

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Fikce a pravda v románech Jeanette Wintersonové
Fiction and Truth in Jeanette Winterson's Novels

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):
Mgr. Daniela Theinová, Ph.D.

Zpracovala (author):
Eliška Zunová

Studijní obor (subject):
Anglistika-amerikanistika

Praha 4. 8. 2022

DECLARATION

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne 4. 8. 2022

Podpis: 

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Daniela Theinová, PhD, for her guidance, her infinite patience, tolerance, all her kind suggestions, and for going above and beyond to help me see this thesis through in spite of all the hurdles. Without her, the study would have never been completed.

PERMISSION

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

ABSTRAKT (CS)

Příběhy mají v románech Jeanette Wintersonové dvojí funkci. Na jedné straně mohou kanonické příběhy přispívat k útlaku a rigiditě a podporovat zažitě společenské normy a předsudky. Na straně druhé však může být vyprávění prostředkem ke svobodě, seberealizaci a získání kontroly nad vlastním životním příběhem. V této bakalářské práci jsem analyzovala tři romány z různých období autorčiny kariéry, konkrétně *Sexing the Cherry*¹ (1989), *The Stone Gods* (2007) a *Frankissstein* (2019), a podrobila je srovnání s několika dalšími jejími knihami. Práce zkoumá, jak Jeanette Wintersonová pracuje s příběhy na tematické i strukturální rovině a jak se jejich prostřednictvím vyjadřuje ke vztahu mezi tím, co je smyšlené, a tím, co je pravdivé. Zaměřovala jsem se především na vztah mezi „fikcí“ a „pravdou“ a tím, jak se tyto koncepty v jejích knihách vzájemně ovlivňují. Tvrdím, že v pojetí Wintersonové nejsou tyto pojmy v rozporu – autorka opakovaně zdůrazňuje, že skrze literaturu a fikci je nejen možné vyjádřit pravdivé věci, ale že obojí dokáže určité „pravdy“ vystihnout daleko lépe než diskurzy postavené čistě na doložitelných faktech. Podle ní má literatura, nebo umění obecně, schopnost vyjádřit takové pravdy a skutečnosti, které se vymykají rozumovému chápání či běžnému jazyku. Wintersonová navíc rozlišuje mezi „skutečností“ (realitou) a „pravdou“, přičemž první pojem zpravidla odkazuje k empirické realitě, tedy ke vnějšímu světu zachycovanému diskursy realismu a racionalismu, zatímco druhým pojmem se obvykle rozumí to, co je autentické, relevantní, popřípadě něco, co má pro jedince hluboký, subjektivní význam. Můj rozbor knihy *Sexing the Cherry* odhalil, že kanonické příběhy, jako jsou například pohádky, odrážejí a propagují společenské a kulturní normy a pomáhají udržovat zajetý řád. Wintersonová vedle nich staví své vlastní, fantastické příběhy, čímž odhaluje zastaralé normy a předsudky zakořeněné v těchto kanonických příbězích, potažmo ve společnosti a v nás samých. Příběhy jsou zde tedy použity ke kritice rigidního společenského řádu a současně se utvrzuje jejich hodnota jakožto nástrojů pro dosažení vnitřní svobody, aktivního jednání, či dokonce přežití. V knize *The Stone Gods* Wintersonová prostřednictvím jedinečné, cyklické narativní struktury kritizuje aktuální problémy, jako je nekonečná honba lidí za pokrokem a z ní plynoucí devastace životního prostředí. Poukazuje na to, jak málo je lidstvo ochotno poučit se z vlastních chyb. V této knize je zdůrazněna mnohohrstevnatost pojmů jako realita a pravda. Pravda, jakožto i historie je navíc prezentována jako nutně nedokončený proces. *Frankissstein*, jež je transformativní převyprávění *Frankensteina* Mary Shelleyové, představuje autorčinu reakci na budoucnost lidstva definovanou technologiemi. V této knize je koncept reality jako takový problematizován a hranice mezi skutečným životem a příběhem se stírají. To odráží nestabilitu blížící se budoucnosti a současně zdůrazňuje význam invence v utváření světa kolem nás. Příběhy nám nejen pomáhají pochopit realitu, ale zároveň realitu ovlivňují, jde tedy o oboustranný vztah. Wintersonová zdůrazňuje význam literatury jakožto našeho spojení s minulostí a jako možného zdroje poučení a lepší budoucnosti.

