‘There was no Us and Them’:
Environmental Justice and Discursive Struggle in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*

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I. Introduction

Imperialism assumes the civilized and the savage, the conquerors and the conquered. Capitalism necessitates the rich and the poor, the deserving and the undeserving. Patriarchal societies consist of the dominant male and subordinate female. Environmentalism struggles with the perceived chasm between nature and culture, or the human and the nonhuman. Jeannette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007) is a novel that engages all of these entrenched and problematic binaric divides, doing so amidst an inquiry into common institutional and environmental discourses. As populations on earth address issues of climate change and alarming environmental degradation at both local and global levels, we must trace the discourses that have contributed to our arrival at such a position. At the same time, we must address the degree to which common environmental positions and politics relate to, cater to, or question such social discourses. Winterson’s inter-planetary, futuristic—yet all too present—novel not only offers a stark picture of environmental destruction in multiple contexts, but also pushes the reader to examine the intertwining discourses of nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, androcentrism, and anthropocentrism, all of which rely on and perpetuate binary logic. Such logic—which necessarily includes notions of domination and otherness—often underlies and justifies environmental degradation and related issues of social inequality, necessitating that these discourses be examined alongside the environmental positions with which they intersect. For “[a]ll environmental-ecological arguments […] are arguments about society and, therefore, complex refractions of all sorts of struggles being waged in other realms.”¹

Winterson consistently disrupts power relations and collapses binaries and dualistic thinking particularly related to sexuality and gender in her work. Her approach as an author

“is to challenge binary logic itself, to argue, for example, that such definition is not absolute or even particularly valid.” She uses her work to speak out for the silenced and oppressed, which can occur through the erasure from history and discourse of beings deemed abject or subhuman, such as the criminalized poor, animals, and same-sex lovers. Winterson disrupts binaries of gender and sexuality in *The Stone Gods* through a heroine that is “not exactly” straight and through same-sex and inter-species relationships. She also gives significant attention to questioning constructions of human/nonhuman, human/natural, and us/ them, while pointing to the power relations that benefit from such constructions. In many cases, she depicts the “abject” other suffering environmental harm and lacking the resources to obtain environmental health.

In the novel’s representation of various environmental discourses and approaches—including environmental justice, deep ecology, and ecological modernization—I believe Winterson promotes the environmental justice approach as the most productive in its goal to disrupt normative power relations and entrenched social divides, though the movement is not without its own shortcomings. The environmental justice movement “started in the US around 1980 as a series of community-based resistances against toxification of local environments and the siting of waste dumps and polluting industries that discriminate against poor and otherwise disempowered communities, particularly minority communities.” According to David Harvey, by putting inequalities at the forefront of the environmental agenda, environmental justice “directly challenges the dominant [environmental]...
discourses.” Environmental justice is a movement that “advances a discourse radically at odds with the standard view and ecological modernization,” and which, of all models, “has proven far less amenable to corporate or governmental cooptation.” Whereas mainstream environmentalism has had a traditional base of support and leadership from the white, educated middle class and from major organizations that have predominantly been male, environmental justice activism garners strong leadership from minority groups and women. This suggests that the roots of the environmental justice position are productive and hopeful due to their distance from and opposition to institutionalized power and discourses that so often lead to environmental harm in the first place.

In *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis writes that “much of the twenty-first-century urban world squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement, and decay.” Such immersion in pollution and human waste creates “one of the most profound social divides” that “truly demarcates two existential humanities.” In exploring a related binary, Harvey discusses the identity constructions of superiority and inferiority ascribed based on the level of environmental “bads” that a community should endure: “if we care to think about it at all, there is a symbolic dimension, a kind of ‘cultural imperialism’ embedded in the whole proposal [to displace toxins]—are we not presuming that only trashy people can stomach trash?” Environmental justice recognizes the constructed societal divides between rich and poor, “trashy” and “not trashy,” with the goal of criticizing and changing these very divides. In other words, environmental justice seeks to identify, disrupt, and eliminate the problematic social binaries that have formed under institutional discourses and which are perpetuated

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6 Harvey, *Justice* 385.  
7 Harvey, *Justice* 385.  
8 Buell, *Future* 142.  
10 Davis 138.  
11 Harvey, *Justice* 268.
through environmental situatedness in pollution and waste. Certain discourses suggest that “abject” persons deserve a degraded environment, and those in positions of power can then use that degraded environment as a means of “proving” their abjection.

Winterson’s novel provides several instances that allow for discussion based on an environmental justice model, but it does not do so without questioning the assumptions, limitations, and political positionality of this model. Just as Winterson questions the dualistic logic and power relations embedded within common social discourses, she also questions these same issues within environmental discourses, including environmental justice. This inquiry occurs within each of the novel’s four sections, which include Planet Blue, Easter Island, Post-3 War, and Wreck City. Planet Blue is a story of a new beginning and the discovery of a new planet. It is the story of the people on Orbus, which, we are told, is a planet that “‘has a projected remaining life span of around fifty years.’”12 Easter Island details a power struggle between patriarchal tribes that display their strength through grand idols, the building of which leads to ecocide. Post-3 War and Wreck City describe a crisis-ridden planet that has undergone severe nuclear war. All sections provide a new backdrop of environmental degradation and a “new” cast of characters, though they have the same or similar names to highlight the ways in which discourses and power relations overlap and operate in multiple contexts.

In this project, I explore the parallels Winterson draws between, first, the power relations and underlying discourses that rely on and normalize identity constructions of inferiority and otherness; second, how these power relations and discourses are implicated in environmental degradation; and, third, how common environmental positions arise from and perpetuate these power relations and discourses, or, conversely, seek to critique them. Within

12 Winterson 32.
each context where these discursive struggles are waged, Winterson points to the productivity involved in collapsing dualistic, normative systems of thought which construct human identity, conceptions of humanness, conceptions of nature or environment, and human relations to environment. In doing so, she suggests that by opening up conceptual categories and making possible what these constructions and discourses declare is impossible, hope for environmental and social well-being emerges. By juxtaposing many environmental positions, Winterson not only points to the limitations of each, but also invites an “opening up” of their possibilities and an exploration of how some positions might borrow from others. Particularly, she points to the ways in which an environmental justice approach might expand beyond its largely anthropocentric, localized applications. In many ways the novel challenges any notion of anthropocentrism or ecocentrism, since to choose only one is to either neglect the social or the environmental. Lawrence Buell argues that we need to move “past the polarization imposed by such ethical rubrics” of anthropocentric or ecocentric.13 Indeed, “a mature environmental aesthetics—or ethics, or politics—must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns,”14 which is precisely the environmental aesthetics and politics Winterson espouses. Finally, I will suggest the ways in which the text’s power struggles and questions regarding humanness and the natural relate to recent theories of queer environmentalism. Winterson’s novel provides a rich opportunity for expanding and contributing to current conversations that merge queer studies and ecological concerns.

