

“We Require Regeneration Not Rebirth”: Cyborg Regeneration in Feminist Science and Speculative Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis examines a recent trend in contemporary science and speculative fiction to produce new and/or alternative iterations of reproduction that are not limited by biology, gender, or species. Through Donna Haraway's notion of "cyborg regeneration" and recent critical and theoretical revisionings of this concept, I investigate this trend in three key texts: Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, and Larissa Lai's long poem "rachel" from her book of poetry *Automaton Biographies*. Each of these authors offers representations of reproduction that counter gender stereotypes and essentialism and produce new cyborg maternal or explicitly non-maternal figures unbound to patriarchal models of reproductivity and colonialist constructions of the mother. By portraying these nonunitary maternal figures and/or non-reproductive bodies, I argue that these sf texts present new forms of procreation that further feminist conversations about gender, the body, the limits of the human, future populations, and desire.

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Introduction

If Rachael (Sean Young) of Ridley Scott's 1982 cult film *Blade Runner* became one of the central inspiring figures for Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism in "Manifesto for Cyborgs," curiously Denis Villeneuve's 2017 sequel, *Blade Runner: 2049*, begins with this figure having died during childbirth. In other words, the one ability she acquires in her unanticipated evolution—the ability to conceive and give birth—is also the cause of her death. By highlighting this possibility that a cyborg could evolve to conceive a child (in a very human way) and yet at the same time killing off the cyborg character who has undergone this evolutionary development, Villeneuve places the hope for life in an otherwise barren world on Rachael's procreative cyborg body and presents a conservative version of a maternal narrative that kills the mother to foreground the child. The film's decision to have Rachael killed off before the first scene takes place results in Rachael's transition into a mythical mother figure, a replicant Eve who might gestate a new generation of replicants. Rachael's premature death too-neatly attempts to gloss over one of the most prominent critiques of *Blade Runner*—a scene that romanticizes and normalizes sexual violence against Rachael. The perpetrator of this violence is Deckard (Harrison Ford), the film's antihero and a blade runner—a replicant hired to murder other rogue replicants who may or may not be a replicant himself. It would seem, then, that the film suggests that the non-consensual sex scene was, in fact, consensual, and *2049* is built on the premise that Rachael and Deckard fell in love, stayed together, and even had a child. If, as Claudia Springer argues, "popular culture plays out contemporary cultural conflicts over sexuality and gender roles in the representation of cyborgs" (qtd. in Sharp 508), then *Blade Runner* certainly left open interesting questions about the legitimization of sexual violence. *2049*, however, smooths over

this conflict and reflects stereotypes that feminism, ecocriticism, race theory, and postcolonialism have worked decades to dismantle.

This thesis explores an increasing trend in which sf repurposes the cyborg figure to generate new, unconventional modes of reproduction. I adopt Haraway's concept of "cyborg regeneration" to identify the ways that sf envisions a form of procreation that does not enact a simple biological (and gendered) regeneration of the species, and in so doing furthers feminist conversations about gender, the body, the limits of the human, future populations, and desire. Approaches to reproduction often carry problematic assumptions about bodies with internal reproductive organs (bodies primarily identified as female), in particular that their primary function is to procreate with bodies assigned male at birth. This naturalized biological imperative to make more humans results in the reaffirmation of links between gender and sex and includes harming gender stereotypes. It exemplifies what Katherine Franke calls "repronormativity," a framework that makes biologically-based assumptions that bodies with uteruses naturally desire to reproduce by imbuing these individuals with gendered stereotypes (qtd. in Denbow 108). Cyborg regeneration underscores the impact of patriarchal, capitalist, and unitary formations of maternity and contrasts repronormativity by deviating from these stereotypes and generating new understandings of reproduction that are not explicitly linked to the womb, species, or gender.

These three chapters that follow analyze texts that repurpose the cyborg and its capacity to subvert conventional narratives of reproduction: Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, and Larissa Lai's long poem "rachel" from *Automaton Biographies*. To varying degrees of success, these texts reimagine more regenerative portrayals of reproduction that undo assumptions about the female-assigned body. As I discuss in further detail below, "generation" emphasizes new gender-neutral modes of parenting rooted in community and technology rather than biological motherhood. It also explores the possibility of

beings to grow, adapt, and change, rather than live out lives (and even categories of being) established from birth. Finally, cyborg regeneration seeks to envision and harness the potential to create new types of beings that cross the boundary between the human and non-human (vs. the continued cloning of the human species). They build on Haraway's initial development of the cyborg in her "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" to disrupt gender roles and biological determinist rhetoric and offer invaluable insight into the potentials and even limitations of cyborg regeneration. Each text signals a growing dissatisfaction with commonplace reproductive narratives. Moreover, through innovative uses of form, tone, language, and structure, these texts inscribe the production of new cyborgs through cyborg unions of nonreproductive technology and human bodies, cyborgean maternal networks, and, in the case of Lai's text, poetic cyborg re-embodiments. These new cyborgs carry with them the potential to radically reconceptualize reproduction, thereby posing significant challenges to what Haraway once termed the "reproductive matrix."

Dismantling The Reproductive Matrix Through Cyborg Regeneration

To investigate the recent critical uptake of the cyborg regeneration in feminist sf, I root my arguments in Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." Haraway's original concept of the cyborg has left an indelible mark on social and feminist theory since its publication over thirty years ago. Her ability to weave seemingly unrelated disciplines into a theory of "wholes and parts" shaped future feminist theory and inspired a wave of cyberfeminism—a popular movement in the 1990s, where feminists assessed and utilized cyberspace and new-media technologies to establish empowering forms of technological embodiment ("Manifesto" 38). "Manifesto for Cyborgs" generated countless expansions of the cyborg and continues to garner critical attention, but

Haraway has never quite duplicated the cultural and theoretical impact of her claim that women are cyborgs, “chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism” (8).

Haraway’s *Manifesto* came to fruition largely in response to popular global feminism and ecofeminism in the 1980s that celebrated the link between nature, maternity, and femininity. She charged their “celebration of goddess spirituality” with gender essentialism (Gaard 31) and ambitiously proposed a new feminist cyborg figure to destroy unitary categories of women and nature. Ecofeminists had naturalized the connection between reproductive bodies and nature, and the cyborg’s potential was in its ability to disrupt assumptions about the reproductive body through an integration (rather than a vilification) of technologies. In other words, the cyborg broke down the “division between nature and culture and even nature and technology, radically destabilizing the entire concept of ‘nature’” espoused by ecofeminists (Alaimo 133) and disrupted the ways in which the “category of woman” is “produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler 5). Haraway does well to critique the widely accepted claim that the category of woman is closely related to “nature” and the prevailing myth (reaffirmed by ecofeminists) that the female-assigned body is inherently a procreative one. But if these reproductive myths fail to reflect reality, then, as Haraway asks, “what would another political myth for socialist feminism look like? What kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be faithful, effective—and, ironically socialist feminist?” (“*Manifesto*” 16). In response to her own questions, Haraway famously argued that it was the cyborg, an “illegitimate,” politicized figure that embodies contradictions and takes “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries,” that could disrupt the myth of reproduction as it is bound to the reproductive body (8).

Haraway contended that the cyborg could produce a new cyborg feminism that escapes gender essentialism and the reproductive matrix. She further argued “that cyborgs have more to do with regeneration [than reproduction] and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing” and went on to proclaim: “We require regeneration, not rebirth and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream for a world without gender” (38-39).¹ The “reproductive matrix” is a structure that reproduces oppressive constructions of the maternal by limiting reproduction to the womb. Because this understanding requires fixed categories like “nature,” Haraway conceptualized the cyborg to be “suspicious,” if not hostile, towards reproduction and replaced the term “reproduction” with “regeneration” to underscore the conceptual shift cyborg theory required. In her later essay, “A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” she compared reproduction to “expensive” and “boring” cloning and wrote, “[v]ery rarely does anything get reproduced; what’s going on is much more polymorphous than that” (69). She instead advocated for a more regenerative approach to feminist theory that is “exceedingly corporeal” and argued that “the body is a collective; it is an historical artifact constituted by human as well as organic and technological unhuman actors” (86). She advanced the idea that the term reproduction implies a literal duplication that, outside of cloning, does not accurately reflect the increasingly networked world. Regeneration, in turn, terminologically resists the rigidity that reproduction implies, leaves the confines of the womb, and opens new feminist possibilities for reproduction without “the stodgy bipolar terms of hominids” (69).

Cyborg regeneration underlines cultural influences over conversations surrounding reproduction and takes issue with the idea that bodies with uteruses are “naturally” maternal. It emphasizes that although human biological reproduction is a fact, it carries weighty cultural

¹ While Haraway switches between “generation” and “regeneration,” I will use “regeneration” throughout this thesis.

assumptions of what it means to reproduce, who gets to reproduce, and what becomes reproduced. It encourages conversations about women's own development and women's mothering acts that include cultural and technological phenomena as well as so-called "natural" instincts. Most importantly, it also allows for narratives of change, where figures (characters, humans, non-humans) can grow and change by taking on traits of one's technological, environmental, community-based, acoustic, and narrative surroundings.

The Cyborg's Expansion and Utility in the Twenty-First Century

Attesting to the longevity and impact of Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* dedicated its 2012 issue to Haraway, positing that without her "Manifesto for Cyborgs" a "feminist method for critically engaging technoscientific visions would have been greatly impoverished; nor would the many proposals for life-giving practices of epistemology or ontology have been envisioned" (23). Each article published in this collection exists by way of Haraway's work. Jackie Orr, a contributor to *WSQ*'s issue, writes that while there are rumours that the "so-called linguistic turn" risks exhaustion and that the "politics of the poststructural" have run its course, "a cyborg's manifesto responds with the perverse, tentacular, fantastic force of a textual-historical, material-semiotic practice of crafting wor(l)ds. Weird agencies proliferate. Wild curiosities find more time" (279). This tentacular, fantastic force is what inspires this thesis's close study of regeneration and its potential to redefine contemporary feminist concerns.

Haraway's cyborg theory continues to be applicable in recent theoretical contributions. Katherine Hayles and Jasbir K. Puar, for instance, build and depart from cyborg theory to extend their own feminist interests in the "densely interconnected" relationship between humans, cognitive computers, and technologies, and the potential for cyborg theory to radically rethink

agency and cognition and the body's relationship to networks in the twenty-first century. But more pertinent to the scope of this project are the critics who use cyborg theory, contemporary race theory and politics to inform new ways of thinking about cyborg reproduction. Elise D. Thornburn merges feminist class theory and the cyborg to examine the Gynepunk Collective—a group of hackers and feminists who 3D-print gynecological devices and create centrifuges and microscopes as anti-capitalist resistance (153). Thornburn's analysis of reproductive labour opens up new possibilities for understanding how contemporary hacktivists can subvert capitalism's control over reproduction by literally making their own “tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (“Manifesto” 33). In a somewhat related vein, Sarah Franklin argues that Haraway's description of embryos in *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields* reveals her first cyborg—the cyborg embryo. She writes, “What is also significant, and cyborg-like [...] is that IVF, which seemed to be ‘just imitating’ the biological facts of sexual reproduction, has proven also to be so radically disruptive to this equation that it is no longer possible to refer to the so-called facts of life with anything like biological certainty at all anymore” (177-178). Franklin applies cyborg theory to consider how the transbiological has the capability to disrupt normative and nuclear methods of reproduction. In yet another uptake of Haraway's theory, Marilyn Maness Mehaffy argues that Haraway's cyborg can only take us so far before we consider that it “is still not intrinsically exempt from appropriation and recontainment within hegemonic ideologies of the body” (179). She notes that the body and the fetus are “vulnerable to verbal overwriting” by corporate and patriarchal narratives, and consequently, “the same technologies that empower an invisible fetus (may) also limit and recontain the authority and agency of the female body empowered in other cyberspaces” (190).

Especially useful to the discussion that follows throughout this thesis are Zoë Brigley's and Denise Handlarski's expansions upon Haraway's concept of regeneration. In her analysis of

Deryn Rees-Jones's novel-in-verse, *Quiver*, Brigley writes that replacing reproduction with regeneration "can emancipate women from and create a dialogue with ordinary female reproduction" (16). In particular, my argument takes its cue from her claim that despite the work of Haraway and other feminists a generation ago, there is an ever-present risk of re-entrenching women into biological determinist conceptions of motherhood. My readings of the three focus texts in question consider how some of the key figures (and worlds) represented often reify the most conservative versions of mothering and reproduction. In looking to see where the texts question such examples of reproduction, and where something more akin to Haraway's "regeneration" might be present, I follow from Handlarski's essay "Pro-Creation—Haraway's 'Regeneration' and the Postcolonial Cyborg Body." Handlarski claims that reproductive technologies have already created a "mutated, altered, or designed" body that exemplifies regeneration (81), but she questions whether Haraway's dissolution of "boundaries and categories" can "satisfy the desire to create a more just world." She goes on to ask, "How can the power of reproduction for 'women' be retained or regained through a regenerative transformation?" (77) Part of her answer lies in expanding cyborg regeneration to include more than the "biomedicalization of reproduction" (82). These technologies have undoubtedly shifted discussions of the female-assigned body, but Handlarski posits that "[c]yborgian motherhood and regeneration needs to be much more holistic" or there is a risk of naturalizing the regenerative cyborg body (82). To be sure, she suggests that naturalizing reproductive technologies, like in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, birth control, etc., avoids the problem that reproductive technologies are still only available to a fraction of the population and thus many individuals who seek out reproductive or nonreproductive medical intervention are "in fact disempowered by [their] existence," and it is vital to be wary of "reproductive technology that wishes to reproduce a sense of origins and hegemony along with its offspring" (83).

Expanding on Handlarski's idea that reproductive technologies can potentially subvert or reaffirm reproductively normative narratives, my first chapter investigates the portrayal of reproductive technologies in *The Stone Gods*. I claim that despite its foregrounding of the cyborg figure, the novel does not critique the matrix of reproduction, but rather reaffirms the concept of an idealized human and naturalizes procreation. My second chapter furthers Handlarski's idea that regeneration is more than the idea that technology can extend the "womb" beyond the body—in her words, that it "is able to remove motherhood from its current political context, a particularly patriarchal setting" (73). Specifically, I read Hopkinson's post-cyberpunk novel, *Midnight Robber*, as a critique of nationalist and colonialist formations of the maternal. Of particular interest is the way Hopkinson merges networked technology with maternal formations to create Granny Nansi's Web, a networked cyborg figure that rewrites maternal myths without solely relying on biological determinism. The final point I draw from Handlarski's essay is her claim that "Regeneration is non-chronological and is not only disinterested in origin, but is interested in being antagonistic to origin" (88). I apply this idea to my final chapter and assert that Lai's "rachel" calls for a regenerative understanding of history and identity that includes the insertion of race. Critiquing *Blade Runner*'s erasure of difference, Lai's playful attention to poetic structure and double meaning creates a new origin story untethered to that of the film.

Similar to Handlarski's emphasis on reproductive technologies, Jennifer Denbow's work on non-reproductive technologies and the social politics surrounding reproduction is also integral to my exploration of sf's maternal and regenerative reimaginings. Her essay puts forth the idea that sterilization by choice "holds the potential to subvert dominant notions of maternal desire and its connection to women's presumed reproductive capacity" (109). Denbow attests that the union of nonreproductive technologies and bodies with reproductive organs becomes a cyborg performance, that choosing nonmotherhood can be a political act. This cyborgian performance,

made possible by the theoretical contribution of Haraway and Butler, “enables a reconceptualization of the female body, which is typically configured as reproductive, as a non- or even antireproductive body. It is not just the performance of non-motherhood that challenges the ontology of gender, but also the sterilized body itself, which has been altered through technological intervention” (119). Those who choose sterilization cast new meaning on the body and disrupt gender essentialism still so pervasive in medical practices. Denbow’s work is particularly applicable to *The Stone Gods*, as the novel presents two reproductive narratives: one that forces sterilization upon individuals but sells it as a utopic removal of reproduction from the womb, and another that emphasizes biological maternity. Both narratives remove the element of choice (the novel does not even broach of the topic of abortion in the latter narrative). While at first glance her novel seems to pose a potential challenge to conventions of reproduction, Winterson is ultimately guilty of engaging in pronatalism, and her cyborgs fall short in their apparent effort to subvert repronormativity. Denbow’s work on cyborg performativity also informs my chapters on *Midnight Robber* and “rachel,” two works that in their own ways reconceptualize reproduction, but not directly through sterilization. *Midnight Robber* expands the category of the mother to nonunitary and community-based networks, which emphasizes the performativity of gender. By redefining the mother, Hopkinson’s novel subverts the reproductive matrix that includes gender stereotypes. Similarly, “rachel” reproduces via the poem itself, becoming a material (and not so maternal) poem that signals a regenerative rebirth. In fact, Lai re-writes the mother in a historically specific letter, where to understand its meaning, the reader must translate from binary code and pay special attention to its sound when read.

