"The boxed-up miseries and fears, orbiting two miles up": Rationing and Rationalizing Emotions in Feminist Speculative Fiction

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In "Post-Anthropocentric Ethics of Care in Turn-of-the-Century Fiction," Katarzyna Więckowska writes that the fictional texts that "represent the human subject as embodied and feeling" highlight human beings' "precarity, vulnerability, and community" (39). Most feminist fiction fits into this description as feminist authors are interested in the way sensitivity, associated with femininity and pushed away in patriarchal contexts as a weakness, can be redefined as a strength and a tool for healthier human relations. As a whole, inWestern cultures, the realm of the emotional has been historically construed as feminine, whereas men are supposed to control their emotions and epitomize reason (Niedenthal and Ric 275). Simultaneously, among emotions, some are interpreted by Eva Illouz as masculine—anger, aggression, pride—and some feminine–empathy, fear, shame (*Cold Intimacies* 3). The dialectics of abundance and scarcity underlies any discourse about certain emotions under patriarchy in the form of opposite judgments: from a patriarchal point of view, the abundance of emotions needs to be dammed; from a feminist one, patriarchy enforces emotional scarcity. Emotions are, therefore, the site of a power struggle. Feminist authors address gender stereotypes by representing emotions as social and political objects rather than solipsistic phenomena; therefore, the working definition of emotions used in this paper considers them as immediate physiological and psychological reactions to varied outside stimuli that are spontaneously judged as beneficial or dangerous according to one's culture and environment[1] I contend that feminist dystopian fiction politicizes emotion[2] as a site of power by representing the tension between the deficit and profusion of emotions under patriarchy. Novels pertaining to the genre of feminist dystopian fiction were selected because they produce an effect of "cognitive estrangement" that defamiliarizes patriarchy (Suvin 4). Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) is composed of four sections, each in a different timeframe. The main characters, Billie and Spike, are different versions of

[1] The definition of emotions is not consensual within psychology, let alone across disciplines. For an overview of the main psychological theories of emotions (evolutionary, cognitive and constructionist), see Chapter 1 of Niedenthal and Ric's *Psychology of Emotions*.

2 Although distinctions are often extremely blurry, I distinguish emotions from feelings which arise from repeated emotional states, include more articulate thoughts, and tend to last longer.

themselves in each narrative. Three of the sections are set in futuristic contexts with advanced technologies, where Spike is a "*Robo sapiens*," a man-made, female-shaped, android, while in the fourth section she is a human man in the 18th century. Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan* (2017) resurrects the mythical figure of Joan of Arc as an eco-terrorist resistant who leads the rebellion against Jean de Men's iniquitous capitalist power. In a near-future where the Earth has become almost inhabitable, Christine de Pizan, the narrator, is part of the elite who have taken refuge on a spaceship called CIEL. Consumed with nostalgia and guilt, she writes Joan's story from birth to demise thanks to "grafting," the technique of engraving words into skin. Finally, *The Water Cure* (2018), Sophie Mackintosh's acclaimed debut, is a choral novel which turns toxic masculinity into a literal epidemic that makes women sick and men more violent. The protagonists, Grace, Lia and Sky, are sisters whose parents decided to shelter in a secluded mansion. In reality, far from protecting their daughters, the parents commit multiple forms of abuse. All three novels denounce the patriarchal repression of women's emotions and the attempt to expunge visible emotions from social life. However, this paper also explores the possibility that the emotions themselves are not repressed: rather, their *modalities* of expression are strictly controlled in dystopian settings. The novels map the licit and illicit emotions and the circumstances in which they are allowed to be expressed. This working hypothesis originates in Michel Foucault's theory in *The History of Sexuality* according to which sexuality has not actually been repressed since the 19th century, because power operates in ways that are more complex than mere repression (16). Sexuality is, in fact, everywhere discussed, but the circumstances of expression are strictly codified and regulated. I aim to show that the effect of patriarchy on emotions is similar: it does not repress them *per se*, but regulates their expression to enforce gender rules. My reading thus focuses on the ambivalence of power with regards to emotions: as feminine elements, they must be evacuated from the public realm, while at the same time being the object of intense attention and proliferating discourse. I define the "economy of emotions" as the organization of the expression of emotions by capitalist and patriarchal power structures that aims at erasing the subjectivity of marginalized groups. In spite of these regulations, however, emotions still abound, which is represented thanks to the body-as-container metaphor. Emotions reveal the porosity of binaries such as emotions and reason, body and mind, and self and other. Therefore, the texts suggest that the potential for destabilization and rebellion stems from women's emotions, reclaimed as empowering rather than shameful.

