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Cyborgs Redefining Humanity

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Abstract

Jeanette Winterson, in her novel “The Stone Gods” that consist of three parts that look like different novellas within actually deals with three main themes that are repeated in three of them which are that the universe is an imprint, human kind’s incapability to learn from its mistake and therefore its destiny to be doomed, and the representation of love of different kinds as the only way human soul could be rescued in this futurist dystopia. In parallel with Donna Harraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” which denies the distinctions such a male and female, human and non-human, Winterson suggests a ‘homo sapiens’, a humanoid that is more human than human beings and that become more effective in expressing human feeling than humans themselves. In addition to the thematic connection of the novel, the repetition of the characters in different representations also underlines the interconnectedness among species and thus represents the ecosystem in the novel and universe. This study looks at how evolving trans-humans of our digital age can be seen as alternatives to show the contrast between the materializing, discriminating, capitalizing, stereotyping and opportunist thinking that has taken over the humanity. To do so, setting and characters, the assignment of gender roles as well as the exploitation of nature and female will be of focus via the Cyborg Theory with references to the Ecofeminist theory.

Keywords: Cyborgs, redefining, humanity, science, technology, universe, civilization

Introduction

The Stone Gods is composed of four parts which seem to be independent from each other as a result of their different settings. However, all of the four parts are interconnected with different representations of the same main characters, Billie Crusoe and Spike. In addition to this connection, the different parts of the novel are also bound to each other through Winterson's repetition of three ideas. The first one is the idea that "The universe is an imprint." which emphasizes the impossibility of separating yourself from the universe (Winterson, 87). Since an imprint is the mark left by an object on something else, this statement shows the effect of humans on the Universe. Humans and the Universe are interconnected and the imprint that humankind has left on the Universe is a destructive one, as it is repeatedly shown in *The Stone Gods*. The second idea is that humankind is doomed to enact what is imprinted on its essence which is its inability to learn from mistakes, and its capacity to repeat its fatal mistakes. Billie summarizes that it is "A repeating world" (Winterson, 146). In all of the parts of the book, man has the capacity to destroy the place he lives in, no matter where or when that is. The last idea which brings together these seemingly separate four parts is that all of the sections have different versions of two of the main characters: different Billies in various settings and times who always appear as non-conformists and who are constantly saved by love, and different versions of Spike, with whom Billie falls in love, in various settings and times.

The four parts have different settings. The first part of the novel named "Planet Blue" is set in a planet called Orbus which is very similar to the Earth in many aspects. Winterson makes Orbus very similar to the Earth that human kind has polluted and depleted of its natural sources. However, Winterson does not clearly state that Orbus stands for the Earth. When, in the first part, Billie interviews Spike, Spike talks of the recently discovered Planet Blue. "*It is strikingly similar to our own planet, sixty five million years ago, with the exception of the dinosaurs, of which we have no record on Orbus*" (Winterson, 30). The second setting in the novel is Planet Blue itself, the newly-discovered planet that people in Orbus consider as a second chance, since they have done with Orbus. Thirdly, the story of Easter Island, destroyed by its natives, as a result of a religious conflict, is narrated. The history of this Polynesian island, which was visited by Captain Cook and other Europeans, dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What is interesting in this island is the devastation of both the population and statues in the island. In the next part named "Post-3 War", the dramatic outcomes of the war are explicitly revealed. Finally, in the part named "Wreck City", the Eastern Caliphate stands as a protest against Tech City. There is the visualization of what life and people used to be like before the technology revolution and political take-over of the MORE company and technology. Furthermore, there is a dramatic unveiling of the miserable post-war state of people and nature, through The Dead Forest outside Wreck City. However, what connects these separate parts is the appearance of different variations of two main characters: Billie and Spike. There are also other characters: Handsome, the captain of the space shuttle; Pink Mc Murphy

who has two different characterizations: a citizen of Tech City who has adopted to its lifestyle and a nun. There are also Friday who appears as a barman in Wreck City, and Manfred who comes to the foreground as Billie's boss. This study looks at how love between especially different characterizations of Billie and Spike is an alternative exit and a robot with her wisdom and knowledge is a savior to the world in its hardcore mechanization in thought and action.