How might new sf reconfigure the reproductive matrix that Haraway fought to dismantle? How does sf literature play a role in the advancement of feminist aims to move beyond the cyborg’s original blurring of gender boundaries and portray inclusive forms of reproduction as

well as nonreproduction? And what sort of alternative pathways open up when sf writers use the cyborg figure as a tool to establish new regenerative frameworks that do not rely on gender binaries or stereotypes and call into question, race, nation, and identity? Cyborgs are particularly relevant in our own exciting literary moment, where critics and theorists find that the body can be both an embodied site of subversion and performativity and a site of shifting boundaries. The cyborg now offers more than a critique of gender roles and stereotypes; it “is a hybrid, trans-being without clear origins, fidelities or identity” that makes visible biopolitical regulation and the reproduction of conservative values on the body (Shields 209). With increasing climate change (and too little political movement to stop or reduce its effects), complex digital networks, social media, gender and income inequality, policies that limit reproductive freedom, transphobia, homophobia, white supremacy—the list could go on—there is an immediate need for an even more illegitimate, subversive, and nonlocal cyborg unfaithful to the central dogmas that created it. Through a close study of *The Stone Gods*, *Midnight Robber*, and “rachel,” this thesis highlights the utility and potential of Haraway’s notion of cyborg regeneration as it has been realized in contemporary feminist politics, even as those politics continue to shift.

The Stone Gods, *Midnight Robber*, and “rachel” each present unique aesthetic and politically forceful representations of cyborg regeneration that examine the ways in which the cyborg body can potentially disrupt the recirculation of repronormative narratives. In chapter one, I consider cyborg regeneration as a fruitful way to interpret *The Stone Gods*’s representation (and even valorization) of biological reproduction as well as its depiction of cyborgs made of nonreproductive technologies and human bodies. Winterson draws parallels between humans and *Robosapiens*, a new cyborg figure that emerges in her imagined post-apocalyptic settings. Too often, however, Winterson vilifies the very technology that could potentially re-inform human reproduction. The novel uses *Robosapiens* as a foil for humans to critique the circulation of

gender stereotypes and narcissistic consumption. Winterson negatively portrays technologically mediated humans, and in so doing, she reifies the boundaries between the technological and the organic. She does not position the cyborg as an illegitimate figure capable of subverting dominant power but an altogether legitimizing one. Later in the novel, Billie, a key character, narrates the events of the story from the womb. As an infant, she spends much of her time lamenting the loss of her mother. The novel, in fact, ends with a return to biological maternity, almost undoing Winterson's earlier work on gender. Her novel results in the reaffirmation of repronormative narratives, but I contend the novel still practices cyborg regeneration through challenging gender norms and consistently re-emphasizing the need for a new "language that could frame a world" (66). What is disconcerting, however, is Winterson's offering of "love" as a potential intervention against biopolitical regulation. I ultimately critique Winterson's suggestion that "love is the answer" and argue that the text misses an opportunity to present alternatives to the biological imperative to reproduce. *The Stone Gods* is therefore a less successful application of cyborg regeneration than my other texts, but an instructive one just the same for its capitulations to naturalized connections between female bodies, mothers and children, and for the work it does to reaffirm the category of the human.

Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* presents a complex reclamation of founding Afro-Caribbean maternal figures and history that includes important feminist and anticolonial politics through cyborg regeneration. Specifically, *Midnight Robber* establishes nonunitary and nonbiological models for maternal reproduction and calls for a more nuanced, networked, and regenerative approach to reproduction and language that are still embedded in Jamaican and Trinidadian social politics today. The novel uses Caribbean references, language, and cyborg imagery to offset the Afro-Caribbean myth system that is still at times informed by patriarchal power. She replaces these narratives with "metaphors of mother-daughter relationships," but

resists recreating unitary biological constructs of the mother (Watkins 119). This metaphor is primarily evident in her reimagining of a technological and historically specific alternative mother, Granny Nansi's Web, and a hybridized daughter-figure, Tan-Tan. The Caribbean mother-island trope was developed to reassert the Caribbean as "home" in response to colonial constructions of the mother-country, and this trope often resulted in essentialized understandings of "women's/feminine" biological reproduction and gender. There is, then, a risk of exploiting and recreating these stereotypes, but this trope can also gesture toward the "tradition of strong mothers in Caribbean folk culture and oral literature" (Rody 113). For instance, Granny Nansi's Web is a historically specific character that draws attention to late-capitalism's and patriarchal hegemony's co-opting of the mother-island trope. Both a recuperative and illegitimate figure, Granny Nansi's Web is a metaphor for the mother-island that rewrites ahistorical and apolitical representations of Afro-Caribbean mothers. In this chapter, I consider how the novel develops the mother-island trope with cyborg technology and how it becomes a cyborg feminist reaffirmation of important maternal figures in the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora.

My third and final chapter examines Lai's "rachel," a poetic recreation of the replicant Rachael from Scott's *Blade Runner*. Lai's poem incorporates repetition, sound, and enjambment to regenerate rachel through the medium of poetry. Although the poem does reaffirm the mother-father dichotomy, Lai offers a poetic cyborg re-embodiment of rachel, a material resistance against *Blade Runner's* erasure of racial difference and limited themes of humanity and liberation. Where Rachael in Scott's film "stands as the image of cyborg culture's fear, love, and confusion" ("Manifesto for Cyborgs" 11), in Lai's reimagining, "rachel" explores what new forms of reproduction are possible when cyborg feminism replaces liberal-based humanism. Lai's "rachel" practices innovative forms of cyborg regeneration that problematize gender hierarchies and assumptions about female-assigned bodies while simultaneously drawing

attention to race. Lai's reimagining recasts Rachael as an Asian-Canadian subject (rachel) who rewrites universal notions of patrilineal lineage and politics and rejects her father, the owner of the Tyrell corporation, and the implanted memory of her "mother," which results in a rejection of corporatized and liberal-based humanism evident in *Blade Runner*. She then turns towards a technologically, historically, and racially specific mother-figure who speaks in both binary and English, and through sound forms a connection to Asian Canadian history. The poem is the cyborg, one that offers a more regenerative imagining than that presented in Scott's film.

Winterson, Hopkinson, and Lai explore cyborg regeneration in different ways, but what unites them is their utilization of cyborg regeneration to imagine alternative forms of reproduction and make marked literary efforts to offer more complex understandings of the intra- and inter-connections between many actors and actants and subjectivities previously jettisoned by universal theoretical practices. The cyborg was an important figure in the 1980s—and even into the 1990s—and this thesis illustrates that recent sf works continue to use the presumed "dead" cyborg and its legacy of subversion to critique the conservative discourse surrounding reproduction. I acknowledge that many sf texts challenge, critique, and redefine control over reproduction, but in this project, I offer that there has been a specific trend in recent literature to reconfigure the cyborg—to highlight its nonlocal and evolved status—and to replace reproduction with cyborg regeneration.

Now and throughout literary history, cyborgs "perform important work for us as individuals and communities, policing our boundaries, defining our norms and mores through their inversions and transgressions. Through their bodies, words, and deeds, monsters show us ourselves" (Hensel and Mittman x). Like other monster figures, cyborgs often have reflected the limitations of a dominant value system and tendency toward universalist and humanist principles, but the cyborg now is an evolved figure, well-armoured to do more than deconstruct

naturalized gender and escape a grid of essentialist and universal modes of thinking. Now that we are a generation past Haraway's cyborg theory, now that the limitations of the cyborg have been critiqued and the cyborg itself has been re-theorized in myriad contexts, and now that notions of distributed agency, of networks as opposed to individuals, and computer cognition are so prevalent, cyborg regeneration can problematize the widespread repronormative narratives to theoretically restructure a recent literary turn towards feminist reimaginings of the cyborg and of reproduction.

Chapter 1: “This is the future, honey”: Non-reproductive Technologies, Futurity, and Regenerative Re-Writing in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*

Jeanette Winterson’s first sf novel, *The Stone Gods* (2007), presents three imaginative stories that raise questions about the inhumanity of humanity and the impact of gender stereotypes on the body. Together these narratives span millions of years and foreground reincarnated key characters, Billie (Billy) and Spike (Spickers). This chapter builds from previous critical and theoretical engagements with cyborg regeneration to investigate two competing representations of reproduction and non-reproduction in three sections of the novel: “Planet Blue,” “Post-3 War,” and “Wreck City.” *The Stone Gods* often vilifies non-reproductive technologies and valorizes the unaltered (and reproductive) human, echoing ecofeminism’s “goddess” rhetoric that inspired Haraway’s preference for the cyborg. But as Greta Gaard notes, although academic feminists discounted ecofeminism for its essentialist practices, it was one of the first truly intersectional feminist groups to analyze “the connections among racism, classism, colonialism, speciesism, and the environment” (27). This chapter draws inspiration from Gaard’s effort to hold ecofeminism accountable for its problematic claims while simultaneously gesturing to its advancement of feminist issues. *The Stone Gods* critiques assumptions about gender, body technologies and the environment but, like ecofeminism, plays into common conservative (and anti-cyborgean) conceptions of reproduction by naturalizing biological maternity. Dismissing the novel for its essentialism, however, risks overlooking its important contributions to recent feminist conversations regarding repronormativity, futurity, and bio-technologies. Winterson’s attention to and investment in biological maternity seems counter-intuitive for a project framed by cyborg regeneration, but I argue that through close (and often playful) attention to non-reproductive and reproductive bodies and the figure of the child, the novel produces valuable insights into repronormative discourses by participating in them. I show how the novel’s

criticism of gender stereotypes and emphasis on re-writing colonial and imperialist novels via narrative layering exemplifies cyborg regeneration. I further contend that the novel equates biological maternity with love—a potential intervention for ecological disaster, corporate greed, an army of radioactive children, extreme economic disparity, inter-planetary imperialism, etc.—thus mitigating the success of the novel’s uptake of cyborg regeneration.

Jennifer Denbow argues that the union of (non)reproductive technologies and the female-assigned body creates subversive cyborg figures (109). Choosing non-reproduction can potentially de-naturalize the common assumption that bodies that can reproduce should (and desire to) reproduce, draw attention to the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes, and, as Denise Handlarski adds, “[shift] the discussion of the female (reproductive body), as it relates to feminist discourse” (80). But Winterson does not utilize the cyborg’s ability to restructure themes of maternal agency. In “Planet Blue,” individuals are made cyborgs through forced sterilization and genetic Fixing, a procedure that reverses the aging process. These cyborgs are not tied to an ideological repronormative narrative that aligns the body with reproductive desire, but to be sure, it is not a utopic portrayal of non-biological reproduction. The absence of choice, the inability to choose whether to reproduce (or not), makes it impossible for the cyborg to become a subversive figure. Where Denbow and Handlarski (in keeping with Haraway) see the merging of reproductive technology and the human body as an ultimately empowering union that denaturalizes the link between the categories of women and nature, *The Stone Gods* presents the bio-medical body as an altogether anxiety-inducing development that promotes an idealized human. Winterson does at times suggest that the human’s constantly changing body is a natural, if not positive, evolution, but there are more instances where she treats biological enhancement and non-reproductive technologies in an altogether negative way. The maternal-driven narratives

of “Post-3 War” and “Wreck City” further expose Winterson’s negative treatment by foregrounding the biological link between birth mother and child.

The Stone Gods was published only a year after Winterson learned that she was breastfed and raised for six months before she was placed for adoption (“Jeanette Winterson”). Winterson found this new information “overwhelming,” and trace elements of her story are visible throughout *The Stone Gods*. Winterson has often been candid about her adoption in her works. *Oranges are not The Only Fruit* (1985), for instance, is a semi-autobiographical story of her adoption into a family of puritanical, if not extremist, Christians who try to exorcise her attraction to the same sex. In an interview, Winterson comments, “With *Oranges*, I had created a marvellous cover version of what my narrative was, whereby I didn’t need to go back any further and explore what my life was like before adoption” (“Jeanette Winterson”). In light of Winterson’s new information, it is not surprising that *The Stone Gods* contains some of the strongest maternal imagery of Winterson’s earlier works. This chapter acknowledges Winterson’s exploration of her own adoption story and its influence on *The Stone Gods*, but considers that the novel’s consistent emphasis on biological maternity and the child reflects all too common repronormative and essentialist narratives. This is not to refute or reduce Winterson’s valid grappling with her past personal experience or to suggest that the novel does not have political value. Instead, *The Stone Gods*’s value lies precisely in its recreation of common assumptions about biological maternity often reaffirmed in popular fiction.

The Stone Gods begins in “Planet Blue,” a world where humans have destroyed planet Orbus’s ecosystem and the body has become a sign of late capitalism: modified and commodified. Reproduction’s move from the womb seems to sever ties between the female-assigned body and notions of motherhood, but forced sterilization and genetic Fixing, which makes “[everyone look alike], except for rich people, who look better,” still regulates bodies

(19). Billie is an activist who refuses to genetically modify her body and a writer in an illiterate world where symbols and letters replace words, and Spike is a beautiful “sexbot” made to please men in space. After Central Power deems Billie a threat, Billie is forced to flee aboard a colonizing ship to “Planet Blue” with Robo *sapien* (Spike), celebrity-chaser, (Pink), and Captain Handsome. Winterson’s playful use of time is often hard to follow. Captain Handsome, who is tasked with diverting an asteroid to kill off the dinosaur species, accidentally begins the ice age, placing the novel roughly 65 million years in the past. William Shakespeare and other popular literary references exist on Orbus and present a layered temporal narrative that suggests the environmental disaster will continue to repeat without an intervention. Spike and Billie breach sexual boundaries and challenge societal norms through their transgression of the only sexual taboo on Orbus—inter-species sex between humans and Robo *sapiens*—and Winterson underscores their love as the “intervention [that can] affect the outcome” (181) of controlled reproduction, climate change, and colonial missions of acquisition. “Post-3 War” and “Wreck City” portray a world where reproduction has not moved from the womb and where femininity and “emotionalism” are linked. Billie narrates “Post 3-War” largely from her mother’s womb through the first twenty-eight days of her life, after which Billie notes, “[t]he person whose body I was, whose body was me, vanished” (124). Billie spends much of the narrative longing for her birth mother to return, which comes to fruition in the final scene of the novel. “Wreck City” follows Billie and Spike, now a disembodied robot head designed to make “the planet-sized decisions that human beings are so bad at” (132), as they leave the confines of Tech City for “the edge of Wreck City, its unofficial boundary and no man’s land” (151). In Tech city, there is no governing system left, and MORE, a rent-as-you go corporation, has extended its reach to regulate every facet of life. Billie is in charge of teaching Spike about the world until she is connected to a “vast mainframe computer—something no human can be” (133). The hope for a

future thus rests on Spike's disembodied (yet explicitly gendered) robot head, but to be sure, MORE are still "the ones in control" (133). After performing sex without "reproductive function," Spike decides to stay in Wreck City (176), and Billie's story quickly comes to a close when she is shot by emotion-less and robot-like human soldiers. When she wakes up again, in a presumed afterlife, Billie reunites with her birth mother, always knowing that "it would end like this" (206).

To make my claim that *The Stone Gods* practices cyborg regeneration despite its reliance on popular repronormative narratives, this chapter's first section reads Winterson's development of non-reproductive technologies and female-assigned bodies as cyborgs. I contribute to contemporary applications of cyborg regeneration through an analysis of two of the text's cyborg figures: (a) Spike, the first key cyborg who draws attention to the broader ideological assumptions about biology and production; (b) the genetically "Fixed" and forcibly sterilized body on planet Orbus. I suggest that Winterson's representation of these figures (and her positioning of them in the narrative as a whole) misses the opportunity to present cyborg regeneration as a powerful intervention against the repeating apocalyptic narratives. In the following section, I further investigate how Winterson's novel thematically seems to practice cyborg regeneration, but her consistent centering of the child and the bio family does not effectively challenge a society that regulates bodies and emotions and does not provide any escape from "[a] repeating world – same old story" (49). The final section further investigates Winterson's claim that "love" can provide a potential pathway out of what is otherwise an endless repetition of environmental and societal destruction and considers Winterson's act of re-writing and narrative layering as regenerative, but not particularly cyborgian.

The Bio-Enhanced Cyborg and Gender in “Planet Blue”

As Denbow argues, the association between bodies with uteruses and motherhood reinforces naturalized reproductive desire, but cyborgs disrupt this alignment by choosing non-reproduction (109). They can improve reproductive rights, but the cyborg is “dangerous if vision becomes unitary and if the cyborg ceases to be a site of contestation” (120). *The Stone Gods* presents precisely this unitary vision. This section will explore how the bio-enhanced body in “Planet Blue” is a cyborg made of non-reproductive technologies and the body. But rather than use the cyborg’s ability to reimagine new and alternative forms of reproduction, Winterson promotes an entirely idealized (and predominantly anti-cyborgian) human figure. The novel’s treatment of technologically mediated bodies echoes a common criticism of technologies, and Winterson establishes the Fixed body as a wholly regulated body—which jettisons the potential for cyborg subversion—but still produces interesting, if not effective, considerations of how gender stereotypes become reproduced on the body.