14 Buell, *Future* 23.
II. NATIONALIST DISCOURSE AND THE LIMITS OF ECOLOGICAL MODERNIZATION

Ecological modernization is an environmental model that seeks “sustainable” environmental practices, attempting to calculate and prevent potential harm rather than clean it up later. In this view, “[t]he rights of future generations and the question of appropriate temporality […] move to the center of discussion.” Oftentimes, however, ecological modernization is linked to nationalist discourses that presume a regional sense of superiority, which leads to claims of ownership or stewardship over natural resources. This is one way in which the discourse of ecological modernization is problematic, and Winterson exposes the problem by juxtaposing it with how various regions or communities will experience the movement differently. Drawing distinctions between achieved levels of modernization simply becomes another means of othering for more “advanced” places and people. Harvey points out that ecological modernization is a “discourse that can rather too easily be corrupted into yet another discursive representation of dominant forms of economic power.” 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,” which is exactly what occurs in Planet Blue.

Winterson interweaves discourses of nationalism or regionalism alongside the environmental discourse of ecological modernization, particularly in Planet Blue. The dying planet of Orbus includes three main geographical areas: the Central Power, the SinoMosco Pact, and the Eastern Caliphate, which operate as thinly veiled depictions of the problematic first, second, and third world identification system, or the categories of The West (Central Power) and The Rest. Readers hear the perspective of characters in Tech City—the ultra-

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15 Harvey, Justice 377.
16 Harvey, Justice 377.
17 Harvey, Justice 382.
18 Harvey, Justice 382.
materialist, ultra-capitalist urban center of the Central Power. Billie, our narrator from the Central Power, assures that the transition to the new planet will be a “‘win-win’”; it will “‘mean a better quality of life for everyone—the ones who leave, and the ones who stay.’”\[^{19}\]

While this sounds peaceful, hopeful, and fair, such a redistribution involves problematic power relations and issues of environmental injustice. The Central Power touts Planet Blue as a “new start,” a chance to “wipe the slate clean,” and a “giant leap for mankind.”\[^{20}\]

But it is not a giant leap for mankind—or even humankind; it is a giant leap exclusively for the powerful, the rich, and the members of a regional community that deem themselves dominant and superior to the rest of the world. Even the name Central Power suggests that all those not included in the region are peripheral or subordinate.\[^{21}\]

To discuss the discovery of the new planet, there is a summit planned “between the Central Power, Easter Caliphate, and our friends in the SinoMosco Pact.”\[^{22}\]

There has been a “[p]eaceful compromise promised.”\[^{23}\] Yet in a speech given by the President of the Central Power, tension brews: “The Central Power has funded the space mission for hundreds of years, and it is understood that any discoveries belong to us [emphasis added].”\[^{24}\] The Central Power is the wealthiest area, and even though they have been the largest contributor of environmental degradation for years, they claim the pristine new planet as their own. Billie’s boss, Manfred, rejoices at the discovery of Planet Blue, and at this sense of ownership:

“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

\[^{19}\] Winterson 5.
\[^{20}\] Winterson 46.
\[^{21}\] Val Plumwood’s notion of a “master identity” based on dualisms in Western thought can be aptly applied to the identity constructions depicted by Winterson through the Central Power.
\[^{22}\] Winterson 5.
\[^{23}\] Winterson 5.
\[^{24}\] Winterson 5.
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.”

Manfred reveals a split between the public and private discourses of the Central Power. While they claim fairness to the world, they know their actions and policies will only represent their own interests. And while he calls the Central Power’s new home an “advanced civilization,” he immediately undercuts his own statement with the offhand suggestion that violence will be exercised freely against anyone whose notion of “advanced” and “civilization” differs from that of the Central Power.

In *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, Harvey’s point that “US leaders have, with considerable public support, projected upon the world in general the idea that American neo-liberal values are universal and supreme and that such values matter since they are the heart of what civilization is about,” aligns with the discourse of the Central Power. Manfred goes on to reveal that “[t]he 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.”

Clearly, the Central Power is not “peace-loving,” since they welcome the opportunity to “shoot ‘em down” when they need to. This passage further reveals that, depending on positionality and economic circumstances, distribution of environmental harm is unequal—and often intentionally so. Manfred exposes and perpetuates a binary created by the dominant, wealthy
region between those that “deserve” to seize the opportunity of a healthy environment and those that do not. The level to which one deserves such an opportunity depends on economic circumstances and constructed categories of national and racial superiority.

Winterson engages a discourse of ecological modernization through Manfred’s justifications of the Central Power. When Billie questions Manfred about his problematic statements, he bitterly tells her 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.”28 His response conveys a construction of superiority and otherness. He insults the religion of “that bunch” as inferior; “that bunch” is a homogeneous description that includes all who are not like him; and he privileges the superior, responsible, “sustainable” living of the Central Power. He later calls those of the Easter Caliphate and SinoMosco Pact “out-of-control lunatics” that are ignoring global responsibility.29 In other words, the Central Power has embraced a new era of ecological modernization, leaving other regions to outdated modes and practices of living.