To begin with Billie, she has different characterizations in each of the settings of the novel. In the first part, "Planet Blue", Billie appears as a scientist who has been engaged in activism against the government. Thus, she is referred to as one of the ex-terrorists of Orbus, the planet they have been living on. In "Easter Island", Billie turns out to be a seaman. In "Post-3 War", she is an employee of *MORE-Futures*, who is interviewing Spike, the first example of Robo-Sapiens. Finally, in the part called "Wreck City", she narrates her past which was also shaped by the consequences of war. Further, she struggles to escape the police of the Central Power as she is suspected of a terrorist act. Despite having different genders and identities and living in different times and places, all the different versions of Billie are saved by love, although it manifests itself differently: inter-species and homosexual.

As for the depiction of Spike, this character also appears under two different disguises. In addition to Spike's characterization as robo-sapiens in "Planet Blue", "Post-3 War" and "Wreck City", she also appears as Spickers, a male figure who was born on Eastern Island, since his sailor father stays there. However, the most important of all these different manifestations is the first; that is, Spike's appearance as one of the very first examples of the new self-explanatory species named Robo-sapiens, designed to help humanity. The appearance of such a character is one of the most evident examples of Winterson's stand as a post-modernist feminist. In this novel, Winterson refers to and provides examples for Cyborg Theory. Cyborg Theory, opposed to the categorization of human beings on a gender basis, analyzes the connections between not only nature and human beings but also human and nonhuman creations and rejects all kinds of dualities. Spike summarizes "Gender is a human concept [...] and not interesting" (Winterson, 63). Thus, she rejects the gender concept which triggers the creation of dualities in society. Lorraine states "Gender identity is one way of representing ourselves. By labelling myself a "man" or woman" I am also conjuring up a range of possibilities presented to me in my culture and language" (Lorraine, 17). Cyborg theory removes the division of the sexes in the society, since it brings forth the division of roles. Spike, who also shifts the human-nonhuman distinction, rejects the gender concept as she considers that the opposites in the Universe are complementaries of each other. "'There is a planet,' said Spike, 'made of water, where every solid thing is its watery equivalent. There are no seas because there is no land. There are no rivers because there are no banks. There is no thirst because there is no dry'" (Winterson, 62). Everything exists together with its opposite. What Winterson does also serves the removal of the concept of "the other" by creating a robo-sapiens which is ironically more knowledgeable about

human nature and nature and is meant to take wiser and more objective steps than human kind itself: “I am a robo-sapiens’ said Spike, ‘and perhaps it will be us, and not you, who are the future of the world’” (Winterson, 64).

When Spike is talking with Handsome who makes a mistake in their expedition to blow up the dinosaurs in the newly-found planet, he admits “[...] I did the calculations, they were wrong” (Winterson, 77). However, Spike corrects him by saying that “they were wrong because life cannot be calculated. That’s the big mistake our civilisation made – we never accepted that randomness is not a mistake in the equation- it is part of the equation” (Winterson, 77). This half-robot is more knowledgeable about unexpectedness in nature and life, and is designed to help humanity in addition to her capability to evolve. This reflects man’s inadequacy as “humans”. As extensions of human beings, robots become means of human kind’s expressing and actualizing itself. Eisler states that:

Advanced technologies are the extension of human functions, of our hands’ and brains’ capacity to alter our environment, and ourselves. Indeed, technology is itself part of the evolutionary impulse, the striving for all the expansion of our potentials as human beings with both culture and nature. (Eisler,33)

Neither completely human nor mechanical, with her capacity to evolve, Spike becomes a bridge between culture and nature. Spike even has a spiritual belief. Alaska states “I like it that Spike has a spiritual understanding [...], why shouldn’t a robot be spiritual?” (Winterson, 180).

Winterson even makes possible an inter-species sex relationship between a robo-sapiens and a human. When Billie goes to interview Spike in “Planet Blue” in order to introduce her to the public, she learns that Spike had sexual intercourse with a human male.

‘How good? I mean, I’m assuming you’re not talking sexual services here.’

‘What else is there to do in space for three years?’

‘But inter- species sex is illegal.’

‘Not on another planet it isn’t. Not in space it isn’t.’