On Orbus, the dominant cultural narrative supports an altogether embodied human that is much in line with Haraway’s initial articulation of the cyborg theory. Winterson underscores this idea in a conversation during which Spike, Pink, and Billie parse the question of what makes a human *human*. Spike suggests that the cyborg merging between humans and biological technologies is an unavoidable evolution, but the characters in the novel rely on rigid categorizations that include anthropocentric understandings about human emotion and naturalized embodiment. Billie and Pink quantify humans via the presence of blood, consciousness, and emotion, where “[i]nsensitive unfeeling people are at the low end of the human – not animal, more android” (64). Humans without a strong emotional capacity are less human (and more negatively machine-like) than those who exhibit more emotions. Spike attempts to undo Pink’s insistence that one’s emotional capacity determines one’s level of

humanity, a particularly counter-cyborgian concept. She highlights the changeability of the human and the fact that humans, like Haraway's cyborg, already embody both the organic and the technological: "Even without any bio-engineering, the human body is in a constantly changing state. What you are today will not be what you are in days, months, years. Your entire skeleton replaces itself every ten years, your red blood cells replace themselves every one hundred and twenty days, your skin every two weeks" (64). Thus, even before humans were systematically "enhanced, genetically modified and DNA-screened," the human was still an uncontained and changing body and makes any ontological distinction between humans and *Robo sapiens* ambiguous, at best (64). Winterson thus disrupts the idea that humans are fixed through Spike, but despite the fact that Winterson portrays the human as an ever-evolving creature, she nonetheless still participates in the very technophobic narratives that she critiques.

Susan Watkins claims that like the "many robots in dystopian novels and film, Spike starts to exhibit human behavior and sexual desires. Unlike many such texts, however, in Winterson's novel, this transformation is not to be feared" (124). Winterson does suggest that this evolution is a result of "consumption, technological innovation, and narcissistic body projects" (Dolezal 92). Haraway would find this technophobic turn troubling, as her manifesto saw the potential of merging the technological and the organic to subvert a dominant and systemic discourse of reproduction. Although Spike addresses human liminality in a way so central to Haraway's cyborg, *The Stone Gods* still participates in confirming growing anxieties regarding non-reproductive technologies and the liminal human. In fact, Winterson further suggests that humans have evolved in an altogether negative way, and that when the bio-enhanced cyborg body interacts with one that has refused medical intervention, the enhanced figure exhibits disgust. The unaltered human takes on a monstrous role similar to the Creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. James C. Hatch notes that "Whenever the Creature's face is seen

in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the reaction is always the same: disgust and fear," and in this response, "the Creature's face is revealed as frightening and disgusting. It becomes all too visible, yet all too unseeable" (34). Like Shelley, Winterson presents the unaltered human body to ask the reader to question the category of the human. When an old woman—who protests biomedical intervention and chooses to age naturally—approaches her, Billie feels disgust: the old woman's "face was lined, worn, weathered, battered, purple-veined and liver-spotted, with a slot for a mouth, garishly coated with red lipstick" (37). She tells Billie, "I am what you become ... if you saw my body, you'd throw up" (37). Billie further describes the woman as "a thing with skin like a lizard's, like a stand-up handbag" (37). While the old woman is, grossly simplified, more human than not, Billie has trouble describing the old woman with human characteristics. She can only describe her as an object or nonhuman, and like the Creature in *Frankenstein*, Winterson portrays the old woman as an assemblage of human and nonhuman objects. When the old woman pulls up her coat sleeve, images of beauty and youth juxtapose her description:

Her arm was bones and stretched flesh – brown, thin skin pulled over bluish, visible tendons. I looked away. One of the smart buildings was flashing one of the usual feel-good advertisements sponsored by MORE-Life. Kids, their parents and grandparents, all identically handsome, wearing the same dirt-free nano-clothes, picnicking in the State Park – Best Days of Your Life – For as Long as Your Life.

The old woman was laughing. She had no teeth. (37-38)

Though Billie is often the "moral" figure in the novel, she cannot look at the old woman. Her disgust and fear manifest as a refusal to confront the old woman's humanity. Winterson "turns the tables" and instead of presenting "enhanced humans" as monstrous figures, the naturally aging body becomes a discursive figure that challenges techno-reproduction and social norms.

Winterson's juxtaposition of the unaltered and bio-enhanced body draws attention to the regulation of bodies, but an unfortunate consequence is that she emphasizes how far removed humans have become since biological enhancement and altogether reifies the very boundaries of human and nonhuman that she later challenges.

Winterson's development of cyborg regeneration may contradict Haraway's initial concept, but the novel nonetheless calls attention to the inadequacies of a system that actively regulates bodies through problematic and oppressive gender stereotypes. As Sonia Villegas-López writes, "female bodies are subordinated to fashion, technological reshaping, and manipulation ... And yet Orbus women comply with it while men go unscathed, mirroring the situation of gender injustice enacted in capitalist societies" (32). Despite improvements in non-reproductive technologies, society determines women's value according to their ability to cater to the desires of men, and as a result, they have not escaped the patriarchal system that places value primarily on their ability to conform. Women feel they "have to look youthful, men less so, and the lifestyle programmes are full of the appeal of the older man" (9). Take, for instance, Winterson's portrayal of women at Peccadillo, "the perverts bar." The bartenders are "translucents"—people who are see-through so that "you can watch yourself" have sex with them (19). There is even an "enormous woman with one leg, hopping along on a diamond-studded crutch," who has modified her body to be able to take "four men at a time," complete with mouths where "one would normally expect to find a nipple" (10-20). At Peccadillo, a word that means "sexual misconduct," women biomedically alter their bodies to accommodate the needs of men. Billie states, "We don't breed in the womb any more, and if we aren't wanted for sex ... But there will always be men" (22). Billie leaves room for interpretation in the ellipses, suggesting that women's utility is found in their ability to either give birth or pleasure men. Winterson thus highlights the role that reproductive discourse plays in circulating and enforcing

gendered assumptions about women's bodies. Despite a potentially utopian removal of reproduction from the womb that might free women from the imperative to birth a child, non-reproductive technologies in "Planet Blue" are a product of Central Power's biopolitical regulation. In fact, this control is also extended to women that refuse to undergo genetic Fixing and/or engage with the current non-reproductive narrative on Orbus. For instance, As previously mentioned, Billie refuses to participate in genetic Fixing and falsifies her records to hide this information from Central Power, but while aboard Captain Handsome's ship on the colonizing mission to Planet Blue, she finds out that Central Power has learned about her forged records. Captain Handsome has therefore been ordered to leave her on the planet with an experimental breeding colony of "Class A political prisoners" forcefully tasked with beginning repopulation efforts (60). Bodies that refuse to participate in bio-enhancement through either genetic Fixing or sterilization become products in this larger system of reproduction and are forced to inhabit another reproductive space where maternity and femininity once again align, creating a bleak totalitarian world wherein women can neither make reproductive choices or become subversive figures—despite their having become cyborgs.

Cyborg regeneration highlights the inter-connectedness between biomedicine/reproductive technologies and the body that can "[free] women from the imperative of biological reproduction" (78) and is a productive way to interpret Winterson's representation of key characters and non-reproductive bodies. Winterson's cyborgs are made by a larger repronormative narrative that sterilizes and enhances female-assigned bodies as a means of bio-regulation, and as a result of this narrative, cyborgs fail to complicate an otherwise common critique of technology. The forcibly sterilized cyborg body is incapable of countering hegemonic forms of reproduction, but still, its value lies in its ability to make visible the production of gender norms, and cyborg regeneration is a useful tool to explore how the non-reproductive

cyborg makes visible the essentialist links between maternity and femininity that Haraway's cyborg sought to end. The next section applies cyborg regeneration to critique Winterson's treatment of the figure of the child and the bio family, a treatment that relies on the ecofeminist link between female-assigned bodies, the planet—and even the universe.

Emotionalism, the Child, and Futurity in “Post 3-War” and “Wreck City”

Where “Planet Blue” presents a womb-free, genetically modified world, “Post-3 War” and “Wreck City” present an alternative future where reproduction still occurs via the female-assigned body. Winterson's novel makes visible the discourse of reproduction, but what remains to be explored is whether or not the novel itself relies too heavily on this discourse of reproduction that Winterson ostensibly critiques. For instance, driven by Winterson's own adoption story, much of the narrative in “Post-3 War” recounts Billie's time in her mother's womb and as an infant, and it therefore stands in stark contrast to the non-reproductive world in “Planet Blue.” This contrast may at first seem to represent opposite (but not opposing) ends of the reproductive discourse and to highlight the various possibilities of reproductive regulation, but Winterson's continued emphasis on biological maternity, emotionalism, and the child in “Wreck City” undoes much of her work on bodily regulation and limits the novel's development of cyborg regeneration.

In “Post 3-War” and “Wreck City,” it is widely accepted that emotionalism hinders rational thought and predominantly impacts women, an altogether sexist turn caused by a “capitalism [that] has gone back to its roots in paternalism, and forward into its destiny – complete control of everything and everyone, and with our consent” (139). Billie remarks that emotionalism:

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. It takes a while for children to learn that they must not feel anything, or that if they do feel anything they must not show it. We're right to teach our children how to think, but it is our children, more often than not, who can teach us how to feel. (142)

In this passage, emotionalism and domesticity are primarily attached to women, normalizing a global category of “women's lives by imposing the norm of motherhood as the only way through which a woman's life could be granted intelligibility” (Grahovac 3). It is no surprise, then, that MORE has denounced emotionalism as the “*mother* of all isms” (141; emphasis added).

But where MORE produces Spike as a robot—“like a prophet”—to make rational decisions for humans (132), Billie suggests that the child is a possible solution to ending a nation-wide turn away from emotionalism. Billie argues that “we need more emotion, not” emotionalism and that “[w]e cannot cut out emotion – it's in the economy of the human body, it is the limbic, not the neural highway that takes precedence. We are not robots” (141). Similar to Pink in “Planet Blue,” Billie links emotion to the human body, reaffirming the differences between Robo *sapiens* and humans, and places the onus for a new future on the human child. The novel, then, furthers reproductive futurism, to borrow a term from Lee Edelman, that “positions heterosexual reproduction and the institution of family at the heart of futurity” (qtd. in Grahovac 4). Similarly, MORE corporation positions Spike as a solution, if not salvation, from a potential World War IV. When asked whether Spike could “prevent a war,” the President of MORE-*futures* states “I have children; I want them to grow up safe. If a robot can help make a safer world, then bring on the robot” (132-133). MORE corporation uses the child as a marketing tool to ensure a

technophilic future without emotionalism, and Winterson uses the child in a not-too-different way: to ensure a technophobic future that reflects reproductive futurity.

The novel's emphasis on the child is literally and metaphorically weighty. Narrating from the womb, Billie writes that she was "weight-free, like a spaceman," which mirrors Lennart Nilsson's photographs of aborted fetuses in his collection *Drama of Life Before Birth*. In particular, Nilsson's image, "The Astronaut," achieved almost iconic status.



Figure 1.1 Lennart Nilsson "The Astronaut"

Against a black backdrop with multicoloured painted specks, this fetus seems to float in space—a "floating signifier" of life itself ("Manifesto" 12). The high quality of Nilsson's images and his manipulation of the environment, whether through special lighting techniques or through changing the position of the fetus, had an affective punch and radically rerouted conversations surrounding women's reproductive rights—and not for the better. Prior to Nilsson's images, it was widely accepted that personhood begins after birth, yet soon after the images were published

and circulated, reproductive progress backslid, as anti-abortion groups used the image as incontrovertible proof that personhood developed in the womb. Like the weightlessness of “The Astronaut,” Billie’s floating fetal body simultaneously signifies futurity and personhood, but after Billie’s birth, the opening line of the novel interrupts the text, “*This new world weighs a yatto-gram*” (123). Where at first mention “this new world” references a new blue planet that can potentially save the human species from dying on Orbus, in “Post 3-War,” this repeated line equates the weight of human life with the weight of planets—a yatto-gram. Although Winterson does well to avoid anthropocentrism by equating all life, including “pale-blue shelled” dinosaur eggs, as “the weight of breaking universe,” she places the hope for futurity (and the weight of the world) on the child (3).

The Stone Gods compares the destruction of the biodiversity and the planet to the decay of the nuclear family. On the border town of Tech City, “Wreck City is a No Zone—no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police” (151). Individuals can enter Wreck City but must enter at their own risk, and on its periphery is a Dead Forest where children and families with radiation poisoning were sent to live out their short lives: “There were children holding hands—or what stumps and stray fingers they had for hands” (195), “there were women ... one, breasts open, the nipples eaten by cancer” (195), and “there were men, skin so burned that the muscles underneath were on show like an anatomy textbook” (195). These descriptions exhibit and amplify gendered stereotypes, much like the body in “Planet Blue.” Men and women are described by their anatomy, and in particular, the description of the woman’s exposed and rotten breasts presents an opposing image to a sex worker in “Planet Blue” who replaces her nipples with mouths. This juxtaposition recreates the Madonna/Whore complex, but *The Stone Gods* never presents an alternative to this dichotomous (and tired) metaphor of women. In fact, where “Planet Blue” reduces women to their sexual function, “Wreck City” reproduces the woman as

an altogether reproductive member of the nuclear family, described as “the bomb-damage, the enemy collateral, the ground-kill, blood-poisoned, lung-punctured, lymph-swollen, skin like dirty tissue paper, yellow eyes, weal-bodied, frog-mottled, pustules oozing thick stuff, mucus faces, bald, scarred, scared, alive, human” (195). Winterson’s development of the nuclear family amid nuclear fallout likens the human to environmental disaster and decay. The “human” at the end of a long list of repulsive descriptors emphasizes that without an intervention, the future of the human is certain to be apocalyptic. Like the implication that the technologically mediated body is an inevitable and negative progression of the human species in “Planet Blue,” Winterson, here, implies that the evolution of radioactive, “lung punctured,” and “frog-mottled” humans is also unavoidable. Reading the novel for its portrayals of the future human further illustrates that Winterson treats bio and nuclear technologies with similar disdain.

The novel ends with Billie’s return to her biological mother at a place they used to walk to while Billie was in utero. Billie first describes her mother’s favourite place as “an old stone farmhouse” with an apple tree, just beyond a bend in the road (130). As they walk toward the house, Billie narrates, “freedom. Walk a little further on. Freedom” (130). The house is representative of Billie’s desire to return to her mother, “a lighthouse, like a pulsar” that she can track because they “are the same stuff” (174). Winterson’s altogether negative portrayal of the bio-enhanced body comes to a point when Billie is shot by “two humans dressed as androids, no faces, no soft skin, combat gear, helmets, guns” (205). Winterson sees this evolution as a sign of end-times. Humans have become late-capitalist androids devoid of emotion, and as Billie falls down, a line referencing Billie’s birth interrupts the scene: “*so much blood that they had to burn the sheet*” (205). Winterson puts the loss of “the human” in conversation with the loss of the mother, and after Billie has been killed, in the afterlife, she walks on the same curved road and sees the same “compact seventeenth-century house, built on the sheer fall of the drop to the

stream” (206). Billie narrates, “it’s you, coming out of the house, coming towards me, smiling, pleased. It’s you, and it’s me, and I knew it would end like this, and that you would be there, had always been there; it was just a matter of time” (206-207). The novel reinforces the biological mother as the inevitable homecoming or “landing place” (162). Winterson’s development of a biological return to the mother is not, of course, antifeminist or otherwise politically regressive in and of itself. But in valorizing the bio-family and vilifying non-reproductive technologies, Winterson’s novel mitigates, if not completely distances itself from, the potentially empowering aspects of non-reproductive technologies. It does so in favor of an absolutist statement that links maternal love (emotionalism) with biology. In fact, Winterson further suggests that the very inadequacies of reproductive and biological control can be solved with love, a potential pathway out of the repeating apocalyptic stories. She asks, if “love is an intervention,” then “[w]hy do we not choose it?” (205). Winterson’s suggestion that “love” can impact the regulation of women’s bodies and environmental disasters equates the reproductive body and nature. In the following section, I read Winterson’s development of love as it intersects with the female-assigned body, nature, and literature to further assess whether or not her act of rewriting could be considered regenerative, even if her deployment of cyborg regeneration is not altogether successful.

Literature, Love, and Regenerative Re-Writing

The Stone Gods often argues that literature can inspire love and emancipate individuals from the repetition of the apocalypse, and its emphasis on positive and hopeful emotions makes *The Stone Gods* at times seem schmaltzy. In response to Winterson’s thematic use of love, Ursula Le Guin writes that the novel is, for her, “distressingly sentimental” (296). Le Guin is not alone. Villegas-López argues that Winterson “[suggests] that only love matters, and that science is part of our lives but not the answer to all the questions” (38). The novel’s often-pedantic use of

love makes it difficult to get out from underneath the stereotypes that the previous sections found still adhering to her representation of bodies, but this section builds from Winterson's linking of love and literature to claim that even if the novel does not necessarily exemplify cyborg regeneration, it advances the idea that we must build from past artistic works and re-write them—exemplifying, instead, regenerative writing. Notably, Winterson layers her narratives with strategically placed excerpts from John Donne's "The Sun Rising" and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Not typically associated with progressive environmental or feminist concerns, the use of these canonical texts underscores the dire need for their reapplication and/or re-writing in a contemporary context.

