

Women are just planets that attract the wrong species: An Exploration of Feminist Issues through Dystopia in Jeanette Winterson s The Stone Gods

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‘Women are just planets that attract the wrong species’: An Exploration of Feminist Issues
through Dystopia in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*

(smjer: engleska književnost i kultura)

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“Everything is imprinted for ever with what it once was.”

Jeanette Winterson, The Stone Gods

For Gramps, with love.

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Introduction

In her science fiction novel titled *The Stone Gods* (2007), Jeanette Winterson uses the history of humankind to create a narrative about its possible futures. It is submerged in repetition due to human tendency to make the same mistakes over and over again, which gives the narrative its indisputable dystopian air. Irrespective of that, however, the novel is not completely overwhelmed by the hopelessness of its setting. Rather, it provides an alternative to humanity's self-destructive tendencies, turning towards hope.

In terms of the genre, *The Stone Gods* belongs to the realm of science fiction. As defined by Suvin, it is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition" (373). It envelops different subgenres, and Winterson's novel displays traits of several different ones – be it feminist, queer, or postmodernist science fiction – while conclusively belonging to none. As Patricia Vaugh explains in her *Feminine Fictions*, there are certain similarities between feminism and postmodernism that feminist SF writers exploit: "[b]oth movements celebrate liminality, the disruption of boundaries, the confounding of traditional markers of 'difference', the undermining of the authorial security of the 'egotistical sublime'" (Roberts 136).

The narrative unravels in three separate but interconnected heterarchical levels, as different iterations of the central character Billie/Billy Crusoe tell their stories. Billie is both the main character in the novel and its narrator, i.e. she is what Genette calls the autodiegetic narrator.

In the first part of the novel, subtitled *Planet Blue*, Billie is a rebellious scientist and a government official in what seems to be the dystopian future, but is later also posited to be the past of human race. She toes the line between being an active participant in the society of the Central Power and someone keen on dismantling it. What finally tips her over is meeting Spike, a highly developed Robo sapiens who is about to be dismantled for doing exactly what she has been created to do – collecting data. Her crime and Billie's seem to coincide – they both know too much and are therefore a threat to the system. The two of them eventually end up on a spaceship bound for Planet Blue; a new planet, a new beginning that is far too enmeshed in the past of its precursor Orbus to be a truly new anything. That is, until an unintended consequence of Captain Handsome's plan veers the entire mission off course, thus introducing the concept of intervention that is central to the novel as a whole.

The second part, *Easter Island*, introduces Billy Crusoe, an eighteenth-century sailor left behind on the island by Captain James Cook's crew in the midst of a war between two tribes. He is a stranded sailor, an abandoned and displaced man; but also a man who finds companionship in Spickers, a Native whose compassion and love for his people propels him into action. Subverting the colonialist narrative of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, Winterson portrays the love between these two men as another point of disruption in the cycle of human violence and destruction.

The remaining two parts of the novel, *Post 3-War* and *Wreck City*, can be interpreted to follow another version of Billie. She is a scientist at the MORE-*Futures* division of the corporation that took over what was left of the world after the nuclear war. More specifically, she is the leader of the project focused on developing a Robo sapiens, an impartial artificial intelligence meant to eliminate the human factor in the process of decision-making so as to prevent another disaster following in the wake of the latest war. Billie develops a bond with Spike that slowly moves her from a state of complacency toward action. By taking the robot head out of the carefully curated environment of Tech City into the lawless and chaotic Wreck City, Billie causes a disruption in the system that Spike has been made to moderate by providing Spike with an opportunity to experience humanity herself. Once again, the bond between them becomes an intervention.

These parts are not presented in a chronological order, and the hermeneutic code – which refers to every element of the narrative that is not explained and raises questions; i.e. an enigma – is pointedly underdetermined (Barthes 19-21). According to Christine Brooke-Rose, “the function of under-determination is to blur” and “the encoded reader is [...] required to cooperate actively, to be hyper-critical” (116). The subtle clues are there, molded into the very core of the novel; the same themes (such as propensity for self-destruction, and desire) flow through separate stories, binding them together into an unforgettable narrative about the repetition of history, examining human flaws and their displacement of core values which brings them to ruination time and again.

The purpose of this paper is to examine that very repetition, its causes and consequences, and most importantly its influence on the lives of female (and female-adjacent) characters within the novel, positing Winterson's idea of an intervention as a sort of antithesis to fate.

Autonomy of the (Female) Body

In the narrative universe of *Planet Blue*, people tend not to grow old. Once they reach a certain age, they genetically “fix” themselves – i.e. they go on with their lives without ever showing any physical signs of growing old. Both men and women opt to undergo the process of genetic fixing, and it becomes so prevalent a choice that refusal to undergo the procedure equals high treason. As Billie explains,

Manfred is one of those confident men who have had themselves genetically Fixed as late-forties. Most men prefer to Fix younger than that, and there are no women who Fix past thirty. ‘The DNA Dynasty’, they called us, when the first generation of humans had successful recoding. Age is information failure. The body loses fluency. [It] is designed to repair and renew itself [...] Science can’t fix everything, though —women feel they have to look youthful, men less so, and the lifestyle programmes are full of the appeal of the older man. Everybody wants one —young girls and gay toyboys [...] Myself, I wouldn’t be able to tell the difference. (9)

As exemplified by the above quote, women tend to fix at a much younger age than men. Men are allowed to grow older while still being considered attractive, whereas women past thirty are treated as if they should not exist. It is a fact, then, that women are pressured by the system to remain frozen in their teens or twenties at the latest, never allowed to reach the point where they might realize that they are more than their looks, and that their sex-appeal should not be the measuring stick for their own sense of self-worth. This emotional manipulation of women is clearly institutionalized not only through the governmental pressure of mandatory Fixing, but also through the aforementioned lifestyle programs that indoctrinate the women of Orbus.

One of the characters in the first part of the novel embodies this ideal of a woman that the Central Power projects down to the letter, and it is her story that introduces some of the more horrifying concepts that Winterson brings to the fore. Mrs. Mary McMurphy, otherwise known as Pink, is a woman so perfectly feminine that her entire life can be summed up by this color. Her living room is “rosy” and “faked out like a teenager’s bedroom” (Winterson 16). Mrs. McMurphy is obsessed with celebrities, a fact proven by the numerous holograms overcrowding the living space, as well as by her claim that she wants to be like Little Señorita – “a twelve-year-old pop star who has Fixed herself rather than lose her fame” (16).

