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Wastelands and Wasted Lives in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

Abstract: This work investigates Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) in order to show how the author questions the environmental exploitation of nature in connection to the exploitation of racial others, such as the poor, robots and women. The analysis is carried out in terms of ecofeminist theories and environmental justice conceptualisations. Winterson's novel focuses on exploitative systems that devalue nature and socially underprivileged humans who have greater risks of exposition to environmentally degraded spaces. In her novel, waste is caused by careless and greedy human activities, which undervalue both the importance of the environment as well as the role and survival of other people. For the purpose of this work, the focus of this textual analysis is on the wasting of natural resources and of human/nonhuman beings.

Keywords: *eco-narrative, dystopia, environmental justice, ecological modernisation, wasted lives, degradation*

The Stone Gods (2007)

Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* is a post-apocalyptic, ecofeminist, dystopian novel describing three non-linear worlds in which government and society take on strong masculine roles that damage both people and their surrounding environment. By providing redemptive models and alternatives, Winterson's novel confirms the dystopian corrective function of idealized societies. *The Stone Gods* was labelled as a feminist critical dystopia, which, to a certain degree, hides a utopia within its structure:

> For many contemporary women writers, the use of utopian and/or dystopian elements has become a preferred mode of interrogating current systems of oppression and violence while offering visions of resistance and possible (future) alternatives ... Jeanette Winterson's recent foray into utopian/dystopian narrative presents a polemical critique of our present self-destructive impulses (via environmental and genocidal disasters) alongside a poetic elegy for an unrecoverable (pastoral) past while articulating the utopian dream of a redeemable future. As such, *The Stone Gods* (2007) is a relevant example of critical dystopia....[1]

Although men have largely dominated the dystopian genre, feminist dystopian novels have been around for a long time as many scholars have aptly pointed out.[2] One of the oldest examples is *The Last Man* written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley in 1826. Furthermore, two other novels, written a

[1] Hope Jennings, "'A Repeating World': Redeeming the Past and Future in the Utopian Dystopia of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*", *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, 27.2 (Fall 2010), 132-133.

[2] Sarah Lefanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1989); Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Lucie Armitt, ed., *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Marleen S. Barr, *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987).

century later, described a dystopian society ruled by men, in which women were reduced to their biological functions: *Man's World* by Charlotte Haldane (1927) and *Swastika Night* by Katharine Burdekin (1937). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Winterson is not a writer in the field of dystopias, as her previous novels are mainly written from feminist and postmodernist perspectives. She recurs to the genre in order to explore several topics, ranging from social to ecological issues, leading to the world destruction. *The Stone Gods* creates alternative communities of humans and robots that actively challenge and oppose the dominant (patriarchal) ruling system. Indeed, as Franková asserts:

> Winterson's dystopia resonates both with Lyotard's theorizing 'techno-scientists' as authoritarian and with ecologists' critique of the loss of unity of humans and nature. What is more, Winterson joins the contemporary ethical ecological debate head on, undisguised by the dystopian fantasy. On the contrary, her experimental, postmodern treatment of time, in this dystopia time permeable through millennia and interplanetary space, aids the urgency of her arguments by reinforcing the repetitiveness of human hubris and folly.[3]

[3] Milada Franková, "Dystopian Transformations: Post-Cold War Dystopian Writing by Women", *Brno Studies in English,* 39.1 (2013), 221.

The Stone Gods explores and challenges several hierarchical dualisms such as dominant/subordinate, men/women, human/nature through a focus on human and environmental waste. When Winterson was asked whether her novel was a political and ecological piece of writing, she claimed that:

> I have said many times that I believe our time to be unique in the history of the world. Either we face our environmental challenges now, or many of us will perish, and much of what we cherish in civilisation will be destroyed. I am sorry to sound apocalyptic, but this is what I believe. *Stone Gods* isn't a pamphlet or a docu-drama or even a call to arms, it is first and foremost a work of fiction, but I am sure that change of any kind starts in the self, not in the State, and I am sure that when we challenge ourselves imaginatively, we then use that challenge in our lives. I want *The Stone Gods* to be a prompt, but most of all, a place of possibility.[4]

[4] Jeanette Winterson quoted in Susana Onega, "The Trauma Paradigm and the Ethics of Affect in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*", in Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau, eds., *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 275.