The Stone Gods presents language and love as capable of intervening in a problematic discourse that depends on the control of bodies. In "Planet Blue," Central Power has enacted a mass illiteracy project that reduces the written language to a series of images and numbers, and only "[s]ingle-letter recognition is taught in schools" (10). Billie calls this "State-approved mass illiteracy. Sorry, a move towards a more integrated, user-friendly day-to-day information and communications system. (Voice and pictures, yes; written words, no)" (13). Take, for instance, the books found floating in space in an apparent "bookstorm" replete with "encyclopedias, dictionaries, a Uniform Edition of the Romantic Poets, the complete works of Shakespeare" (49). Assumed to have been blasted into space following the state's illiteracy program, the books reflect the patriarchal control over language and a time when words still had their etymology—their history. Encyclopedias and dictionaries link words to their meaning, and Romantic and Shakespearean texts often explore or evoke the very emotions that Central Power tries to suppress. Following the removal of these works, the written word has effectively lost its meaning and utility. When Billie asks where the books came from, Handsome replies, "A repeating world – same old story" that involves retelling the same old colonial, imperial, and masculinist

stories (49). Books, however, are what save Billie from the initial bombings of the WWII in “Wreck City.” “As the building collapsed” the books made both “a raft” and a “casing,” shielding her from debris (163). Due to ecological concerns in Tech City, print media is obsolete, and books “came to [Wreck City] like people and animals ... certain people, certain animals, looking for a landing place” (163). Books, for Winterson, are the literal salvation and treated as life with material agency. One can further draw the conclusion that each likely weighs a yattogram.

Love is indelibly anchored to literature. Winterson sees poetry as capable of inspiring love in “Planet Blue” but still relies on essentialist links between women’s bodies and nature. After reading the well-known line from John Donne’s poem, “The Sun Rising,”—“She is all states, all princes I, nothing else is” (66)—Spike emotionally and biologically evolves. When she first encounters this line of poetry, she cannot process the data. Spike says, “I can read several languages and I can process information as fast as a mainframe computer, but I did not understand that single line of text” (66). Captain Handsome teaches her the poem, and through reading (and understanding) poetry, Spike’s now beating heart metonymically represents her ability to feel. Spike transitions from a heartless and unfeeling cyborg to one that hopes to learn to love. Donne’s poem is rife with unsurprisingly sexist and normative imagery and is “essentially a love poem—a proud assertion of the primacy of love and an elaborate compliment to his mistress,” an “eloquent testimony to [Donne’s] determination to set his face against conventional notions of morality” (Scattergood 313). The poem also relies on gendered concepts of ownership, and Spike finds the poem’s implied “taming” problematic and wants to make Billie her “free and wild place that [she] would never try to tame” (68). Spike even hopes to generate a “new language of beginning” to reflect a new form of love not necessarily exhibited in popular or canonized poetry (like Donne’s). Winterson equates love with poetry but then further

parallels the human body and the planet. In one of Spike and Billie's final conversations in "Planet Blue," Billie asks, "How long do you think it will be before a human being writes a poem again?" (91). Spike assures Billie that it will be millions of years and adds, "I know it because it will happen when someone finds that the stretch of the body-beloved is the landmass of the world" (91). Here, Billie responds, "'She is all States, all Princes I'" (91), mirroring the gendered implications in Donne's poem. But by comparing Billie to a "free and wild place," Spike still establishes a connection between women's bodies and nature that Haraway critiques. Although this scene primarily works to undo some of the problematics in Donne's poem, Spike (and Winterson) still rely on this essentialism. Furthermore, the line "She is all states, all prince I" repeats throughout the rest of the novel and acts as a bleak reminder of how the reproduction of patriarchal values links women to the state. If "She is all states," her identity is inextricably bound to the nation and reduced to an object, or rather, a place to regulate.

Watkins claims that apocalyptic writing stresses both "circularity and repetition" and "might suggestively be called 'reproductive,'" and what she calls reproductive, I call regenerative (120). Both in form and narrative, Winterson's novel emphasizes this circularity in her re-centering of Billie in a text that rewrites Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, a text rife with colonial and imperialist tones, but replaces "patriarchal conquest" with "metaphors of mother-daughter relationships" (Watkins 119). Winterson's metaphor, however, leaves much to be desired. The novel twice repeats a line from *Robinson Crusoe*. The first reference occurs in "Planet Blue," when Captain Handsome and others are en route to kill the dinosaur population on Planet Blue. Pink McMurfhey looks "around the main deck in some confusion [and asks] 'What's all this writing stuff?'" (48). A line from *Robinson Crusoe* interrupts her: "' – I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, tho' not of that country ...'" (48). Captain Handsome responds to Pink, "'It's a shipwreck story... the men like it'" (48). The line merges

with the plot of the scene itself and connects their colonial and imperial aim of populating Planet Blue with the story of *Robinson Crusoe*. The line interrupts the text again in “Wreck City,” but as the primary narrator of this section (and therefore of her own birth and infancy), Billie responds to the quotation with, “That’s not me, that’s Robinson Crusoe. Birth is a shipwreck, the mewling infant shored on unknown land. My mother’s body split open and I was the cargo for salvage” (122). Billie’s acknowledgement of the interrupting line and refusal to identify with its content disrupts Defoe’s text and replaces it with the biological metaphor between mother and daughter. Winterson thus centers Billie as a Crusoe-nian figure who could potentially rewrite a text linked to white, masculinist forms of imperialism. Handlarski writes that regenerative “writing, be it SF, or cultural theory, is a way to regenerate and disrupt the grand narratives” (91), and certainly Winterson’s reimagining of *Robinson Crusoe* does have value in highlighting how paternalistic and canonical stories, like *Robinson Crusoe*, impact future stories and will continue to until they are re-written. But Winterson too often reaffirms the very problems she seeks to solve. Her re-writing parallels *Robinson Crusoe*’s sense of isolation and separation from home with Billie’s separation from her mother, replacing paternalism with biological maternity and gender essentialism—again, the very thing Haraway’s cyborgs critiqued. Considering that Winterson’s solution to the repeated stories of colonialism, imperialism, and paternalism is not activism, protest, or even anti-exploitation policies and behaviours, but love, perhaps the late Le Guin is right in her assessment that *The Stone Gods* is “asked to carry far too much weight” (296).

As Watkins argues, “contemporary women writers offer a new intervention in the literature of apocalypse that has much to say about the important relationship between gender and the way we imagine the end of the world as we know it” (119). In its most successful moments, *The Stone Gods* offers an interrogation of the impact of extreme gender norms, regulated bodies, and

capitalism consumption, but at its worst the novel's negative portrayal of technology and investment in biological maternity and futurity results in essentialist assumptions about women's bodies. Undeniably, the novel's discomfort with reproductive and non-reproductive technologies is evident, as significant scenes portray the technologically evolved and nuclear waste-contaminated human as an inevitable and frightening figure in apocalyptic times. Although Winterson's development of cyborg regeneration is altogether less successful than the texts I explore in the following chapters, *The Stone Gods* still provides key insights into some of the trappings of popular reproductive narratives. Compared to the texts that follow, the novel's consistent affirmations of nature (as opposed to technologies), the child, maternity, futurity, and claim that love can impact environmental and apocalyptic disasters read as too eagerly facile. In my next chapter, I read Hopkinson's Caribbean-inspired novel, *Midnight Robber*, for its development of cyborg regeneration via the mother-as-history trope and nation language. Like *The Stone Gods*, Hopkinson comments on the link between women, nature, and language but without becoming trapped by essentialist modes of thinking.

**Chapter 2: “You will be a weave in she web”: Mother of history, Nation language, and
Regeneration in Nalo Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber***

"The people educated in this system came to know more, even today, about English kings and queens than they do about our own national heroes, our own slave rebels, the people who helped to build and to destroy our society. We are more excited by their literary models, by the concept of say, Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood than we are by Nanny of the Maroons, a name some of us didn't even know until a few years ago."

Kamau Braithwaite, *History of the Voice*²

“Nansi story? Another time I go tell you about Brer Anansi, the spider man, the trickster. So much you have to learn! But me go teach you.”

Granny Nanny, *Midnight Robber*

In Chapter One, I proposed that *The Stone Gods*'s consistent emphasis on biological maternity and its accompanying theme of “love” result not in cyborg regeneration but in platitude. I suggested, however, that regenerative re-writing offers a productive sidebar to a novel that is otherwise taken up with a superficial exploration of maternal tropes and what it means to reproduce. Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* also participates in regenerative re-writing, but it is further developed through what Kamau Braithwaite considers “nation language”—“an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there” (13). Nation language plays an important part in critiquing, subverting, and resisting imperial language and colonial culture, but what is unique in Hopkinson's development of nation language is that it takes up an altogether anticolonial figure—the Caribbean mother of history. The mother of history has made an important literary contribution to Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic writing, but it relies on assumptions about the female body and makes gendered links between

² This book is a transcript of Braithwaite's 1979 conference presentation at Harvard University. Braithwaite also released an audio version of this speech so that listeners could “get the sound of it, rather than the sight of it” (17).

women and nature. As a result, this figure continues to “[present] ideological difficulties for the emerging generation of Caribbean women writers” (Rody 113). But these writers, Hopkinson included, have identified its limitations and have worked within them to “[conduct] an emerging collective recuperation of the figure of a Caribbean mother-of-history;” in some cases they have gone so far to produce some its “most extensive, even obsessive, elaborations” (113). Thus, where Winterson’s narrow focus on the bio family and her engagement with regenerative re-writing do not inform one another, Hopkinson’s use of nation language and the mother of history are co-constitutive. In this chapter, I will argue that it is through Hopkinson’s development of nation language that the mother of history moves, in her novel, from an essentialized and unitary maternal figure to a networked community of cyborgs and nonhumans, exemplifying Haraway’s notion of cyborg regeneration.

As Braithwaite outlines in his highly studied and referenced *History of the Voice*, prior to the 1970s, Jamaica’s education system taught students to valorize England as Jamaica’s “mother-country,” which resulted in students learning more about “English kings and queens” than their “own national heroes” (Braithwaite 8). The mother-country represents colonizing power, and in the preface to his 1977 book of poetry, *Mother Poem*, Braithwaite radically claims the island of Barbados as his “mother-island.” He challenges the colonial mother-country figuration and writes that “the poem is about porous limestone: my mother, Barbados: most English of West Indian islands, but at the same time nearest, as the slaves fly, to Africa” (qtd. in Rody 112). Braithwaite is the first poet and critic to localize the Caribbean experience through the mother-island, and his reconceptualization is “one of the defining marks of the last quarter of the twentieth century in Caribbean literature” (112). As mentioned, women Caribbean writers have built upon the legacy of the mother of history in order to reaffirm women’s contributions to Caribbean culture and history. Hopkinson’s revisioning does the same, but her novel moves

beyond historical recuperation and representation and engages in a dialogue with yet another contemporary potential erasure of Afro-Caribbean culture in the Jamaican school system. At the turn of the twenty-first century, at the time of *Midnight Robber's* publishing, educators and politicians in Jamaica proposed banning Anansi and other mythic Afro-Jamaican figures in schools (Marshall, "The Anansi Syndrome" 127). Hopkinson's novel practices cyborg regeneration to critique this potential erasure of West African and Caribbean culture and argues for the mother of history's continued relevance in the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora.

Following the genocide of the Amerindian population, colonizers in the Caribbean forcefully brought over people from Ashanti, Congo, and Yoruba to replace the lost labour. Braithwaite sees this forced shipment of the West African language as the beginning of "a new language structure" that had to "submerge" itself because the English, Dutch, and Spanish conquistadors "did not wish to hear people speaking Ashanti or any of the Congolese language" (7). These underground languages, however, did not disappear. They evolved and transformed and even affected the imperialist languages that suppressed them. This evolved language is nation language, which "in its contours, rhythm, and timbre, its sound explosions [...] is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree" (2). Writing in nation language is "almost the rule" in Caribbean writing (49), and *Midnight Robber's* development of nation language exemplifies cyborg regeneration in its ability to redevelop portrayals of the Caribbean mother of history through the inclusion of technology and the West African and Jamaican trickster tradition of using nation language as resistance. Like the trickster, Haraway's cyborg includes "the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" ("Manifesto for Cyborgs" 34). Hopkinson's use of cyborg and trickster

imagery and nation language opens up new possibilities to present the mother of history beyond its gendered and limited construction.

Midnight Robber begins in the future world on Toussaint, where the Marryshow Corporation implants tiny nanomites into everything, including the people, “[t]he tools, the machines, the buildings [and] even the earth itself on Toussaint and all the Nation Worlds” (Hopkinson 10). Nanomites make it possible for everyone and everything to make a cyborgian connection to the Grande Nanotech Sentient Interface, Granny Nansi’s Web. This figure makes dual reference to Granny Nanny of the Maroons, one of the first women liberators of enslaved people who used military-like tactics to protect her Jamaican settlement against English colonials, and Anansi, a Jamaican trickster spider (Marshall *Anansi’s Journey* 104). The novel’s protagonist is Tan-Tan, the daughter of Antonio, the mayor of Cockpit County. Granny Nansi’s Web is a maternal cyborg entity that mimics the limitations of the mother of history by restricting access to important women and douen historical contributions, but she nonetheless teaches Tan-Tan the legacy of West African (Asante) and Jamaican tricksters and their use of innovative language as a weapon. The relationship between Granny Nansi’s Web and Tan-Tan is like a mother/daughter relationship and reflects the common sf aim to replace “narratives of paternity and conquest with metaphors of mother-daughter relationships” (Watkins 119). Rather than forming a biological and unified mother/daughter relationship, Tan-Tan and Granny Nansi’s Web are part of a larger maternal community made of technologically networked connections, interspecies community, and past historical and cultural maternal mythology. Tan-Tan then utilizes this education on New Halfway Tree, where she transforms into a trickster figure. Tan-Tan’s connection with her technologically networked mother figure, however, is cut short when her father, Antonio, kidnaps and brings her to a prison Planet, New Halfway Tree, while she is still wearing her Robber Queen costume. Tan-Tan’s nanomites are thought to have calcified, and

she lives for years without access to her community of AI “othermothers”—nonbiological mother figures (both human and AI) who care for her (Lillvis 241).

New Halfway Tree is a “mirror planet of Toussaint” where those in power on Toussaint send “the thieves-them” and “the murderers” (2). New Half Way Tree is accessible only through one-way dimension veils that separate the two worlds. Tan-Tan and her father’s journey through the dimension veils parallels the Itanami river rapids that enslaved “people in ships would go through” (74). On arrival, they are greeted by Chichibud, a bird-lizard like creature native to New Half Way Tree—a douen who helps them adjust to life on New Halfway Tree. But after moving through the dimension veils, Tan-Tan finds that “everything change up” and that “she didn’t know [her father] any more” (94). Indeed, Antonio undergoes a shift of his own and begins to sexually abuse Tan-Tan. In an attempt to cope with the “bad” new father who hurts her and the “good” Antonio on Toussaint, she “felt her own self split in two to try to understand, to accommodate them both” (140). She transforms herself into the Robber Queen, a figure based on the mythic Caribbean vigilantes Midnight Robber and Anansi. Midnight Robber is a trickster figure who exposes the “legacy of empire and slavery in Trinidad” through his “resistance to officialdom, linguistic innovation, and the disruptive nature of play, parody and humour” (Marshall “Resistance Through” 210). Anansi is a mythic spider figure who tests boundaries and, like Midnight Robber, is known for using language as a weapon. While embodying the Robber Queen, Tan-Tan kills her father to defend against his sexual advances. Chichibud finds Tan-Tan and welcomes her into his community, and Tan-Tan learns that she is pregnant with Antonio’s child. Her stay with the douen is the first time that she has had access to a nurturing community and maternal care since connected to Granny Nansi’s Web. But when Tan-Tan and Abitefa, Chichibud’s daughter, visit a neighboring village, word quickly spreads to Antonio’s surviving wife, Janisette, that Tan-Tan is in hiding with the douen. After a particularly violent end to the

douen community, Tan-Tan and Abitefa are exiled for leading humans to their secret home. Tan-Tan then travels, telling tales of the Robber Queen and finding empowerment in her embodiment of trickster figures. The novel climaxes as Tan-Tan's "linguistic innovation" and storytelling merge with the physical labour and birth of her son, Tubman. At this point, the reader learns that Tan-Tan's nanomites "ceased functioning" when she went through the dimension veils but did not "[calcify] permanently" (139). As a result, Tubman is born with internal nanomite technology that connects him to Granny Nansi's Web. Because of this merging of the technological and the organic, Tubman is the first traditional cyborg figure on New Halfway Tree, and his birth symbolizes the union between New Halfway Tree and Toussaint. As the novel concludes, the reader also learns that it is Tubman's eshu (an AI figure implanted into Tan-Tan's body) who narrates the interjected stories that tell exaggerated tales of Tan-Tan the Robber Queen to Tubman. Tan-Tan, then, joins a legacy of telling oral trickster stories and renegotiating the role of the mother to be "a paradigm of more complex and ambiguous figuration" than purely biological maternity (Rody 113).