The Economy of Emotions: Repression, Regulation, Consumption

Repression and "Happycracy"

The Stone Gods, *The Book of Joan* and *The Water Cure* each denounce an impoverishment of emotional life due to repressive structures of power. The control of women's emotions, especially those perceived as negative, contributes to dystopian world-building. In *The Water Cure*, the three daughters Grace, Lia and Sky are isolated from the rest of the world by their parents who force them to follow a series of rituals. The official purpose of those rituals is to protect them from being contaminated by the toxin spreading on the outside. However, they are also attempts to purge emotions which are construed as a threat:

> Strong feelings weaken you, open up your body like a wound. It takes vigilance and regular therapies to hold them at bay. Over the years we have learned how to dampen them down, how to practise and release emotion under strict conditions only, how to own our pain. I can cough it into muslin, trap it as bubbles under the water, let it from my very blood. (Mackintosh 18)

The use of the second person address in the first sentence signifies that the narrator, Lia, is repeating the discourse that she and her sisters hear from their parents, reframed as general truths. Repressing one's emotions is a lengthy training process that requires repetition ("regular," "over the years"), hence the ritualization implemented by the parents. Repression actually consists in a *redirection* of emotions into more acceptable (hidden) outlets.

A similar cultural defiance against emotions appears in "Planet Blue," the first section of *The Stone Gods*, where the narrator Billie also needs to hide what she truly feels:

> I should be glad to be shopping in work time, but I'm not glad about anything. In fact, I'm depressed, which is pretty much illegal. By that I mean that at the first sign of depression I, you, anyone is supposed to see their doctor and be referred to someone from Enhancement, but I am someone from Enhancement, and I am depressed. (Winterson 27)

The tautology conveys a cynical satire of the bureaucratic, neoliberal[3] dystopian society. It also imitates the way the character's emotions are forced to develop in a vacuum. Similarly to the characters of *The Water Cure*, Billie's insight shows that repressing emotions does not suppress them in any way; it only generates more negative emotions and prevents release. The obligation to hide sadness, pain or anger echoes the concept of "happycracy" described by psychologist Edgar Cabanas and sociologist Eva Illouz as "the new coercive strategies, political decisions, management styles, consumption patterns, individual obsessions and

3 "Neoliberal" refers to the late capitalist ideology that appeared under Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. It favors the deregulation of the market, the freedom to do business and to consume, and the dismantling of the welfare state (Mudge 705). It stresses ideals of personal responsibility and individualism (Harvey 23). Neoliberalism tends to present itself as the natural order of things rather than an ideology serving an economic model.

emotional hierarchies that, together with a new notion of citizenship, have emerged in the age of happiness" (*Manufacturing*, "Introduction"). This concept applies particularly well to the excerpt from *The Stone Gods* which describes corporate pressure on characters to appear happy at all costs, inducing a disconnection from their actual emotions. The emotional regime at play represses negative emotions that hinder productivity or threaten social order. Citizens of dystopian regimes and, in this case, (young) women are kept in check because their emotions have no place in the public sphere, a rule that they have internalized. The characters develop self-discipline which strengthens structural relations of domination. The parallel with happycracy puts into relief the satirical element in Winterson's criticism of modern surveillance and management.

Rationalization

Eva Illouz's work helps one to delve deeper into the analysis of the patriarcho-capitalist control over emotions in the novels. Her 2017 study *Cold Intimacies* demonstrates that emotions underwent a process of rationalization in the 1960s and 1970s, with two main requirements: quantification and commensuration (30). Quantification consists in making "intimate life and emotions [...] into measurable and calculable objects, to be captured in quantitative statements" (32). Commensuration is "using numbers to create relations between things. It transforms qualitative distinctions into quantitative distinctions, where difference is precisely expressed as magnitude according to some shared metric" (Espeland qtd. In Illouz 32). In *The Water Cure*, a similar process of rationalization is at work. Emotions and feelings, love in particular, are quantifiable and therefore commensurable:

> "How much do you love Mother today?" we ask each other, one by one, lying in the dying grass of the garden or on the beach, burying each other's feet in the sand. The answers come with no hesitation. "Two per cent."
> "Forty per cent."'
> "One hundred and twelve per cent." (14)

This scene, like many others in the novel, has an iterative value (Genette 145)—it is presented as one exemplary instance of a series of similar events which are repeated in the diegesis. Its function is to build up the stifling atmosphere of a repressive family context.

The author is critical of a rationalized vision of emotions stemming from a socio-economic context similar to the non-fictional context described by Illouz, in which emotions have a transactional function: "'How much do you love your sister?' [Mother] asks, and when I outstretch my hands wide to indicate this much, she nods. She leans into my ear and asks me, quietly, to do something for her" (115). The parental authority encourages such a commodification of emotions because it makes them tradable. The physicality of Lia's response ("I outstretch my hands wide") turns her feeling into an object with a measurable value. Thus objectified, love is turned into an obligation and a debt. As for Lia, she becomes

her family's debtor, which allows her mother to have her do what she wants (bury Grace's baby at sea). The childishness of the gesture clashes with the emotional manipulation and the level of responsibility placed upon Lia's shoulders. Another instance of this is Grace describing the parental strategies as "[s]tricter ways of measuring our loves. So we portioned it out in finite acts. A kiss to the cheek was worth *this* much" (241). Moreover, the family has a ritual of drawing straws (in the form of golf clubs) that determines whose love is allocated to whom each year–as there are four irons and they are five, one of them is not allowed to receive affection (9). Thus, emotions are not merely repressed: in addition to being concealed and measured, they are also put into a certain lexicon, that of quantification and trade (economic vocabulary), which reveals a deeply entrenched liberal commercial ideology. It remains so even though the story takes place after the parents sought isolation from the rest of society. The parents perpetuate the outside capitalist and patriarchal structures they claim to protect their daughters from; proving this protection is only a pretext to discipline the girls' emotions and thoughts. The author points out the ubiquity and insidiousness of power, which infiltrates all spheres of life, including emotions.