As Said describes in Orientalism, “the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.”30 The Central Power easily stands in for Europe in this formulation. Said further explains that “[t]he relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”31 The rhetoric of power and domination comes through clearly in Manfred’s rants. By the distinction he draws between the “responsible” way the Central Power is living, while the rest of the world still

28 Winterson 7-8.
29 Winterson 31.
31 Said 35.
irresponsibly drills oil, we see the complexity of an imposed hegemony as well. At one point, the Central Power themselves drilled oil in abundance and lived a life that was once seen as progressive, but is now seen as irresponsible because it is not their current practice. The dominant hegemony and what is “best” is always that to which the Central Power currently ascribes. Billie tries to reason this very point with him: “When we destabilized that planet it was in the name of progress and economic growth. Now that they’re doing it, it’s selfish and it’s suicide.” He angrily replies that “those backward sky-god worshippers and those stupid little slant-eyed clones—those guys are crippling us.” At this point, his means of “othering” takes on an explicit racial dimension. The core (or central) power of the world uses such identity constructions to “prove” superiority; furthermore, this discourse reinforces nationalist sentiments since “[n]ationalism is secured by hostility to enemies,” a part of which is “hostility based on institutionalized racism.” By presenting it alongside nationalist discourse, Winterson points out that ecological modernization cannot be successful unless it merges with principles of environmental justice.

III. IMPERIAL DISCOURSE, DEEP ECOLOGY, AND A POLITICAL PASTORAL

Discourses of imperialism relate closely to discourses of nationalism or regionalism in that the rhetoric of superiority and civilization touted on behalf of hegemonic, powerful nation states underlies the colonial movement. “Imperialist discourses […] depict the colonial other as inherently inferior, thereby validating the conquering nation’s imposition of alternative cultural values and political modes of governance.” Winterson either explicitly

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32 Winterson 31.
33 Winterson 32.
mentions or implies colonization and discourses of imperialism several times throughout *The Stone Gods*. For instance, we learn from Spike that Tech City’s largest corporation, MORE (an appropriate title to reflect the society’s conspicuous consumption), “‘is building a space-liner called the *Mayflower*. It will take those who can afford it to Planet Blue.’”\(^{36}\) In a clear stab at this reference to early European colonization, Billie responds that the plan is “‘strictly hierarchical, then.’”\(^{37}\) The characters rely on a constructed hierarchy of beings related to economic class to determine who has access to the new planet. Furthermore, since the Mayflower set out to inhabit a “New World” which was not new at all, a hierarchy of beings had to be in place to justify its supposed newness. The world is rendered only according to the “civilized,” and not the “savage.” Just as the Central Power perceives the dinosaurs and creatures inhabiting Planet Blue as inconveniences, so too did European colonialists aboard the Mayflower regard Native American inhabitants. Earlier in the novel, the President compares the Central Power’s discovery of Planet Blue “to the men who found the Indies, the Americas, the Arctic Circle.”\(^{38}\) Related to these references, the following text repeats throughout all sections of the novel:

*The new world — El Dorado, Atlantis, the Gold Coast, Newfoundland, Plymouth Rock, Rapanui, Utopia, Planet Blue. Chanc’d upon, spied through a glass darkly, drunken stories strapped to a barrel of rum, shipwreck, a Bible Compass, a giant fish led us there, a storm whirled us to this isle. In the wilderness of space, we found.* . . \(^{39}\)

Here, we get a list of “new” worlds (that are actually quite old) followed by notes on their discoveries by European explorers. Since societies already inhabited these lands, Winterson

\(^{36}\) Winterson 60-61.
\(^{37}\) Winterson 61.
\(^{38}\) Winterson 5.
\(^{39}\) Winterson 7.
exposes the rhetoric that stems from problematic power relations. The subjectivity and positionality of the conquered becomes completely masked. Winterson pushes readers to align the current situation of Planet Blue with imperial projects around the world.

We must consider, though, that dinosaurs and not human populations inhabit Planet Blue. When the President gives his speech to the people regarding Planet Blue, he assures them that a “[n]ew colonizing mission [is] being made ready. Monsters will be humanely destroyed, with the possible exception of scientific capture of one or two types for the Zooeum.” In conceptualizing the transition to the new planet as a colonizing mission, Winterson engages discourses of animal rights important to ecologism. The President’s statement brings the definition of “humanely”—and of “human” itself—into question and forces consideration about what kind of rights the creatures already on Planet Blue should have. The *OED* defines “humanely” as synonymous with “kindly, compassionately, benevolently”—a definition that does not seem to sit easily next to the word “destroy.” The humans will “humanely” *destroy*, meaning that since they benefit from the destruction, it is “humane” only in that it is human-centered. Furthermore, if the Central Power grants life to any of these creatures, it too would only be for human benefit: for the entertainment and use value the animals hold since they could be put on display at the zoo. As Gerrard notes, zoos “distort our perception of animals” and function as “a spectacle of imperial or neocolonial power.” Such perceptions would ultimately reinforce the Central Power’s treatment of the animals.

In a crucial message of the book, Spike tells Billie 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.’” Such a statement has many implications in terms of environmental

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40 Winterson 5.
42 Winterson 65-66.
positions. The questioning of anthropocentrism might act as a critique of environmental justice—which is ultimately a human-centered movement—or it might expand environmental justice to include non-human beings. The danger in the latter, of course, is a critique usually involved when dealing with issues of animal rights: whether the rights and value of every living thing should be equal to the rights and value of every human, and whether that is always an ethically responsible position. How, for instance, would one deal with a situation in which a rodent might be saved at the expense of a human life? In any case, by framing the trip to Planet Blue as a colonization mission, Winterson questions what kinds of hierarchies of living things can and should matter to an anti-hierarchical movement like environmental justice.

Winterson also questions value systems through her engagement with the environmental discourse of deep ecology. The ecocentric stance Billie sometimes assumes is indicative of deep ecology, which, at its most basic level, “demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature.” On the one hand, a deep ecological discourse offers hope in that it is “in opposition with almost the entirety of Western philosophy and religion,” but “[o]ne major, recurrent objection to deep ecology is that ecocentrism is misanthropic.” Billie seems to fall into the trap of assuming an “untainted” or pure wilderness that would be better off without human life. Such an imagining of wilderness renders “nature in a state uncontaminated by human civilization,” and draws a sharp distinction between nature and culture.