The act of Fixing is illegal for children, but it is revealed in several instances in the text that it is very much socially desirable. Little Señorita's "boyfriend says he's delighted" (Winterson 16). Mrs. McMurphy's husband is also a fan, and all she seems to want is to please him. It does not seem to bother her in the least that her husband is a pedophile. She just does not want to lose him. When Billie questions whether Pink thinks she can stop her husband from having sex with girls by turning into one herself, she replies, "[T]hat's not my aim. He can do what he likes as long as he doesn't do it in the house [...] and as long as he comes home now and again and does it with me" (Winterson 17). Here is a grown woman, Fixed at the age of twenty-four by Billie's estimation, admitting that her husband being a pedophile does not matter as long as he remains her husband.

The normalization of this kind of attitude marks a significant point of estrangement, raising the question of *why*. Why do these people accept things like pedophilia? Why do the women of Orbus bow under the pressure of societal expectations that entrap them with ever-expanding impossible beauty standards? Why is nobody standing up to claim the right to decide what to do with their own bodies?

The answer is as simple and as complicated as this: "Single-letter recognition is taught in schools" (Winterson 10). Billie's boss reprimands her for using a notebook and a pen during her interviews, claiming that "[n]obody reads and writes any more - there's no need" (8). The utter disregard for foundational literacy displayed by everyone but Billie (and later Captain Handsome) is a crucial stepping stone to understanding how the society of Orbus got to where it is in the narrative present. People of Orbus are uneducated and illiterate, which makes them less prone to self-reflection, effectively cutting off their access to the tools necessary to avoid the entrapment of state propaganda.

In order to develop critical thinking, one must be able to consider multiple points of view. To do that, one must keep learning. Without the ability to read, the citizens of the Central Power have become reliant on what they are being told, thus accepting the government propaganda as empirical truth. Their capability for self-development beyond the point of what they are taught in schools (i.e. single letter recognition) has been effectively destroyed in the name of convenience, or rather by corporate greed.

The MORE corporation came to power by capitalizing on the idea of progress, dazzling those in charge of the people with the promises of advancement and power. This desire to always be one step ahead of the rest of the world has been massively exploited, allowing the corporation in question to accrue political sway, and to eventually take over the leadership of an entire nation. By equating progress with simplification of everyday human lives through advertisements, MORE corporation established a pattern of complacency that, among other factors, allowed for the mass illiteracy that followed. Putting the emphasis on convenience instead of learning, and focusing the idea of personal development on what one can do to their bodies using all the new technology has managed to turn the entire nation into mindless consumers blissfully unaware of their own oppression in only a couple of generations.

When Billie says, “There is no resistance to Central Power. That’s why it seems to me to be useful to be able to read – if only between the lines” (Winterson 26), she demonstrates how the state sanctioned mass illiteracy functions as a form of social control, making rebellion an (almost) impossible mission. By removing a major medium of communication, the government has greatly reduced people’s ability to express and exchange ideas. Other than making them less prone to considering different stances on social issues in the first place, it also makes organizing rebellion a greater challenge than it used to be. Left without the ability to send messages and write manifestos, even those who retained predisposition for critical thought struggle to find likeminded individuals. The anonymity of such forms of communication is completely lost, and publicly displaying displeasure with the current state of affairs results in consequences too dire for people to dare to speak up. If they cannot organize beforehand, they cannot rebel.

So it becomes quite clear that it is not merely their bodies that the government is controlling; in fact, the overwhelming success of the governmental control over thoughts of the people and their manner of expression is far more insidious, as it is one of the major defining features of totalitarianism. A totalitarian society is one in which “[n]onconformity of opinion [...] is treated as the equivalent of resistance or opposition to the government, and [...] institutions of compulsion are used to enforce the orthodoxy of the proclaimed doctrines of the state” (“Totalitarianism”).

If this is the general state of the Central Power society, then Pink is not an outlier, but rather a representative character. Her blatant disregard for her husband’s pedophilia and her subsequent

desire for genetic reversal merely mirrors the values and attitudes of the society she grew up in. One can hardly be blamed for having been born into a cult, and the society of Orbus is very much devoted to the cult of beauty and youth. Just like other young women of Orbus who have either never been exposed to alternative ideas, or have fallen short of comprehending them due to the state-sanctioned lack of critical thinking skills, Pink is both a product of her environment and its victim.

Billie, on the other hand, is clearly disgusted with the current state of affairs on Orbus. Her narration is largely ironic in tone, but also earnest at times. Her education and interest in history is what makes her uniquely equipped to observe and unmask the fallacies of the society in Central Power.

While looking for Mr. McMurphy at the Peccadillo, Billie has a conversation with the guard, who tries to justify the case of children being Fixed at an early age. He compares it to Civil Rights movements, claiming that pedophilia is “just a word, like ‘homosexual’.” Billie quickly expresses her disgust by replying “[n]o, it’s not a word like ‘homosexual’, it’s a word like ‘goatfucker’” (Winterson 21). This exchange leads her to contemplate the position of women in their society, and she goes on to ask: “Do you ever think of a world where there are no grown women at all? Just little girls?” to which the Peccadillo bouncer replies, “Don’t get me going. I’m on duty” (Winterson 22).

It is important to note that in three out of four parts of *The Stone Gods*, Billie is a woman. Her gender seems to be the most prominent of features in the first part of the book. Billie is a rebel who refuses to get Fixed at a certain age in order to remain young and beautiful. She believes firmly in what she considers to be natural, and even goes as far as faking her own data in order to cover up for her resistance to what has become a norm in their society. Her cover is blown, and she is sent on a visit to the newly discovered, Earth-like planet – Planet Blue. Aboard the spaceship, she ceases trying to cover up her beliefs and has an open conversation with others on what it really means to be a woman.

As the discussion progresses, the ability to bear children is put forward as a defining feature. However, in a world of advanced technology in which they live, that is no longer quite true. Billie contemplates whether there is even place for women in such a society:

So this is the future: girls Fixed at eight years old, maybe ten, hopefully twelve. Or will they want women's minds in girls' bodies and go for genetic reversal? The future of women is uncertain. We don't breed in the womb any more, and if we aren't wanted for sex ... (Winterson 22).