Consumption of emotions

The neoliberal paradigm also appears through the commodification of emotions and feelings, drawing the reader's attention to the dystopian aspects of late capitalism. In *The Book of Joan*, because of the extreme control imposed over people's lives and of the damage caused by climate change on their bodies, people have lost the ability to experience genuine sensations and emotions. The depletion of emotional spontaneity is paralleled by an abundant verbalization and textualization of emotions in the form of narratives. This state of affairs is reminiscent of Eva Illouz's observation on the ambiguity of emotions in the contemporary world: they are situational and therefore particular, yet they are also regularized and commodified and therefore lose particularity (*Cold Intimacies* 38). In the novel, the void left by contemporary emotional life is invested as a market by creators who provide romance fiction as a replacement. The narratives are sold for profit: emotional life has become a trade, and emotions a commodity. Sentimentality—the propension to rely on emotions rather than reason—is a homogenized product that everyone, men or women, desperately needs and therefore consumes. It is particularly weaponized against women to enforce heteronormativity and male domination.

Yuknavitch denounces the marketization of emotions, tightly imbricated with patriarchal and capitalist powers. Like everything vital in the author's universe, emotions are extracted, transformed and sold for profit, thus drawing a parallel between emotions and the Earth's natural resources that the elite spaceship uses to the last drop. In particular, desire and love, the most sought-after emotions in the diegesis, are repackaged as a literary and commercial

object, a product which the narration distinguishes from actual emotions by calling it "romance." Romance is the tradable, never satisfactory version of emotion. The consumers are humans whose bodies have devolved to a point where they have almost no physical sensations nor pleasure. Since paper has disappeared in this post-apocalyptic context, the body is of utmost importance: the narratives are written onto people's skin thanks to "the new form of storytelling" called "grafting" (9). Therefore, Yuknavitch denounces the cynicism of a regime that isolated, exploited and altered people's bodies, while also selling them cheap thrills in an altered form. She shows that the loss of the sensory relation to the world is inseparable from emotion scarcity. Characters have no choice but to look for ersatz emotional life in a type of romance fiction that puts their bodies through voluntary violence and mutilation.

The villain Jean de Men uses love tales to perpetuate misogyny and rape culture. Female characters in his work are reduced to sexual objects and his narratives sanction their rape. Here Yuknavitch points to the fact that even when actual rape cannot be committed (as genitals have disappeared when human bodies devolved), it survives in literature and shared culture, "permeat[ing] consciousness" (21). Far from harmless, romance fiction constructs women as available, dehumanized bodies. However, Christine subverts Jean de Men's cynical exploitation of emotions. She becomes his competitor in skin grafting to launch a war of "representation against representation" (21). Her art, which used to compensate for love and eroticism scarcity, becomes politicized and rejects the restrictive role assigned to women as sexual and procreative objects. Her "literary resistance movement" becomes collective and powerful (22-3). Thus, Yuknavitch demonstrates the importance of writing alternative stories to challenge dominant views, in this case from a feminist viewpoint. Such a stance is also metatextual, since the text thus asserts the value of its own endeavor to rehabilitate the figure of Joan of Arc as an ecofeminist leader and to recall Christine de Pizan's iconoclastic proto-feminist writing. The realm of literature is presented as a dialectics between domination and resistance, both intradiegetically and extradiegetically.

Emotions and the Destabilization of Boundaries

In spite of the multiple dystopian attempts to rationalize, regulate and instrumentalize emotions for power and profit, emotions have a subversive power that all three authors present as relevant within a feminist perspective. The hierarchy of reason over emotions originates in modern conceptions of the human, based on Cartesian dualism, which separates the mind from the body, the human from the sensible world, and the subject from the object. Queer and postmodern feminists have, since the 1960s, denounced the gendered nature and

the violence of these dichotomies (Butler 16-21, Cixous 69-76, Haraway 3-90).[4] Moreover, ecofeminists have underlined the analogy between the domination of women and the domination of nature in Enlightenment philosophy (Merchant xvi). The association of women with nature ties them to the realm of emotions: they are "irrational, more sensitive, impure" (my trans., Hache 20**).** *The Stone Gods*, *The Book of Joan* and *The Water Cure* partake in the criticism of Humanist dualisms as they show how these structures justify exploitation, destruction and violence. In this section, I focus on the way the authors represent emotions as spontaneous and uncontainable elements that destabilize boundaries between body and mind, sensitivity and reason, and even between human and non-human. Consequently, they reveal and challenge the organization of patriarchal power.