The Stone Gods is the first and only work of science fiction written by Winterson so far. Although many critics seem not to consider it as science fiction, Winterson herself declared that:

> People say to me, 'so is *The Stone Gods* science fiction?' Well, it is fiction, and it has science in it, and it is set (mostly) in the future, but the labels are meaningless. I can't see the point of labelling a book like a pre-packed supermarket meal. There are books worth reading and books not worth reading. That's all.[5]

[5] Https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/jan/28/science-fiction-genre, accessed 2 July 2014.

Even if Winterson objects to labels, her novel makes use of a number of recognisable technicalities of the SF genre.[6] First of all, settings (in the future, in space, on a different or alternative world, in a different universe or dimension); secondly, non-human characters (e.g. robots); thirdly, references to science and technology (e.g. to scientific theories and technological advances, imagining or describing the consequences of both scientific and technological developments); fourthly, dystopia; fifthly, allegory (reference to distant locations, such as Easter Island).

The Stone Gods consists of three seemingly independent narratives reaching a time span over several centuries. The first chapter compares the condition of the dying planet Orbus with the new Planet Blue. The second chapter is set in the 18th century and explores how humans sacrifice nature for their meaningless cultural practices, the third and the fourth chapters focus on differences between the industrial Tech City and its alternative old-fashioned Wreck City.

The Stone Gods takes its title from the Easter Island statues[7] and this reference invites us to consider the wider point of humans not learning from their mistakes. It is a clear reference to the anthropogenic destruction of the ecology of Easter Island and the resulting death of its civilization. Easter Island, indeed, is systematically damaged for illogical reasons to the point it is no longer habitable and it becomes a wasteland. In Winterson's novel, the stories are interconnected by the common theme of human greed and irresponsible economic and anti-ecological behaviour that reduce both disadvantaged people and over-exploited environments to waste.

The Stone Gods explores a variety of topics, including technology, scientific advancement, global warming, pollution, capitalism, colonisation and war. However, the most important topic is that of the danger of technology and its devastating consequences of the wasting of natural resources and human beings. Winterson criticises the way in which humanity has become reliant on technology as, despite making life easier for humans, it reduces, in the end, both people and their surrounding environment to degradation. Her novel deals with the representation of destruction, degradation and waste in every chapter. Indeed, Winterson herself acknowledged that "I was heading towards a gigantic break down when I wrote this book. There is a death at the end of each section".[8]

Technology vs. Environment: Waste, Wastelands and Wasted Lives

The first chapter of the novel introduces readers to the dying planet Orbus. On this planet there is an advanced technological society characterised by body perfection, sexual freedom, no aging, no government, corporation control and *Robo Sapiens*. Planet Orbus was essentially destroyed and reduced to a

[6] For further reading on the SF genre, see Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds., *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Marleen S. Barr, ed., *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism* (Lanham, DM: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

[7] Easter Island (*Isla de Pascua* in Spanish and *Rapa Nui* in Polynesian) is located between Chile's west coast and Tahiti in the South Pacific Ocean. This Island is famous for its enigmatic giant stone statues or *Moai* whose oversized heads, carved centuries ago, reflect the history of the dramatic rise and fall of the most isolated Polynesian culture.

[8] Http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/book/the-stone-gods/, accessed 3 July 2014.

wasteland because of human greed that led to its exploitation and destruction. This reference is clear when Billie and her boss, Manfred, talk about the planet: "But Orbus is dying." "Orbus is not dying. Orbus is evolving in a way that is hostile to human life." "OK, so it's the planet's fault. We didn't do anything, did we? Just fucked it to death and kicked it when it wouldn't get up".[9]

[9] Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 10. All further references to this edition.

Technology was not sensibly used as it only represented a means of gaining more and more wealth in the hands of few powerful people. These powerful people are the ones who then decide to leave and find, or colonise, another planet in the hope for a better future. The discovery of Planet Blue represents, indeed, a new opportunity to start again. However, Winterson questions the idea of space colonisation, thus highlighting the ecological and cultural consequences of conquering other countries or spaces. On the one hand, she criticises the ruling power hegemony, on the other, she offers us alternative spaces (and communities), which can resist and oppose the dominant ruling power.

Winterson attempts to show that no matter how hard mankind tries to live in harmony with the surrounding environment, it will always end up in the same way, that is "either we kill each other or we kill the planet or both. We'd destroy the lot rather than make it work" (240). These themes of perpetual and recurring degradation and destruction are showed through the example of the two human civilisations that, despite being sixty-five million years apart, are virtually the same.