Klíčová slova:

Jeanette Wintersonová; fikce; pravda; realita; invence; vyprávění; narativ; umění; historie; láska

¹ V češtině vyšlo pod názvem *Jak naštěpit třešeň* (2004).

ABSTRACT (EN)

Stories in Jeanette Winterson's novels have a dual function: on the one hand, canonical narratives can be agents of oppression, rigidity, and the perpetuation of norms and biases; on the other, storytelling can be a force of freedom, self-actualization, and agency. In this thesis, I have analysed three novels from different parts of the author's career – namely *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), *The Stone Gods* (2007), and *Frankissstein* (2019) – reading them alongside some of her other works, to explore how Winterson works with stories and storytelling both as a thematic and structural element, and how she uses them to comment on the relationship between what is invented and what is true. My main focus was on how the two key concepts of “fiction” and “truth” influence each other in Winterson's writing. I argue that these two categories are not contradictory in the author's conception; she repeatedly stresses not only that fiction has the capacity to express truths, but that it can do so more efficiently than rigid adherence to facts. In addition, the author draws a distinction between “the real” and “the true,” where the former generally refers to the empirical reality, the outside world that we tend to mediate by discourses of realism and rationalism, and the latter can be understood as that which is authentic, genuine, even meaningful on a deep, largely subjective level. The analysis of *Sexing the Cherry* revealed that canonical narratives such as fairy tales serve as agents of the binding social and cultural norms and as promoters of the established order. By juxtaposing these narratives with her own, fantastical ones, Winterson foregrounds the stale norms and biases ingrained in the canonical stories and, by extension, in the society and ourselves. Thus, stories and fantasy are being used for critique and simultaneously, their value as tools for liberation, agency and survival, is asserted. Through the use of a unique, iterative narrative structure in *The Stone Gods*, Winterson critiques topical issues such as humanity's unending chase after progress and the resulting ecological devastation, and foregrounds how the human race keeps making the same mistakes. The multiplicity of meaning in relation to reality and truth is emphasized, and truth as well as history are presented as necessarily unfinished processes. *Frankissstein*, Winterson's subversive retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, reacts to the emerging future dominated by technology. There, the entire concept of reality is problematized and the boundaries between real life and story are blurred, which reflects the instability of the approaching future and also stresses the importance of invention in the shaping of the world around us. Stories are shown to not only help one make sense of reality, but to affect reality in turn; it is a mutual relationship of influence and intervention. Winterson emphasizes the importance of fiction – or literature as a whole – as a connection to our past and humanity as well as an invaluable source of learning.

Key words:

Jeanette Winterson; fiction; truth; reality; invention; storytelling; narrative; art; history; love