Billie expresses regret and sadness at what seems like the inevitability of humans destroying Planet Blue in the same way they have destroyed Orbus:

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

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43 Gerrard 21.
44 Gerrard 21-22.
45 Gerrard 59-60.
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.⁴⁶

She tells the planet that she is sorry, clearly acknowledging value in the planet itself that she believes deserves health in its own right. As I will discuss in upcoming sections, I do not necessarily believe it is misanthropy Winterson and her characters struggle against, but contempt for the dominant systems and discourses those in power are so eager to transport to Planet Blue.

The split between an untainted nature and an urban space as polluted or corrupted by humans necessitates a discussion of the pastoral. Pastoralism often “implies an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship.”⁴⁷ Billie embraces a somewhat problematic pastoral setting on her farm: “in the middle of this hi-tech, hi-stress, hi-mess life, F is for Farm. My farm. Twenty hectares of pastureland and arable, with a stream running through the middle like a memory […] My farm is the last of its line.”⁴⁸ Although Winterson engages with this seemingly pastoral setting, she perverts the preserve by turning it into a very political space from which Billie—a revolutionary rebel—works against and launches attacks against the system. The pastoral is far from a depoliticized or idyllic space, but instead is a place of political activity where Billie hides “Unknowns.” Ultimately, the pastoral becomes a place from which to launch movements for social justice.

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⁴⁶ Winterson 22.
⁴⁷ Gerrard 33.
⁴⁸ Winterson 11.
IV. ECOLOGISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM

Our narrator’s name, Billie Crusoe, a clear reference to Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, certainly evokes notions of imperialism and the duality between the human and the natural. The story also espouses an ethic of capitalism that Winterson sees as disastrous. *Robinson Crusoe* is a myth that has been told and retold, and is a story with complex and overlapping interpretations: “the story may be seen at once as a comment upon the relationship between the individual and society; an heroic rejection of the old world order; a piece of pre-colonialist propaganda; a tale raising archetypal problems of ‘otherness,’ of ‘naturalness,’ of ‘inequality,’ of ‘origin.’”49 It can further be seen as “a mediation upon the nature of being and the relationship between the self and the non-self.”50 I believe that in pulling from the *Crusoe* myth, in providing her own twenty-first century retelling, Winterson has created a novel which captures all of these ideas. The ways in which critics have interpreted and reinterpreted this story over time help highlight the need to recognize the complex relationships between human-nature and human-human:

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 *Grundrisse* 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

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50 Spaas ix.
communion with nature, Crusoe wishes to possess and exploit his environment.\textsuperscript{51}

This reading describes the necessity for “speak[ing] in cognizance of human being as ecologically or environmentally embedded.”\textsuperscript{52} Furthermore, as the reference to Marx points out, this reading suggests the necessity for analyzing the ways in which the dominant economic system affects one’s ability to imagine such embeddedness. The “acquisitive individualism” mentioned here, which suppresses the ability to recognize oneself as belonging to a natural community, is the cornerstone to capitalist discourse.

The system of global capitalism operates to perpetuate binary logic. Capitalism creates an unequal distribution of wealth and environmental degradation, which thus leads to unequal distribution of that degradation onto the poor. Such a dynamic leads to discourses that justify inequality by a reliance on problematic binary constructions of identity. Paul Burkett points out in \textit{Marx and Nature} that the “uneven development of capitalist production systematically divides workers into environmental ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ insofar as the worst human effects of ecological plunder and degradation are often imposed on the poorest, most socially marginalized sections of the working class.”\textsuperscript{53}

In \textit{Green Political Thought} Andrew Dobson iterates and reiterates why a separation needs to be drawn between environmentalism and ecologism—a separation I see as very much linked to the ways in which Winterson engages and critiques capitalism. Environmentalism, according to Dobson, “argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present

\textsuperscript{52} Buell, \textit{Future} 8.
values or patterns of production and consumption.” Ecologism, on the other hand, “holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human world, and in our mode of social and political life.” Winterson certainly pushes an ideology of ecologism, and part of changing the mode of social and political life is confronting the ills of a capitalist system. Manfred, who is eager to take the current system to Planet Blue, exemplifies a complete lack of critical thinking regarding modes of social life:

“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 else likes city life. The Central Power believes the biggest obstacle to mass migration will be setting up the infrastructure in time. We can't go back to the Bog Ages.”

No one will even leave for the new planet until those in power set up the industrial and commercial infrastructure that they are used to on Orbus. It is important to note, and perhaps easy to forget, that these are the thoughts and concerns of the Central Power. They embrace the system and cannot imagine life without it since it is what renders them the “us” in an us/them paradigm. Dobson explains that

[...]here is now a perfectly respectable claim to be made that green politics can be a part of a technological, affluent, service society [...] This is the green politics of carbon dioxide scrubbers on industrial chimneys, CFC-free aerosols, hybrid cars—and even nuclear power. In this guise, green politics presents no sort of challenge at all to the twenty-first century consensus over the desirability of affluent, technological, service societies. But [...] the historical significance of radical green politics is that it constitutes precisely

55 Dobson 3.
56 Winterson 32.
such a challenge, and that we shall lose sight of that significance if we conceive of it only in its reformist mode: a mode that reinforces conspicuous consumption and certain sorts of technology rather than calling them into question.\footnote{Dobson 5.}

Winterson points to the profound and tragic irony of a people who are desperate to take an advanced capitalist system with them to a new planet when the unchecked forces of capitalism have greatly contributed to the dire necessity of the move in the first place. I believe it is this attitude of an unquestioning devotion to an often destructive system that leads to Billie’s deep ecological sentiments of feeling “sorry” for Planet Blue.

When Manfred makes his statement that everyone \textit{not} from the Central Power can “go to Hell,” since they are “draining the last drops of oil out of the ground,” he does not engage, quite purposefully, with the social and economic relations underlying environmental policy. When there is money to be made in “responsible” living—in ecological modernization—and when there are resources to live in such a way, then the already wealthy will entertain the idea. But the already poor are forced to simply try to catch up, try to survive by whatever means possible—even if that means relying on outdated or environmentally destructive processes.