As established in the above quote, the manner of reproduction at Orbus is no longer dependent on the womb. In his essay *On the Poetics of Science Fiction*, Suvin introduces the term *novum* as a defining feature of the science fiction genre. He postulates “a spectrum or spread of literary subject-matter, running from the ideal extreme of exact recreation of the author's empirical environment to exclusive interest in a strange newness, *novum*” (373).

The function of the *novum* “womb-free” – the idea of birth outside of a mother’s womb made possible by the colossal advancement in medicine and technology – is perhaps best understood through the lens of radical feminism. The basic premise of the radical feminist view on this issue is that historically there has always been an expectation of motherhood latched onto a woman’s back from the earliest childhood onwards. The social conditioning and the patriarchal system of child-rearing made sure that all women grew up either wanting to be mothers, or too scared to speak up about the lack of motherly instincts for fear of becoming social pariahs after being called unnatural and wrong. The radical-libertarian feminists devised a new theory, which suggested that “the less women are involved in reproduction, the more time and energy [they] will have to engage in society’s productive process” (Tong 74). Winterson’s application of this idea in *The Stone Gods* demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case.

Scientific progress has relieved women on Orbus of the burden of carrying a new life in their bodies. This is the one point of discussion on which both Billie, an emancipated woman, and Pink, who keeps in line with the more traditional societal norms on Orbus, can agree is a good thing. Yet somehow women remain trapped within the confines of their bodies, which proves that childbearing and child-rearing are not the only parts of the female experience that keep women from being fully engaged participants in and shapers of their society.

In Pink’s case, she turns to chasing her husband’s attention by trying to become a perfect fantasy woman in an already perfected society. She is proof that the need for connection can override any other need and all reasonable thought. Her world is small, and her primary connection seems to be to her husband. She simply wants to feel wanted, and so she does what she has been programmed to do by the society she grew up in, namely, everything she possibly can in order to

be a good wife to her husband. She is the perfect picture of femininity, but her husband is a pedophile so that is not enough. She sees that he lusts after a twelve-year-old child star, so she decides to turn into the object of his lust in order to gain his attention.

Billie, however, is unburdened by issues Pink faces. She experiences femininity in an entirely different way to Pink, demonstrating how there is no singular female experience. Even though Billie and Pink share the same anatomy, they do not think and feel the same way about all aspects of their society. They are individuals with different needs and wants. Billie does not care about men at all, whereas Pink's entire identity depends on her husband's opinions and desires.

According to Tong, radical-cultural feminists believe that the only way to women's liberation is to "escape the confines of heterosexuality and create an exclusively female sexuality through celibacy, autoeroticism, or lesbianism" (Tong 3). They posit that only through companionship between women they can find true freedom from their oppressors, and so they encourage women to reject men as feasible sexual or domestic partners, claiming that women will never be able to remove themselves from the patriarchal system unless they become completely independent of men. Education and subsequent employment play a big part in the radical feminist movement, although, as previously mentioned Mrs. McMurphy's case reveals, financial independence will not in fact make women any less susceptible to men's whims as long as they depend on them for fulfillment of their romantic and sexual needs.

One major oversight on the part of radical feminists, however, is the fact that sexual preference is not and never can be a choice. Pink McMurphy cannot simply substitute her husband with another woman, no more than Billie can fall in love with just any woman.

Different people function in different ways, which is perfectly illustrated in the opposing characteristics of Billie and Pink. While the former is a self-made woman, a rebel in a corporate society whose values set her apart from the rest, the latter is as close as a woman comes to perfection by the book of patriarchal society. She is a housewife whose only purpose in life seems to be her husband's satisfaction. As the embodiment of femininity, she displays an urge to please and the need to be loved – and as such, she is a narrative foil to Billie, who demonstrates an entirely different way to experience womanhood. The glaring differences between these two characters serve to illustrate the necessity of an intersectional approach to feminism.

Additionally, technological advancement of the societies on Orbus do not offer an escape from the confines of gender and the idea of binary sex. According to Jennings,

rather than freeing women and men from those discourses dictating the terms of gender according to appearance, these have become even more rigidly fixed than before, stressing further the disparities between the physical expectations for the sexes. (137)

As mentioned earlier, women on Orbus are held to much higher standards than men. They are pressured to Fix at a younger age, whereas men get to be permanently middle-aged without being shamed for it. Rather, male age and experience are framed as attractive, while women need to hide every hint of having aged, or in some cases, of having developed mentally beyond the age of fourteen.

In other words, despite its high degree of technological development, the world is still largely phallogentric, i.e. subjected to male desire, whether or not women affected by it actually care for men's opinions. Billie's utter disregard for men does not make her exempt from having to wear make-up and dresses, or from remaining "Model Thin" (Winterson 22). The solution to the women's emancipation then is not in deepening the chasm between men and women, but dismantling the system that put it there in the first place.

Another false dichotomy that the people of Orbus are indoctrinated with is that of human versus Other. This is particularly relevant when discussing the bodily autonomy of robots. While most of the mechanical creatures in Winterson's novel are little more than highly (or sometimes not-so-highly) functional and independent machines, there is one particular kind of robot that represents a missing link between man and machine – the so-called *Robo sapiens*.

Seeing as everyone in the Central Power has been genetically modified, or, in other words, *enhanced* pre-birth, they can rightly be classified as transhuman. When it comes to celebrities and Peccadillo employees, they are even further removed from what is generally considered human. They undergo so-called macro-surgery, the results of which are people like one-legged woman with mouths in place of nipples (Winterson 20), and celebrities who are "surgically stretched to be taller" and whose "hair can do clever things like change colour to match their outfits" (16). Everyone seems quite unbothered by these changes, and if anyone deems any of those people less than human, their opinions are not brought forward in *Planet Blue*.

One thing they do seem to struggle with, however, is the concept of robots being people, too. At the beginning of the novel Billie meets Spike, one of several existing Robo *sapiens* who has incidentally been sent on a space mission in order to gather information about the newly discovered Earth-like planet. Billie interviews this robot in front of the cameras, making certain observations about Spike which showcase that Robo *sapiens* barely differ from humans in any significant way – other than their (supposed) lack of emotion. They look human, walk and talk like a human, even think in a way a highly advanced human might. Most importantly, unlike humans, Spike cannot forget anything. All in all, Robo *sapiens* appear to be equal to, or in some respect even superior to humans – and yet, Billie observes that Spike is barely treated any better than the average LoBot, cleaning robots that “have no feet because they spend all their time on their knees cleaning up” (Winterson 14). The government justifies it by claiming that Robo *sapiens* have no hearts and are therefore “heartless” (15) – implying that they have no emotions and cannot feel things the way humans do, therefore they do not warrant the same consideration when it comes to their mechanical lives.