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
PERMISSION	iv
ABSTRAKT (CS)	v
ABSTRACT (EN).....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Truth and Reality.....	2
1.2 Thesis Structure.....	5
2 <i>SEXING THE CHERRY</i> : NARRATIVES IN JUXTAPOSITION	8
2.1 Winterson’s Postmodern Approaches	8
2.2 “Happily Ever After, of Course”: Undermining Canonical Narratives.....	9
2.3 “I’m Telling You Stories, Trust Me”: Fictionalizing History	13
2.4 “Empty Space and Points of Light”: The Clash between the Real and the True.....	17
3 <i>THE STONE GODS</i> : NEVER ENDING, ALWAYS BEGINNING	21
3.1 “A Repeating World”: Winterson’s Productive Irresolution.....	21
3.2 “Love Is an Intervention”: Love and Storytelling	26
3.3 “Tell Me a Story, Spike”: Words for Comfort	31
4 <i>FRANKISSSTEIN</i> : INVENTING REALITY	34
4.1 “Reality Is... What?”: Relativizing the Material World.....	34
4.2 “The Teller or the Tale?”: Reimagining the Monster	38
4.3 “The Human Dream”: Accepting the New Reality	45
5 CONCLUSION	48
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most fascinating aspects of Jeanette Winterson's texts is the way the author works with stories and foregrounds acts of storytelling, not only as a creative take on reality, but to comment on the relationship between what is invented and what is true. In her narratives, which invariably feature a multiplicity of stories being told, she offers diverse speculative approaches to reality and identity, thus emphasizing the role of belief and subjectivity in experience. Above all, stories in Winterson's work have a dual function: on the one hand, canonical narratives can be agents of fundamentalism, oppression, rigidity, perpetuation of norms and biases; on the other, storytelling can be a force of freedom, self-actualization and agency, comfort, a tool to help one reconcile with reality and find solutions to real-life problems. In my thesis, I will examine Winterson's use of stories and storytelling both as a topic and an approach to life and reality transcending the boundaries of the novels. My main focus will be on how the two key concepts of "fiction" and "truth" influence each other in Jeanette Winterson's writing. I argue that these two categories are not contradictory in the author's conception; she repeatedly stresses not only that fiction has the capacity to express truths, but that it can do so better than rigid adherence to facts. In addition, the boundaries between what is fictional and what is real are continuously problematized or outright blurred. This allows Winterson to simultaneously question and assert the value of both categories. For the purposes of the thesis, I have selected three novels from different parts of the author's career – namely *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), *The Stone Gods* (2007) and *Frankissstein* (2019) – to explore how Winterson works with stories and storytelling both as a thematic and structural element and what her novels propose about the relationship between "fiction" and "truth."

Winterson regularly undermines continuity in her narratives; they are often ambiguous, fragmented, recursive, with unclear ends and beginnings. Being a master of paradoxes, the author employs various techniques to counterbalance this lack of continuity. Apart from thematic motives – such as the journey, seafaring, faith or belief – there are also many structural elements that tie the works together. One of the characteristic features of her style is the mixing or juxtaposition of realism and fantasy, which can be found in all her novels. Winterson's books often reference or outright "quote" one another, so one can encounter the same sentiments or even word-for-word expressions across the different novels, which creates a sense of familiarity and unity. Winterson herself has stated that her books² form a cycle, and that she sees them as "one long continuous piece of work."³ Reading her oeuvre, one gets the impression that the individual books all share a thematic core. Some of the key thematic elements explored in her work, apart from stories and storytelling, include the search of the Self, the disruption of gender binaries, the importance of art and literature (for the individual as well as

² At the time of the interview, *The PowerBook* (2000) had been the latest of Winterson's published novels.

³ Jeanette Winterson, qtd. in Susana Onega, *Jeanette Winterson* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 6.

humanity as a whole), and love, generally hand in hand with loss and the endless search for a meaningful connection to another person. All of these will be touched on in this study.

1.1 Truth and Reality

Before delving into the particulars of my thesis, it is important to set down a theoretical framework regarding the main concepts I will be working with throughout: in particular, “truth” and “fiction” and their mutual relationship. I have used Lamarque and Olsen’s *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*⁴ as my primary source, alongside *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Considering the topic of my thesis, a question suggests itself of how – and whether at all – truth can be conveyed through fiction. In order to answer it, it is important to first attempt to define the term “fiction” itself. According to Lamarque and Olsen, one way of understanding it would be as the “unanalysed, non-technical concept of fiction” – that which is “made up, untrue, not conforming to reality”;⁵ viewed in this way, the term itself would then imply falsity, the opposite of truth. However, as the authors point out, the use of the term “fiction” has shifted around the era of modernism to signify a genre – the novel, novella or the short story. The Modernists “use ‘fiction’ to refer to what they create, but they emphasize that their task is to tell the *truth*”⁶ – which marks a move away from the idea that that which is “fictional” is also inherently incompatible with “truth.” This use caught on and the term is now widely understood as referring to a piece of literature in prose, “created from the imagination [and] not presented as fact, though it may be based on a true story”;⁷ it may be conveying what is proposed as genuine rather than accepted “truths” about the world and the human situation. It is this meaning that I have in mind when using the term in this thesis.