In Wreck City, the character Friday explains a very similar dynamic to Billie. The reason they didn’t give up oil before, “‘in the rich West, was 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.’”\footnote{Winterson 165.} India and China followed in the industrial footsteps of the West as the capitalist economy demanded it. This dynamic left the West ahead before the war and they are also ahead after the war: “‘War has been
wonderful for the Western economy—or it will be. We’ve been developing non-fossil-fuel-dependent technologies but barely using them because they’re more expensive than the old-fashioned heavy hitters of oil and coal. Pollution was still cheap… We couldn’t afford to be the good guys.”

This statement, which reveals the ways in ecological modernization can undergo cooptation by way of the markets and powerful governments and corporations, aligns perfectly with one of the most common environmental economic discourses. The “standard view” describes situations in which an environmental problem is dealt with only “after the event,” ensuring that environmental hang-ups do not inhibit the “progress” of capital accumulation. As Harvey points out, embedded in such a view is the belief that no environmental damage is irreversible. We simply make a mess, fix it, and continue in our progress. And, predictably, concerns for the environment and for related social justice issues are “kept strictly subservient to concerns for economic efficiency.”

So even though oil and coal were known to be killing the planet before, Western countries put the use of more efficient technologies on hold since they were not as profitable.

Saral Sarkar argues that the notion of “eco-capitalism”—or a capitalism that fosters a healthy environment—is ultimately impossible; free market capitalism, by its very nature, cannot provide a solution to environmental degradation and social injustice. Similarly, James Speth believes that “most environmental deterioration is a result of systemic failures of the capitalism that we have today.”

The Stone Gods repeatedly exposes this position. Post-WW3 War presents a society admittedly ruled by a corporation. MORE owns and runs Tech City,

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99 Winterson 165.
60 Harvey, Justice 373.
61 Harvey, Justice 374.
62 Harvey, Justice 375.
even though “MORE had been the world’s most aggressive free-marketeers; regulation-wreckers, carbon-kings.”\textsuperscript{65} They were in favor before the war, and now they own everyone and everything: “Pre-War, the ‘MORE is MORE’ bumper stickers sold the highest living lifestyle around the world. And we bought it.”\textsuperscript{66} And yet, even though this lifestyle is implicated in the ruin they have endured, they are still buying it: “In Post-3 War economics, Capitalism has gone back to its roots in paternalism, and forward into its destiny—complete control of everything and everyone, and with our consent.”\textsuperscript{67} The planet is dying, which has finally forced us to ponder “the ugliness of what we had built, the ugliness of how we had destroyed it, the brutal, stupid, money-soaked, drunken binge of twenty-first-century world.”\textsuperscript{68} Again, Winterson questions the conspicuous consumption of the system itself and asks similar questions to Dobson. The ideology of ecologism asks “whether dominant post-industrialism’s project of material affluence is either desirable or sustainable,” which is “missed if we choose to restrict our understanding of green politics to its dominant guise: an environmentalism that seeks a cleaner service economy sustained by cleaner technology and producing cleaner conspicuous consumption.”\textsuperscript{69}

To avoid pointing the finger solely at post-industrial capitalism in the West, Winterson presents an allegory of pre-capitalist power struggle in the Easter Island section. This retelling of the ecocide of an entire island civilization points to historical modes of production other than industrial capitalism that cause environmental destruction. It is not one mode of production or one way of organizing society that is the culprit in environmental harm; rather, it is the quest to gain and maintain power at any cost, thereby silencing dissenting voices, failing to recognize ecological embeddedness, and ignoring long-term

\textsuperscript{65} Winterson 133.
\textsuperscript{66} Winterson 134.
\textsuperscript{67} Winterson 139.
\textsuperscript{68} Winterson 164.
\textsuperscript{69} Dobson 7.
consequences. Our narrator now is Billy (and not Billie), a ship hand that has been left behind by his crew. Billy finds that “[t]he island was stripped and bare, with few trees or shrub-bushes of any kind. Nature seemed hardly to have provided it with any fit thing for man to eat or drink.”

Billy witnesses the final act of this destruction: “The 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.” In an act of defiance to the rival tribe, leaders fall the final tree. Billy is shocked, wondering: “Why would a man destroy the very thing he needs most?” He soon realizes that the power struggle between tribes has manifested in the worship of idols which ultimately laid the island to ruin: “These idols, staring out to see with their massy stone faces, stood many feet high, dark and heavy and impassive, and seated upon great plinths of wood and stone.” Since “the laboring of the Stone Gods had been the sole purpose of the island’s society,” the warring tribes cut every last tree to make the wooden foundations for the idols and to float the Stone Gods along the shore. Wood is a god that they bow to; it is considered more valuable than money or gold.

After learning the history of the tribes and the events on the island, Billy thinks he understands this civilization:

I was now satisfied in my mind that the Idols had been worked for magical purposes and in veneration of unseen powers. Rival wars had begun the deadly destruction of vying Idols—for if I can keep my ancestor, while

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70 Winterson 97-98.
71 Winterson 100-01.
72 Winterson 102.
73 Winterson 103.
74 Winterson 108.
75 Winterson 114.
losing you yours, I increase my Mana. The waste of such an enterprise seems hardly to have struck them, but I admit that my countrymen do the same in their warring and burning.\textsuperscript{76}

In an attempt to increase personal “Mana,” you must bring loss to others around you, leading to great waste and destruction. “Mana” can easily read as wealth and power, as Billy’s rendering of the situation provides an apt metaphor that can be applied to later capitalist systems. The false idols, or material objects, that represent and glorify power and wealth similarly doom the characters in the other three sections. Easter Island operates as a microcosm for what has occurred in Planet Blue and Post-3 War. In the beginning of Post-3 War, Billie finds a lost manuscript on the tube: “The Stone Gods, said the title. OK, must be anthropology. Some thesis, some PhD. What’s that place with the statues? Easter Island?”\textsuperscript{77}

But we see as Billie flips through the book and reads passages that it is the story of Planet Blue, and not the story of Easter Island; however, it is indeed titled The Stone Gods. Winterson pushes the reader to parallel the worship of false idols in the other sections of the novel to the destruction on Easter Island.