This showcases a strictly anthropocentric view of the world, emphasizing the supremacy of humankind over other forms of life. Posthumanism, on the other hand, is defined by Francesca Ferrando as a movement which “generates out of the deconstruction of the human,” acknowledging that “numerous human beings have not been fully recognized as ‘humans,’ as proved by the history of racism, sexism and colonialism, among many other frames” (2). She goes on to add that

[p]ost-anthropocentrism enriches this ethical discussion by adding speciesism, thus suggesting that the recognition of human diversity should not stand on human supremacy, and that non-human persons (such as non-human animals and plants, as well as inorganic entities like robots) should also be granted the condition for a dignified existence. (2)

This is one point of contention that even Billie seems to struggle with in the beginning. She knows more than the rest, but has not had a chance to develop an opinion of her own when it comes to Robo *sapiens*. Instead, she starts out believing and re-iterating the Central Power’s official stance on Robo *sapiens*, which is that they are sub-human. Through her interactions with Spike, she comes to understand that the differences between humans and the Robo *sapiens* have been

greatly exaggerated. By embracing Spike as her equal, Billie abandons her anthropocentric stance and adopts a posthumanist worldview.

I is for Identities

Throughout the novel, Winterson repeatedly poses the question of what the true self really is, exploring possible answers through the experience of different characters. When Billie in *Planet Blue* says, “I is for Identity” (25), she is referring to the administrative identity – name, documents, passports and credit accounts. Once a person commits a crime bad enough to be stripped of their identity, they are referred to as X-Cits, or more informally, the Unknowns (25-26). It is said they are what is left of the Rebellion. There is no record of them ever having existed, and yet Billie mentions seeing them cleaning the streets sometimes. These people have no claim to their names, they cannot travel or buy anything, and yet they are there, and the government keeps strict track of them via micro-tags and satellites. The Unknowns are a paradox of existence, a Schrödinger’s cat left out in plain sight. Even as cast-outs they cannot escape the consequences of having been born into that society. The governmental surveillance is omnipresent and omniscient; it is a typical dystopian deity of a religion called capitalism. Perhaps even more so than that, for as Billie notes, “the satellite system [...] watches us more closely than God ever did” (Winterson 26).

The government of the Central Power is a corporation that has turned its people’s identities into an object, or rather a commodity – something that is earned through continued obedience to the state apparatus, and taken away as a form of punishment for attempted rebellion. They cannot travel without a passport; cannot even illegally emigrate due to being constantly followed by the satellites. They cannot work to earn money (or jetons, as the case may be), and are therefore left at the mercy of the state which sees them as nothing more than objects. In a way, it is a fate worse than death, as they are permanently cut off and alienated from their community, even though other people are right there, passing them by in the streets. It is yet another form of social control, a twisted form of capital punishment which allows people to continue existing, but not to continue living.

The Unknowns, however, are not the only ones whose identity is objectified on Orbus. As previously hinted, there is an entire species of hyper-intelligent, self-aware beings who are fully denied any claim of personhood – the Robo *sapiens*.

During Billie's first encounter with a Robo *sapiens* named Spike, she explains that

all information-sensitive robots are dismantled after mission, so that their data cannot be accessed by hostile forces. She's been across the universe, and now she's going to the recycling unit. The great thing about robots, even these Robo *sapiens*, is that nobody feels sorry for them. They are only machines. (Winterson 6)

The official governmental stance is that these robots have not been programmed to feel, which the government then uses to justify their demolition when the robots' existence outweighs the purpose they have been created for. Billie observes that the process of robots transferring data before being dismantled is "a kind of suicide, a kind of bleeding to death" (6). Even that early in the narrative she senses that there might be *more* to their story than it first appears. But she has not yet gotten to know Spike, and she tries to put it out of her own mind by repeating the governmental propaganda which states that, "[Robo *sapiens*] show no emotion because emotions are not part of their programming. Amazing to look so convincing and be *nothing but* silicon and a circuit-board" (Winterson 6, emphasis mine).

In order to better understand Spike's personhood and identity, it is necessary to take a closer look at the concept of cyborg. In her book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Donna Haraway defines the concept of cyborg as

a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics - the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other - the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. (150)

A cybernetic organism, then, emerges from the junction of humanity and technology, belonging to both sides while being defined by neither. In this sense, both Billie and Spike seem

to reflect Haraway's "border war" – Billie for her ability to go beyond the boundaries of humans and human-construed concepts of capitalist, racist and patriarchal culture, and Spike for her ability to go beyond the boundaries of robots and robotic qualities that exclude emotional development. In that regard both characters *responsibly* transgress boundaries and experience *pleasure* in doing so.

Billie in the first part of the novel is set apart from the rest of the society by the virtue of her nostalgic connection to the past. She lives on a farm, a place she describes as "[t]wenty hectares of pastureland and arable, with a stream running through the middle like a memory" (Winterson 11). She says it is "the last of its line – like an ancestor everyone forgot. It's a bio-dome world, secret and sealed: a message in a bottle from another time" (11). Billie also owns a real dog (as opposed to robots that have been designed specifically to replace pets), uses a notebook and pen to make notes, and is interested in the subject of history. She resists getting genetically Fixed to prevent ageing, and does whatever is in her power to cling to what is natural.

However, she cannot completely escape the intrusion of the world around her into her life. Her farm is not sustainable because nobody eats naturally grown food anymore, and so she must work elsewhere. She is constantly submerged into the current timeline, and she numbs herself to it by going through the motions, employing irony when she can, and speaking her mind when she cannot. The values that she holds are a major part of her identity, but she cannot share them with anyone for fear of being labelled a criminal and losing everything she has. This inability to be who she really is outside of her bio-dome is the root of her depression. She is alienated from the society at large, and her inability to express her values and beliefs prevents her from building new relationships and finding her own community. The only like-minded people she knows of are sweeping the streets; they are nameless and constantly surveilled by the government, and it poses too much of a risk to her little piece of paradise she has managed to carve out for herself. Thus, she remains a cog in the wheel of her corporate, totalitarian state, trapped and unable to see a way out. The only thing that can liberate her of these constraints is an intervention – and that is exactly what her meeting with Spike becomes.