Emotions and Reason

All three authors articulate the debasement of women with that of emotions and, inevitably, the body and anything material. For instance, *The Water Cure* emphasizes how the gendering of emotions justifies female submissiveness:

> Part of what made the old world so terrible, so prone to destruction, was a total lack of preparation for the personal energies often called *feelings*. Mother told us about these kinds of energies. Especially dangerous for women, our bodies already so vulnerable in ways that the bodies of men are not. (12)

In *The Stone Gods*, Billie analyzes the cultural gendering of emotions and its socio-economic effects with a critical point of view:

> We cannot cut out emotion–in the economy of the human body, it is the limbic, not the neural, highway that takes precedence. We are not robots–apologies there, Spike–but we act as though all our problems would be solved if only we had no emotions to cloud our judgement. […] It is why women have had such a hard time juggling family and work, and why some women sincerely neglect their children for the sake of their job—anything else would be sentimental and soft, emotionalism versus practical good sense. It doesn't stop the child crying, though. (169-70)

Emotions, feminized and seen as weaknesses, are instrumentalized to justify women's inferior social status. However, both quotations also underline that emotions are impossible to dismiss because they are rooted in the human body regardless of gender. Therefore, the rejection of emotions is an already-lost struggle against a profoundly human feature.

Asserting the primacy of emotions challenges the hierarchical binary since reason is shown to be motivated by emotions. The narrator makes this idea explicit in *The Stone Gods*: "[rational

4 In the wake of Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist critical theory, these thinkers argue that binary oppositions are not neutral but hierarchical. In *Cyborg philosophie. Penser contre les dualismes*, Thierry Hoquet describes the development of binaries in three steps: the creation of difference, the valorization of one term over the other, and the absolutization of difference as natural, timeless truth (330). Many radical feminists such as Hélène Cixous or Shulamith Firestone consider that the men/women opposition is the root of all dualisms.

people] are very aggressive, very controlling, but they hide it behind intellectualization and hard-headed thinking" (170). The plot of *The Stone Gods* as a whole exemplifies the dialectics between denial and resurgence of emotions which motivates wars, imperialism and the exploitation of resources. In fact, all three novels gradually expose the emotional motivations behind the villains who pretend to embody reason; namely: the fear of women's autonomy, aggression, and loneliness. Acknowledging that cold reason is enmeshed in emotions imparts the female characters with tools to resist men's illusionary natural superiority.

The Persistence of the Body

The relationship between body and emotions is often thought of in terms of containment as shown by common expressions like "being overwhelmed," "channeling anger," or "happiness spilling over" (Rosenwein 834). Barbara Rosenwein calls this the "hydraulic view" of emotions which originates in the medieval theory of humors, according to which people's health depended on the balance of bodily fluids associated with anger, sadness, joy, and composure (836). According to Rosenwein, this understanding of emotions is irrelevant not only because the medical theory is outdated, but also because emotions cannot be understood only in terms of the opposition between restraint and expression (837). Instead, she relies on 20th century scientific understandings of emotions: in cognitive psychology, emotions are seen as reactions to an appraisal of a situation being positive or negative, which makes them vary between individuals (836-37). In a social constructionist view, "societies bend, shape, encourage and discourage the expression of various emotions" (837). The three feminist dystopias discussed here seem to embrace these theories because they insist on context and therefore can account for the way patriarchal power shapes emotional life. Still, the texts maintain a strong emphasis on the body to challenge the conjoint, the Cartesian ideal of rationalism, and convoke the image of the body as a container of emotions. They challenge the illusions of a rationalist, "hard-headed" (Winterson 208) worldview by insisting on materiality and physicality. The novels show that the censorship of emotions in public does not enable the dystopian authorities to suppress the intimately material, corporeal manifestation of affect.

Therefore, women's emotions and bodies are not merely despised, they are also feared as a threat to the patriarchal order. This subversive potential is particularly striking in *The Water Cure* when the daughters are tortured by the father for expressing their pain and sadness, and yet emotions persist:

> We have never been permitted to cry because it makes our energies suffocating. Crying lays you low and vulnerable, racks your body. If water is the cure for what ails us, the water that comes from our own faces and hearts is the wrong sort. It has absorbed our pain and is dangerous to let loose. Pathological despair was King's [the father] way of

> describing an emergency that needed cloth, confinement, our heads held underwater. What constituted an emergency was me and my sisters crying in unison, unable to stop.
>
> I love to cry, though. With King gone, I have forgotten to feel guilty about doing it. There is no one left to notice what I do now. Alone in my room, the windows flung open and the sun lazy against my eyes. Or underwater in the pool, where all water is the same water. (67-8)

The forms of violence are immediately contrasted with agreeable sensations: "confinement" is echoed by "the windows flung open and the sun lazy against [Lia's] eyes," the "heads held underwater" become willingly crying underwater. This passage relies on the usual metaphor of the body-as-container from which emotions flow. Here, the fluidity of emotions anchored in the body is a factor of potential disorder and ungovernability. In the absence of patriarchal-parental authority, Lia reunites the water from her body with the outside water, making boundaries between the inside and the outside, the human body and its environment, collapse, while also rebelling against the patriarchal authority. Therefore, Mackintosh uses the "hydraulic model" as a relevant image, while also incorporating the specific socio-cultural context that delineates the licit and illicit ways of feeling and expressing one's emotions.

