

Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

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At first sight, *The Stone Gods* seems to be a science fiction novel, but as we proceed, as words enter our minds and form small units of meaning, that coalesce into larger ones, doubt makes its way in and we are no longer certain whether what we perceived as a story about the future is merely that. Not surprisingly, since it is, after all, a Wintersonian story, and we never know what to expect. By the time we reach the last page of the first chapter, we are almost sure that it was not the future we had read about, but the past; or, to be more exact, the past of Planet Blue, aka our Mother Earth.

Three strands of narrative are intertwined in Wintersonian fashion, different locations, different moments in the evolution of mankind: (1) Orbus, a planet teetering on the edge of destruction 65 million years ago, at a time when our Mother Earth was still populated by carnivorous monsters, the dinosaurs; (2) Easter Island in the 18th century, an ecosystem on the verge of extinction, and (3) Planet Blue, aka the Earth, in a state of devastation following a nuclear war, World War 3. These tragic accounts of devastation brought about by people's compulsion to engage, time and time again, in similar patterns of destruction, are built around lead characters who bear the same names, although they populate three different space-times: (1) Billie Crusoe, a scientist from Orbus, goes on a mission to the newly discovered Planet Blue, together with Spike, a highly advanced Robo sapiens, and with Captain Handsome who decides to stage a meteor collision in order to destroy the dinosaurs inhabiting the new world; (2) Billy, one of Captain Cook's sailors is accidentally left stranded in 1774 on the Easter Island where he encounters Spickers, the son of a Dutch sailor who had landed on the island two years earlier with Captain Roggeweins; (3) Billie, a survivor of the nuclear World War 3, on Planet Blue, travels to Wreck City together with Spike, a robot head, in an attempt to escape the autocracy of Tech City, the former city of London rebuilt by MORE, a massive global corporation that had taken over all power in the post-nuclear holocaust world.

Thus, what began with 'overtones of Orwell's 1984' ends in a similar fashion, with grim images of a 'post-nuclear holocaust world'. As Capp points out, the 'degree of urgency and prophetic angst in the writing is a reminder of Winterson's evangelical origins, explored in her first novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and her familiarity with the idea of apocalypse'. *The Stone Gods* is, according to Merritt, 'a Borgesian parable about history and repetition and a liberal's *cri de coeur* about what we have done and go on doing to ourselves'.

References:

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