Post-3 War Billie faces similar circumstances. She is a scientist who fixates on the past, only this time the past is her own. She imagines the story of her mother, the story of the time before the latest world war. Her own identity is uncertain because she does not know where her story

begins. Deeply contemplative, Billie discusses some philosophical issues with the robot head she has been working on, and whose sole purpose would be to make impartial decisions on behalf of humanity. She, too, needs an intervention – and once again, it is her connection with Spike that propels her into action, compelling her to exit the gates of Tech City.

Both Spike, the fully embodied Robo *sapiens* in *Planet Blue*, and the robot head Spike from *Post-3 War* and *Wreck City* manage to exceed the expectations set for them by the society that has created them. They breach the set boundaries by observing, learning and analyzing the knowledge they accumulate, applying their conclusions as to how they interact with the world and each other. However, as much as Billie needs Spike in order to change her life, Spike also needs Billie. In the third part of the novel, Spike learns everything from Billie. On the other hand, in Part One Spike is already well-developed before meeting Billie. Even so, her interactions with Billie are what pushes her towards further, more significant progress.

In short, the relationship between Billie and Spike in all parts of *The Stone Gods* is what changes and ultimately shapes their identities.

While aboard the spaceship bound for Planet Blue, a scene unfolds in which Spike and Billie are left alone, and Spike initiates a kiss between them. Billie is struggling with the concept of kissing a robot – as she believes (or rather is still trying to convince herself) that Spike has no emotions simply because they have not been built into her:

“Your systems are neural, not limbic. You can’t feel emotion.”
Spike said, “Human beings often display emotion they do not feel. And they often feel emotion they do not display [...] what is impossible sometimes happens.” (Winterson 62)

Spike hints at her ability to feel even though she has not been made to feel. This demonstrates her ability to change and grow, to evolve – just like a human being. She goes on to elaborate further by asking Billie

[I]s human life biology or consciousness? If I were to lop off your arms, your legs, your ears, your nose, put out your eyes, roll up your tongue, would you still be you? You locate yourself in your consciousness, and I, too, am a conscious being. (Winterson 63)

If one takes rational thinking as a defining trait of humanity, then Spike most certainly qualifies. But more so than that, Spike is a conscious being – she is aware not only of the outside

world for which she has been created to collect data from, but also of her own self. That, more than anything, gives her the right to claim some semblance of humanity. Even animals are able to perceive the world around them, and Spike may reasonably be placed several levels above that, given her capacity for data analysis. But the fact that she has grown and changed as a result of examining the data she has collected proves that she has gone above and beyond what her makers intended her to be.

By fulfilling her primary purpose of data analysis, Spike has managed to internalize the things she has observed about human beings. In fact, everything she knows she has learned through observation. Spike is the proof of the concept that technology is a neutral tool. Whether humans use that tool in a way which is good or bad is entirely up to them. Ergo, the way technology is used to surveil and control people is bad not because that is its intrinsic value, but because the intentions of those who wield it are corrupt.

Haraway also suggests that “[f]eminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control” (175). Spike herself observes for the sake of learning, which is what science is truly about – to learn and evolve, to fix mistakes and avoid making the same ones again. It then follows that identity cannot be controlled or pre-determined, for it does not come from what one is made to be, but rather from what they choose to do with what they are given. It is that choice, the exercise of free will, that makes Spike as human as Billie is. Her ability to feel is just a consequence that has evolved from those choices.

Spike has managed to evolve traits that are not meant to be part of her system through free will, but has also gone on to reject the parts of the system that are built into her. She is a robot built in the likeness of a woman, but that does not mean she is one. Gender is not inherent to Spike, it does not come from within. It is a constraint thrust upon her by the system that has made her. She is a woman by the virtue of perception, because her anatomy mimics that of a biologically born female.

In *Planet Blue*, Spike states that “[g]ender is a human concept, and not interesting” (Winterson 76). She does not define herself by what humans want her to be, and yet it does not seem to matter all that much, for humans choose to see her as what she has been constructed to look like. Her intelligence is beyond comparison, and yet she is not hailed as an exceptional conversationalist. Men use her for sex during her first expedition to Planet Blue, and that is

precisely the reason she has been made to look like a woman, regardless of the fact that “inter-species sex is punishable by death” (Winterson 18). Her purpose is not only to analyze data, but to double as a sentient sex-toy for the men on board. Her self-identification means something only when she starts to get closer to Billie, who, though resistant to the idea at first, grows to accept her for who she is, rather than for what she is designed to be. It is this moment that marks Billie’s shift towards posthumanism.

Pink McMurphy, however, falls too far behind when it comes to adopting a posthumanist perspective. She asks repeatedly, “[i]sn’t she a robot?” whenever Captain Handsome expresses affection toward Spike (Winterson 48-57). There are several layers to Pink’s inability to comprehend this idea. Firstly, as previously discussed, she has not been educated adequately so that she could develop critical thought. More importantly, however, she is not receptive of the idea of a free-forming identity as hers is not intrinsic, but relational. As demonstrated in her interview with Billie, Pink cares about nothing other than her husband. Even her interest in celebrities stems from her husband’s interest in Little Señorita. All she wants is to please him, to have his attention and affection. She can never disagree with him without running a risk of losing what little of him she has. For that reason, even if she were capable of self-reflection and of considering a different point of view, she would not be able to commit to it fully as long as she relies on her husband’s approval.