In focusing on a pre-capitalist society in Easter Island, Winterson avoids placing blame solely on the system of capitalism as we know it today. There are discourses of wealth, superiority, materialism, and egoism bound up in power relations that transcend boundaries of any one system and cause environmental degradation in any context. She also succeeds in disrupting a common European identity construction of “tribal life” by describing this society’s ecocide. Billy notes, “[m]ankind, I hazard, wherever found, Civilized or Savage, cannot keep to any purpose for much length of time, except the purpose of destroying himself.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} Winterson 109.
\textsuperscript{77} Winterson 119.
\textsuperscript{78} Winterson 109.
people have been represented as dwelling in harmony with nature, sustaining one of the most widespread and seductive myths of the non-European ‘other.’” Winterson explicitly raises the civilized/savage binary and simultaneously deconstructs it by disrupting a common myth.

V. ANDROCENTRISM, ANTHROPOCENTRISM, AND SPEAKING AGAINST SILENCE

Winterson is an author who writes against patriarchal discourses of domination and “against a male tradition that is validated by its insistence on distinctions between self and other.” Our first view of Easter Island, which is portrayed as a patriarchal society, includes “a shore of fine sand where upwards of a hundred men, no women or children, awaited us.”

Before the final tree is felled by the tribal leaders, women protest but are silenced:

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 part of the ritual, but one of the women is lying the length of her body against the tree, and wailing […] 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 society clearly subscribes to a hierarchy of power based on gender, and this instance is rich for analysis based on an ecofeminist position. Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out the struggle of women to sustain their communities and push back against “maldevelopment’ and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies,

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79 Gerrard 120.
80 Hardin 84.
81 Winterson 97.
82 Winterson 101.
multinational corporations, and global capitalism.\textsuperscript{83} It seeks connection between all forms of
domination, including the domination of nonhuman nature, making it necessarily
antihierarchical.\textsuperscript{84} Ecofeminism works against patriarchal discourses, but it can quite easily
become a position of exclusivity or one that relies on essentialist identity constructions—such
as woman as the nurturer—that feminists tend to work against. In this situation on Easter
Island, I do not believe Winterson suggests that women should be the caregivers of the land,
but rather that she points to the danger of excluding or silencing voices in a society that are
deemed subordinate or insignificant.

Even if the “human” voices in a society are acknowledged, a purely anthropocentric
perspective is just as destructive. Yet how do we speak for the nonhuman? Lawrence Buell,
argues that

an obvious difference between ecocriticism and emergent discourses on
behalf of silenced or disempowered social groups [is] in the kind of
identitarian claims that could be plausibly made in that context. One can
speak as an environmentalist, one can “speak a word for Nature” […] but
self-evidently no human can speak as the environment, as nature, as a
nonhuman animal.\textsuperscript{85}

Because Winterson’s text makes the categories of human and nonhuman so slippery, I believe
the issue what can have a voice is a complicated one. If we imagine each being as socially
and ecologically embedded in a natural community full of unstable and constantly changing
categories, then the possibility of voices seems to multiply. Winterson’s text suggests that

\textsuperscript{83} Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, Introduction, Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory,
\textsuperscript{84} Gaard, Ecofeminist Literary Criticism 4.
\textsuperscript{85} Buell, Future 7.
limiting voices and assuming a static category of humanness leads to both social injustice and environmental damage.

For instance, the Central Power relies on a rigid category of the nonhuman against which to form an identity. When Billie performs an interview with Spike, who has gone on a space mission to Planet Blue, she asks to hear all of the details of the new planet. Spike goes on to describe its abundant forests and animal life, when we hear Billie’s boss cry out in the background: “‘Ask her when we can start relocating’ shouted Manfred. ‘We want the human story.’” It is not difficult to see that the egoism and anthropocentrism (but only for the right kind of humans) revealed in this statement is what led the people of Orbus to destroy their planet in the first place. In describing how Planet Blue will affect peoples’ lives, Billie responds: “‘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? I mean to say, no other planet hosts human life.’” To this the interviewer “nods and smiles vigorously,” in absolute agreement that we should define success solely by the consideration of the “human.” Winterson questions how “humanness” is understood and seems to demand that the definition of the human, which has inevitably been constructed through complex relations of power, be deconstructed and recognized as an unstable category that should not necessarily be privileged over others.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

While every section of this novel includes instances of environmental injustice, I wish to focus on the final section, Wreck City, to illustrate both the productivity of the environmental justice model and how Winterson opens it up to new applications and

86 Winterson 30.
87 Winterson 4.
88 Winterson 4.
possibilities. The post-nuclear world of Wreck City is the slum—the “pocked and pitted scar
tissue of bomb wreckage”\textsuperscript{89}—that lies outside of the corporate hold MORE has on Tech City.
Here there is a binary between Tech and Wreck, between the corporatists and the alternative
communities and outcasts. Wreck City is “where you want to live when you don’t want to
live anywhere else. Where you live when you can’t live anywhere else…. The bomb damage
hasn’t been cleared in this part of town, and maybe never will be.”\textsuperscript{90} Issues of environmental
justice become apparent since the wealthy, urban space is clean, yet wreckage remains in the
slums. “Wreck City is a No Zone” whereas Tech City is the “official part of town.”\textsuperscript{91} The
title of No Zone fits perfectly with Mike Davis’ description of how slums are typically
viewed: Slums are “frequently seen as threats simply because they are invisible to state
surveillance and, effectively, ‘off-Panopticon.’”\textsuperscript{92} There are different ways of existing
outside of the system in the No Zone, since those in various groups calling themselves
“alternative societies” live amongst those that the city-dwellers cast out.

We learn that there is a war brewing between Tech City and Wreck City which stems
from the binary created by the identity constructions of a Tech versus a Wreck inhabitant:

Tanks today surrounded the perimeter of the No Zone, known as Wreck City
[…]. 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 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

\textsuperscript{89} Winterson 151.
\textsuperscript{90} Winterson 151.
\textsuperscript{91} Winterson 151.
\textsuperscript{92} Davis 111.
inhabitants to come forward and live within the wider community of their fellow citizens. After that, we’re going in.”

