structure. Colebrook challenges human centered narratives that imagine time as progress toward fulfillment, mastery, or redemption (Colebrook, 2014, pp. 28 to 30). *The Doloriad* pushes this critique into reproductive life. Time continues through bodies, births, and generations, yet this continuation produces endurance rather than emergence. The human future survives biologically while losing the ethical and imaginative force usually attached to futurity. Williams therefore presents reproduction as duration enclosed within ecological damage. This reproductive enclosure also reveals the limits of endurance as a moral category. Endurance can suggest strength, persistence, and resilience, especially in narratives of catastrophe. In *The Doloriad*, endurance acquires a more troubling meaning. The Family endures by preserving the structures that harm it. Survival becomes inseparable from the continuation of violence. The Matriarch's reproductive demand sustains the group while binding it to coercive forms of kinship. Through this logic, Williams exposes the danger of treating survival itself as an ethical good. Survival may preserve life, yet it may also preserve the conditions that make life damaged.

The novel's treatment of children brings this danger into sharp focus. As figures of the future, children usually carry narrative hope. Williams gives them a different function. They reveal how catastrophe enters futurity and how damage becomes inheritance. Their lives prove that the species continues, but their existence unfolds inside a world where continuation has lost regenerative force. The child, then, becomes one of the novel's most unsettling figures: a sign of life after catastrophe that offers continuity while intensifying the horror of inherited stagnation. By presenting reproduction as enclosure, *The Doloriad* transforms the post-apocalyptic survival plot. The question shifts from whether life can continue to what kind of life continuation preserves. Williams's answer is deliberately uncomfortable. The Family survives through a reproductive order that carries ecological damage forward, binds bodies into coercive kinship, and converts futurity into repetition. Survival therefore becomes a biological fact with ethically unstable consequences. The novel insists that going on is never innocent when the structures of continuation reproduce the conditions of harm.

Reproduction in *The Doloriad* ultimately reveals the central paradox of ecological stagnation: life persists, yet persistence becomes the very mechanism through which damage endures. The Family's future is biologically present in its children, but that future remains enclosed within the aftermath that produced them. Williams therefore detaches reproduction from renewal and survival from consolation. In doing so, she turns futurity into one of the novel's most disturbing ecological questions. What continues after catastrophe is life itself, but life carries forward the corrosion, violence, and exhaustion of the world that remains.

III. Temporal stagnation and narrative suspension

Temporal stagnation in *The Doloriad* extends the novel's critique of survival from the body and reproduction into the structure of time itself. Life continues after catastrophe, yet this continuation unfolds as duration rather than transformation. Events move forward, bodies persist, and routines repeat, but time rarely produces meaningful development. Williams presents the post apocalyptic aftermath as an extended present in which survival carries life onward while keeping it bound to the same damaged conditions. Temporality therefore becomes one of the novel's most powerful expressions of ecological stagnation. This temporal condition appears through the novel's repeated emphasis on continuation. The phrase "life went on" captures the minimal persistence that governs the world of the text (Williams, 2022, p. 13). Its simplicity is important. Life continues because it continues, rather than because it moves toward repair, renewal, or purpose. Williams turns going on into a bare temporal fact, stripped of the redemptive force often attached to endurance. Survival becomes activity without transformation. Time passes, yet its passage preserves the same horizon of damage.

A similar logic shapes the novel's treatment of memory. Williams describes "the necessity of this perpetual forgetting, the hiding of the past beneath the successive layers of the unchanging present" (Williams, 2022, p. 31). This image transforms the present into an accumulating surface that covers the past instead of organizing it into history. Memory remains present, but it loses the power to create sequence, consequence, or direction. The past becomes buried beneath repetition, while the present expands into a dense and immobilizing duration. Through this temporal structure, catastrophe becomes less a single event than an ongoing condition that absorbs both memory and futurity. Claire Colebrook's reflections on posthuman temporality help clarify the stakes of this suspended duration. Colebrook challenges human centered models of time that imagine history as progress, mastery, or movement toward predetermined futures (Colebrook, 2014, pp. 28 to 30). *The Doloriad* intensifies this critique by presenting temporality as endurance enclosed within ecological damage. Time continues, but its continuation produces persistence rather than emergence. The world of the novel therefore belongs to a post apocalyptic temporality in which catastrophe has already happened, while its aftermath keeps extending itself through bodies, kinship, and narrative form.

Repetition reinforces this enclosure by turning movement into recurrence. Actions unfold, yet they repeatedly return characters to the same conditions. Williams captures this circularity in the scene where "the children always came for him, hauling him out of his bed and carrying him to a building far away where he repeated the impulses of his memory until the night fell again and they took him back to his lair" (Williams, 2022, p. 21). The structure of the sentence itself follows a closed circuit: removal, repetition, return. Activity continues across the scene, but nothing accumulates beyond the repetition itself. The body moves through space while remaining temporally trapped. This pattern gives survival the form of performance. Later, Williams describes the siblings as enduring "the whole damned performance of survival" while they "waited and waited" (Williams, 2022, p. 116). The phrase suggests that survival has become ritualized, repetitive, and emptied of transformative promise. Waiting usually implies expectation, but here it becomes another form of enclosure. The characters wait inside a world where arrival has lost its force. Anticipation survives as habit, while futurity becomes absorbed into recurrence.