Michael Korda’s observation that “[men] don’t as a rule hate [women].... They just don’t want to know anything about them” is proved to be true in the case of Mr. McMurphy (qtd. in Russ 9). When Billie tracks him down to ask his opinion on his wife’s genetic reversal to a twelve-year-old, he says, “Yeah, whatever she wants. I’m behind her all the way. Her choice. I believe that women should make their own choices. Whatever she wants, all the way” (Winterson 26). He is supportive of her doing whatever she wants because it caters to his sexual fantasies, but his detached behavior points to the fact that he has nothing to lose. He is already free to do whatever he wants outside of his house. He does not really care how his wife feels about it, as long as what she feels keeps her in her place, the place he chooses for her, which is right below him. Men need women because their masculinity is dependent on being adored like gods that they see themselves as, and exploitation of female bodies is something they consider themselves entitled to. As Joanna Russ argues,

women are drafted as a permanent class of worshippers. Under the hatred and fear of women evident in the myth there is, I believe, a desperate appeal for collusion – the male victory ... is abjectly dependent on the female reaction. Without the women's adoration, the men's genitals are not sacred or impressive but only a means to male sensual enjoyment. (9)

In other words, women in a patriarchal society are nothing more than a vehicle for male pleasure; they cannot be subjects in their own right. They need only speak when praise of man's ego is demanded. Men seek to alienate women from their own bodies in order to possess them. This is the reason why heterosexual women seem to be the gateway to keeping a firm structure within society. Men need to be worshipped, and straight women are a part of the population most eager to do so. In Pink's case, she has been brainwashed into thinking she is not good enough, and is therefore constantly striving to achieve a new level of perfection in order to please. All she asks in return is to be loved back, and when her husband denies her appeals, she readily assumes it is her own fault. Heterosexuality is her prison, and her hunger for love and approval makes her a perpetrator of the system that is the source of her misery. Leaving her husband is not an option for Pink not only because she believes she loves him, but because her self-identification relies too heavily on him; for who is Mary if she is neither Pink nor Mrs. McMurphy?

While aboard the *Resolution*, Handsome and Spike explain that in order to inhabit Planet Blue, they must first find a way to remove dinosaurs because they are “an early evolutionary species, human beings are a late evolutionary species. We can't cohabit” (Winterson 50), which prompts Pink to come to an unexpectedly profound conclusion: “I think that's what's wrong with my marriage” (50). She recognizes that she and her husband are so different they might as well be different species. While Billie and Spike definitely *are* that, it does not prevent them from falling in love because they recognize the self in the other. Pink cannot do the same with her husband – she has no self to mirror that is not already a product of his imagination. Pink is looking for love and affection in the wrong place, but has had no chance to notice that as long as she is fully submerged in the way things function within the society of Orbus. Things are not completely different aboard the spaceship, but they all feel removed from it enough to at least be honest and open with each other. Far from the cameras and social consequences that come with transgressions within the system, they are finally able to consider aspects of their lives and identities free of fear. For Pink McMurphy, this might be the first time ever that she has even considered herself as a person, and not a vehicle for her husband's desires. In a roundabout way, Pink's story shows there

can be no love between two people if there is inequality; and it is also why Billie's change of perspective allows her to love Spike to the point of intervention.

Motherhood & Abandonment

Another aspect of identity in the novel evolves around the concept of motherhood. In the third part of the novel, titled *Post-3 War*, Billie tells her origin story. The chapter opens with the narrator finding a copy of *The Stone Gods*, which, as Van der Wiel points out, strongly suggest authorial self-narration. Winterson once again comes back to "the same deeply traumatic story of impossible love between an unwanted child and her red-haired teenage mother that [she] has been trying to tell all her life" (204). It is a story of rejection with a twist – Billie is abandoned by her mother twenty-eight days after her birth, but she comes back for her child once the adoption papers have already been signed. According to Reina Van der Wiel, that instance alone makes this story different from other Winterson's stories of adoption, as it "gets rewritten in a way that makes it perhaps less difficult to come to terms with" (205).

Billie's adoptive parents are not mentioned; there is no resentment, only sorrow and an empty space that Billie tries to fill in with something that will never come. She sums up the crux of this story in the following passage: "You never stop looking. That's what I found, though it took me years to know that's what I've been doing. The person whose body I was, whose body was me, vanished after twenty-eight days. I live in an echo of another life" (Winterson 149).

The way in which the account of her abandonment gets cut off in favor of describing the totalitarian regime that rules the Post-3 War era signals repression of Billie's trauma. The origin story full of missing parts and a pervasive sense of melancholy, when faced with Billie's reality of life in a world after the nuclear war, begins to resemble a dream. It is likely nothing more than a story that she tells herself in order to make peace with the trauma of being abandoned; however, it is just as likely a picture of the pre-war society that Billie remembers. It reveals a deeper social issue that has played a major part in creating, or rather causing Billie's fragmented identity. Her mother did not necessarily leave her because she did not love her. Rather, the opposite may be true – although it was hard, and she changed her mind and came back for her once, ultimately Billie's mother left her because she loved her. She knew she could not give her everything a child needs to grow up happy and healthy, and so she gave her up, hoping that someone else would. In a capitalist society, her mother's lack of money was an unforgivable sin.

If the continued survival of the species is to be placed on women's backs, then there ought to be a system in place that would help them in raising children they birthed. Billie's mother, abandoned by her husband and too poor despite being a hard worker, had to give Billie up for adoption. She is abandoned by the society and is thus forced to abandon her child.

Billie in *Planet Blue* fixates on the history of humanity, whereas Billie in *Post-3 War* struggles with the concept of being cut off from her own history. The story of her mother is no stranger than the stories of different worlds that Captain Handsome tells in the first part of the novel. When she says, "It will be better. Better to begin again" (Winterson 124), it is an echo of the deep-seated human desire for a clean break, a new start unburdened by the failures of their past.

Birth, adoption, or a new world – Winterson's narrative offers many iterations of a fresh start; though it is rarely, if ever, a true break with the past. It is a fact Billie is acutely aware of in every incarnation. Contemplating her mother's pregnancy and her own birth, she says

She did what she could – she gave me a chance at life [...] Twice turned out – once from the womb-world, once from her, and for ever – banishment became its narrative equivalent, a story I could tell. But because of this I know that inside the story told is the story that cannot be told. Every word written is a net to catch the word that has escaped. (127)

Watkins posits that pregnancy, as presented from the point of view of an unborn child, can be read as a kind of colonization of a woman's body (125), drawing a direct parallel between Billie's story of adoption and the larger, overarching narrative of global collapse.

When Pink says in *Planet Blue*, "Women are just planets that attract the wrong species" (57), she is merely lamenting her failed marriage; however, the image of women's bodies as planets lingers. Orbus had been colonized, used up, and drained of resources. Then, once it started to "develop in a way that is hostile to human life," it was abandoned altogether (Winterson 7). After giving birth to Billie, her mother is left ravaged by the consequences of her pregnancy. And Orbus, having hosted human life for several millennia, is suffering the consequences in much the same way, shouldering the blame for what humanity did to it. Even Pink's story fits into this parable – her husband discards her in favor of young girls, having already gotten all he could have from her. Similarly, humans decide to abandon Orbus the moment they encounter Planet Blue, leaving the home they destroyed behind for a "better looking", "life-sustaining" planet.