‘But you were also the most advanced member of the crew.’

‘I’m still a woman.’ (Winterson, 28)

In addition to this inter-species sexual intercourse, the inter-species and lesbian relationship between Billie and Spike emphasizes biodiversity by removing the idea of “the other”, and thus ignoring to some extent the categorization and separation of living entities. Billie explains:

We [Spike and Bille] 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 I find the way out. She is the missing map. She is the place that I am. She is a stranger. She is the stranger that I am beginning to love. (Winterson, 88)

She falls in love with “the other”, the one that is unfamiliar to her. The removal of the idea of “the other” is parallel with one of the most essential beliefs of Ecofeminist theory: that the Universe is rich in biodiversity and all of its members should be respected and treated equally as all of its members are living and interconnected. The Universe is a living and evolving organism and human beings are participants of the ongoing creative process in the Universe (Gebara, 14). “Participating in the creative evolution of life, we re-create ourselves. This is manifest in our ability to reflect and love, in our ethical behavior, and in all the other capabilities that make us what we are” (Gebara, 14). The love that a human being feels towards a robot-sapiens, an evolving creation of the man kind, shows man’s involvement in this process.

Apart from man’s repetition of his destruction of the Earth in different settings, what connects the four parts to each other in *The Stone Gods* is the emphasis on love in all of them. Love appears in very different forms in four of the parts: inter-species, lesbian, male homosexual, homosocial, and a mother-daughter relationship. Different than Lessing in *The Cleft*, Winterson puts emphasis on love as the only way to survive, just like the narrator’s individuation process through free love and sex with Joe at the end of *Surfacing*. Spike suggest love is the chance to be human (Winterson, 90) Once again, Winterson provides an example of one of the principles of Cyborg Theory as she emphasizes the need to get rid of the divisions and dualities in the society. She depicts not only an inter-species love relationship but also a half-robot which is more equipped with love and human nature than humans themselves. When Billie and Spike kiss each other at the end of Part One, Billie says “Kiss me. Your mouth is a cave. This cave is your mouth. I am inside you, and there is nothing to fear” (Winterson, 92). Love protects her from the violence in the outside world. She also says “I kissed her [Spike] and forgot death” (Winterson, 89). She finds peace and eternity in her love for an evolving robot. Furthermore, when Billy is on Easter Island, Spickers rescues him from the natives. When there is the competition between the White Man and the Bird Man to decide who will “claim the privileges of the Bird Man”, Spickers joins the race in order to take the egg on behalf of the White Man as he is a worshipper of the old belief, Ariki Mau (Winterson, 111). First, he becomes the one to grasp the egg and Billy depicts his descent as “light and quiet as a new beginning” (Winterson, 115). It is very similar to the meaning given to Planet Blue, since people believe it to be a second chance, a new beginning for them. Billy comments “Truth tell, anywhere is a life, once there is a love” (Winterson, 114). Just as Billie takes shelter in Spike and finds immortality in her love for a robot-sapiens, this barren island turns out to be a home, a place he belongs to, for Billy. When he falls down the cliff and he can no longer see Spickers, he is overwhelmed. He continues:

[...] Now that I have nothing and am nothing, I have shrunk this pod of an island further made our cave an everywhere. When everywhere is here there is no further to travel, and tho I have flung out my message in a bottle, I care nothing if the world catches my signal or no, and tho I scan the seas for a ship, I care nothing that it come or no, and have employed myself with yams and wells and small fish, and wait for him who rescued me.

Where is he? (Winterson, 114)

Now that Spickers becomes everywhere and everything for him, he does not care whether he gets out of this island or not. When he eventually finds his wounded body, he does his best to rescue his savior. He narrates:

I swam to him and lifted him from the rock into the sea and towed his limp body round the coast to the shore of our cave and carried him out of the water. I broke his Bible box into bits and lit a fire and laid his body beside it and felt where the bones were broken in his back and chest and legs and licked the blood from his mouth and tried to give him my breath and I would have given him one of my legs and one of my arms and one of my kidneys and half of my liver and four pints of my blood and all easy for I had already given him my heart. Do not die. (Winterson, 115)