As can be seen in the definition quoted above, a crucial characteristic of fiction is still that it is made up, not factual. However, that is not to say that works of fiction have to be inherently comprised of fabrications. In fact, Lamarque and Olsen argue that “neither truth-value nor reference determine fictionality, at least in the literary application.”⁸ According to them, “[t]ruth (or falsity) is not part of the definition of either fiction, literature, or metaphor.” Crucially, the authors claim that despite that, “truth (and falsity) can arise in connection with all three, in unproblematic ways.”⁹

When philosophers or critics talk about “fiction as a means for the discovery, or communication, of truth,” they do not simply mean that individual sentences in a work of literature can (or need to) be factually true; this sentiment generally refers to “truth that has deeper human significance, like the universals that Aristotle claims in *The Poetics* to find in the works of poets, or the kind of truth about

⁴ Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁵ Lamarque and Olsen 268.

⁶ Lamarque and Olsen 270–271; italics original.

⁷ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Fiction,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 17 Jan. 2019, <<https://www.britannica.com/art/fiction-literature>> 28 Jul. 2022.

⁸ Lamarque and Olsen 31.

⁹ Lamarque and Olsen 366.

human nature.”¹⁰ Lamarque and Olsen state that “[w]e can learn from metaphors, just as we can learn from fiction, and not merely factual truths but new ways of thinking; a good metaphor [...] can change our conceptual resources.”¹¹ According to Fred Kroon and Alberto Voltolini:

A common claim is that literature provides knowledge about moral values, especially about the particular moral requirements of concrete situations [...]. Some think literature can also provide a kind of conceptual knowledge, such as insight into a moral concept like sympathy [...]. Others have thought it can even teach deep psychological truths or truths about our place in the world. In many cases, however, the “truths” readers claim to find in literature will be quite contestable, with different works presenting different points of view. Even then, however, it might be argued that readers at least acquire knowledge of possibilities.¹²

I believe that Jeanette Winterson shares a similar perspective. As will be demonstrated in the course of my thesis, the author repeatedly stresses the idea that art (and specifically literature) is a valuable vehicle for expressing profound truths and, furthermore, that it has the capacity to convey truths inaccessible to the discourses of realism and rationalism. That brings up another point that is important to stress for the concerns of my thesis: the problematic identification of truth as that which is “real.”

Given that truth is one of the central, most studied subjects in philosophy in general,¹³ trying to define it within this thesis and introduction would be an impossible task. Some theories associate truth with realism; in that view, calling something (a sentence, proposition, utterance etc.) true or false reflects its correspondence (or the lack thereof) to the world, which is assumed to “[exist] objectively, independently of the ways we think about it or describe it.”^{14,15} In this sense, then, realism should be considered the most “truthful” of literary representations, as it endeavours to reflect the world “accurately.” However, as Lamarque and Olsen point out, “[l]iterary realism is a ‘mode of presentation’, [...] not a kind of ‘correspondence’ relation.”¹⁶ As mentioned earlier, Winterson’s beliefs about art seem to largely align with the Modernists, with whom the author openly affiliates herself.¹⁷ It can be seen not only in her opinions about art being able to convey truths, but also in her stance against realistic representation and her use of self-referential techniques that are associated with it. Henry James and Virginia Woolf, for example, both took a stand against realist fiction, with Woolf stressing, in the words

¹⁰ Fred Kroon and Alberto Voltolini, “Fiction,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2019 Edition, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/fiction/>> 7 Apr. 2022.

¹¹ Lamarque and Olsen 365.

¹² Kroon and Voltolini.

¹³ Michael Glanzberg, “Truth,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2021 Edition, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/truth/>> 27 Jul. 2022.

¹⁴ This we will also find problematized in Winterson; see chapter 4 in particular.

¹⁵ Opposite to realism stands anti-realism, according to which truth essentially equals verifiability; “[t]ruth is not, to this view, a fully objective matter, independent of us or our thoughts. Instead, truth is constrained by our abilities to verify, and is thus constrained by our epistemic situation” (Glanzberg). These are only two out of many different theories of truth.

¹⁶ Lamarque and Olsen 315.