In *The Book of Joan*, Yuknavitch presents the body as the ultimate site of resistance when everything else is lost. She articulates the body, sensations, and emotions with writing. The narrator's flattened, whitened and insensitive body feels emotions through the art of grafting and its transmission. For instance, Christine is overwhelmed by emotions as she is teaching a student a technique that she had learned herself from the man she loves, detained by the regime:

> The girl cannot see my tears. They pool like salted pearls at the corners of my deep-set eyes, hidden by a few folds and curls of flesh I grafted in the shape of ocean waves around my eyes and brow bone. Each tear makes its way down the raised rivulets and hills covering my cheekbones, then slips imperceptibly into the corner of my mouth. I drink in my love and anger and fear. (91)

Like Mackintosh, Yuknavitch convokes the notion of the body-as-container releasing emotions. The specificity of the way she uses this image is that Christine's face is marked by folds of scar tissue from grafting, in which the tears run unnoticed. The scene reclaims the hackneyed comparison of a woman's face with a natural landscape. Christine's body is not seen from a male point of view: on the contrary, she is the author of her own face through grafting. Thus, Yuknavitch shows her character's tenuous albeit unwavering resistance to Jean de Men's patriarchal conformity. The image of pain enfolded in rolls of flesh represents the persistence of the body and its irreducible intimacy. These emotions are also very specific to Christine's situation as the subject of a dystopian regime. In *The Book of Joan,* as in *The Water Cure*, the hydraulic metaphor is not opposed to a social constructionist view where emotions are embedded in structures of political power. Whereas Rosenwein rejected the

hydraulic model as outdated and even retrograde, it is still compatible with contemporary literary depictions of emotions which reshape it in innovative ways.

"What's a Human?"

Like *The Book of Joan* and *The Water Cure*, *The Stone Gods* can be said to pursue a social constructionist approach to emotions within the social, political, and even anthropological sphere. In the third section titled "Post-3 War," readers are told that Spike has no "limbic pathway" (169), the part of the brain that transforms sensory stimuli into emotional responses. Without this brain structure, Spike is unable to feel emotions which, according to Billie's definition, excludes her from humanity (169). Un-emotionality is the very reason why Spike was conceived by the techno-scientific complex "MORE-Futures": to counter "over-emotionalism" which led to fanaticism and war in the past (169).

However, the boundary begins to erode when Billie wishes to "ha[ve] no feelings at all" (237), to "be neural and not limbic" (238). According to her own definition, not to feel amounts to not being human. However, the desire not to feel, and thereby to stop being human, is paradoxically presented as profoundly human:

> Far out, too far to see with the human eye or to hear with the human ear, is everything we have lost. We add to that loss feelings that are unbearable. Send them out into deep space, where we hope they will never touch us. Sometimes, in our dreams, we see the boxed-up miseries and fears, orbiting two miles up, outside our little world, never could rocket them away far enough, never could get rid of them forever. (237)

Here, a new aspect of the rejection of emotions appears, not on the part of dystopian authorities, but on the part of characters who suffer dystopian circumstances–capitalist exploitation and ecological crisis. Given the proximity between the extrapolated near-future and the actual world, the reader is encouraged to feel included in the generic "we" and examine the difficulty of dealing with negative emotions under dystopian circumstances. The imagery of these lines conveys the ambiguity of negative emotions: both pushed at a distance, lodged in a container that is not the human body, but never suppressed.

Moreover, the question "what's a human?" asked by Billie is complicated by Spike's character evolution (99). Winterson posits an intrinsic relationship between art and a specific emotion, love, while affirming their incompatibility with commercial exploitation: "Neither art nor love fits well into the economics of purpose, any more than they fitted into the economics of greed. Any more than they fit into any economics at all" (169). This statement is strikingly similar to Christine's words in *The Book of Joan*: "Two things have always ruptured up and through hegemony: art and bodies" (97). Therefore, art, love and bodies are presented as starting points for cultures of resistance. The uncountable, unmanageable quality of love and art is exemplified by Winterson when the character of Spike, the *Robo sapiens* supposed to

be entirely neural, begins to learn to feel. She does so after her human partner, Captain Handsome, reads her a poem and explains it to her. After this troubling experience–which she calls "system failure" (81)–Spike expresses her will to feel love. The rest of the section displays clues that Spike's emotional life keeps growing: she uses increasingly metaphorical language, she declares her love to Billie and she quotes poetry. She also loses interest for the mission she is supposed to accomplish for "Central Power," the political-industrial force that made her. The human/robot and reason/emotion dualisms no longer hold. Moreover, the ability to feel is presented as the path of resistance since Billie and–now "limbic"–Spike try to get away from the market economy and patriarchal hierarchy, fleeing to the margins of the city. Bonding and connecting with one's emotions and with each other is presented as stepping away from exploitation, for humans and robots alike–the distinction between them having become deeply unstable.