The Stone Gods exemplifies Winterson's vision of technology. Despite the utopian merits of considering technology as a means of progress and civilisation, she suggests that in the end, technology turns out to be a repressive tool in the hands of those who control it and it may ultimately damage both people and the environment.

As stated above, throughout the novel, Winterson seems to promote environmental justice in a variety of ways. For instance, the author makes several references to the role of ecological modernisation, which is often bound to nationalist discourses based on a regional sense of superiority. Ecological modernisation is the interplay of ecology and economy whose environmental practices are aimed at attempting to calculate and prevent potential harm rather than clean it up later. This theory is bound to nationalist discourses that presume a regional sense of superiority, which leads to claims of ownership over natural resources. Ecological modernisation can be applied as a theoretical concept to analyse those changes to the central institutions deemed necessary to solve ecological crisis and, from a more pragmatic perspective, as a political programme to redirect environmental policymaking.[10] According to David Harvey, however, ecological modernisation is a "discourse that can rather too easily be corrupted into yet another discursive representation of dominant forms

[10] For further reading, see Joseph Murphy, "Ecological Modernisation", *Geoforum,* 31 (2000), 1-8.

of economic power" and it can also "be conveniently used to make claims on behalf of major governments and corporations for their exclusive and technologically advanced management of all the world's resources".[11] This is exactly what happens in Winterson's novel where we find discourses of nationalism and regionalism interweaved with the environmental discourse of ecological modernisation.

[11] David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 382.

An example of how Winterson engages on discourses of ecological modernisation is through Manfred's justification of the Central Power in claiming that "[t]he Central Power is trying to live responsibly on a crowded planet, and that bunch are still scanning the skies for God, and draining the last drops of oil out of the ground. They can go to Hell" (7-8). Manfred's statement implies a sense of superiority and provides hints to the construction of 'otherness'. This is more clearly evident when later on Manfred calls people from the other regions (the SinoMosco Pact and the Eastern Caliphate) "out-of-control lunatics" uninterested in global responsibility (31). In other words, the Central Power is the only party interested in ecological modernisation that leaves the 'other' regions to out-dated modes of living. This sense of superiority reinforces their sense of nationalism through the achievement of ecological modernisation, which, in Winterson's opinion, cannot be successful unless it takes into account the true principles of environmental justice.

In this part of the novel, the concept of the wasting of human beings and of the environment is very clear. The over-exploitation of natural resources has made Central Power richer and more powerful, thus allowing them to finance the space mission to find a new planet to colonise and, eventually, exploit. When Central Power finally finds it, they announce the determination to leave the poor Eastern Caliphate and SinoMosco Pact on the dying planet:

> This is a great day for science. The last hundred years have been hell. The doomsters and the environmentalists kept telling us we were as good as dead and, hey presto, not only do we find a new planet, but it is perfect for new life. This time, we'll be more careful. This time we will learn from our mistakes. The new planet will be home to the universe's first advanced civilization. It will be a democracy ... because whatever we say in public, the Eastern Caliphate isn't going to be allowed within a yatto-mile of the place. We'll shoot 'em down before they land. No, we won't shoot them down, because the President of the Central Power has just announced a new world programme of No War. We will not shoot down the Eastern Caliphate, we will robustly repel them.The way the thinking is going in private, we'll leave this run-down rotting planet to the Caliphate and the SinoMosco Pact, and they can bomb each other to paste while the peace-loving folks of the Central Power ship civilization to the new world. (31)

Although the concept of waste generates an ethics of responsibility, this is not the case for the Central Power, which besides exploiting the environment and racial others (including the poor), charge the Caliphate and the SinoMosco Pact for the depletion of the planet. Billie, however, replies that the waste of the planet is the Central Power's fault and that others are only following what they did first. Furthermore, when Spike joins in the conversation and claims that it is too late to care for the planet, Manfred angrily answers:

> 'It is never too late!' ... 'That's delusional, depressive and anti-science. We have the best weather-shield in the world. We have slowed global warming. We have stabilized emissions. We have drained rising sea levels, we have replanted forests, we have synthesized food, ending centuries of harmful farming practices,' he glares at me again, 'we have neutralized acid rain, we have permanent refrigeration around the ice-caps, we no longer use oil, gasoline or petroleum derivatives. What more do you want?'. (24)

Spike simply replies that she does not want anything as she is a robot. This statement reinforces the idea that the degradation and exploitation of the planet was carried out by humans for human greed.