¹⁷ Alina Preda, “Crossing the Boundaries between Modernist and Postmodernist Poetics: the Critical Reception of Jeanette Winterson’s Novels,” *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 5.2 (2019): 23, <<https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcest.2019.8.02>> 21 Jun. 2022.

of Lamarque and Olsen, that “it is conventional rather than true”¹⁸ – an idea which Winterson appears to wholly subscribe to. In fact, according to Lamarque and Olsen:

The whole modernist movement in art amounted to a challenge at a fundamental level to the idea of “representing reality”. The point of modernism, at its best, was to exhibit the plurality of worlds, private and public, in contrast to some single “objective” world given in experience.¹⁹

As a result, “representation itself had been exposed as a kind of artifice,” which the artists foregrounded by deliberately drawing attention to the fictional nature of their works²⁰ – another aspect typical of Winterson’s writing. As will be demonstrated in the body of this thesis, the author herself is critical of realism, and she makes a distinction between “the real” and “the true,” stressing that these two terms are not synonymous.

In addition, the last part of Kroon and Voltolini’s argument foregrounds another important problem: the multiplicity of truth, which is another concept found abundantly in Winterson. This brings to mind the philosophy of relativism, defined by *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as follows:

Relativism about truth, or *alethic relativism*, at its simplest, is the claim that what is true for one individual or social group may not be true for another, and there is no context-independent vantage point to adjudicate the matter. What is true or false is always relative to a conceptual, cultural, or linguistic framework.²¹

The idea of truth as well as reality as something without objective, uniform validity is typical of Winterson’s writing and aligns it, as I will show in chapter two, with postmodernism as well.

Finally, fiction (or storytelling) is not only a possible source of truths about the world, but also about the self. Many argue that narration is a crucial aspect of the human experience and that it “plays a central, even indispensable, role in cognition.”²² Frank Ankersmit takes this sentiment even further, arguing: “Narrative is not just one more way of looking at oneself and that could be exchanged without any real loss by non-narrativist – for example, scientific – ways of conceiving of the self. It’s the only and exclusive way for achieving self-knowledge.”²³ This view seems to be consistent with the way Winterson treats narratives. In her work, she even constructs one’s life and identity as a story and stresses the importance of such narrative approach: “We keep telling ourselves to ourselves – telling ourselves to others – and sometimes one single detail rediscovered or removed is enough to change the balance of what we know.”²⁴

¹⁸ Lamarque and Olsen 271.

¹⁹ Lamarque and Olsen 170.

²⁰ Lamarque and Olsen 171.

²¹ Maria Baghramian and J. Adam Carter, “Relativism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2022 Edition, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/relativism/>> 29 Jul. 2022; italics original.

²² Lamarque and Olsen 223.

²³ Frank Ankersmit, “Truth in History and Literature,” *Narrative* 18.1 (2010): 36, *JSTOR* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25609383>> 28 Jul. 2022.

²⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (London: Vintage, 2014), xv–xvi. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses (abbreviated as O).

1.2 Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into three chapters, which focus on *Sexing the Cherry*, *The Stone Gods*, and *Frankissstein*, respectively, with references to Winterson's other works wherever relevant. Many of the main concepts I explore in this study are present already in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Winterson's first and arguably most famous novel to date. This novel is also the focus of an article by Mara Reisman, entitled "Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,"²⁵ from which I will draw in the following paragraphs that introduce these central themes.

Chapter two of my thesis analyses *Sexing the Cherry* and it mainly focuses on the juxtaposition between canonical and self-created, fantastical narratives. Canonical narratives such as fairy tales serve as agents of the binding social and cultural norms and as promoters of the established order; in Reisman's words, a function of these "culturally appropriate stories" is "ideological indoctrination."²⁶ By juxtaposing these narratives with her own, fantastical ones, Winterson foregrounds the stale norms and biases ingrained in the canonical stories and, by extension, in the society and ourselves. Thus, stories and fantasy are being used for critique and simultaneously, their value as tools for freedom and liberation, self-actualization and agency, even survival, is asserted. A similar juxtaposition can be observed in regards to time-keeping and history, where Winterson challenges the perception of history as fact and reconstructs it as discourse and cultural construct. She disrupts the "absolutist binary paradigm"²⁷ of terms like fact/fiction or story/history and criticizes the realist, rationalist discourses that insist upon them. She foregrounds how insufficient such discourses are and stresses that they are in fact no less "fictional" or "invented" than fantastical stories. The final section of this chapter deals with the distinction that Winterson makes between "the real" and "the true," which is in many ways central to her writing as well as to my thesis. The author argues that realism cannot convey the deeper truths of the human experience. She emphasizes the importance of art (particularly literature), which according to her has the capacity to express such truths. This idea echoes through the remaining chapters of the thesis as well. Importantly, Winterson stresses that stories (fiction, fantasy) should not be perceived in opposition to material reality, it is not – or should not be – an "either/or" relationship.