Environmental atmosphere deepens this temporal stagnation. Williams describes "the enormous lethargy that hung above the empty city" (Williams, 2022, p. 13), transforming stillness into a material condition that shapes the world itself. Lethargy becomes atmospheric rather than merely psychological. It presses upon bodies, spaces, and relations, slowing existence into a suspended state. The environment participates in temporal enclosure by giving duration a physical weight. Ecological space holds life in place, preserving the conditions that prevent emergence from taking shape.

The novel's account of temporality also weakens causality. Williams describes experience as "an eternal, causeless present" (Williams, 2022, p. 33), a phrase that condenses the collapse of developmental sequence. Cause and effect lose their organizing force because events fail to gather into trajectories capable of changing the world. The present becomes causeless because it no longer appears as the result of a meaningful past or the beginning of a different future. It simply persists. Through this structure, Williams transforms aftermath into a temporality of suspension, where duration replaces direction. This suspended temporality reaches one of its clearest formulations when Agathe becomes "not sensitive to the passage of time" (Williams, 2022, p. 24). The loss of temporal sensitivity reflects more than individual disorientation. It signals a world in which time has ceased to provide the spacing through which experience becomes organized. Moments no longer separate into a clear before and after. Instead, they merge into a continuous present that absorbs difference. Agathe's experience therefore mirrors the broader ecological structure of the novel: life persists within a field where transformation struggles to emerge.

Narrative form reproduces this same temporal condition. *The Doloriad* does not merely represent stagnation as a theme; it makes stagnation part of its formal movement. Scenes accumulate, but they often resist developmental sequence. Perception fragments, memory disperses, and language drifts through unstable associations. The result is a narrative that moves while withholding the satisfactions of progression, revelation, or closure. Williams's form therefore mirrors the world it depicts. Narrative continuation becomes structurally equivalent to ecological continuation: both proceed through suspension rather than transformation.

The instability of language sharpens this formal stagnation. Williams describes thought as a condition in which "everything suggests everything else" and experience dissolves into "an endless drift of associations and links from which he can't untangle himself" (Williams, 2022, p. 84). Meaning spreads laterally instead of organizing itself into hierarchy or sequence. Association replaces explanation, and language moves through excess connection rather than coherent development. This drift matters because it formally enacts the novel's stagnant temporality. Narrative continues producing links, images, and impressions, yet these movements generate density rather than direction.

Perception follows the same suspended logic. The novel describes "the day" as "one impossible simultaneity" (Williams, 2022, p. 15), collapsing temporal sequence into overwhelming co presence. Experience becomes simultaneous rather than progressive. The world arrives all at once, preventing perception from arranging events into ordered continuity. Such moments reveal how narrative suspension operates not only through plot but also through sensory form. Time becomes difficult to inhabit because perception itself has lost stable sequence. This formal structure places *The Doloriad* in conversation with anti-developmental narratives of waiting and repetition, yet Williams gives suspension a specifically ecological force. In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett famously condenses repetitive temporality through the claim that "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes" (Beckett, 1954, p. 41). Williams's novel shares this concern with continuation emptied of arrival, but its suspension emerges from a damaged ecological field rather than from existential abstraction alone. The characters in *The Doloriad* wait, repeat, and endure because their world has organized survival as enclosure. Stagnation becomes environmental, bodily, and narrative at once.

The refusal of closure intensifies this structure. Williams writes that "there won't be an ending, but it won't be the same either" (Williams, 2022, p. 155). The line holds the novel between repetition and alteration. Something changes, yet change refuses to become resolution. The future appears as difference without transformation, continuation without redemptive arrival. This is one of the novel's most important temporal insights. Williams does not present stagnation as simple stillness. Rather, she imagines a world where movement continues while remaining unable to become renewal. Such movement appears again in Jakob's recognition that "there would be no transformation, nothing except a slow breaking down" (Williams, 2022, p. 128). The sentence defines the novel's temporal logic with brutal clarity. Time produces erosion rather than becoming. Processes continue, bodies age, relations persist, and the world shifts, but these changes take the form of breakdown. Transformation is replaced by deterioration. Through this movement, Williams offers a vision of temporality in which the future survives as decay rather than possibility.

The phrase "the human project limped on" and the image of life clinging "to its rock" gather these temporal concerns into a stark account of survival (Williams, 2022, p. 130). Humanity continues, but its continuation

appears weakened, diminished, and materially bound to exhaustion. The verb “limped” turns progress into impaired movement. Life remains attached to the world, but that attachment takes the form of desperate persistence. Temporality here becomes ecological endurance at its most compromised: movement continues, yet it carries no guarantee of regeneration. By structuring time as repetition, suspended duration, and narrative drift, *The Doloriad* transforms survival into an anti-developmental form. Its characters remain alive, but their lives unfold inside a temporal field that absorbs anticipation and weakens transformation. Narrative form participates in this process by refusing to convert survival into closure or revelation. Williams therefore gives ecological stagnation a temporal and formal structure. The world continues, the story continues, and life continues, but continuation itself becomes the mechanism through which damage persists.