The Central Power's superiority also recalls discourses of imperialism and hegemony. In *The Stone Gods*, characters belong to a constructed hierarchy on the basis of their economic class status, which determines who has access to the new planet. Power relations are clearly evident in the way the Central Power leads the negotiation for the colonisation of the new planet and one of the most striking examples can be seen in their speech when they assert that:

> The new planet offers us the opportunity to do things differently. We've had a lot of brilliant successes here on Orbus – well, we are the success story of the universe, aren't we? ... But we have taken a few wrong turnings. Made a few mistakes. We have limited natural resources at our disposal, and a rising population that is by no means in agreement as to how our world as a whole should share out these remaining resources. Conflict is likely. A new planet means that we can begin to redistribute ourselves. It will mean a better quality of life for everyone − the ones who leave and the ones who stay. (4-5)

This statement is a clear example of how a utopian image is used to justify colonisation by highlighting a bright new future to the masses and avoid opposition towards the mission. Furthermore, to avoid any accusation of potential violence associated with the colonisation mission, the Central Power states that "[m]onsters will be humanely destroyed, with the possible exception of scientific capture of one or two types for the Zooeum" (5). The extermination of local inhabitants, no matter whether they are human or nonhuman, as long as they can be hostile to modern 'civilised' life, is generally accepted as necessary

for the survival of the superior species, that is a certain white Western capitalist society. Moreover, the term 'monsters' refers to the dinosaurs that inhabit the planet. This is an example of how Winterson deals with discourses of animal rights and environment, thus denoting the negative effects of colonisation. It is strange to find the two words 'humanely destroyed' together as if the local (colonised) inhabitants of the new planet (dinosaurs) will benefit from this human colonisation and some of them, indeed, will be granted living for humans' entertainment purposes. As Gerrard notes, zoos "distort our perception of animals" and serve the function of "a spectacle of imperial or neocolonial power".[12] This message is also clearly exemplified through Spike's statement that "[t]here are many kinds of life. Humans always assumed that theirs was the only kind that mattered. That's how you destroyed your planet" (65-66). The implications of such a statement should not be underestimated, as it implies a critique of environmental justice through anthropocentrism, which could either include humans only or also nonhumans.

[12] Greg Gerrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 150.

Winterson's critique of imperialism and its impact on both people and their surrounding environment can also be viewed through her choice of the narrator's name, *Billie Crusoe.* There is an overt reference to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where the dualism between human and nature is explored. Among the many interpretations of the meaning of Defoe's story, Louis James acknowledges that:

> The modern shift from a romantic view of Crusoe to a hostile reassessment of Defoe's story began as early as 1857, when Marx in the *Grundisse* pointed out that although Crusoe had been taken as a model of the return to a 'natural' life, the story was, in fact, in stark opposition to the basic state of mankind, which is a communal one. Crusoe's acquisitive individualism pits him against any ideal of a natural community. Instead of being in communion with nature, Crusoe wishes to possess and exploit his environment.[13]

[13] Louis James, "Unwrapping Crusoe: Retrospective and Prospective Views", in Lieve Spaas and Brian Stimpson, eds., *Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 4.

In line with Defoe's character, Crusoe, Winterson's novel provides us with a hint to the system of global capitalism, which creates an unequal distribution of wealth and environmental degradation deeply affecting the lower or poor classes. In this respect, there is an interesting passage in her novel when Manfred claims:

> We need infrastructure, buildings, services. If I'm going to live on a different planet, I want to do it properly. I want shops and hospitals. I'm not a pioneer. I like city life, like everyone likes city life. The Central Power believes that the biggest obstacle to mass migration will be setting up the infrastructure in time. We can't go back to the Bog Ages. (32)