The third chapter focuses on *The Stone Gods*, which has a unique, iterative narrative structure that seems to be going in a loop instead of providing a denouement. This strategy allows Winterson to critique topical issues like humanity's unending chase after progress and the resulting ecological devastation, and foreground how the human race keeps making the same mistakes. The multiplicity of meaning in relation to reality and truth is emphasized, and truth as well as history are presented as a necessarily unfinished process, which the narrative structure reflects. The overall view on truth in this

²⁵ Mara Reisman, "Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*," *Rocky Mountain Review* 65.1 (2011): 11–35, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289361>> 14 Apr. 2022.

²⁶ Reisman 12.

²⁷ Reisman 21.

novel is consistent with *Sexing the Cherry*; in addition, Winterson stresses the crucial role of literature as a link to our humanity. Another one of Winterson's perennial themes is love, which is also the focus of the second section of this chapter. The author draws parallels between love and writing/storytelling and posits that love, like art, is a creative and transgressive force that has the capacity to intervene in the destructive cycles humanity seems to be stuck in. In addition, love can be read as the bridge between "the fantastical" and "the real," which harks back to the necessary integration of these two modes. Finally, Winterson suggests that such love can also exist between the reader and the text, foregrounding that fiction can have equally transformative effects on readers and, through them, on the "real world." The last function of stories explored in this chapter is their capacity to bring comfort by allowing us to either temporarily escape from or, more importantly, make sense of and peace with the external reality. Narratives provide us with a tool to organize the chaos of life and find meaning in it. They can offer hope and even help one survive overwhelming circumstances. Furthermore, Winterson foregrounds the self-making power of stories, which can equally have curative effects and is crucial for one's sense of identity. The capacity of fiction to express overwhelming and complex emotions and states "truthfully," that is, authentically or effectively, is much more important for Winterson than any objectively verifiable "truths" (facts).

The focus of chapter four is *Frankissstein*, Winterson's subversive retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which reacts to the emerging future dominated by technology. There, the entire concept of reality is problematized and the boundaries between real life and story are blurred, which reflects the instability of the approaching future and also stresses the importance of invention in the shaping of the world around us. Stories are shown to not only help one make sense of reality, but to affect reality in turn; it is a mutual relationship of influence and intervention. As Reisman puts it in her article on *Oranges*: "Winterson represents the symbiotic relationship between how stories help construct reality and how reality can construct or reconstruct stories." That, according to her, "allows, on different levels, the narrator [...], the author Winterson, and readers to be actively involved in shaping the world," and it foregrounds how the stories have "social importance within the novel and cultural influence outside the novel."²⁸ In the previous books, Winterson had stressed the self-healing and self-making capacity of stories; this largely positive association is somewhat problematized in *Frankissstein* through its connection with the Frankensteinian monster. Additionally, the author blurs the line between creator and creature; she casts individuals and humanity as a whole as in some ways "monstrous," as we invent new technologies with the ambivalent potential to liberate or destroy us and are becoming increasingly bound up in them. That, especially in connection with the inclusion of a trans (non-binary) protagonist, solidifies the novel as one of Winterson's most controversial and problematic works. Finally, the novel can also be read as a way of coming to terms with the new reality. Despite her pessimism about the post-human turn, Winterson remains essentially hopeful about our capacity to influence the future. She

²⁸ Reisman 30.

emphasizes the importance of fiction – or literature as a whole – as a connection to our past and humanity as well as an invaluable source of learning.