Hopkinson's novel critiques the trope of the mother of history that often results in an essentialized understanding of "women's/feminine" biological reproduction and gender stereotypes. It presents a new mother of history that valorizes the "tradition of strong mothers in Caribbean folk culture and oral literature" without becoming bound by its restrictive gendered link between women and nature (Rody 113). Specifically, Hopkinson's foregrounding of Granny Nansi's Web and Tan-Tan results in linguistic and corporeal forms of cyborg regeneration. Both figures are nuanced, networked, and regenerative reimaginings of the mother of history. They establish new models for maternal reproduction that exist outside of biologically deterministic constructions of the mother made possible only through nation language. The novel's merging of cyborg technology, the body, and nation language calls for a re-envisioning of the very maternal

myths and history that inform social politics in Jamaican and Trinidadian culture and result in cyborg regeneration.

In order to prove these claims, this chapter proceeds as follows. In section one, I make two claims: (a) that Granny Nansi's Web is a West African and Jamaican cyborg regenerator that enacts a complex historical recuperation of maternal history while simultaneously excluding important women's contributions to Jamaican identity; and (b) that nation language is a, if not the, vital component to reclaiming lost women's and indigenous contributions in Caribbean culture and history. I consider Granny Nansi's language, nannysong, Hopkinson's attempt to recreate nation language in its close linguistic connection to "the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean" rather than the dominant culture and language imposed during colonial Jamaica (Braithwaite 13). This attention to nation language's ability to produce new possibilities for expanded understandings of the mother of history results in cyborg regeneration. In section two, I read Tan-Tan as a cyborgean regenerator in her embodiment of the Robber Queen and other trickster figures in Caribbean history—one that critiques conventional unitary and biological understandings of maternal reproduction. In women's Caribbean literature, "historical recovery tends to be figured in plots of reunion with the mother; birthing and gestation metaphors predominate," but Caribbean women authors often "[avoid] the obvious link of a daughter's becoming a new mother in return" (Rody 124). However, what is unique in Hopkinson's novel is despite giving birth, Tan-Tan and her child, Tubman, form a cyborg connection to nonbiological forms of the maternal that enact a complex revisioning of the mother of history.

Granny Nansi's Web as Mother of history

This section will first explore how Granny Nansi's Web embodies Granny Nanny of the Maroons in a reaffirmation of Jamaica's founding historical leaders and tricksters and critiques

the mother of history's reliance on gendered stereotypes. Granny Nansi's Web's erasure of contributions of women or the douen community mirrors the limitations embedded in the popular mother of history but provides an alternative solution to potential historical and cultural erasure—nation language. Hopkinson's development of nation language through nannysong, the douen language system, and the dialogue and narrative itself demonstrates cyborg regeneration in its ability to reconceptualize the mother of history as a networked community and to recuperate maternal mythical and historical figures without naturalizing women as reproducers.

Granny Nansi's Web is a "data-gathering system" that collects information from all people while simultaneously granting them seemingly unlimited access to a global culture and history (Hopkinson 10). At first, Granny Nansi's invasive surveillance tactics and endless data-gathering can be read as wholly malevolent, but this figure is in actuality a complex expression of Caribbean Marronage history, as survival in colonial Jamaica required invasive surveillance strategies (Marshall *Anansi's Journey* 102). In an interview, Hopkinson addresses Granny Nansi's surveillance tactics. She states that the

person who invented the system saw the high level of benign surveillance as an acceptable trade-off for the kind of safety and high quality of life that the people would have. There are no poor people on Toussaint, and no wage slaves. And though Granny Nanny perceives all, she doesn't tell all, unless she thinks it's an issue of someone's safety. It really does feel like being mothered, and sometimes that's a good thing, sometimes it's a smothering thing. (Hopkinson, SFF World)

Published prior to a contemporary shift in societal anxieties over increased data mining via the internet, Hopkinson's suggestion that a lack of privacy is an "acceptable trade-off" could read like a near-naïve sentiment; however, in the context of Maroonage history, survival necessitated a somewhat questionable lack of access to privacy as well as "invisibility, secrecy, and stealth"

(Marshall *Anansi's Journey* 95). Hopkinson constructs Granny Nansi's Web as a maternal figure who sacrifices privacy for safety, and in light of what could be considered a moral ambiguity in Granny Nansi's Web, critics often try to determine whether this figure is benevolent or intrusive (Anatol 114; Fehskens 140). While these criticisms inform much of this chapter, debating whether Granny Nansi's Web is ultimately "good" or "bad" risks oversimplifying the complicated history of the Maroons. It also potentially reduces Granny Nansi's Web to a simplistic literary legacy of the mother in the Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic writing; instead, it is a complex (and I suggest regenerative) development of the mother of history.

Hopkinson's reimagining of Granny Nanny of the Maroons includes a critique of the gender stereotypes embedded in the mother of history trope. Rody claims that "[r]ecovering [the] mother—once mainly a male literary enterprise—has become a key venture for women writers" (119), and similarly, Hopkinson recreates mother-island's "complex gendered orderings" in order to underscore its ideological flaws (112). Take, for instance, that Hopkinson utilizes the gendered reproductive union of the Marryshow Corporation and of the feminized planet. She uses phallic and gendered reproductive language when describing the "birth" of Granny Nansi's Web to demonstrate that the mother-island is restrictive in its reliance on the stereotyped link between women and nature. The novel reads, "Marryshow Corporation sink them Earth Engine number 127 down into it like God entering he woman; plunging into the womb of soil to impregnate the planet with the seed of Granny Nanny" (2). Here, the planet of Toussaint is a feminized "womb of soil" that makes problematic links between women and nature—common in mother-island imagery—and the seed of Granny Nanny is likened to the sperm or "seed" of the Marryshow Corporation. Granny Nanny is an actual product of the male phallus, suggesting a patriarchal and corporate ownership of Granny Nanny. This particularly heteronormative recreation of the mother of history is an interesting development, considering that some

historians consider that the British formed treaties with Granny Nanny and the Maroons, exchanging “semi-autonomy” for the “return [of] runaway slaves” (Marshall, *Anansi’s Journey* 96); however, as other historians argue, Maroons agreed to the stipulations outlined in the treaty but still secretly helped enslaved people escape (97). With this historical context in mind, I suggest that Hopkinson develops Granny Nansi’s Web as a product of the Marryshow Corporation only to later renegotiate her status as a maternal trope with gendered orderings through nation language.

Rody writes that figurations of mother-island range anywhere between “a nationalist (and residually colonialist) privileging of the symbolically male order associated with domination [...] to a postcolonial, feminist reaffirmation of the culture’s deeply maternal consciousness, its shaping maternal myths” (Rody 114). Hopkinson’s writing at first seems to reflect both ends of this spectrum. On one hand, her development of this trope recreates the “privileging of the symbolically male order” and seems to uncritically reify gendered tropes and imply that Granny Nansi is a product of the Marryshow Corporation and the “fertile” planet. It would seem that Hopkinson does not challenge or critique links between women and nature—that she relies on these gendered tropes like many other Caribbean texts. But, on the other hand, Granny Nansi’s Web later fails to grant access to information about founding women as well as the indigenous douen on the planet. Granny Nansi’s Web thus shows its limitations when constrained by a global and corporate agent. For instance, when Tan-Tan first tries on her Midnight Robber costume, her artificial intelligence robot (Eshu) tells her, “time was, is only men used to play the Robber King masque” (29). The only exception to this male role is Trini Belle Starr, who has “the same name as a cowgirl *performer* from America” and whose image does not exist in Granny Nansi’s database (29; emphasis added). The eshu’s description of the American Belle Starr “cowgirl” as a “performer” seems to flippantly minimize her existing legacy as “The Bandit

Queen” (Rascoe *Belle Starr*).³ Indeed, the eshu cannot provide further images of or history about the Trini Belle Starr—the only woman to perform as Midnight Robber. This inability to share information forces the reader to consider what other historical, societal, and linguistic contributions have been left out of Granny Nansi’s cyborg database. Therefore, the mother of history can only go so far without reconstructing the matrix of the maternal to exist outside of the gendered and thus biological formation between women and nature. The trope of mother-island does portray “strong mothers in Caribbean folk culture and oral literature” (Rody 113) but falls short of elevating and recuperating other important contributions of women. Eric D. Smith’s no-holds-barred criticism considers that Toussaint is a utopian world that “results in [...] generic novelty” and that Granny Nanny and other references “are bereft of any but the most tangential and memorial historical significance” (139). Undeniably, the historical figures on Toussaint seem to be once-removed from their own vitality, and in some cases, many women’s contributions to this utopic society are minimized, strikingly so. I contend, however, that this historical erasure works to instead make visible the limits of the mother-island trope, and that it is through nation language that this figure can evolve beyond its gendered limitations.

The language of Granny Nanny, nannysong, bears striking resemblance to nation language and makes it possible for the mother of history to evolve. Braithwaite characterizes nation language as “based on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning. When it is written, you lose the sound or the voice, and therefore you lose part of the meaning” (17). Similarly, Nannysong involves speaking rather than reading and is a part of the legacy of tonal and rhythmic expression of nation language. For instance, programmers designed Granny Nansi “like a newborn adult all the intelligence there, but no knowledge,” and

³ Like Granny Nanny, the legend of Belle Starr is a mix between fact and fiction and has inspired numerous stories and poems (Bellen “Belle Starr; Taylor “Loving Belle Starr”).

she was meant to “come to consciousness” through a series of codes and programs developed for artificial intelligence (51). As a result of this programmed intelligence, Granny Nansi evolved. The programmers thought that her “quantum brain get corrupt” and were “prepare[d] to wipe it and start over” (51). But before the programmers wipe her data, they “run the messages through a sound filter; tonal instead of text-based” (51). They found that Granny Nansi became “too complex” for the programmers to understand and “had develop she own language:” an evolved “creole” called nannysong (51). As mentioned earlier, this figure was originally made of the gendered reproductive union between the planet and the Marryshow Corporation, and this figure’s ability to evolve is directly linked to the development of nation language. Hopkinson thus uses nation language as a powerful tool to transition the traditional mother of history to more complex and nonunitary figurations. If nation language is an anticolonial linguistic resistance, then it might also provide feminist possibilities for reconsidering the mother of history and its essentialized link between women and nature. Indeed, Granny Nansi’s Web’s ability to evolve is pre-programmed. Nannysong is a built-in fail safe to ensure that she can continue to grow and network. Like Granny Nansi’s Web and Nannysong, built into the Jamaican culture is nation language that makes it possible to linguistically resist colonialism and to evolve.

Hopkinson develops nation language as a subversive response to the lost legacies of douen and women’s contributions to society. She simultaneously replaces the risk for historical loss with new possibilities through nation language and expands the possibilities of the mother of history to include other forms of community. It is in this historical and cultural recuperation that the novel practices cyborg regeneration. When Tan-Tan asks the eshu about the douen species who once existed on Toussaint, it responds, “I don’t know plenty about them, young mistress” (33). The eshu, who typically retrieves information instantaneously from Nansi’s Web, continues

after a long pause, “‘Indigenous fauna, now extinct’ [...] to make Toussaint safe for people from the nation ships” (33). The douen on New Halfway Tree guide and help humans survive, and describing the douen as “fauna” creates a hierarchical relationship that not only favours humans over nonhumans but leaves out their contributions to society in the larger historical narrative. This particular erasure parallels the brutal killing of the Amerindian language and population in the Caribbean. Following Christopher Columbus’s arrival, Europeans colonized the Caribbean and within thirty years had murdered the indigenous population at a rate of one million per year (Braithwaite 8). All but small remnants of the indigenous language died. Following the colonization of the Caribbean, there was “an intrusion of European culture and peoples and a fragmentation of the original Amerindian culture” and people “had to start speaking (and thinking) four metropolitan languages rather than possibly a single native language” (Braithwaite 6-7). Similar to the Amerindian population, the douen are forced to learn the language of humans. When Tan-Tan asks Chichibud why he speaks her language, for example, he replies, “‘Yes. Anglopatwa, Hispanopatwa, and Papiamento. Right? We learn all oonuh speech, for oonuh don’t learn we own” (95). “Anglopatwa” and “Hispanopatwa” refer to Jamaican-infused English and Spanish, and Papiamento is a “creole language” mostly based on Spanish and Portuguese (“Papamiento”). This exchange suggests that like the indigenous population in the Caribbean, the douen are forced to learn imperial languages, and that New Halfway Tree will propagate the same historical, cultural, and linguistic erasure as on Toussaint. The potential for cyborg regeneration, then, does not lie solely in renegotiating the role of the mother, but in the potential for producing new historical narratives that include other sources of maternal communities. For instance, the douen offer Tan-Tan a community similar to the cyborg community found in Granny Nansi’s Web. Although the douen do not form a cyborgian connection with Tan-Tan, they play an important role in providing her with a form of maternal

community, a home to “give [her] body and [her] mind time to heal after what Antonio [did]” (221) and an education to teach Tan-Tan how to survive outside of the village.

Through phonic similarities between the douen language and nannysong, Hopkinson draws further parallels between the douen community and the community on Toussaint for the purpose of extending the maternal metaphor to include interspecies community. For example, despite Tan-Tan’s dismissal of the hinte language as “a grumbly series of warbles” (173), she cannot seem to shake the feeling that the hinte language and nannysong are somehow related. Then, “on an impulse,” Tan-Tan “sang at Abitefa the Anansi Web’s phrase for ‘sunny and fine,’ the way Nanny responded most often when asked about the weather” (266). Not able to understand, Abitefa “just stared at her,” but this one-sided exchange nonetheless shows a tonal link between Granny Nansi and the douen (266). This link is also shown in the materiality of the text. Take, for instance, the aesthetic link between the douen women and Tubman’s eshu, who tells the bold narratives to Tubman. When Benta or Abitefa, female douen, speak, the font is bold and contained by two asterisks, and it is in the same font and size as the eshu’s narratives “How Tan-Tan Learn to Thief,” “Tan-Tan and the Rolling Calf,” and “Tan-Tan and Dry Bone.” This visual similarity between the hinte and the eshu’s stories further suggests that both provide similar forms of maternal care and community and are part of an enduring legacy of nation language. As a result, the novel presents nation language as a vital part of expanding the mother of history to include alternative forms of community.

Nation language is not limited to the hinte language or nannysong but is also exhibited in both dialogue and narration. Hopkinson’s incorporation of various Jamaican and Trinidadian sound-based words, for instance, draws attention to the “rotten roots of some of our ideas: words such as ‘shitstem’ for ‘system,’ for example, or ‘downpress’ for ‘oppress’” (“An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson” 150). This sound-based playfulness attests to the powers and limitations of

language and exhibits nation language in its involvement with the physical nature of language. To read these instances of code-switching, one must listen or perhaps even say the words aloud for the full effect. The novel's use of nation language and maternal cyborg imagery inform one another. Granny Nansi's Web at first exhibits the problematic gendered aspects of the mother of history trope, but she becomes a cyborgean regenerator in her ability to disrupt the stereotypically gendered and unified mother of history. Her development of a new language system, nannysong, subverts the patriarchal and corporate encodings that created her and mirrors nation language. It is Hopkinson's development of nation language, which produces a new networked mother of history, that section two builds on. If Granny Nansi's Web makes it possible to include new forms of maternity beyond the unified and biological mother, then Tan-Tan's development of nation language transplants the potential for a new mother of history on New Half Way.

Tan-Tan as Mother Trickster

Marshall writes that tricksters use language as a tool for resistance and are a "re-creative force" (*Anansi's Journey* 32) and a "medium through which the individual can challenge the moral, political, and social values of their society" (179). In considering the historical and societal legacy of the trickster, Hopkinson's development of the trickster (as it is shown in Tan-Tan's body) is the perfect tool for renegotiating the role of the mother to exist outside of its bound and biologically-based constructs. In this section, I suggest that Tan-Tan, like Granny Nansi's Web, is a mother of history who shifts, modifies, and reconstitutes the boundaries of her body to include maternal trickster figures. She exemplifies Haraway's concept of cyborg regeneration in her reclamation of her body from the mother-island trope, where the maternal body is not a bounded and unitary figure but a complex, networked one.