Temporal stagnation ultimately completes the novel’s larger critique of survival. Abject bodies reveal how ecological damage enters flesh. Reproductive enclosure shows how damage passes into futurity. Narrative suspension demonstrates how damage organizes time and form. Together, these structures make *The Doloriad* a powerful account of post apocalyptic life as compromised continuation. Survival remains central, but its meaning shifts radically. Instead of promising renewal, it becomes the persistence of life inside conditions that keep reproducing their own exhaustion.

CONCLUSION: SURVIVAL WITHOUT CONSOLATION

The Doloriad ultimately transforms survival into one of the most unsettling problems of post-apocalyptic fiction. Williams presents a world where life continues after catastrophe, yet continuation carries little redemptive force. Bodies persist, families reproduce, time passes, and narrative movement continues, but these forms of persistence remain bound to ecological exhaustion, bodily corrosion, coercive kinship, and suspended futurity. Survival becomes meaningful precisely because it loses the consoling associations usually attached to endurance. Rather than presenting life after catastrophe as the beginning of recovery, the novel imagines survival as compromised continuation. This article has argued that ecological stagnation in *The Doloriad* emerges through three interconnected structures: abject embodiment, reproduction without futurity, and temporal narrative suspension. First, the novel presents the body as a site where environmental damage becomes material and intimate. The Family’s bodies carry the marks of ecological pressure, appearing as corroded, permeable, and exposed forms of life. Williams’s description of the body as “the sign of that greater corrosion” condenses this logic by making embodiment inseparable from wider ecological deterioration (Williams, 2022, p. 7). Abjection, in this context, becomes more than a disturbance of bodily order. It becomes the material condition through which bodies and environments remain bound together inside the same damaged field.

Reproductive survival extends this stagnation across generations. The Matriarch’s demand that the Family “keep on going” turns continuation into a biological and social command, yet this command preserves the structures of harm that organize the Family’s world (Williams, 2022, p. 70). Children, usually associated with renewal in post-apocalyptic narratives, appear in Williams’s novel as figures of inherited exposure. Born after catastrophe, they inhabit “the only world they had ever known,” a world already saturated by degradation (Williams, 2022, p. 32). Through this reproductive logic, futurity survives biologically while remaining ethically and imaginatively enclosed. Life continues, but it continues through the repetition of damage.

Temporal and narrative suspension complete this structure of ecological stagnation. Williams repeatedly presents time as duration rather than development. Phrases such as “life went on” and “the unchanging present” reveal a world where continuation persists while transformation remains suspended (Williams, 2022, pp. 13, 31). Narrative form follows the same logic. Scenes accumulate, perception fragments, memory disperses, and language drifts through unstable association. The story moves, yet its movement produces density rather than resolution. In this sense, the novel’s form participates in the very condition it depicts. Ecological stagnation becomes narrative structure as well as thematic content.

The broader significance of this reading lies in its challenge to comforting ideas of survival. Post apocalyptic fiction often gives endurance an implicit ethical value, as though the continuation of life were itself a sign of hope. *The Doloriad* complicates that assumption by asking what survival preserves when the world that remains is already damaged. Williams’s answer is deliberately severe. Survival may preserve bodies, kinship,

species, and memory, yet it may also preserve violence, coercion, exposure, and ecological exhaustion. The novel therefore separates persistence from redemption. It insists that going on can become a form of entrapment when continuation reproduces the conditions of harm. This conclusion also matters for Environmental Humanities because it complicates celebratory accounts of ecological entanglement. The novel certainly affirms the inseparability of bodies and environments, but it presents that inseparability through corrosion, permeability, and contamination. Relation becomes exposure. Contact becomes constraint. Interconnection becomes a medium through which damage circulates. By giving ecological relation this darker force, Williams resists any easy movement from entanglement to ethics. The novel suggests that ecological thinking must account not only for interdependence, but also for the damaged conditions through which interdependence is lived.

Survival without consolation, then, names the novel's central contribution to post apocalyptic studies. *The Doloriad* offers neither the comfort of extinction nor the promise of renewal. Instead, it imagines a world where "the human project limped on" and "life clung to its rock" (Williams, 2022, p. 130). These images capture survival as impaired movement and desperate attachment. Humanity continues, but its continuation appears diminished, exhausted, and ethically unstable. Life remains, yet remaining itself becomes a troubling condition. Williams's novel forces a difficult reconsideration of hope after catastrophe. The question is no longer simply whether life can survive ecological collapse. The sharper question concerns what kind of life survival sustains, what forms of harm it carries forward, and what futures it forecloses while claiming to preserve. *The Doloriad* answers by presenting survival as persistence inside damaged systems rather than movement beyond them. Its bleakness is therefore not empty nihilism. It is a rigorous critique of the assumption that continuation naturally contains renewal. In Williams's post-apocalyptic world, life goes on, but going on becomes the very form through which ecological stagnation endures.

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