2 SEXING THE CHERRY: NARRATIVES IN JUXTAPOSITION

2.1 Winterson's Postmodern Approaches

While Jeanette Winterson associates her work with the modernist project, as mentioned in the introduction, her writing also features many postmodernist techniques. In his chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*,¹ Barry Lewis describes various characteristic elements of postmodernist fiction, out of which temporal disorder is especially prevalent in Winterson's novels. As a result, past, present and future cease to be distinct and separate categories and time is no longer represented as a straight line. In the words of Villanelle, the heroine of *The Passion*: "Without past and future, the present is partial. All time is eternally present and so all time is ours."² In *Sexing the Cherry*, which is this chapter's main focus, the majority of the story is set in Winterson's version of seventeenth-century London. Towards the end of the book, however, past and present momentarily intersect. The timeline "merges" with a modern setting for a few odd chapters, and instead of being narrated by the book's two protagonists, Jordan and Dog Woman, we are led through them by the voice of a navy cadet, Nicholas Jordan, and an unnamed woman activist, who appear to be merely different versions of the original two protagonists. The boundary between the two pairs of characters, or between the two settings, is never clear – they exist simultaneously, as if blended together. This virtually non-existent separation between past, present and future is even more striking in *The Stone Gods*, which will be discussed in detail in subsection 3.1 of the following chapter. Winterson's conception of time is fluid and often paradoxical. In addition, the author tends to undermine continuity in her narratives and the stories rarely feature a single and unambiguous narrative line with a clear beginning, middle and end. They tend to be fragmented and recursive, often with jumbled ends and beginnings. The metaphor of a lighthouse – a central image in *Lighthousekeeping* – illustrates this principle well: not a continuous narrative line but rather flashes of narrative "light." Indeed, fragmentation is another element characteristic of postmodern fiction.³

Another prominent feature of Winterson's writing that is also typical of postmodernist texts is the emphasis on multiplicity and ambiguity and the rejection of fixity. As María del Mar Asensio Aróstegui puts it in her article on *The Passion*, the novel "emphasizes the discursive and plural nature of all narratives and insists on the fact that *reality* may be endlessly rewritten because it is nothing but a linguistic construct."⁴ The same can be said about *Sexing the Cherry* as well as other works. Not only reality but also the concept of truth is represented as multiple and unfixable. Winterson foregrounds the creative process of constructing and interpreting fiction as well as reality in most of her works, an issue

¹ Barry Lewis, "Postmodernism and Literature," *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 124–133.

² Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 62. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses (abbreviated as P).

³ Lewis 126–129.

⁴ María del Mar Asensio Aróstegui, "History as Discourse in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*: The Politics of Alterity," *Journal of English Studies* 2.2 (2000): 17, <<https://doi.org/10.18172/jes.54>> 21 Jun. 2022.

discussed in more detail in the last section of this chapter, as well as in the two following chapters, focusing on *The Stone Gods* and *Frankissstein*, respectively.

Winterson's novels are heavily metafictional. Moreover, several of her works (including *Sexing the Cherry* and *The Passion*) can be read as "historiographic metafiction," a term coined by Linda Hutcheon, that is closely associated with postmodern writing. According to Hutcheon:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.⁵

One of the most striking features of Winterson's texts is precisely her problematizing of fact and fiction, the blurred boundary between the two concepts, as well as problematization of history. On the subject of historiographic metafiction, Mark Currie writes:

These are novels which advance the proposition that historical sources are always textual, or that historical representations are always constrained by the conventions of representation in which they operate. They depict a world of texts in which historical fact, historical representations and historiographic ideology are inseparable.⁶

History is constructed as discourse rather than fact and it is closely associated with fiction, which is further emphasised by Winterson's inclusion of fantastical elements in historical settings. In fact, the question of history and historiography frequently comes up in postmodern writing. According to Jana L. French, one of the problems of postmodernism is "how to account for the gap between history as it happened and as we say it happened."⁷ These themes and elements can be found in most of the author's novels and will be discussed in more detail particularly in this chapter, in the context of the historical fantasy *Sexing the Cherry*.