The novel uses the trickster figure to further comment on the limitations of the mother of history and joins the popular literary trend of “[transplanting] the primal scene of the rape of the African motherland to the mother-island, often personified or incarnated in an actual mother” (Rody 113). This transplant risks essentializing the link between Tan-Tan’s body to the planet, but I argue that in her embodiment of the Robber Queen, Tan-Tan reclaims her body from these gendered constructs. Also, Marshall writes that “[t]he trickster is part of a culture in a continual state of flux where binary oppositions are tested to strengthen the social structure” (*Anansi’s Journey* 36), and we see this in Hopkinson’s portrayal of Tan-Tan as the Robber Queen. Hopkinson’s novel tests these oppositions in her portrayal of Tan-Tan as the Robber Queen, a role that materializes more concretely after her she is physically and psychically traumatized. After the first instance of sexual abuse, Tan-Tan “felt her self split in two to try to accommodate [bad Antonio and good Antonio]. Antonio, good Antonio, smiled at her with his face. Good Tan-Tan smiled back. She closed her mind to what bad Antonio was doing to her bad body” (140). After this split, Tan-Tan “wasn’t Tan-Tan, the bad Tan-Tan. She was Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, the terror of all Junjuh, the one who born on a far-away planet, who travel to this place to rob the rich in their idleness and help the poor in their humility” (140). Rather than fully experience her own psychic split, Tan-Tan physically embodies the Robber Queen. As a result, Tan-Tan survives the sexual trauma and escapes the abuse, and she is able to work towards healing this split throughout the novel. Tan-Tan’s subjectivity splits into “good” and “bad,” but the embodiment of the Robber Queen saves her. Indeed, it is not Tan-Tan who shoves the knife into Antonio, but the Robber Queen, “the outlaw woman, who quick like a snake got the knife braced at her breastbone just as Antonio slammed his heavy body right onto the blade” (168). Hopkinson thus uses the trickster figure to recuperate the mother-of-history. She does, indeed, shift the metaphor of the “rape” of the African motherland to the mother-island, risking

essentialism by comparing Tan-Tan's body to the mother-island, but Hopkinson also saves Tan-Tan from this violent transplant with the trickster figure, gesturing to its ability to recuperate and empower the mother-of-history trope without gendered and essentialized construct of women's bodies.

Becoming the Robber Queen allows Tan-Tan to renegotiate her identity and legacy as a trickster, primarily due to her ability to use language as weapon. Tan-Tan's embodiment of the Robber Queen occurs in moments of high intensity and insecurity, and taking on this role allows her to temporarily stop the traumatic flashbacks of her abuse and quell the voice of "bad" Tan-Tan. For example, after Tan-Tan learns she is pregnant with Antonio's child, she visits a neighbouring village to try to terminate her pregnancy. There, she becomes overwhelmed with memories of her sexual abuse when she sees a mother abuse her son, Alyosius, with a switch. Tan-Tan remembers Antonio hitting her legs with his belt, and:

Something in Tan-Tan broke loose, howling. Her skin felt hot. She pushed Alyosius to one side, grabbed the switch from his surprised mother and fetched her one slice *swips* on her leg [...] Is like a spirit take her. A vengeance had come upon her, it was shining out from her eyes strong as justice. (244)

In this instance, Tan-Tan's previous abuse haunts her, and she inhabits the trickster figure in order to bring justice for her herself and Alyosius. Throughout this exchange, memories of the abuse alternate with Tan-Tan as a trickster figure. Instead of Tan-Tan, "Somebody spoke her words the way the Carnival Robber Kings wove their tales, talking as much nonsense as sense, fancy words spinning out from their mouths like thread from a spider's behind: Silken shit as strong as a story. Somebody's words uttered forth from Tan-Tan's mouth" (245). This excerpt references Midnight Robber and his legacy of using "fancy" and "nonsense" words as weapons, and the spider's thread alludes to trickster, Anansi the spider. Tan-Tan, as "the woman of words,

the Robber Queen” finds power in this ability to spin her own story so much so that “for once, Bad Tan-Tan was quiet” (246). In her embodiment, the Robber Queen allows her use of nation language to temporarily mask her past abuse and the resulting psychic split of “good” and “bad” Tan-Tan. She does, however, leave her body during the exchange and only afterwards considers that the voice “must have been her[s]” (246). Kristen Lillvis suggests that “adopting the Robber Queen persona [...] prevents [Tan-Tan] from fully comprehending herself as an empowered subject” (244). While Lillvis’ argument expertly reads the negative effects of dematerialization of the body in an African and Caribbean context, I argue that Tan-Tan’s embodiment moves beyond “adopting” (or performing) the Robber Queen as Lillvis implies. But even if Tan-Tan’s embodiment is performative, as Handlarski notes, performance “can also be weighty, be put to political use, be something that ‘matters’” (89). The Robber Queen ensures Tan-Tan’s survival and escape from her father’s assault and results in Tan-Tan’s empowerment. Although Tan-Tan at this time cannot fully experience herself as a unitary figure, to experience herself without the Robber Queen would force Tan-Tan to repeatedly experience the memories of the abuse. The Robber Queen allows Tan-Tan to renegotiate her identity as a nonunitary trickster figure and expand the maternal to include West African and Asante trickster figures.

Tan-Tan’s embodiment of historical Caribbean women allows her to participate in a regenerative recuperation and expansion of maternal history that occurs most intensely at the climax of the novel. Tan-Tan yells in to the crowd: “Not wo-man; I name Tan-Tan, a ‘T’ and a ‘AN; I is the AN-acaona, aino redeemer; the AN-nie Christmas, kneel boat steamer, the Yaa As-AN-tewa; Ashanti warrior queen; the N-AN-ny, Maroon Granny; Meaning Nana, mother, caretaker to a nation” (320). The capitalized letters (T, A, N) visually merge Tan-Tan’s identity with the powerful women mentioned in this excerpt. Tan-Tan now attaches her identity to earlier maternal cultural and historical figures ensuring not only her own survival but also the survival

of founding women's legacy and their roles in shaping contemporary identity. Perhaps more notably, at least in the context of this chapter, is that sound-based aspects of this excerpt exhibit the two characteristics of nation language outlined in section one: it is both a part of the legacy of oral storytelling as well as *total expression*. The speech must be read out loud to hear the cadence. The repetition of sounds created by "AN" and the hard consonant "T" sound similar to the varying intonations evident in nation language (Braithwaite 18). After Tan-Tan's Robber speech, "[r]ough with emotion, her cracked voice came out in two registers simultaneously. Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, the good and the bad" (325). In using language as a weapon, Tan-Tan is able to inhabit her body fully and to "just [be] Tan-Tan, sometimes good, sometimes bad, mostly just getting by like everybody else" (326), which suggests that it is in using nation language that Tan-Tan gains control over her body again and paves the way for the birth of Tubman.

What is unique about *Midnight Robber* and of particular interest to this thesis is that Hopkinson does not evade "the obvious link" of Tan-Tan becoming a mother herself. In fact, the novel's themes culminate with the birth of Tan-Tan's child. Hopkinson presents Tan-Tan as a mother to her child while simultaneously renegotiating the role of the mother, and the theme of cyborg regeneration, then, culminates with the birth of Tubman who is born a part of Granny Nansi's Web. The eshu, now naturalized in Tubman's body, tells him:

You could hear me because your whole body is one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface. Your little bodystring will sing to Nanny tune, doux-doux. You will be a weave in she web. Flesh people talk say how earbugs give them a sixth sense, but really is only a crutch, oui? Not a fully functional perception. You know; you really have that extra limb. (328)

Tan-Tan's biological birthing is paired with another networked form of maternal presence:

Granny Nansi's Web. In this way, Hopkinson does not reject the role of the biological mother

but rather presents a maternal community. Additionally, because Tubman's "bodystring will sing to Nanny Tune," Tubman is born speaking and thinking in nannysong—a metaphoric and literary reimagining of nation language. In his corporeal connection to Granny Nansi's Web and nannysong, Tubman forms a naturalized link to nation language and history. Of course, "Tubman" is also a reference to Harriet Tubman, a liberatory figure who helped enslaved peoples escape from the southern United States through the underground railroad. In using this reference, not only does Hopkinson regenerate Caribbean and West African lore, but she also addresses African-American and African-Canadian history and implies that liberatory figures, like Tubman, have a place in the global sphere of maternal history and culture. Tan-Tan, then, is a cyborgean regenerator not in the physical birth of her son, but in making a cyborg connection to new forms of the maternal that simultaneously enact a historical recovery and expansion of maternal community.

In this chapter I have argued that Granny Nansi's Web and Tan-Tan are cyborgean regenerators who challenge biological and gendered constructs of the maternal and present alternative forms of the maternal that expand beyond the biological to include other forms of maternal community. I have suggested that Granny Nansi's Web performs a historically recuperative portrayal of the mother of history, and in Hopkinson's portrayal of the birth of Granny Nansi's Web through the sexual act between the Marryshow Corporation and the planet, she simultaneously gestures towards the much-lauded creation of mother as history while also suggesting that it is due for an update. Hopkinson utilizes the liminality of the cyborg and cyborg imagery to show how with linguistic connection to nation language, the mother of history can move beyond its gendered encodings. Specifically, nation language is a political tool for reimagining the role of the Caribbean mother in a cyborgean sf context. I also suggested that Tan-Tan engages in her own form of cyborg regeneration in her redrawing of the boundaries of

her body to include maternal imagery and tricksters that do not rely on the gendered dichotomies and stereotypes often used in mother-island imagery. Tan-Tan's birth is redemptive, since it reclaims maternal history from a patrilineal literary legacy of linking women to nature. Using Rody's work on the maternal, I suggested that the trickster figure and its legacy of using language to challenge societal oppositions and binaries constructs a more nonbiological and networked maternal family. This novel deserves critical praise for taking on common literary constructions in Caribbean literature and complicating their portrayal while engaging in a feminist critique of normative gendered constructs and the naturalization of women's bodies. Hopkinson's novel both embraces the past while critically regenerating the legacy and future of the mother of history in Caribbean literature. In the same way that the tricksters are liminal and play a simultaneously constructive and deconstructive role in society, Hopkinson uses these figures to make bold refigurations about the future of Caribbean writing and history and the future of the mother of history. *Midnight Robber* challenges the traditional and dominant sf narrative form (even the less-limiting sf genre) and regenerates the tradition of storytelling through fusing Jamaican and Trinidadian mythical and historical traditions with new technologies. Similarly, in the following chapter, I read Lai's long poem, "rachel," for its attentions to cyborg imagery and sound to present an alternative origin story than that shown in *Blade Runner*, on which it was based.

**Chapter 3: “look, it’s me with my mother”: Sound as Cyborg Regeneration in Ridley Scott’s
Blade Runner and Larissa Lai’s “rachel”**

The sf writers discussed in this thesis explore the dichotomies between nature and culture and, more specifically, emphasize how “the material self cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific and substantial” (Alaimo 20). In my chapter on *The Stone Gods*, I argued that Winterson develops cyborg imagery to question the constructs of gender but that the novel ultimately fails to escape essentialist portrayals of biological maternity. *Midnight Robber*, by contrast, utilizes cyborg regeneration and the trickster figure to re-conceptualize cyborg maternal figures that resist biological determinist forms of maternity and recuperate founding African and Caribbean maternal history. This chapter builds from the first two and places Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*⁴ in conversation with Larissa Lai’s poem “rachel” from her 2009 book of poetry *Automaton Biographies*. In “rachel,” Lai creates unique instances of cyborg regeneration within the medium of language itself, emphasizing the sound of language over sight. Through homonyms, homographs, and translation, Lai underscores the value of hybridity and illegitimacy and complicates subjecthood, whereby the duality in words themselves, their slippages, and meanings, make for better and even more complex iterations of identity than those shown in the film. I ultimately claim that “rachel” is a poetic cyborg re-embodiment of Rachael that practices cyborg regeneration in its re-conceptualization of agency, maternity, and reproduction, and also in its explicit critique of the role that race plays in tropes of (re)production in Scott’s film.

⁴ The film is inspired by Philip K Dick’s science fiction novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. In 1991, Ridley Scott released a *Director’s Cut* of the film, and in 2007, an extended version called *The Final Cut*. Though there are seven versions of the film, these two and the original are the most popular and commonly referenced.

Lai's "rachel," a critical poetic remake of the film named for—if not re-embodiment—one of its principal characters (Rachael), critiques the film's racist and patriarchal representations. *Blade Runner* questions the construction and limitations of the human but often focuses on the separation of the organic and the technological in an altogether superficial way that reaffirms gender and sex binaries and universalist constructions of the human. But as feminist and cultural theory now well knows, Haraway's cyborg is not just an android or automaton that blurs the lines between the technological and the organic. It is a socio-political tool that re-conceptualizes identity and agency in order to problematize the essentialized link between female bodies and nature. Interestingly, in the "Manifesto for cyborgs," Haraway comments on how Rachael reflects cultural anxieties:

It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what is body in machines that resolves into coding practices ... There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic. The replicant Rachel in the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* stands as the image of cyborg culture's fear, love, and confusion. (178)⁵

This excerpt considers the fact that marked differences between the technological and the organic are more ambiguous than these fraught categories suggest and that if Rachael, as a cyborg, embodies this union between the organic and the technological, then she also reflects the cultural fear of breaching this dichotomous relationship. The film also considers how patriarchal models of heteronormativity impact and police bodies but largely erases race from its critique. Hee-Jung Serenity Joo points out, for instance, that Scott only explores humanity through the

⁵ The final phrase in this excerpt was only added in a later publishing of the Manifesto in *Cyborg, Simians, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. This reference to *Blade Runner* is also suspiciously absent from the 2004 republishing in *The Haraway Reader*. What is also notable is that Haraway misspells "Rachael," lacking the "a," mirroring Lai's spelling of "rachel."

lens of white characters. As she writes, the film is set against the backdrop of a city “overcrowded with Asian bodies and Orientalist signifiers” that indicate cultural anxieties that “[date] back to the beginnings of Asian immigration” (247). Unique in Lai’s interpretation of “Rachael” is that she asks how racial markers and racism inform production and reproduction in a patriarchal capitalist context. Part of Lai’s reimagining of a new subject outside of the normative paradigm in the film, not coincidentally, includes a racially specific cyborg who engages with her relationship to race in part via her own relationship with her mother. In fact, Lai forefronts a nonbiological maternal figure and problematizes notions of lineage, which results in a new “origin” story for Rachel. In the preface to “Rachel,” Lai pairs Haraway’s above excerpt with a statement Rachael makes after she learns that she is not human: “Look, it’s me with my mother” (11). This juxtaposition suggests that a complex renegotiation of the maternal is of vital importance to Lai’s project. In fact, the mother Rachael initially “clings” to is not a figure who has produced her, at least in the traditional sense, but a figure implanted into her memories by the Tyrell Corporation. If “Rachael” from Scott’s film is a “cyborg” who reaffirms gender hierarchies and determinist assumptions of the female body (even as a robot), then in Lai’s recreation, the cyborg is the poem—one whose technologically networked and creative forms of replication work to insert a regenerative capacity into Scott’s more conservatively cyborgian character. The structure of Lai’s poem largely moves from Rachel’s initial rejection of her father and “biological” mother towards regenerating “Rachel” through poetry, and Lai’s incorporation of *Blade Runner*, poetic language, and Asian-Canadian history produces a cyborgian regenerator that redefines the role of the mother to include non-unitary, multilingual, and racially specific formulations of the mother.

Lai’s treatment and renaming of “Rachael” in *Automaton Biographies* follows a number of similar engagements with this figure in previous texts. Lai first challenged the racial

ambiguity and racism in *Blade Runner* in her debut novel, *When Fox is a Thousand*. Early in the text, the protagonist of the novel (Artemis) and her friend (Eden) watch *Blade Runner*, and the narrative describes the “eye maker” from the film. The narrative reads: “The man who made eyes was Cantonese. [Artemis’s] heart hiccupped as she watched Roy and Leon descend on him, life-like machines with human souls” (26). Lai, here, begins to play with the idea of cyborg subjectivity as it relates to race. She describes the replicants as having souls, and in doing so, she actively humanizes the replicants. She also establishes a specific Cantonese identity for the eye-maker, rewriting and critiquing the film’s problematic portrayal of stereotyped Asian identities. Lai continues her commentary on the film’s use of Asian stereotypes in her 2004 short story, “Rachel” (in this story she uses the upper case “R” which then becomes lower case in the poem in *Automaton Biographies*). Lai reimagines Rachael as a racialized android who learns that she is a replicant only after failing the Voight-Kampff test, a test that determines whether an individual is a human or a replicant. This short story develops Rachel’s relationship with her Chinese mother and explores the implications of implanted memories, all while questioning “what it means to be a machine” (“Rachel” 59). “Rachel” also draws similarities between the way the film treats replicants and the way it treats Asian bodies; both, in Lai’s analyses, are less than human. Notably, Lai changes the spelling from “Rachael” to “Rachel,” which, Michelle Reid notes, “suggests something has been lost between iterations” but could also imply a return, since “‘Rachel’ is the original Hebrew version of the name” (354). Rather than “return” in the biblical sense, however, Lai’s spelling of “rachel” mirrors Haraway’s spelling in the “Manifesto,” suggesting a cyborgian return to Haraway’s initial articulation of the cyborg. I claim that Lai’s many iterations of “Rachel,” in fact, exemplify cyborg regeneration, and are attentive to the ways in which race informs understandings of embodiment and (re)production, and, in particular, notions of the mother and maternal relationships.