It is clear from this passage that nobody seems to like the idea of living on a

new planet without the entire commercial and industrial infrastructure they are used to on their own planet. This idea, however, is voiced by the Central Power, or in other words, by those 'capitalists' who are used to power, infrastructure and all the wealthy resources and cannot live without them. Winterson, therefore, shows us the irony hiding behind these people who are eager to bring with them an advanced capitalist system onto the new planet, without considering the fact that they have been driven out from their own planet and are looking for a new place to live due to the capitalist system's consequences in the first place. The question is what would happen to the 'others' or poor people living in the other areas? As Manfred himself claimed above, "[t]hey can go to Hell" (8). What Winterson is therefore suggesting is that nothing will change on the new planet, history will be repeating itself again, thus perpetuating those binary distinctions between rich (colonisers) and poor (colonised), between human and nonhuman beings, between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In terms of critique of Capitalism, Winterson offers an additional instance in the final part of the novel, The Wreck City, when the character Friday tells Billie that they had not given up oil before "in the rich West ... because India and China were never going to do it till they'd drained every drop. They had a right to industrialize – they weren't going to go to hand-wringing classes about the planet" (165). However, India and China followed, eventually, the industrial model of the West, as the capitalist economy demanded it. Winterson goes on describing the effects of capitalism on the environment ad on the impossibility of promoting an eco-capitalism as a form of alternative capitalism able to foster a healthy environment.

Industrial capitalism, however, has not exclusive responsibility for the destruction of the environment; as Winterson implies, there are also some historical modes of production which recall a pre-capitalist power struggle as described in the Easter Island chapter. The narrator here is called Billy, now turned into a male shipmate on Captain Cook's vessel, stranded on a desolate island where he meets Spikkers, a native islander, who explains to him that trees on the island were chopped down and made into wooden sledges in order to transport material used by the natives to build stone idols. Billy witnesses the final act of destruction of this island when "[t]he Natives appear to be making procession towards some totem or obelisk, except that it is fringed. By use of my small telescope I discover, to my great surprise, that it is a tree, standing alone" (100-101). At the beginning Billy cannot understand why people are destroying what he feels they may need the most, but then he realises that "the labouring of the Stone Gods had been the sole purpose of the island's society" (108) and trees were therefore needed to make the wooden foundations for their idols and float the Stone Gods along the shore. In this case, therefore, capitalism cannot be blamed for the denigration of the environment, as there are so many

other issues to take into account when investigating and assessing the reasons for the destruction of our surrounding environment. In this chapter, Winterson criticises cultural practices as being irrational and disastrous to human survival by claiming that cultural priorities are rational in the current context but they may prove to be irrational at later stages. The deforestation of Easter Island is a way for Winterson to show how the disruption of ecological balance is caused by careless human activities. As more and more trees were cut, soil erosion led to decreased crops, birds fled, turtles died, food became scarce, tribal conflicts intensified into civil war. Moreover, instead of saving the environment around them, the natives, in the end, also destroy their statues out of frustration. Easter Island is another example of a wasteland and wasted lives caused by human greed, irrationality and careless activities. In other words, Easter Island is used as a metaphor for 'ecological death'.

Although there are many instances throughout the novel of human and environmental wasting, the chapter dealing with Wreck City is probably one of the best examples in this respect. The post-nuclear Wreck City is undoubtedly the "slum" or "the pocked and pitted scar tissue of bomb wreckage" (98). Winterson shows her readers a clear binary between Tech and Wreck, between wealthy and a technologically advanced society and the outcast, between the perfect environment and the wasteland. "Wreck City is a No Zone – no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police. It's not forbidden to go there, but if you do, and if you get damaged or murdered or robbed or raped, it's at your own risk" (98). Hegemony and power relations are implied in this binary division between these two different identities, as also exemplified in the following lines:

> A spokesman from MORE- *Justice* told reporters that it was time to take a tougher approach to No-Zone activities. "It's just a den of thieves," he said. "We left them alone while we were rebuilding our own infrastructure, but there is now no reason why anyone should be living outside Tech City. We have offered jobs and accommodation to anyone in the No Zone – an offer we still extend. This will be day one of a seven-day amnesty for any No-Zone inhabitants to come forward and live within the wider community of their fellow citizens. After that, we're going in." (101-102)

Wreck City symbolises an alternative society where people can live in freedom without any kind of rules, laws and imposition. Tolerance is the key concept in this city, which, paradoxically, from a place of exclusion becomes a place of inclusion by gathering together the 'others', all those people excluded by the MORE corporation. People living in Wreck City are people who need to be eliminated; there is no intention to integrate them in the 'official' city (Tech City). They are considered and treated as waste to be trashed and forgotten

about. In the end, indeed, MORE conducts a military raid to attack Wreck City and manages to kill many people, including the narrator Billie.