Tech City does not consider those in Wreck City fellow citizens at all, but rather as the enemy—an enemy that will endure violence if they do not assimilate to the hegemonic system of MORE. Winterson portrays the No Zone as an urban slum, which, as Davis explains, is “first and above all envisioned as a place where an incorrigible and feral social ‘residuum’ rots in immoral and often riotous splendor.” When MORE suspects Billie of a terrorist plot, Friday responds, “‘What did I tell you? It’s going to be the same old stuff creeping back—already we’ve got an Us and a Them.’” Winterson makes an explicit stab at the illogical nature of binaries that only cause destruction. An environmental justice approach to this situation would seek to break down the false construction between the “two different kinds” of people envisioned.

Juxtaposed with this challenge to identity constructions based on relations of power is a description of the Dead Forest—a horrifying place, but also a space that complicates defining the human and the natural. When Billie tries to escape the violence of Wreck City, she travels to where “[t]he city stretches on—way past here and into the Unknown” and makes a sickening discovery. She comes to the Unknown, which is “a petrified forest of blackened and shocked trees, silent, like a haunted house. [...] Their bark had a coating—like a laminate. Further in, deeper, I could see that these trees were glowing.” Friday informs her that this is the Dead Forest. “It looked like nothing from Nature. [...] It was like walking into a corpse, only the corpse wasn’t dead.” It is a place where MORE does not patrol,

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93 Winterson 157.
94 Davis 22.
95 Winterson 168.
96 Winterson 159.
97 Winterson 161.
98 Winterson 168.
because “they hope it will kill us all. If you can’t nuke your dissidents, the next best thing is to let the degraded land poison them.” 99 Friday points out a striking case of environmental injustice in which the capitalists of Tech leave the human waste from the war to die in Wreck.

The Dead Forest is not simply a dead “natural” area, but its destruction interweaves the concerns of the “natural” sphere and the “human” sphere. Within the forest Billie sees “five or six rabbit-like animals—hairless, deformed” and then comes upon “[a] boy and a girl. Perhaps. Holding hands, barely dressed, both with rags tied around their bodies. They boy was covered in sores, the girl had no hair…. The boy grinned. He had no teeth.” 100 The binary between human and nature is challenged through a forest that does not look like it is “from Nature” and humans that are only “perhaps” human. When Billie wants to help them, Friday explains, “We can’t. They’re toxic radioactive mutants. They won’t live long. It’s Tech City’s big secret, one of them anyway. The incurables and the freaks are all in there. They feed them by helicopter.” 101 And every time when these people were fed, “[n]o one looked down and no one looked up.” 102 A hypocrisy is revealed between Tech City’s disregard for the people in the forest and their impersonal, futile act of feeding them by helicopter. One cannot help but think of the occasional food aid dropped in by helicopter from wealthier countries or from private organizations to the world’s destitute. Winterson points to a dissonance between a global capitalist system that leaves so many around the world starving, and the small acts that provide meager, temporary solutions for only a few.

At this point, Winterson presents a powerful juxtaposition between the powerful and the “abject” as the people of the Dead Forest walk out to meet the troops of MORE. Her descriptions of the mutants explicitly ask again and again what gets to count as human:

99 Winterson 162.
100 Winterson 170.
101 Winterson 171.
102 Winterson 196.
Then I saw them, coming in through the dark at all the far edges of the Playa. Coming in on all fours, coming in on crutches made from rotten forest wood, coming in ragged, torn, ripped, open-wounded, ulcerated, bleeding, toothless, blind, speechless, stunted, mutant, alive—the definition of human. Souls?

They lived in the Dead Forest. 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, 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 hatred for others.  

By calling them the “new generation of humans,” Winterson illustrates that the category of human is indeed unstable and in constant flux. She certainly complicates any stable division between the ecocentric and anthropocentric and pushes for an entire shift in thinking that includes both and recognizes how one necessarily blends into the other. This nightmarish depiction of the disempowered and forgotten cannot help but accomplish the goal of rendering humans as both socially and ecologically embedded. Those in the dead forest are “creatures of another planet—from another planet, lost on this one” and they come face to face with their oppressors. A “mutant” man from the Dead Forest walks up to a man on the front-line, spits in his face, and says: “Toxic, me or you?” Then he is shot. Just

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103 Winterson 195.
104 Winterson 196.
105 Winterson 198.
as soon as the “other” explicitly challenges the binary, the person in power silences him with a bullet.

The description of Wreck City also expands categories in that it collapses any possibility of a pastoral or “untainted” nature. Buell explains that “environmental criticism’s working conception of ‘environment’ has broadened in recent years from ‘natural’ to include also the urban, the interweave of ‘built’ and ‘natural’ dimensions in every locale.”

Winterson engages this crucial incorporation of both built and natural environments when describing the damage of the nuclear war and what it brought: “the molten rain, the nuclear wind, the blackened-out sun, the buildings with their fronts torn off, the riverside apartments gutted, the river a stinking ditch.” The environmental damage of both the sun and rivers are interwoven with the damage to buildings and apartments. The environmental justice movement, with its focus on poor urban environmentalism, engages with this more productive and open conception of environment.

Winterson also opens up new possibilities for the environmental justice model by suggesting that it move beyond its local applications. Harvey’s main critique of environmental justice is that it is too particularist, “fighting an incinerator here, a toxic waste dump there, a World Bank dam project somewhere else.” He both calls for and acknowledges the difficulty of a discourse “of universality and generality that unites the emancipatory quest for social justice with a strong recognition that social justice is impossible without environmental justice.” This discourse must “adopt a politics of abstraction capable of reaching out across space, across multiple environmental and social conditions.” It is clear that in a time of global climate change and a time when “[t]he

106 Buell, Future 12.
107 Winterson 163.
108 Harvey, Justice 400.
109 Harvey, Justice 400.
exhaustion of the most economically viable reserves of resources from the ‘core’ richer nations is driving the expansion of the extraction in the world’s ‘peripheral’ nations,\textsuperscript{110} we indeed must seek an environmental justice model that reaches beyond local boundaries. In part, Harvey suggests that the environmental justice movement radicalize ecological modernization,\textsuperscript{111} which Winterson also seems to demand. I believe a concern regarding environmental justice is that it achieve an equal distribution of environmental degradation without actually decreasing the cumulative amount of destruction to ecological systems. Social justice must be paired with an ideology of ecologism that questions consumption and with sustainable practices of ecological modernization.