Lai's poem offers more potential for subversion than the film through language and reimagines an alternative to the circulation of normativity and power. Through her linguistic use of multiple meanings, Lai creates a hybridized cyborg figure, Rachel, and emphasizes the importance of sound and illegitimacy. In my first section, I outline *Blade Runner's* reaffirmation of normativity and what happens when "science" takes over reproduction. Particularly, I consider that the Voight-Kampff machine valorizes human reproduction by measuring the cyborgs' acquiescence to these norms via the eyes. I claim that Lai's "Rachel" takes a stance against the reproduction of a universal construction of identity and subjectivity enforced by the Voight-Kampff test. Lai's poem, as a result, exemplifies Haraway's notion of cyborg regeneration by producing a poetic re-embodiment of Rachael that pays critical attention to complex iterations of identity and double meaning produced through the medium of language. In my final section, I contrast *Blade Runner's* development of the mother as a tool to define the human with Lai's foregrounding of an alternative subject who rejects her implanted memories of her mother. As Stacey Alaimo writes, "we need not take an imaginative leap into science fiction in order to realize that we inhabit a corporeality that is never disconnected from our environment" (156). Our material selves cannot be disentangled from our environments, which are made up of human, nonhuman, and sociopolitical influences, and Lai's poem underscores the ways in which heteronormative and universalist practices in the film influence the body. Lai's poem thus practices cyborg regeneration by presenting a maternal subject who stands as an alternative to the one in the film: a cyborgean regenerator that complicates the construction of heteronormativity, desire, and the maternal.

The Voight-Kampff Machine, Eyes, and Is

Blade Runner is a canonical science fiction film, lauded for its keen attention to aesthetics and thematic portrayal of what it means to be human. Set in 2019 Los Angeles, the film begins with a title screen that introduces the Nexus-6 replicant, an illegal genetically engineered robot that is biologically identical to humans. The film follows Deckard, a blade runner⁶ brought out of retirement to chase down and kill four replicants. Deckard, one by one, “retires” them, except for Rachael, and the film ends ambiguously by suggesting that Deckard may be a replicant, too.⁷ Since replicants are physically indistinguishable from humans in the film, the Tyrell Corporation develops the “scientific” Voight-Kampff machine that tests whether the subject is either a captured “illegal” replicant or human by measuring involuntary blink and iris reactions to questions that refer to normative social and sexual constructs. If the subject physically responds to the questions (regardless of verbal response) the subject is human, and if there is no physical response, the subject is replicant. I consider the Voight-Kampff machine to be inseparable from the cultural, the historical, and the political and assert that it maintains Alaimo’s concern that science “offers no steady ground, as the information might be biased, incomplete, or opaque and the ostensible object of scientific inquiry—the material world—is extremely complex, overwrought with agencies and ever-emergent” (20). In fact, the “science” behind the Voight-Kampff machine is similar to the lie detector test, which is based on galvanic technology developed in the 1800s, “during the apogee of scientific racism” (Verlinden 323). This technology was “linked to and built on culturally specific ideas about crime, madness, race,

⁶ Blade runners are murderers-for-hire made to kill all replicants on Earth.

⁷ The recent sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*, seems to put this possible narrative to bed, as Deckard has aged beyond the four-year replicant lifespan, but many in *Blade Runner*’s wikifandom still consider it a possibility.

gender, normative bodily functions, and affective capacities” (Verlinden 323-324).⁸ One such use of galvanic technology concluded that “skin thickness was a physiological indicator of a person’s intelligence” (323) and that women and those in the LGBT community were considered “prone to deception” (324). Researchers used galvanic technology to produce culturally biased findings that dehumanized women and those in the queer community. If the film’s aim is to blur the demarcations between replicant and human in order to engage in a dialogue of what constitutes humanity (as most science fiction does), then it misses the mark in its inability to account for the specificity of identity and in its reproduction of problematic identity politics that Lai’s poem hopes to undo. This section claims that Lai’s poem critiques the Voight-Kampff machine’s investment in the eyes to measure humanity and subverts this emphasis by reaffirming multiple possibilities for meaning through homographs, enjambment, and ambiguous words that function as both noun and verb. Lai’s attention to hybridized meaning through the medium of language itself disrupts absolutist assumptions about identity and consent and generates new forms of being that exemplify cyborg regeneration.

Lai’s poetic cyborg re-embodiment of Scott’s character Rachael delegitimizes universal and essentialist understandings of identity and makes visible the impact of heteropatriarchy on

⁸ Brian Massumi, in his highly referenced “The Autonomy of Affect,” recalls three case studies in scientific research in order to further explore and define affect. One case study that is relevant for this chapter is the Galvanic Skin (GS) response that “measures *autonomic* reaction” (84). In other terms, the GS response measures the physiological response to images and stimuli by measuring breathing and heart rate, which indicate an emotional response and an automatic physical response. Massumi uses this case study to theorize affect as not the emotional response that can manifest as physical reactions but as the automatic and unconscious. While his work certainly impacted and informed the Affective turn and subsequent theorization of affect, Massumi’s essay does not disclose or discuss the history of the tests used to measure the GS response. In fact, Jasper J. Verlinden’s argues that Massumi “[overlooks] the fact that the knowledge claims made on the basis of such experiments are already filtered through culturally and historically specific belief sets as well as the preconceptions of the researchers and the basic tenets of their field” (321).

the body. To be sure, the Voight-Kampff test's modus operandi is to define the human through a lens (literal in this case) of heteropatriarchy. The aesthetics of Rachael's Voight-Kampff test further illustrate this enforcement. In viewing Rachael from Deckard's point of the view, her eyes have a distinctly empty look. When looking through the lens of the Voight-Kampff machine, however, Rachael's eyes seem human—normal. In an interview, Scott states that in order to visually differentiate between replicants and humans, he put a hollow "light in [Rachael's] eyes" as an homage to the leopard at the beginning of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (see fig. 1 and fig. 2, Open Culture).



Figure 3.2 Screenshot of Rachael Taking the Voight Kampff Test.



Figure 3.3 Screenshot from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*

The light reflected in Rachael's eyes reminds the viewer of their own essential humanity and that Rachael is still non-human, a replicant. The Tyrell Corporation implanted memories from Tyrell's niece into Rachael in an attempt to make her indistinguishable from humans. Tyrell tells Deckard, "Rachael is an experiment, nothing more [...] If we gift them with a past, we create a cushion or pillow for their emotion, and consequently we can control them better." What results is the advancement of a dominant ideology that defines the human through involuntary biological reactions and requires, as Judith Butler writes, "that women reflect [the] masculine power and everywhere reassure [the] power of the reality of its illusory autonomy" (Butler 57). In the first stanza of "rachel," Lai underscores how implanted algorithms, memories, and desires are largely reproduced as a means to control and define rachel's/Rachael's replicant identity. [R]achel's father's "algorithms spill life/ *more human than human*"—the slogan for the Tyrell Corporation (13), and as a result, she "dream[s] an ethic/ pure as lieder/ pale as north/ moth before industrialization" (13). These ethics are reproduced within rachel's body and reference a pre-industrialized and German (lieder) world that valorizes the "natural" biological body and Western constructs of humanity. At the beginning of Lai's poem, rachel is a product of the Tyrell Corporation that "rations [her] emotional response time/ pupil is the empty space/ through which light passes" (14). Lai, here, references the cold, hollow look of Rachael's eyes in the film; however, she later undermines the power of the Voight-Kampff machine and places the policeman in the role of the nonhuman. As rachel writes:

i camp policeman
 testing cold because of the accident
 nothing really wrong
 he hides what he can't bear. (15)

The word “camp” is a verb that implies a temporary stay in nature, and if the figure of the policeman includes heteropatriarchal assumptions of what it means to be human, then “camp” emphasizes Rachel’s status as an outsider. Homographs, “hides” and “bear,” link the policeman to nature and violence. The first compares the policeman to a hunter who “hides” or skins animals. He also “hides” his own identity as a replicant—“all along/ you were one of us” (40). The word “bear” not only references the animal but also implies that the policeman cannot “bear” or carry the weight of his reality. This wording suggests that Lai is reversing the roles; rather than the film’s comparison of Rachel to an animal through the aesthetics of her leopard-like and hollow eyes, Lai puts the policeman in the position of the nonhuman.

Lai’s poem emphasizes the sound of language and its ability to shape and produce new meanings not supported by the Voight-Kampff machine and replaces the vacuous representation of the eyes with the potential for sound. If the film constructs identity through sight and eyes, then Lai pays critical attention to sound to emphasize the inherent hybridity in language and identity. Consider Lai’s homographs “i” and “aye” in the following stanza:

my balance is off
 not inner ear
 but “i” say
 if in agreement
 “aye.” (28)

The sounds produced by “i” and “aye” are the same, and so Lai links Rachel’s constructed identity with her consent—“aye.” But by placing both words in quotations, Rachel distances herself from both her identity and consent, suggesting that neither is possible, or in the least, applicable to her cyborg identity. Her imbalance comes not from her biology but the constitution of her “i,” and as long as Rachel’s “i” is constructed, her consent—her “aye”—cannot truly be

hers. Lai also further explores consent in a revisioning of the violent sex scene between Rachael and Deckard.

The film's tense scene begins with Rachael sitting at a piano in Deckard's apartment, where propped above the keys are pictures of Deckard's family with an accompanying soundscape that blends saxophone and synthesizer music. Deckard comes out of his bedroom, sits down next to her and kisses her. Rachael, visibly scared, jumps up and opens the door in an attempt to escape, but Deckard aggressively slams the door shut and forces himself on her. Deckard treats Rachael like an object and has little to no regard for her autonomy. Even in the script's description of Rachael, the narrative infantilizes her, calling her "young and small" (*Blade Runner Draft Script* 88). Robert Yeates asserts that this scene "can be viewed as an example of taboo sexual role playing, specifically of dominance and submission," which he considers potentially innovative, since at the time scenes that portrayed these types of power dynamics were "uncommon in Hollywood movies" (74). Where Yeates interprets the film's sex scene as S/M role playing, I maintain that it depicts a violent, non-consensual encounter that normalizes sexual violence and reflects a culture of toxic masculinity. In "rachel," Lai portrays rachel's version of this rape scene and exposes how Deckard's actions reduce her to a sex doll that "requires mouth/ to animate (29). Noting her own inability to give consent, rachel says:

can not sustain my
 insubstantial flesh
 without plastic
 covering of consent

i float ghostly
 a hot air incubus

made of breath and want. (29)

[R]achel proves that she cannot consent to the sexual act enacted by the policeman and recedes (floats away) from her body. She is dehumanized and even considers that her own death “is not one.” Although she consistently reasserts her “i” throughout the poem, the policeman strips it from her. As a result, rachel becomes a “hot air incubus/ made of breath and want” (29). An incubus is a demon that has non-consensual sex with sleeping women—descending onto their victims in their most vulnerable state—and bears striking similarity to the policemen’s non-consensual sexual violence. In this way, rachel absorbs the policeman’s violence and gives the reader a more complicated rachel whose subjectivity inhabits seemingly contradictory spaces at once.

Lai also uses phrases that begin with “i” followed by words that can be read as either a noun or verb. This word play makes it possible for rachel to become a hybridized figure with new regenerative agency—she can reassert and reproduce herself:

i dream insect hatching
 my brother’s incest
 curious as logic
 of folded paper. (17)

The noun form of “dream” reflects her implanted memories and algorithms, but the action of dreaming itself suggests a new form of agency that questions the construction of her “i,” her subjecthood, while reasserting her own ability to become a cyborgean regenerator. Dobson points out that “she dreams insects hatching rather than dreaming *of* them [which] suggests that she brings them into being, more immediately than humans might. Rachel’s dream world intersects, moreover, with the waking world” (400). Dobson’s reading, however, only includes the verb form of “dreams,” and I suggest that rachel is also a “dream.” Reading “dream” as a

noun reinforces Lai's criticism of liberal humanism. By stating "i dream" rachel claims that she is a dream, a manifestation of the Tyrell Corporation. Despite the fact that rachel is built to desire and embody her memories, she finds that they are "curious as logic." In this part of the poem, rachel begins to distance herself from and reject her algorithms, suggesting the beginning of a new and different subject than that depicted in *Blade Runner*. She rejects what was meant to humanize her and questions the authoritarian form of control that her father has over her body, memories, and desires and inserts the potential for subversion through sound rather than sight.

Lai takes the emphasis off of sight and finds multiple possibilities and meanings through sound. Notably, Lai's dedication page consists of two words, both homographs. She writes "four eyes" (5), but one can easily hear "four i's," which could reference the four poems in *Automaton Biographies*. Alternatively, one can hear "for i's," which might suggest that Lai's dedication is for those whose subjectivity, their "i," has either been questioned or policed outside of the bounds of the book of poetry. Another possibility is in the original spelling itself: "four eyes," a dedication to eyes, their production and use. This dedication is indicative of Lai's concern with generating multiple meanings. Take the following example into consideration: "i see double/ roy told him/ *if only you could see/ what i've seen with your eyes*" (28). To "see double" implies that rachel can see two realities, one that references the corporate reproduction and control of her "i" and another of her later technological turn, which culminates at the end of the poem. Replicant Roy's acknowledgement of the construction of the eyes as "*your eyes*" suggests replicant subjectivity is still under the control of corporatized patriarchal power, and Lai takes issue with the construct of subjectivity itself. In another example, Lai finds the possibilities for hybrid meaning and subversion through enjambment:

your human

subject's broken star

our crossed wires clutch ever bigger
 guns they hold
 our “i”
 this certainty. (40)

The line “your human/ subject’s” rejects liberal humanist understandings of subjectivity. By noting ownership of “subjects” to humans, Lai considers that the humanist construct of the subject “i” is limited. Reading the line “guns they hold” in isolation implies that “they,” humans, hold the power, but the enjambed line, “our crossed wires clutch ever bigger/ guns,” implies that replicants have more power. Language, specifically poetry, makes it possible for Lai to renegotiate power in ways not possible through the medium of film. Lai values hybridity and critiques the liberal humanist approach to subjectivity as a “certainty” and further presents Rachel as a new figure who has escaped the violent construction and control of her humanity in *Blade Runner*. She has been re-embodied in the poem itself, becoming a cyborgean regenerator capable of critiquing the liberal humanist constructs of the subject. Lai’s shifting emphasis between the sight of words and their potential in sound is not merely word-play, but instead makes it possible for Rachel to become a cyborgean regenerator that reproduces the self. The following section investigates Rachel’s shift away from liberal humanism towards becoming a cyborgean regenerator who, through the medium of language, regenerates a racially and historically specific mother.

Maternal Memories and Asian-Canadian Identity

The Voight Kampff machine assesses humanity based on who has experienced normative mothering and relies on the biological and patriarchal cultural system in which the category of “mother” and maternal memories appear. The test reaffirms normative constructs of family by

measuring the unconscious biological (pupillary) response to normative constructions of the mother, suggesting that conforming to traditional family structures and heteronormativity makes one more human than not. The Voight-Kampff test polices normativity vis-à-vis the mother and requires participation and interpretation of the results by a human. This test becomes a conduit for heteropatriarchal power, and individuals in the film—humans—reproduce this very power. If the Voight-Kampff test is like the lie detector test, it requires a norm, or baseline, that then “set[s] the parameters” against an “insane” individual, and therefore problematically reinforces “binary differentiations” between what is normal and what is deviant (Verlinden 324). In *Blade Runner*, in order to determine what “deviant” or “norm[al]” behaviour is, one must assume that there was a test subject—and that this subject loved their mother. But where the Voight-Kampff test legitimizes the link between maternity and humanity, Lai’s poem complicates, critiques, and delegitimizes *Blade Runner*’s use of “science” and maternity to justify humanity. She develops sound-based poetry that makes it possible to present Rachel as an illegitimate figure who turns away from her father and the implanted memories of her mother towards a technological and racially specific mother figure, as shown in a letter Rachel writes to her mother at the end of the poem. Lai thus continues her foregrounding of sound rather than sight to establish a poetic re-embodiment of the cyborg that renegotiates patriarchal, biological, and universally encoded constructs of the mother.

Blade Runner includes two scenes where replicants, Leon and Rachael, take the Voight-Kampff test. In a question posed to replicant Leon, the administrator asks him to “describe in single words only the good things that come into your mind about your mother.” Leon seems unnerved during the test and responds, “my mother? Let me tell you about my mother,” right before he shoots the administrator and escapes. Since Leon does not have memories of his mother, his violence is nonconformist—a way for Leon to reject (but not really subvert) the

production of a social system that he does not participate in (yet is defined by). Consider the scene in which Deckard administers the test to Rachael. He asks questions that refer to her role as a mother with child and her marital and sexual relationship with her husband. These questions rely on a heteronormative family structure and require that Rachael take on the role of a mother and wife. Recognizing that the test evaluates her conformance to heteronormativity, Rachael responds to Deckard's question with, "Is this testing whether I'm a replicant or a lesbian, Mr. Deckard?" Where Leon is judged based on his feelings towards an altogether imaginary mother, because of Rachael's female physical form, she must take on the role of the wife and reproducer, further making visible the production of essentialist gender portrayals in the film—for Rachael to be human, she must biologically reflect maternal traits.