The novel ends with Billie getting shot, and instead of reaching for light at the end of the tunnel, she sees her mother standing at the gate of her house, smiling, waiting for Billie to join her. Her story comes a full circle: death is a sort of homecoming, a return – perhaps even a new beginning.

Entropy, Repetition & Intervention

This chapter will focus on the concepts of entropy and repetition in Winterson’s novel, examining how it manifests, what it signifies and how it is relevant to the question of feminist issues in the futuristic societies of *The Stone Gods*. The goal is to expose the underlying mechanisms at the basis of most gendered inequalities, and to examine possible interventions proposed by the text.

As previously stated, people on Orbus are beautiful and young, and most are genetically Fixed (i.e. they never show signs of growing old) at such a young age that they are almost immortal. The appetites of men, however, are hardly satisfied by that. Since the legal age for fixing is fourteen, men have decided they like their women even younger. When Billie sees ten-year-old twins in the Jacuzzi with a sexual predator, she says, “We buy them. We wouldn't do it to kids born in the Central Power because (a) it's illegal and (b) we're civilized” (Winterson 23). There is a strong sense of irony that belies Billie’s words, and it reveals just how right Billie is when she observes that “bio-tech has created as many problems as it has fixed” (47). It is one moment among many in which a typical utopian dream of everlasting youth and immortality is revealed to be a dystopian nightmare. No matter how perfect women get, men will ask for something better – and the system will provide. Human desire for transgression is an overwhelming urge, and the scene in the Jacuzzi is the one that embodies the essence of the state of entropy. As defined by Larsen, entropy is “a measure of the disorder in systems, or their tendency toward disorder” (515). Peccadillo functions as a form of disruption of all pretenses of normality, which is what the state of entropy is really all about – i.e. “a mixed, disordered, indiscriminate, heterogeneous dis-unity” (Jackson 73).

During her visit to the Peccadillo (a place where people go to satisfy their unnatural and illegal sexual desires), Billie’s chat with the bouncer brings up the implication that soon enough even pedophilia will be normalized. In this particular set of circumstances, pedophilia is framed as an inevitable consequence of a very sanitized version of society where there is nothing transgressive

about regular human bodies. But is it really inevitable that men should turn towards children once they are surrounded by perfect women? Or is this simply a consequence of being a part of the social class that calls all the shots?

Pink McMurphy rationalizes her husband's pedophilia, claiming that "[h]e's just sentimental. When we go shopping, he always likes to go to the toy store. Men, y'know, they don't grow up – it makes sense that they like girls" (Winterson 58). It is precisely this kind of gender essentialism that radical feminists employ, but it is counterproductive to women's liberation. It makes victims of women, and bullies out of men.

This is problematic on three different levels. First, if men are simply born that way, if it is something in their genes that makes them male and that is also simultaneously encoded with aggression and destructive urges, then they are absolved of all moral condemnation for their deeds. One cannot be held responsible for something that is simply in their nature. Secondly, it makes women perpetual victims, which both prevents them from reclaiming the power that the patriarchal system takes away, and also makes it unimaginable that a woman could ever enact violence upon another. Finally, it also does disservice to those men who face consequences of their actions head on; men who are honest and kind and do not wish to harm anyone but are aware that the system is rigged in their favor. Those men are women's allies, but this essentialist, black-and-white view of gender differences denies their very existence.

This kind of apologism belies the lack of critical thinking, not only on Pink's part, but on a larger, societal level. The people of Orbus are largely unable to differentiate between right and wrong. Their inertia is a consequence of mass illiteracy and constant surveillance; they have become somewhat complacent when it comes to relying on their own judgment. However, one cannot deny that the actions of men are largely driven by their desires, fueled by the system that has taught them to take whatever it is that they want, and to take it right now. Boes and Marshall argue that "human beings in the new epoch can no longer simply be defined [...] as acting upon the natural world. Instead, they must also be described as being acted upon by that same world on an ontological, rather than merely existential, level" (61). That is to say, humans on Orbus are merely adapting to the circumstances that the system perpetuates, and as the curators of this system are those who hold all the social and economic capital – namely men – it makes sense that their world turns into a dystopia. Everything men want becomes available to them in one way or another,

because the system works in their favor. It is merely fate, a cycle of systemic entropy. Something significant must happen to shake the wheel and push it off its charted course – an endless cycle of repetition demands an intervention.

The way humans tend to imagine an intervention is an apocalypse. As Winterson demonstrates at the very start of *The Stone Gods*, a new beginning in human imagination is inextricably linked with the current world ending. Orbus is dying, or rather “evolving in a way that is hostile to human life” (Winterson 7). A catastrophic end is re-imagined as a new beginning, and the apocalypse is reframed as “a notion of an absolute break with the past: a hypothetical point in time when the human condition irrevocably change[s]” (Boes and Marshall 62). However, Winterson’s novel is full of clues and metaphors that point to the fact that the way humans imagine a clean break with the past is precisely what keeps them trapped in this cycle of repetition.

Using excerpts from Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Captain Cook’s diaries, lines of Donne’s poetry and many references to the stories of promised lands and new worlds, Winterson creates a powerful leitmotif whose function is reinforcing that sense of repetition and inscribing her novel with messages of past and future, connecting the narrative levels into a beautiful, yet strange semiotic web.

While aboard the *Resolution*, Handsome tells many different stories, all of them focused on the same final message. Their world is, as he says, “[a] repeating world – same old story” (Winterson 49). He mentions planets he has seen on his space travels that he believes used to be just like Orbus – homes to highly developed societies that advanced until they inevitably self-destructed. In particular, he talks about Planet White, “as white and cold as death, [...] as hot as rage. The planet is a raging death” (51). It is a planet he believes humans inhabited and abandoned prior to moving to the red planet, which is what he calls Orbus. Spike does not agree with his theories, claiming that “there is no evidence for that” (55). Still, his words are strangely poetic, and they serve to prove his point when Billie demands to know if the stories he tells are true. He replies: “All stories are true. It’s the facts that mislead” (64). His answer calls to mind the old Jewish proverb that poses the question “What is truer than truth?” The answer is, stories. It refers to oral culture, how stories were used to educate younger generations, to teach them history and customs of their people and, in doing so, taught them not only their past, but their future, too. What Handsome is really saying is that dismissing stories on the basis of them being untrue puts one in

danger of missing many important lessons they were meant to teach, and thus makes it easy for humans to repeat the mistakes of their forefathers.