The situation of people living in the Dead Forest is even worse.[14] The Dead Forest is not simply a dead natural area, it is another interesting metaphor used by Winterson to refer to the wasting of human beings and natural resources and it is characterised by degradation and destruction which combine concerns of the natural sphere (waste of the environment) with the human sphere (waste of human beings). The Dead Forest is one of the Tech City's biggest secrets. It is extremely radioactive and is inhabited by toxic mutants, who were expected to die but their bodies have survived the interaction, mutating into something else:

> They were the bomb-damage, the enemy collateral, the ground-kill, blood-poisoned, lung-punctured, lymph-swollen, skin like dirty tissue paper, yellow eyes, weal-bodied, frog-mottled, pustules oozing thick stuff, mucus faces, bald, scarred, scared, alive, human. They bred, crawled out their term, curled up like ferns, died where they lay, on radioactive soil. Some could speak, and spat blood, each word made out of a blood vessel. They were vessels of a kind, carriers of disease and degeneration, a new generation of humans made out of the hatred of others. (125)

The Dead Forest and people living in it have been disposed to the margins like rubbish dumped into the marginalized society. They are the unwanted and exploited products of a technologically advanced society where only few, rich and powerful people deserve to live in. In other words, "[i]f you can't nuke your dissidents, the next best thing is to let the degraded land poison them" (104). These people are fed by helicopters and readers can easily juxtapose this image with that of food aid dropped by helicopters from wealthier countries or from private organizations to the poorest countries and people in the world.

Besides the wasting of natural resources and of human beings, Winterson also includes a few instances of how nonhumans are also created and exploited to satisfy human greed and they are finally disposed of when they are no longer useful or needed. In Chapter One, Spike is considered to be a commodity built for a space mission and she has to be "switched off" or killed after the completion of her task so that the data that she has collected cannot be transmitted to rivalling sides. "It's policy; 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" (9). Spike is another victim of the system, just like animals, disadvantaged people and degraded environments. Once exploited and useless, they are just waste, nothing else.

[14] Winterson's section on the Dead Forest recalls Ursula K. LeGuin's *The World for World is Forest* (1976). This work describes the conflict between the forest-dwelling natives of the planet Athshe and the Terran colonists who exploit and abuse them and their environment.

Finally, focus is laid upon another minority group, women, who in Winterson's ecofeminist approach bear a direct connection with their surrounding environment. Her novel, in this respect, resembles other feminist dystopias in that it does not only address the destiny of individual characters, but it explores the structure of the whole ruling system to determine the origin(s) and causes of both dys- and utopian visions, in line with Melzer's opinion according to whom "[science fiction female writers] create explicit political narratives that do not just center on an individual's subjectivity but address *systems* that shape our world: social, technological, economic, and political systems".[15] This means that in feminist dystopias, and in *The Stone Gods*, women are portrayed as either victims or active opponents of the ruling system in stark contrast to the dominant and destructive nature of men. Women, as also suggested by Winterson in her novel, through their common sense, sensitive nature and emotions are the only ones who truly care about the environment around them and are therefore the ones able to save the planet and restore the natural order.

[15] Patricia Melzer, *Alien Constructions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 179.

In ecofeminist theory, only women feel sorry for the destruction of the environment and ask for forgiveness from nature that is believed to be something animate. In line with this theory, Winterson provides readers with several examples throughout the novel. In the first part of the novel, for instance, the protagonist, Billie Crusoe, expresses all of her regrets and sorrows for having destroyed Planet Blue, as it had previously occurred with Orbus, by claiming:

> Out of the window, where it's going dark, I can see the laser-projection of Planet Blue. She needs us like a bed needs bedbugs. 'I'm sorry,' I say, to the planet that can't hear me. And I wish she could sail through space, unfurling her white clouds to solar winds, and find a new orbit, empty of direction, where we cannot go, and where we will never find her, and where the sea, clean as a beginning, will wash away any trace of humankind. (22)

In the second chapter of the novel, readers learn from the very first lines that Easter Island is a patriarchal society when Winterson writes that "we slithered rope-wise into the scoop of a boat, and rowed towards the shore of fine sand where upwards of a hundred men, no women or children, awaited us" (97). She asserts that people living on this island do not seem to care about the damage to their own environment and only women attempt to prevent the local chiefs from putting down the last tree:

> A great cry goes up round the tree and what appears to be a dispute. Women, and this my first sight of them, are grouped against the men, mayhap as a part of the ritual, but one of the women is lying the length of her body against the

> tree, and wailing so strong that I can hear it from my Warren. A male figure, wearing a headdress of bird feathers, strikes the woman, and at this signal, for so I interpret it, all the women standing by are struck at by the males and driven away, as you would drive off a chatter of monkeys. The men alone remain at the site and, to my surprise, two of the strongest in build step forward to fell the Palm. (101)

Men, however, seem to be deaf and blind to their desperate cries and after beating women up, they collectively take the tree down. Winterson, therefore, seems to suggest that only women could feel a sense of responsibility and affection towards the environment which contrasts with men's strength and destructive reason.[16] From an ecofeminist perspective, therefore, women are silenced and the environment is destroyed, thus implying a double defeat. Finally, women ask for forgiveness from nature in the last part of the novel, in line with ecofeminist theory, as exemplified in the following passage:

> Wreck City had twenty alternative communities ranging from the 1960s Free Love and Cadillacs, to a group of women-only Vegans looking for the next cruelty-free planet. 'They're playing at the party tonight,' she said. 'Chic X.' 'Chic X? A band?' 'Lesbian Vegans. Dinosaur-friendly. Some of them have already been to Mexico to say sorry.' 'Mexico? I'm not sure I'm following this...' 'Where they found the crater – in Chicxulub, a.k.a. Sulphur City. It's where the asteroid hit sixty-five million years ago – up goes the sulphur, down comes the snow. Ice age – out go the dinosaurs, in come the humans, give or take a few apes.' 'Simple as that?' She nodded. 'Life is much simpler than we like to admit'. (174)

The female characters keep on playing an important role in the final part of the novel, when a group of them decide to found an 'alternative community' in Wreck City to protest against the authority of their families as well as that of Central Power and MORE. This women's alternative solution, which rejects the high-tech and artificial way of life, clearly stands for the ecofeminist solution to the ecological crisis and it is undoubtedly another example of woman-nature bond at the core of both ecofeminism as well as Winterson's novel. These women create an alternative community, which embraces 'difference' by offering people an alternative society as a new "way of organizing human relations in which beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species – the difference between female and male-diversity is not equated with inferiority or superiority".[17] The ultimate goal of this alternative group of women is to challenge any form of domination in an attempt to reach, promote and develop equality.

In her ecofeminist approach, Winterson includes all the minority and silenced groups in her novel, no matter whether they are human or nonhuman,

[16] For further reading on feminist utopian writing, see the following texts: Oriana Palusci, *Terra di lei: l'immaginario femminile tra utopia e fantascienza* (Pescara: Tracce 1990); Chris Ferns, *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool U. P., 1999); Judith A. Little, *Feminist Philosophy and Science Fiction: Utopias and Dystopias* (New York: Prometheus books, 2007).

[17] Riane Eisler, "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto", in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Book, 1990), 28.

but they have the right to hold a position and to express their own opinion, which is too often unheard and not welcome by those in power. In this regard, for instance, when Billie interviews Spike, the robot chosen to go on a space mission to Planet Blue, she is willing to have all the details on this new planet including animal life and vegetation but her boss is not interested and tells Billie to "[a]sk her when we can start relocating.... We want the human story" (30). In other words, through this statement, Winterson offers her readers an opportunity to see how men's selfishness and anthropocentrism led to the destruction of the Planet Orbus in the first place and, to a certain extent, as history will be repeating again, what will lead to other future destructions, no matter the place where these people live.