Emotions and Feminist Resistance

Although the success of feminist dystopias in the 21st century indicates an underlying pessimistic tendency in the feminist movement, most of these dystopias actually point to paths of resistance that constitute utopian streaks. The reading of *The Stone Gods*, *The Book of Joan* and *The Water Cure* proposed here aims at showing that women's emotions (in particular empathy/caring, love, and, more paradoxically, anger), participate in the utopian horizon of feminist resistance in fiction.

Care Ethics

In her foundational study, *In a Different Voice* (1982), care ethics theorist Carol Gilligan has shown that women's ethical choices in the United States of the last quarter of the 20th century[5] were generally guided by relation rather than individuation, by compassion rather than competition (8). This enables her to explain how women do not fit in male psychologists' development charts and to advocate for updating the field. Initially a descriptive stance, care ethics has become a part of moral philosophy: it posits caring as the foundation for ethics, which is defined as "knowledge about how to live a good life" (Tronto 15). Therefore, care ethics is a political project that deals with the organization of social life: "Moral problems are problems of human relations, and in tracing the development of an ethic of care, I explore the psychological grounds for nonviolent human relations," writes Gilligan in her 1993 preface (xix). Since care ethics stems from the observation that emotions and values are culturally distributed across the gender divide, it is relevant to use it as a theoretical framework for a feminist reading of the texts.

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5 Contextual details matter because generalizations about men's and women's ethics and emotions could rightly be accused of naturalizing pseudo-universal differences between men and women.

The protagonists often follow trajectories that end up favouring empathy and caring for one's community and one's habitat rather than individualism, self-reliance and self-serving exploitation of one's surroundings. However, the novels do not offer simplistic views of the evolution of values and relationships. *The Book of Joan* explores the difficulties of choosing trust and caring over violence and personal interest. As an ecological resistant and martyr, but also as an "engenderine"—a muted human who has become a "human-matter interface" (94)—Joan has a power of "creation and destruction" (221) which she can use to save the world by eliminating the capitalist caste. As such, she is construed as a providential savior by Christine, the narrator who tells her story. However, instead of saving humanity, Joan tries to kill everyone in a massive explosion. This leads Christine to change the focus of her story: "In our desire to claim her as ours, we'd misread our heroine's aims. We thought she'd wanted to end the Wars, to save mankind, each of us secretly hoping to be chosen" (105). Projecting an ideal of caring and reparation on Joan turned out to reproduce patriarchal expectations. Moreover, the myth of the messianic figure is acknowledged as "not only man-made, but man-centered," tied to the glorification of the father (99). The text puts its own character construction into perspective, which is materialized by a sudden shift in narration in Book 2 as Joan, previously a character in Christine's narrative, becomes a first-person narrator. This can be interpreted as a reclaiming of her individual voice because she distances herself from heroic destiny and selflessness: "I don't even remember how to *care* about humanity any longer" (176, my emphasis). The shift in focus from caring for humanity to caring for her beloved, Leone, reveals the pressure put over women to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

At the end, however, Joan still decides to sacrifice herself to save humanity and the non-human world, but on her own terms since she does it for Leone's survival. Yuknavitch resolves the tension between Joan-as-character and Joan-as-narrator thanks to her "engenderine" superpowers: she can save her lover, but also human and non-human life on Earth. Therefore, far from renouncing to making her a heroine, the novel ends with a picture of Joan as a larger than life, sacrificial figure. This ambiguous conclusion partly undermines the novel's ambition to challenge the association between selflessness and femininity and of letting go of the myth of the hero.

Joan can be contrasted with Spike from *The Stone Gods*, with whom she shares the burden of saving humanity. Winterson hints several times at the fact that since Spike was created by humans, making her into a woman is a deliberate choice that originates in the exploitation of women in society. Before she met Billie, Spike was on a three-year space mission during which she was used as a sex doll by the male astronauts. That is the reason why she was made in the shape of a beautiful woman. In the last two sections of the novel, another version of

Spike is also an attractive woman, although she only has a head. She has been designed to save humanity from "over-emotionalism" but also, more interestingly, she is "programmed not to overmasculinize data" (174). Therefore, the character is supposed to balance rationalism with attention to detail and personal matters, a divide that only strengthens gender ideology. However, Winterson shows that neutrality is an illusion, first because the ideology of the firm that created Spike is biased in favor of rationalism, and, secondly, because spending time with Billie and escaping the lab makes Spike care about sex, spirituality and political dissidence. Therefore, Spike's positionality as a woman matters because she was designed to please the male gaze and serve male values, but womanhood rather becomes a place of resistance. Winterson shows that womanhood is a social position of exploitation, which does not even require the subject to be a human being. By having Spike choose Billie and the resistance movement, Winterson builds a posthuman figure that escapes gender determination.