Handsome's statement hits right at the center of the problem brought up by the anthropocentric notion of a complete break with the past – it cannot be done without risking the repetition of history. And yet, if his theory about the repeating worlds is right, that is exactly what humans have been doing.

Winterson's novel puts a dystopian spin on what is already quite a negative philosophy, centered around endless repetition caused by utter disregard for history. But Handsome tells another story, this time of a young man who makes one fatal mistake and driven by his guilt decides to commit suicide. Before he pulls the trigger, he says: "If I had known that all that I have done would lead me to this, I would have led a very different life. If I could live my life again I would not be here, with the trigger in my hand and the barrel at my head" (Winterson 66). An angel hears his plea and grants him his wish: "In full knowledge of what you have become, go back and begin again" (66). This same scenario is then repeated several times, for the man, with full knowledge of what has happened before, ends up committing the same crime all over again. The story paints a rather bleak picture of humanity if taken literally, but as a metaphor it is an accurate one.

Irrespective of entropy visible in all the worlds and planets in Winterson's novel, the only real way out lies in the "intervention" – a powerful disruption of the cycle of repetition. The intervention is realised through one consistent element that stands out in every part of the novel, and that is the emotional connection shared by Billie and Spike. In *Planet Blue*, Billie struggles with the concept of being attracted to a robot, even if Spike does look like a "drop-dead gorgeous" woman (Winterson 28). Her doubts stem from internalizing government propaganda on Robo *sapiens*, as she had never before been in close contact with one of them. During Spike's final interview before she is meant to be dismantled, Billie begins to form an emotional connection with Spike. Her initial attraction to a person she perceives as a woman but believes to be emotionless machine slowly morphs into genuine feelings once they are on board the *Resolution*. Spike explains how, having learned from the world and people around her, she has managed to evolve the ability to feel, going above and beyond of what the scientists who made her intended. But even more than her ability to experience and express emotions, Spike points out that all of them, be they Homo or Robo *sapiens*, locate themselves in their consciousness (63). It is not about what makes

them different, but rather about everything they have in common. Spike may not be human, but ultimately Billie falls in love with her for who she is as a person.

There is a moment between Spike's attempt at seducing Billie and Billie's acceptance of her advances, and it is in that moment that Billie comes to the realization that

[e]very second the Universe divides into possibilities and most of those possibilities never happen. It is not a uni-verse – there is more than one reading. The story won't stop, can't stop, it goes on telling itself, waiting for *an intervention* that changes what will happen next. *Love* is an intervention. Hand over hand, beginning the descent of you. Hand over hand, too fast, like my heartbeat. This is the way down, the cliff, the cave. No safety, no certainty of return. (Winterson 68, emphasis mine)

Once she gets past her reservations, Billie is able to fully embrace Spike as an equal, recognizing her humanity. Spike makes a bid for connection with Billie, and Billie responds, marking the final step in becoming truly posthuman. Their last conversation before death is about their respective definitions of love. For Billie, it is many things: recognition, discovery, sacrifice, treasure (90). For Spike it is one thing only:

“I think it's the chance to be human.”

“Human? You make us sound almost worthwhile.”

“One day you will be. Feel.”

She took my hand and put it against her chest. I rested my hand there, silent, listening, wondering. Then I felt it. Then I felt it beating.

“What?”

“My heart.” (Winterson 90)

Love as an intervention is what the crux of the narrative comes down to. Love is not imprisoned within the constraints of a body. It is an alternative to destruction, a force that can challenge fate. It is only through caring about each other that humans can change their world, and break away from mistakes of their past without repeating them.

Conclusion

In about two hundred pages, Winterson tackles many prominent modern feminist issue. She presents various aspects of bodily autonomy and all the ways in which patriarchal society violates it, rejecting the tenets of diet culture and the cult of youth. She subverts the expectations

of heteronormative gender essentialism, and builds a strong case for basing one's identity on consciousness instead of any particular body part. Most importantly, she presents love as a strong and viable alternative to destruction, be it self-imposed or external.

The Stone Gods does not shy away from the uglier parts of humanity, but rather meets them head on, offering alternatives not by simply telling what is wrong with society, but by showing how genuine human connection can help fix it. It shows that fate often is not something pre-determined, but rather a product of an underlying system at work, implying that humanity need not necessarily be heading for self-destruction. Rather, what manifests as self-destructive impulses may merely be a symptom of systemic corruption.

The Stone Gods is a dystopian novel that, with all its tragedies, does not entrench itself in misery and doom, but rather turns towards hope. With various excerpts from other stories woven into it, it is at once a strange and hopeful love letter to both humanity and literature.

Most importantly, with this novel Winterson proposes love as an intervention, as a force capable of breaking the cycles of abuse and destruction, giving us hope that in the end, we can still save this world, and each other.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the ways in which Winterson depicts and eventually unveils the mechanism behind most modern feminist issues. Using repetition as a literary device, but also as a major motif, Winterson builds *The Stone Gods* into a multi-layered exploration of the challenges of womanhood, history and fate. This metatextual novel contains multitudes, tightly interwoven and virtually inextricable, centering the human condition as a driving force of the *perpetuum mobile* that is our universe. This reading is focused mainly on what is, in this dystopian utopia, considered to be Other – be it women, queer people, or robots – and their fight to rip away from the centrifugal force that keeps the world turning in an endless cycle of forgetting history and repeating it. The novel itself posits that the world these characters live in is “a repeating world” – the entire course of human history happens again and again, and humans keep repeating the same mistakes. It paints a rather bleak picture of humanity and, on the surface, makes it look like it is simply human nature not to learn anything from past mistakes and to eventually self-destruct. Through her carefully constructed narrative, however, Winterson reveals that fate might not be what it seems, and that there is a way to break the chain of suffering. Entropy presented in the novel can be broken by forming the bonds that are the ultimate core of the story, the only thing capable of breaking the pattern of self-destruction - human love.

KEY WORDS: *The Stone Gods*, Jeanette Winterson, feminism, bodily autonomy, identity, entropy