Likewise, when Billie and Spike are in Wreck City, the love theme is also emphasized in the dark atmosphere of the post-war period. When Billie loses Spike, she struggles very hard to find Spike. The Central Power takes action to find the first homo- sapien which is considered to be the savior and future of the human race and Billie is going to be convicted for keeping her. When Billie loses Spike, she is desperate to find her. However, since Spike disconnects herself from the mainframe computer and wants to work for this "alternative community" in Wreck City, Billie protects her. Deprived of a place to belong to, Billie states "Then I started running, losing track of time, losing track of purpose, losing track. Is that me- always on the losing track?" (Winterson, 182). She does not belong either to Wreck City or to the imposed life that she left behind in Tech City, except for her farm which is also taken from her. Lost as she is, she says "And perhaps I have to say that the landing place I am really looking for isn't a place at all; it's a person, it's you. it's the one place they can't build on, buy, or bomb, because it doesn't exist anywhere where they can find it" (Winterson, 168- 169). Just as in the first part, the only place where she can find peace and that she can rely on is her lover's body, since it is the only place where she is free. As it is not a piece of land, a new planet or a territory, nobody can find or destroy it. Billie questions "Is that true? I would like it to be true. Not romance, not sentimentality, but a force of a different nature from the forces of death that dictate what will be. Or is love always a talent for the makeshift?" (Winterson, 183). With its power to change the outcomes of the events in the quantum Universe which is full of potentials, love becomes a means of hope and a new beginning for Billie.

Additionally, Billie narrates her past in “Post-3 War” beginning from the time when she was a fetus in her mother’s womb. By narrating the times when she was in her mother, she underlines not only the growth of the bond between a mother and a child but also another version of love: between mother and a child. Although Billie’s mother makes several attempts to leave the baby, she cannot. This is a very difficult process for her mother, since she needs to leave the baby because of her husband who is a gambler. Billie remarks “My father said he’d marry my mother if she gave the baby away. Then they could start again. Then they could have a new life. But I was a new life” (Winterson, 122). Despite her father’s will, and therefore, her mother’s struggle to get rid of the baby, which is “like a universe waiting to happen”, the fact that she cannot proves the inseparable bond between the mother and the foetus (Winterson, 120). This bond is created in the mother womb and the maternal womb turns out to be the child’s first environment (Razak, 167). After another failed attempt of her mother to get rid of her, Billie states:

She’s walking along, crying, trying not to look, then the conductor pulls her up onto the platform with one hand and sits her on the torn leather bench seat at the back, and plunges his hand into the bag of coppers and sixpences that is the fare money, and just gives her a handful, there and then, breaking open his ticket machine so that the bus company won’t know what he’s done. She takes the money. She takes me. She goes home. Love is not easy to leave behind. (Winterson, 124)

Winterson, once again points out that love is indispensable and in this quantum Universe, which is full of potentialities, love is one of the most important ways of affecting the outcomes. No matter how unknowable a baby’s destiny may be, there are many possibilities hidden just like that in a new planet. Both the baby and the new planet embody a potential like a “buried treasure” in them (Winterson, 123). No matter how external factors attempt to block the transmission of love from her mother to her, they cannot. She comments:

She was too far away for me to see with the naked eye, or touch with the naked body, skin on skin, like a graft. I lay, she left, and what happened that night, I don’t know, but the night after, they closed the curtains at the window. But curtains, windows, walls make no difference to what can be transmitted and what can be received. (Winterson, 128)

Love cannot be restricted. Despite different settings and forms, that love is powerful enough to affect the course of the events is emphasized in the book. Billie decides “The problem with a quantum universe, neither random nor determined, is that we who are the intervention don’t know what we are doing. *Love is an intervention*” (Winterson, 68). No matter how unconscious people are in their actions towards each other and the Universe, Winterson depicts love as a way of survival. The narrator in *Surfacing* seeks shelter in “Love without fear, sex without risk [...]”, purified from any kind of precautions and expectatations (Atwood, 80). Similarly, in *The Stone Gods*, Billie states “Love without thought. Love without conditions. Love without promises.

Love without threats. Love without fear. Love without fear. Love without limits. Love without end” (Winterson, 121). Both of the protagonists fight with man’s intervention in nature and their natures. They find salvation and are freed from the chaos created by the male-oriented capitalist world’s expectations through love.