Still, Spike remains a positive figure of care as she does everything she can to keep Billie safe, especially in the first two sections of the novel. Moreover, her encounter with poetry helps her develop an empathy that goes beyond humanity. When Billie and Spike are stranded on Planet Blue, Spike decides to carry on her back a "Three Horn," an animal that had begun to follow them. She helps it climb uphill even though it costs her "extra power" (101) without any rational motivation, which runs counter to her programming. She gives gratuitous care to a "companion species" (Haraway 91), which is a subtle way for the narrative to show the evolution of the character. Thus, a reading that focuses on ethics in feminist literature helps shed light on non-theatrical details of the texts. All three novels contain several similar examples of the female protagonists worrying about animals and creating connections with them. These episodes suggest a persistent utopian impulse behind feminist dystopian narratives. The horizon of feminist social change is based on values of care towards the characters' human and non-human environments, even though they may conflict with other values such as self-determination. These tensions allow for complex and nuanced character evolution.

Love Redefined?

Caring does not necessarily entail love but both partake in a relational (as opposed to individualistic) view of society-building. The feminist aspect of the novels includes a revaluation of caring and loving, which encourages the examination of love relationships. According to Patrick Hogan, romantic love is "almost certainly the most common emotion treated in enduring and popular literary works cross-culturally" (7). Traditionally in Western fiction, heterosexual romantic love is heralded as the strongest and most fulfilling kind, culminating in the celebration of marriage and the family. Feminist and queer theory,

however, have a different take on these issues, denouncing both the "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich) of the social and cultural realms, and the oppression of straight women reflected in literature. *The Stone Gods*, *The Book of Joan* and *The Water Cure* also adopt a political perspective on love relationships–authentic love is held as a central value that fosters resistance to power, provided it is reappropriated and redefined.

The Stone Gods and *The Book of Joan* put forward unconventional love stories through couples that are not only lesbian, but also posthuman. Billie and Spike, both women (even though Spike is a *Robo sapiens*, she is socially positioned as a woman), have a romantic relationship in the first section of *The Stone Gods*. In the second section, where they are two human men, their relationship is erotic and romantic too. As lesbian, gay, "inter-species" couples (33), they defy authority and cross boundaries. In *The Book of Joan*, Joan is an "engenderine"–a mutant–and her lover Leone is a human with a transplanted pig heart. Those relationships foil normative, heterocentric but also anthropocentric blueprints as they involve figures who are hybridized respectively with technology, animal life and non-living matter. They can be described as "cyborgian" figures that transgress normative definitions of gender and humanity (Haraway 5). The characters subvert scripts that reduce women to procreational instruments or objects of male pleasure.

The lesbian relationships stand as counter-narratives to the patriarchal schemes. However, the tragic fate of the characters still abides by a trope of lesbian representation known as the "Dead Lesbian Syndrome," "the identifiable pattern, evident in fictional media throughout the anglophone world, in which women characters who are romantically or sexually attracted to other women characters are much more likely to die than cisheteronormative female characters" (Rizzuto 2). In *The Book of Joan*, Joan sacrifices her life to save her lover and the human species while in *The Stone Gods*, each version of the couple dies tragically. Representing romantic love in a tension between salvation and tragedy follows traditional heterosexual blueprints. In addition, the Dead Lesbian trope forecloses the possibility of lesbian happiness, which restricts the utopian horizon of these novels and strengthens a cultural representation of lesbianism as synonymous with suffering and death.

The Water Cure differs from the other two as its initial focus on romantic relationships is abandoned in favor of sisterly love and the possibility of a community of women. Two of the sisters are part of noxious straight relationships (Lia with a narcissistic, sexist man called Llew and Grace with her adoptive father). They eventually reject the men's yokes on their emotional lives and enact a double rebellion by getting rid of the twisted models of both heterosexuality and family, which are acknowledged as sites of violence. The narrative reaches a turning point when the sisters kill Llew and James, the intruders who murdered their mother. Interestingly, Grace uses the caring and self-sacrificing women's role to her

advantage. She pretends to take care of James to get closer to him before she kills him: "I invite the confessionals of men. I am no stranger to them. Absorbing the guilt and the sorrow is something the world expects of women. This is one of the things you [her father] taught me about love" (217). The text seems to echo Elsa Dorlin's notion of "dirty care," "the nasty care given to ourselves, or to our power to act, when we become, to save our skin, the expert of others" (my trans., 206). According to Dorlin, women's caring qualities originate in the violence of men's oppression. Here, Grace reverses this violence against James because she fulfills his emotional needs, but then stabs him to death. She symbolically kills her father through him—the use of generic "men" and "women" endowing the scene with a more generic value. The reversal of violence restores the female characters' agency. They become "anti-care" figures, like Joan who initially tried to kill off humanity with her powers. In *The Water Cure*, the "dirty care" given to men is eventually redirected to consolidate sisterly bonds, an evolution indicated by the structure of the novel in three sections: "Father," "Men," and "Sisters."