In *The Stone Gods,* Winterson provides the readers with several cases of wasting of human beings as a result of scientific and technological advances, which have taken the issue of sexuality to the extreme. Planet Orbus, for instance, has gone so far that everybody can be young and beautiful forever, thus leading to sexual deviations, such as sex with young children. In this respect, there is a passage in which Billie has to deal with Mrs Pink McMurphy who wants to be genetically reversed to the age of twelve to revive her husband's sexual interest. Although this is possible on their planet, Billie tries to persuade her not to do it. All her efforts are hopeless as Mrs McMurphy is willing to comply with her husband's paedophilic desires and asserts "[y]'know, I'd be fucked up and miserable anyway – and if I'm going to be fucked up and miserable, I'd rather be young, fucked up and miserable. Who wants to be depressed and have skin that looks like fried onions?" (70). In other words, Winterson seems to suggest that there exist an important gap between the promises of technology and what it actually delivers and this progress in technology, as in the case of planet Orbus, might increase the divergence between men and women. Furthermore, people from the Central Power are not only characterized by their perverse sexual preferences, but they also have a growing inclination towards homosexuality. Traditional sexual intercourses between men and women are, indeed, sidelined by scientific discoveries because people "don't breed in the womb anymore"(20) and "most [human beings] were born outside the womb"(55). In other words, Winterson seems to diminish the role of heterosexuality in favour of a naturalization of homosexuality. Winterson's transgender attitude and the ecofeminist idea of biodiversity are perfectly exemplified in the same-sex relationship between the two main characters. For instance, in the first part of the novel, Billie (woman) falls in love with Spike (female-shaped robo sapiens) and she claims that:

> We made love by our fire, watching the snow shape the entrance to the cave. When I touch her, my fingers don't question what she is. My body knows

> who she is. The strange thing about strangers is that they are unknown and known. There is a pattern to her, a shape I understand, a private geometry that numbers mine. She is a maze where I got lost years ago, and now find the way out. She is the missing map. She is the place that I am. She is a stranger. She is the strange that I am beginning to love (88).

What Winterson suggests in this passage is that Billie falls in love with the 'other' and this removal of 'otherness' echoes one of the most essential beliefs of the ecofeminist theory according to which the Universe is rich in biodiversity and its members should be respected and treated equally. Another example is found in the second part of the novel where Spikkers and Billy's (both male characters) relationship becomes more and more intimate and it gradually develops into mutual love, care and understanding, thus emphasizing the universality of human experience. Winterson's aim is to disrupt not only the hetero-normative system but also the social construct of the male and female identity by claiming that "[t]ruth tell, anywhere is a life, once there is a love" (138). In her novel, it is homosexual love, freed from prejudice and system requirements that led to individual redemption. This kind of love is not opposed by society but it becomes victim of the devastating colonisation and civilisation processes that ultimately destroy the human kind as well as the environment.

Winterson, in her novel, offers a wide range of redemptive models and alternatives to the most common hierarchical dualisms such as dominant/subordinate, human/nature, and men/women, which are able to resist and challenge the traditionally male-biased and male-supported society.

Concluding Remarks

The Stone Gods is a novel dealing with several binary divides by challenging institutional, environmental and gender discourses. The notion of *waste* in Winterson's novel refers both to the environment, which is repeatedly exploited and reduced to a wasteland and to human beings who are forgotten by society and treated as waste.

Winterson's dystopian futuristic novel provides readers with an interesting picture of environmental destruction in multiple contexts in which several discourses of nationalism, capitalism, imperialism, androcentrism and anthropocentrism help readers understand how power relations are perpetuated in history and how people keep on making the same mistakes over and over again. In other words, Winterson suggests that the new world only turns out to be a repetition of the old one. In her novel, Winterson deliberately disrupts power relations to show readers how the environment and the minority groups (including women as well as nonhumans) are those that are discriminated the most by powerful people and institutions.

Winterson dwells on how technology and scientific advancements are the main cause or catalyst to the destruction of both environments and underprivileged people. In her vision, the progress and conveniences brought about by science and technology are overshadowed by the destruction they have eventually caused both to human beings as well as their surrounding environment. Technology and scientific advancements have led to massive destruction and depletion of both natural resources and human beings. Planet Orbus is wasted away and is reduced to a wasteland; despite the abundance of natural resources, Easter Island is depleted and wasted by careless human activities; the promising Planet Blue is characterized by chaos, war and waste of both natural resources and human beings.

Destruction, degradation and waste seem to be the final result of human greed, no matter the place and no matter the time. Billie is disappointed about her own world and by staring at the sky, once again, she dreams of another escape and wonders: "If we found another planet, we could leave everything behind, start again, be safe. It would be different, wouldn't it? Another chance" (128). Nevertheless, as readers learn at the end of *The Stone Gods*, another escape would be pointless as things would not be different because people would make the same mistakes over and over again. It would only be another place to colonise and exploit until it would be reduced to another wasteland.