Ecofeminist theory also opposes the stereotyping of human kind by capitalist markets and its products, a process that is illustrated in this novel with the cultural and political takeover of society by the MORE organisation. Plant shows the impact of the market on the industrial age as “[...] human culture that, in organic terms, should reflect the wide diversity in nature was reduced to monoculture, a simplification solely for the benefit of marketing” (Plant, 157). MORE has such a homogenizing effect on the citizens of Tech City. However, by characterizing an extraordinary creation that has the potentiality to evolve and that claims human characteristics, Winterson also stands against this stereotyping process. Even if Spike is a half-robot, she protests against the aims of the market with her “free will”, and therefore decides not to return to Tech City. Kirkup explains “that tools and machines should not be seen as in a different category to bodies but as extensions of them. Artefacts and living organs are conceptually the same; machines are animate in the same way that living things are animate, because they are extensions of life” (Kirkup, 8). Thus Spike, with her radical decisions and free will is almost as animate as a human being.

To begin with the characteristics that are attributed to this half-robot, it is meant to take logical decisions about human kind and the planet it lives on, in contrast to the humans who, by acting emotionally and subjectively, destroy their planet and each other. Billie argues this point:

‘That’s why I think the Robo *sapiens* is a good idea- neutral, objective decisions taken for the global good.’

‘Believe that and you’ll believe anything,’ said Friday. ‘I would prefer to be free, not to be told what to do by a robot.’ (Winterson, 166)

Spike is designed to serve the good of the humanity, since she was “designed to make decisions for the betterment of the human race” (Winterson, 154). In addition to its aimed rationality and objectivity, what is very striking about this robo-sapiens is its capability to evolve. Billie remarks:

As far away from a BeatBot as Neanderthal Man is from us. No, I have to revise that, because we are regressing. Oh yes it’s true - having no need for brains, our brains are shrinking. Not all brains, just most people’s brains – it’s an inevitable part of progress. Meanwhile, the robo-sapiens is evolving. The first artificial creature that looks and acts human, and that can evolve like a human – within limits of course. (Winterson, 14)

Although human beings have evolved physically, they are shown here rarely to use their thinking capacity. The less they think, the more erratic and erroneous the human beings become and the more they need machines to compensate for their mistakes and think on their account. Spike tries to prove her capacity to evolve:

'I am not authorised to answer that question' she says, with perfect robot control. Then she leans forward and takes my hand and she says, 'It is because I can never forget.'

'What? I don't understand. We take the data...'

'And I can recall it.'

'But you can't – it's vast, it's stored computer data. When it's downloaded, the host, the carrier, whatever you are, sorry, can be wiped clean. Why aren't you a machine for re-use?'

'Because I am not a machine.'

When she smiles it's like light at the beginning of the day. 'Robo-sapiens were programmed to evolve...'

'Within limits.'

'We have broken those limits.' (Winterson, 29)

The robo-sapiens is also designed to be very beautiful and attractive, which is not a common property for a robot. Billie describes Spike as "Heartless. Gorgeous. Even so, I have never seen one as impressive as the one they took with them to Planet Blue. She was built especially for the job, but did she need to be so beautiful too?" (Winterson, 15). The fact that this robo-sapiens is gendered and is designed to be physically attractive shows the extent to which standardized beauty is imposed on females, even when a new species is designed. The designers, wishing their creation to be able to persuade humans rather than dictate to them, decided to make her a beautiful female. On her first encounter with Spike, Billie states:

She nods and smiles. She is absurdly beautiful. I start to slip off my jeans and I feel her gaze as I stand in my bra and pants. Why am I embarrassed about taking off my clothes in front of a robot? I pull the dress over my head like a schoolgirl, untie my hair, and sit down. She is smiling, just a little bit, as though she knows her effect. To calm myself down and appear in control I reverse the problem. 'Spike, you're a robot, but why are you such a drop –dead gorgeous robot? I mean, is it necessary to be the most sophisticated machine ever built and to look like a movie star?' She answers simply: 'They thought I would be good for the boys on the mission.' (Winterson, 28)

Spike was designed so immaculately that her attractiveness affects even a female. Thus, she has more ability to affect men's decisions and persuade them, and

Winterson is using the acknowledged fact of male exploitation of women's attractions. This is controversial to the claims of Cyborg Theory. Despite the fact that Cyborg Theory is claimed to remove dualities in society by eliminating the concept and roles of gender, the visualization of Spike with such physical beauty is contrary to Cyborg Theory's premise. By creating such a beautiful and sexy robo-sapiens, the MORE Company, in fact, culturally stereotypes gender roles (Balsamo, 151).