Women's Anger

Considering the many tragic elements of the novels' plots, love is not necessarily the most subversive emotion in these feminist dystopias, invested as it is by normative, sexist and violent scripts that subdue emancipatory drives. Anger, however, proves a decisive lead to follow for oppressed female characters. In *The Water Cure*, the drastic evolution of the sisters leads to the recognition of their connection with other women through shared emotions:

> The anger again, an anger I can't call new because it feels too familiar, it feels like something that has been waiting for me all along. The women's pain had to stick around somewhere. Captured by the topsoil, atmospheric remnants, calcifying into pebbles moved by the sea. We had eaten and breathed it, made it our own. (187)

The imagery emphasizes the materiality of emotions and extends it beyond the human body to suggest contagion, but also commonality between the women. Once again, the patriarchal containment of women's emotions fails. The "women" in question in these lines are the guests whom the sisters' parents used to welcome in their house to purge them of the toxic masculinity disease. However, the therapy based on brutal rituals did more harm than good, which parallels the way the parents treated their daughters in the name of protection. Throughout the narrative, Mackintosh weaves connections between the situations of victimized women thanks to the porosity metaphor and fragments of the women's voices echoing those of the sisters'.

The image of emotions leaking into the women's surroundings has a corollary: summoning emotions and strength from the environment.

> The anger of the women seeped a force from outside them. It was an anger that welled up deep in their chests. Without it, they would not have been able to survive. I personally have always welcomed it. The moments of power. The burning in my stomach. (235)

Anger as a common condition is turned into a tool for rebellion. The narrative gradually builds an ethics of sororal linkage beyond blood ties which changes the perception of emotions from weakness to strength. Rebellion transcends space and time by linking the sisters to the outside world and older generations.

A similar metaphor of anger materialized as geological force runs throughout *The Book of Joan*. The narrative of Joan's childhood follows the development of her power which consists in an ability to summon telluric forces and enables her to generate shock waves, explosions and other disasters. She uses it on a large scale on the battlefield for the first time after finding her mother's dead body, a moment which triggers intense sadness and anger: "There are no more mothers,' Joan said, and in her voice was a rage as old as Earth's canyons, cut by erosion and plate tectonics and the force of water. And yet her emotions were still those of a teen, unable to contain what raged inside her body" (78). The similarities with *The Water Cure* are striking since both authors draw parallels between women's bodily strength and underground forces, which subverts the usual coding of the women/nature association, centered on care and nurture. Young girls' strong emotions are a source of disorder, rebellion and vengeance, especially as women's anger is usually associated with madness and hysteria in patriarchal imaginaries.

The foregrounding and even the praise of women's anger and violence may seem to contradict the ideals of care and empathy that underlie the feminist messages of the novels. However, the targets of anger and empathy are different. The novels show that the anger that triggers rebellion against sources of oppression enable a redirection of care toward fellow victims and, under certain circumstances, allows for the hope of community-building. *The Water Cure* ends on a hopeful—albeit open—ending where the sisters go out into the woods surrounding the house to find a community of women. They wish to "create a new [place] with [their] rage and love" (247). *The Stone Gods* also features the hope for community since Billie and Spike meet "the Alternative," a resistance movement which includes a group of "Lesbian Vegans" (207). Although Winterson initially depicts them humorously as a caricature of New Age beliefs and lesbian separatism, the narrative later shows them as determined resisters who give out rifles and grenades to fight the police. Thus, women are represented as both capable of building love relationships between each other and of committing violence against patriarchal and capitalist power. Anger and its consequences can be said to defeat gendered emotional regimes. Violence is either legitimized by the plot or shown as abusive: the sisters of *The Water Cure* are partly responsible for the death of an

innocent boy and in *The Book of Joan*, Joan kills enemies, allies and civilians alike. Thus, the authors avoid the pitfall of representing women's emotions and ethics as naturally better than men's. Women's anger is not shown to be inherently righteous, but it makes the characters full, flawed and sometimes morally ambiguous.

Conclusion

Winterson, Yuknavitch and Mackintosh use emotions to build up their dystopian narratives because emotions are revealing of the characters' social status and of a given society's specific emotional regime. The novels foreground gendered distributions of power through the dialectics of emotional abundance and scarcity: *The Water Cure* outlines a trajectory of liberation of pent-up emotions which culminates in violent rebellion; in *The Stone Gods*, Spike and her relationship with Billie interrogate the role of emotions in the economic and political realms as well as in our very definition of (post-)humanity; finally, *The Book of Joan* depicts an affect-deprived society due to human beings broken ties with their habitat and bodies. The representation of emotions in contemporary feminist fiction addresses the notion of repression as a synonym for the impoverishment of emotional life. Nevertheless, in a capitalist and patriarchal context, emotions are not so much repressed as managed and regulated. Emotions are pushed back into the intimate sphere while at the same time the object of acute attention from political power. Women's anger eventually erupts in the public sphere and becomes the source of rebellion. Therefore, the novels examine, denounce, but also overthrow, the patriarchal codification of emotional life. In accordance with the cognitive and social constructionist theories of emotions, these novels observe the modalities of expression of emotions in specific dystopian settings, considering the organization of emotions as the result of one's environment. Feminist literature thus contributes to the understanding of emotions as social and political objects using its own tools, notably the creation of feminine voices that resist dominant patriarchal discourses, the choice of images (the body-as-container, the circulation of affect between the human body and the Earth) and the careful crafting of narrative evolutions that allow for moral complexity.

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