\textbf{VII. Hope, Politicizing the Personal, and a Move toward Queering Environmentalism}

As I mentioned earlier, this novel at times struggles with what can be read as misanthropic sentiments. Billie cries out just pages from the novel’s end: “‘This is never going to work. Humans can’t do it—either we kill each other or we kill the planet or both. We’d destroy the whole lot rather than make it work.’”\textsuperscript{112} Yet Winterson presents profound instances of hope through personal relationships that challenge humanness and normativity. “Humans can’t do it” if we adopt and accept only the dominant discourses that determine humanism, but Winterson conveys hope through opening up the possibilities of humanness. Val Plumwood explains that “it is the development in certain cultures, especially and originally western culture, of a particular concept and practice of human identity and relationship to nature which is the problem, not the state of being human as such.”\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Harvey, \textit{Justice} 401.
\textsuperscript{112} Winterson 201.
\textsuperscript{113} Val Plumwood, \textit{Feminism and the Mastery of Nature} (New York: Routledge, 1993) 12.
Recently, several authors have begun engaging with notions of queer environmentalism.\textsuperscript{114} This trend not only considers the ways in which ecological thought can be useful to queer politics, but also asks how queer political movements and theories might productively inform ecologism. In “Queering Ecocultural Studies,” Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands advocates for an ecocultural studies of a social nature that engages ecology with the specific intersections and relations of power with which cultural studies has historically been concerned. She promotes an ecocultural studies that makes nature appreciable in cultural practices and that also always reads “nature” as a porously-bounded realm of relations intertwined with (but not reducible to) others. More specifically—and here [she] finally come[s] to the “queer” part—[she] advocate[s] a critical practice of ecocultural analysis that challenges, as part of an analysis focused on the contingency and articulation of power relations, the ways in which natural and ecological relations have been read and organized to normalize and naturalize power, and likewise the ways in which cultural relations have incorporated and shaped other-than-human actors and processes in the unfolding and re/production of power.\textsuperscript{115}

This novel operates as a site of struggle between the power-bound discourses of nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, androcentrism, and anthropocentrism and various ecological positions. In arguing that the novel queers environmentalism, I imagine “queerness” similarly to Mortimer-Sandilands in “that ‘queer’ is not merely an identity-based proposition,\footnote{\textsuperscript{114} In addition to the works discussed here, see, for example, Greta Gaard, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” \textit{Hypatia} 12.1 (1997): 114-37, and Richard Phillips, Diane Watt, and David Shuttleton, eds., \textit{De-Centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis} (London: Routledge, 2000). \textsuperscript{115} Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, “Queering Ecocultural Studies,” \textit{Cultural Studies} 22.3 (2008): 458.}
but rather a mode of examining and challenging specific relations of power in intersection
with others.” Buell calls the intersection between queer studies and environmentalism,
simply, the unsettling of normative thinking about environmental status quos. Winterson’s
text queers environmentalism by exploring parallels between the power relations that have
historically been destructive to queer identities and those that are destructive to the
environment. She furthermore opens up conceptual categories in ways that are productive to
both queer and environmental theories and politics.

*The Stone Gods* not only includes queer “human” relationships, but engages a new
move in queer studies: the queering of nonhuman objects or beings. Winterson accomplishes
this primarily through the character of Spike, a Robo *sapiens* designed to make rational
leadership decisions. The title assigned to her, Robo *sapiens*, linguistically merges the words
robot and human as it conceptually merges notions of the human and nonhuman; thus, her
very existence challenges such categories. In her forward to *Queering the Non/Human*,
Donna Haraway explains that “[q]ueering has the job of undoing ‘normal’ categories, and
none is more critical than the human/nonhuman sorting operation. That is crucial work and
play.” Queering the nonhuman offers a new way of looking at the world by troubling the
binaries of natural/unnatural, human/animal, living/dead, organic/inorganic, animate/
inanimate, nature/culture, and useful/useless, among others. The intimate relationship that
develops between Billie and Spike is a clear example of queering the nonhuman. Their
intimacy engages a hybrid process that opens up new ways of being in the world and new
modes of sociability.

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116 Mortimer-Sandilands 458.
120 O’Rourke xvii-xviii.
In another instance, Winterson presents a memorable intimacy between a mutant boy and his dog. As Alice Kuzniar explains, the intimacy between humans and their pets has the potential to profoundly disturb limits of both animal and human existence. A relationship between a human and a pet explores what it means to exist through relations with an Other, and “reorients companionship and kinship away from the normative strictures of heterosexual coupling and the traditional family.”

Winterson describes this intimacy through small but powerful moments of kinship: “The small boy was whimpering. I gave him the bottle of milk. He knelt down and poured some into his one good cupped hand, and gave it to the dog to drink. When he had done that with half of the milk, he drank the rest straight off. We went on.”

This is one more instance, in the midst of environmental decay, that illustrates the hopefulness of breaking down traditional categories. The boy and dog are both mutants, thus disallowing even the strict categories of human and animal. They become simply beings sharing. Even the small act of a boy unselfishly feeding his pet before himself is made political and significant because of its context and implications. The “human/dog relations can function as a strategy to challenge, critique and subvert norms relating to sex, gender, species, desire, intimacy and love.”

As the weight of environmental degradation felt locally and globally presses ever heavily upon us, Winterson has provided a text that points to challenging problems and hopeful solutions. She demands that complex discourses of power be critically examined alongside environmental positions to see their mutual influences. She disrupts binary constructions and makes fixed categories of the human and the natural impossible, which ultimately allows for new modes of sociability and encourages the blending of common

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122 Winterson 199.
environmental models. The environmental justice movement, particularly, can benefit from a reimagining, or a “queering,” of its potential applications. In a novel with multiple planets that expands beyond even this globe, we see the ways in which environmental justice can reach beyond particularist struggles. Part of this expansion comes with the recognition that anthropocentrism is and must be a fluid positionality that relies on an unstable border between the human and the nonhuman. Such a reimagining allows the environmental justice model itself to exist in a somewhat fluid state that addresses the inseparable spheres of ecology and social justice.
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