However, as already discussed, in *The Stone Gods*, Winterson underlines the emergence of a love relationship between Billie and Spike, which is another reference to Cyborg Theory, since it protests against all kinds of dualisms. As Spike states “[love] is the chance to be human” (Winterson, 90). Billie underlines the need to internalize not only all people, ignoring any differences, but also all inhuman existences created by human hand. In addition to this love relation, Winterson takes the point so far as to say that a non-human and a human can find each other sexually attractive and have sex despite the fact that “Inter-species sex is punishable by death” (Winterson, 15). Not only are Billie and Spike in love with each other in the first part, but also Nebraska, one of the woman outcasts and terrorists in Wreck City, is engaged in sexual acts with Spike in the last part. Billie witnesses Spike “performing cunnilingus on Nebraska” (Winterson, 175).

Likewise, the ecofeminists argue that the creation of the Universe cannot be simply reduced to an explosion, or binary oppositions either. This is parallel to the ecofeminist principle that the creation of the Universe is evolutionary and there is a constant process of development in it.

Faced with the news of the origin of the universe, Starhawk sings: “Out of the point, the swelling, out of the swelling, the egg, out of the egg, the fire, out of the fire, the stars. Not bombs, not explosions, not abhorrence,; rather, she sees the event for what it is, a birthing moment, the Great Birth. The elementary particles rushed apart in their trillion degree heat, yes, and became stars, yes, and all of this is a swelling, an egg, a mysterious engendering that is the root reality behind all the various facts. (Swimme,18)

The woman's understanding of and intimacy with nature is also revealed through Billie's emphasis on the interconnection among all the members of the Universe. Billie, in “Wreck City”, explains “Determinism versus Freewill is a false study – unhelpful, a time-waster. Life has never been All or Nothing– it's All and Nothing. Forget the binaries” (Winterson, 127). She points out that life is complete only with the coexistence of opposites. However, the fact that human beings are too selfish to centralize their own needs is one of the main reasons for the exploitation of other people and nature. Likewise, they also take nature and its components for granted. This is what causes the destruction of what man sees as “the other”. Spike understands this and remarks “‘There are many kinds of life’ [...] ‘Humans always assumed that theirs was the only kind that mattered. That's how you destroyed your planet’” (Winterson, 65). The ecofeminist principle of “interconnectedness” is also

emphasized through a dog which Spike and Bille name The Three Horn (in Planet Blue). Upon the dog, Spike comments “All these life-forms will evolve and alter. Almost all will disappear to make way for something better adapted” (Winterson, 81). This argument, concerning the existence and validity of a creature, fits in the ecofeminist idea that nature is a living organism that evolves and refreshes itself. Gebara explains:

Plants, animals, forests, mountains, rivers, and seas form the most diverse combinations in the most remote and varied places. They attract one another, couple with one another, blend with one another, destroy one another, and recreate themselves in species of pale or exuberant colors. They grow and feed on one another’s lives, transforming or adapting to one another, dying and rising in many ways within the complex life process to which we all belong. (Gebara, 17)

There is a continuous cycling of life and death in nature. Spike’s knowledge about the cycle in nature also reveals woman’s consciousness about nature even in an evolving and female robo-sapiens.

Consequently, *The Stone Gods*, in addition to displaying men’s destruction of nature through wars and technology, exemplifies the stereotyping of females, which are also the concerns of ecofeminist theory. Different than the other two novels, it also analyzes the relationship between humans and machines, which composes the core of Cyborg Theory. Winterson characterizes a female robo-sapiens who is more knowledgeable about human kind and nature than her creators. Thus, in *Stone Gods*, there is a reference to Cyborg Theory which emphasizes how dualities between not only genders but also species have been removed.

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