In *Blade Runner*, after finding out that she is a replicant, Rachael holds out a picture to Deckard and says, "Look, it's me with my mother." She uses the memory of her mother as a justification of her humanity. Lai references this scene, writing that "only photographs/ will stave the terror/ *look it's me with my mother* (32). The "terror" is of Rachel's status as a replicant, but Lai further makes it possible for Rachel to challenge the assumptions about her own humanity and turn against the policeman. She rejects the heteronormative-laden questions that the policeman poses and:

[wells] against his
 emotional calfskins
 his killing jar
 his girlie magazine's
 gooey centre. (15)

The "emotional calfskins," "killing jar," and the "girlie magazine" reference the questions that Deckard poses to Rachael during the Voight-Kampff test, and in ascribing ownership of these

objects to the policeman, Lai takes the power from the policeman. [R]achel “well[s] against” the heteronormativity operating against her in order to reaffirm her own identity. Her rejection proves that she can impact the heteronormative culture the policeman enforces.

The film restricts Rachael to the category of the mother and reproducer, but Lai retells Rachel’s birth to underscore that it duplicates heteronormativity furthered by the Voight-Kampff test. She comments:

i athena my own sprouting

this knowledge colds me

in my ice-fringed room

my asian fits this frost

i owl my blink

slow stare i thought was mine

father given

my heart exudes a kind of love

a kind of mourning. (16)

In Greek mythology, Athena comes straight out of Zeus’ head wearing armor, presumably ready to fight. Lai’s use of “i athena my own sprouting,” then, produces a “kind of mourning” for Rachel. As Dobson notes, the owl is Athena’s “symbolic animal, bringing to mind her birth, as well as the ‘blink’ of its eyes and hers, the blink that she thinks is her own until she learns that her ‘father,’ Eldon Tyrell, gave it to her in her manufacture” (401). Lai thus links reproduction to the production of the eyes and suggests that Rachel emerges from her father, much like Athena, as a reproduction of liberal humanist values, but Lai also incorporates Asian-Canadian identity and

history to Rachel. The “ice-fringed room” references the Asian eye-maker, Chow, from *Blade Runner*—also referenced in *When Fox Is A Thousand*. By comparing Rachel to the eye-maker, Lai proves that she is invested in renegotiating patriarchal reproduction and shifts the paradigm from a controlled and corporatized reproduction of heteronormative constructs to a reimagining of a new mother figure that merges Asian-Canadian identity with technology.

Lai’s poem provides more than just a rejection of her father and the limited construct of the mother. It produces an alternative subject that counters Rachel’s origin story and the normative memories placed in her mind. The poem reads:

faith in wiring
 we illegitimate offspring
 our father’s lawful
 monsters to turn or not to turn. (39)

Lai’s use of the phrase “we illegitimate offspring” mirrors Haraway’s assertion that “[t]he main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the *illegitimate offspring* of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential” (10; emphasis added). Although Lai writes “we illegitimate offspring,” the subsequent enjambment contradicts the previous line. The lines “our father’s lawful/ monsters” suggests altogether legitimizing monsters that must choose whether or not to “turn” against the father. Lai, then, emphasizes the collective agency across all replicants and cyborgs in order to become “unfaithful to their origins” (*Manifesto for Cyborgs* 10). The poem highlights Haraway’s cyborg’s rejection of a patriarchal capitalism, which the Tyrell Corporation fittingly represents. A possible cyborg feminist critique of *Blade Runner*, however, would point to the gender dualist dichotomy the film affirms between the father-as-science and mother-as-biological-reproducer. Rachael is, in fact, a

product of the Tyrell Corporation that “plays God” with science, but Rachel, in turn, is unfaithful to her father and rejects her own origins. I suggest that Lai’s later use of the technological mother likewise reaffirms this dichotomy but does so to produce dual meaning through ambiguous language and to complicate constructions of the maternal.

Where the film uses the figure of the mother to establish and test “normality,” “Rachel” challenges the father and implanted memories of her mother. The poem ends with a letter to Rachel’s mother, written primarily in binary code, gesturing towards a new maternal subject that merges the gap between the organic and the technological. This hybridized letter includes the use of a multilingual technologized language (binary code and English words) in order to provide an alternative to the patriarchal power the policeman extols:

dear mother

011100100110010101110100011101010111001001101110001000
 000111010001101111001000000110110001100001011011100110
 011101110101011010010111001101101000 that is to say 0110000
 101101110011001110111010101101001011100110110100000100
 000011011110110011000100000011001100110111101110010011
 001010110100101100111011011100110010101110010100100100
 111001100100000011001100110111101100100011001000110010
 101110010 otherwise 011101000110100001100101001000000110
 001001101111011000010111001001100100011001010111001000
 100000011100000110100101100011011101000111010101110001
 00110010101110011 a mixture of 01100011011000010110111001
 100001011001000110000100100000011101110110100101101100
 011001000010000001100101011011100110111101110101011001

110110100000100000011101000110111100100000011100100110
 010101110100011100100110000101100011011010110010000001
 110010011000010110100101101100011101110110000101111001
 cn to cnn and rpms to dna 011101000110100001100101001000000
 110001001001010110111001100100001000000110100101101110
 001000001101101011110010010000001100011011011110111001
 0011011100110010101110010

love rachel. (41)

Translated, the letter reads: “*dear mother / return to languish that is to say anguish of foreigner’s fodder otherwise the boarder pictures a mixture of Canada wild enough to retrack railway cn to cnn and rpms to dna the bend in my corner / love rachel*” (Fung and Prater 205). The insertion of English words reflects a hybridity of language, and even without binary code, these English words read: “dear mother/ that is to say/ otherwise/ a mixture of/ cn to cnn and rpms to dna ” (41). Even without the translation of binary code, the words “mother” and “other” suggests another maternal figure than the normative mother figure in *Blade Runner*. The line “rpms to dna” links the body to the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway in which Chinese labourers were contracted to finish its construction. At the time, Chinese labourers suffered from “race-based exclusion” and overt racism (Ross 163), and between the 1870s and 1920s, laws were even put in place to limit Chinese workers from voting, entering politics, and “holding certain jobs” (164). The retracking of “rpms” to “dna” thus links rachel’s body to the past and generates a new hybrid maternal figure, and Lai embraces hybridity through her development through sound. The word “fodder,” for example, sounds similar to “father,” and as Prater and Fung argue, “the invocation of ‘father’ through ‘fodder’ [collapses] paternal lineage with accessible, inferior, disposable material used first in colonial capital (as in ‘canon fodder’) then first-world

corporatist interest” (206). Lai sees patrilineality and corporations as co-constitutive, and in this letter, she critiques a history gained through her memories and of her patrilineal corporatization to establish a new origin story linked to Asian-Canadian identity.

Through language and sound, Lai presents rachel as an Asian-Canadian cyborg. What results is not unlike a rebirth—though I offer that it is more regenerative in nature. [R]achel reimagines her “own sprouting” and generates an alternative origin story for that of Athena and Graeco-Roman myth systems. Her concluding letter to her mother allows rachel to tell her own mythology outside of a heteronormative culture. In rooting rachel’s identity and memories in the experience of Asian-Canadians, Lai moves away from the corporatized father figure to that of a technologically and historically specific mother. In doing so, rachel’s eyes are no longer a lens for the light of the father to shine through, and she becomes a cyborg figure capable of producing her own meaning. The poem thus develops cyborg regeneration to challenge and renegotiate heteropatriarchy through the trope of the mother and the inclusion of race. [R]achel, as a result, decolonizes her identity and body from the hyper-masculine and authoritative forces that manipulate her in *Blade Runner* and is reembodied through language. In this chapter, I suggested that Lai’s poem, “rachel,” is a linguistic cyborg re-embodiment of Rachael from *Blade Runner*. The poem challenges the reproduction of heteropatriarchal values as they are produced and measured by the eyes and instead emphasizes hybrid and multiple meanings made through sound. Through homonyms, homographs, and multilingual technologized language, Lai offers more possibilities for cyborg agency than that shown in Scott’s *Blade Runner*, and “rachel” turns away from the patriarchal father, Tyrell, to a networked and nonunitary maternal figure that merges Asian-Canadian history and computerized technology. Lai thus radically promotes a new alternative maternal figure, one that does not reproduce a universalist and normative construct of the human but generates a networked, sound-based cyborg poem.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to demonstrate the unique representations of cyborg regeneration in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, and Larissa Lai's "rachel." Specifically, each text's development of cyborg imagery, generative re-writing, and language combats larger narratives of reproduction that, in fact, produce problematic gender stereotypes, essentialist portrayals of maternal metaphors, and limited universalist (and reductive) constructs of the mother. Through close attention to language and the representations of non-reproductive and reproductive bodies, each of my focus texts re-imagines how humans/nonhumans are increasingly intermeshed with and impacted by nonlocal and nonmaterial influences on the body and presents alternatives to conventional forms of reproduction through the medium of language. I assessed Winterson's exploration of gender norms as they are reproduced on the body and claimed that her regenerative writing can potentially rewrite patriarchal and imperialist narratives; however, the novel's emphasis on biological maternity and development of "love" often functions to reaffirm repronormative narratives. I also investigated Hopkinson's development of the mother-as-history trope in the context of cyborg imagery and nation language. I claimed that the cyborgs made of non-unitary and trickster figures were productive in their ability to underscore the importance of nation language in contemporary Caribbean countries and diasporas and to present broadened portrayals of maternity that are not limited by biological reproduction. Although *Midnight Robber* ends with the birth of Tubman, the novel expands the trope of the mother figure to include nonunitary and networked maternal figures. My final chapter read Lai's revisioning of *Blade Runner* for its use of poetic language that—through sound—provides multiple meanings and complicates constructions of the universal subject. Lai's poem "rachel" not only is a poetic re-embodiment of

Scott's character (Rachael), but also establishes a new hybridized cyborg maternal figure with ties to Asian-Canadian identity and history. This project ultimately draws attention to the ways recent sf explores alternatives to popular reproductive discourses, but a project of this nature has undoubtedly exposed some unique problems.

I would like to address the primary theoretical quagmire that plagued this project—that the two terms that framed the entirety of this project became the most difficult to define: cyborg and regeneration. If Haraway's cyborg is made possible by the “leaky distinctions” between human and animal, animal-human and machine, and the physical and nonphysical (“Manifesto” 10), then does it stand to reason that anything can be a cyborg? And if regeneration is largely a terminological and philosophical shift away from reproduction, then could we not think regeneratively in myriad contexts? After much research in hopes to contain my analyses, I found that the cyborg is not only ubiquitous but seemingly limitless, and narrowing the scope of this project became a constant battle. As a result, much time was spent in this thesis winding down pathways of posthumanism, new materialism, affect theory, assemblage theory, vital materialism, object-oriented ontology, etc., to find the cyborg's potential as it has been taken up in the texts I address. The core offerings of these various schools of thought can be distilled to something similar to Stacey Alaimo's claim that “we need not take an imaginative leap into science fiction in order to realize that we inhabit a corporeality that is never disconnected from our environment” (Alaimo 156). Because of this fact—that our material selves cannot be disentangled from our environments—there was, for a longer time than I would like to admit, a tension between recognizing cyborg theory's ubiquitous nature and honing in on its development in the texts in question. In my thinking, I tended to define cyborg regeneration by what it was not, but, of course, it is not enough to consider cyborg regeneration as an alternative to conventional forms of reproduction. The very ubiquitous nature of the cyborg, then, was the very

thing that produced the most trouble for this thesis. I tried my best to reconcile this pull towards general ideas about the topic, and considered that if reproduction is a part of an ideological matrix that reproduces gender stereotypes, essentialist practices, and colonial and corporatized constructions of the mother, reflecting and amplifying normativity and dehumanizing those who diverge from its narratives, then cyborg regeneration, in turn, encourages conversations about reproduction outside of this matrix, expanding biological notions of reproduction and naturalized maternal instincts. Cyborg regeneration, as particularly evidenced in my chosen texts, signals an ongoing shift in the ways individuals participate in (or not) common reproductive narratives and offers the possibility to generate new forms of being that exist by way of crossing the boundaries between human and non-human.

Haraway's notion of cyborg regeneration still, thirty years later, offers ways to subvert conventional and traditional notions of reproduction that make up the "reproductive matrix." The reproductive matrix holds the links between sex and gender as fact, recreates gendered stereotypes, and naturalizes the female-assigned body to the planet, and these narratives become concretized in political agendas and policies. Even in 2019, there is an increase in proposed policies that seek to limit reproductive justice. In 2018, U.S state governments, for instance, introduced almost 350 provisions that severely limit vital reproductive resources that include access to contraception, assistance in cases of domestic violence, livable wages, sex education, hormone therapy, STI prevention, pre- and post-natal care, and technologies that foreclose reproduction (Guttmacher). Though not all have passed and/or been enacted, they signal an increase in reproductive legislation that is undoubtedly linked to repronormative behaviours. In particular, one of the most widely-adopted pieces of legislation is the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (PUCPA) that clings to conservative views of fetal personhood and states that any individual who terminates their pregnancy after twenty weeks, with exceptions for

survivors of rape and incest, could potentially face jail-time.⁹ PUCPA uses the claim that the fetus can feel pain at twenty weeks—a claim debunked by the majority of medical researchers—to justify criminalizing abortions, turning individuals who seek physical and emotional welfare into criminals. Missing from this bill is the recognition that the mother is at a higher risk for death during delivery than legally induced abortion. In fact, in the U.S., the birth mother is over fourteen times more at risk for during childbirth than during an abortion procedure. (Raymond et al.). PUCPA thus forces individuals who do not want motherhood into gestating a baby in a country whose maternal death rates are the highest in all developed countries¹⁰ and where those denied access to abortions are statistically more at risk of living in poverty (Cohen). This policy speaks to heteronormative reproductive politics that lack intersectional analyses of race, gender, and class, furthers biologically determinist stereotypes of women as “natural” mothers, and presents itself as a piece of legislation capable of ending stalled reproductive debates.

PUCPA is made possible by repronormative narratives and is an unfortunate result of what Heather Latimer calls the “politics of choice.” Latimer writes that while there have been developments in abortion, surrogacy, IVF, cloning and stem-cell research, “the terms of reproductive debates remain largely the same” (4-5). Where it would seem that the rise of reproductive technologies along with increased access to more research would only improve access to reproductive care, framing access to abortion within a “pro-choice” and “pro-life” binary risks taking attention away from the fight for inclusive reproductive justice and ultimately results in a seemingly endless repetition of the same old debate. As Latimer notes, the term “pro-life” reflects the circuitous nature of political rhetoric surrounding reproduction and writes that

⁹ The bill also adds that survivors must file a report of the rape with the police.

¹⁰ After a six-month long investigation, NPR and ProPublica (2017) published findings that indicate that maternal mortality rates in the United States rise as rates decrease in other developed countries. Their research also found that “more American women are dying of pregnancy-related complications than any other developed country”; doctors have not received adequate training in labor and delivery; and hospitals are under-prepared for birth emergencies.

“[c]ompared to [the word] anti-abortion, which implies only a negative stance, [the word] pro-life suggests that one can, and should, always make the positive or ‘right’ choice and ‘choose’ life” (5). Part of PUCPA’s allure and popularity stems from its insistence that it can resolve the debate between pro-choice and anti-abortion. Although Pew Research Center reports that generational views about abortion have remained mostly unchanged, PUCPA uses this stalled debate to its own conservative end. The policy uses fetal pain as emotional leverage meant to sway under-informed pro-choice individuals. Currently, thirteen states provide pamphlets that erroneously claim that the fetus can feel pain, and twenty-six states mandate that those who hope to terminate their pregnancy must receive an ultrasound, of which three states require the abortion provider to display and describe the image (Guttmacher). Medical practitioners force those who seek an abortion to look at the fetus, now a sign of state-controlled reproductive care. Ensuring access to legal, safe, and local medical practitioners who offer abortion services is, of course, vital, but too often this discourse diverts attention away from the socioeconomic factors and inequalities that limit one’s access to reproductive justice. To be sure, the topic of abortion often dominates popular reproductive narratives, which implies that reproductive care is only about the capacity to gestate a child. It is part of a larger circuitous discourse—produced within a reproductive matrix—that privileges birthing via the womb. Cyborg regeneration offers alternatives to this stalled reproductive discourse that avoid the conservative policies and political agenda behind what PUCPA proposes.

Latimer writes that popular reproductive narratives are "inadequate in making sense of the topic's [i.e., reproduction's] complexities" and suggests that examining fictional representations of reproduction exposes its limitations and inadequacies (5). This project aimed to explore the political potential for cyborg regeneration to respond to repronormative and restrictive conceptions of reproduction. There is, indeed, an increasing need to radically redefine the ways

we engage with reproduction, and sf has often been unfettered ground for parsing, critiquing, and reimagining new forms of production outside of the reproductive matrix. My chosen texts, *The Stone Gods*, *Midnight Robber*, and “rachel” each participate in the sf genre and cyborg regeneration to reconceptualize agency, identity, and—of course—reproduction. Ultimately, if popular reproductive narratives fail to reflect the many forms of reproductive care, then I contend that cyborg regeneration can now, and in the future, make visible the flaws in policies that limit reproductive justice, disrupt a matrix of essentialist thinking, and generate new possibilities for alternative maternal and non-maternal meanings.

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