2.2 "Happily Ever After, of Course": Undermining Canonical Narratives

The plot of *Sexing the Cherry* follows a young man named Jordan on his journey to maturation and self-discovery, paralleled by the countless physical, seafaring journeys he takes across the world. Half of the book is narrated by his adoptive mother, an unnamed dog-breeding giantess who calls herself simply Dog Woman and who found baby Jordan on the banks of the Thames and decided to raise him as her own. It incorporates many magical elements as well as various philosophical musings. This novel amply exemplifies the subversion of canonical stories mentioned in the introduction; like in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson works here prominently (and predominantly) with fairy tale tropes.

⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 93.

⁶ Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 68.

⁷ Jana L. French, "'I'm telling you stories.... Trust me': Gender, Desire, and Identity in Jeanette Winterson's Historical Fantasies," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10.3 (1999): 245, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308390>> 22 Jan. 2021.

One of the clearest examples can be found in the stories of the Twelve Dancing Princesses. In his search for the mysterious dancer Fortunata whom he briefly encountered on one of his adventures, the main protagonist Jordan comes across her eleven sisters who tell him their life story. It is set up as a classic fairy tale premise – the princesses were essentially being held captive, waiting for their respective charming princes to rescue and subsequently marry them. However, Winterson puts a subversive spin on the individual tales. These princesses are not sitting idly and waiting to be saved, they have their own agency and keep defying their captor and finding ways to escape their confinement. Each night, they fly to a silver city where they dance “for joy thinking nothing of the dawn where [they] lived.”⁸ Later, when they are finally “rescued” to fulfil their expected fairy-tale happy endings and marry a prince each, the mood becomes solemn, the overwhelming impression being that of yet another captivity rather than rescue. The princesses have their agency denied and are forced to marry their “rescuers” against their will. Not one of them is headed for a happily-ever-after with her new spouse – or, as one of them says: “We did [live happily ever after], but not with our husbands” (S 48). In fact, three of the princesses eventually leave their spouses, six end up killing theirs, one prince simply dies and another one, in an ironic twist, gets turned into a frog after his wife first kisses him. In addition, three of the princesses find love with a woman. The only one of the sisters who manages to escape a dreadful marriage and is able to follow her passion instead is the aptly named Fortunata – “the fortunate one.” Most of the princes prove to be vile, cruel, controlling or simply emotionally dysfunctional; they cheat on their wives, isolate them or downright abuse them. The single notable exception would be the “prince” who turns out to be a woman and who ends up having a truly loving relationship with her wife. That is, until the repressive and unforgiving social order interferes again as people find out about the two women’s relationship and come to burn the princess’ wife at the stake.

In these subversions, the horrifying ramifications such fairy tale conventions may have for reality are being exposed. A point Mara Reisman makes in her essay on *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* can be applied here as well: “for women, fairy tales inform real marriage expectations. Thus, fairy tale and reality mix on the page and in our cultural expectations, demonstrating how pervasive and insidious these stories are.”⁹ Conventionally, fairy tales are stories aimed at children and they have a prominent socializing function: they may teach about courage, kindness and love but also, for example, about the established social order and gender roles. In his book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes notes: “Fairy tales and children’s literature were written with the purpose of socializing children to meet definite normative expectations at home and in the public sphere.”¹⁰ Through Winterson’s treatment of them, these narratives are critiqued and the traditional roles and gender-related stereotypes are disrupted.

⁸ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Vintage, 2014), 108. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses (abbreviated as S).

⁹ Mara Reisman, “Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Rocky Mountain Review* 65.1 (2011): 18–19, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289361>> 14 Apr. 2022.

¹⁰ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

According to French, Winterson deconstructs “the discourses that naturalize, and thus legitimize, a narrow range of human sexuality [...] while rendering unnatural, or aberrant, all that falls outside it.”¹¹ The powerful presence of the canonical narratives is, however, acutely felt even in Winterson’s stories of “true” love, as out of the three such relationships two end in tragedy when the fairy tale conventions assert themselves in the end. The second one (alongside the story mentioned in the previous paragraph) is a direct subversion of the tale of Rapunzel. In this ironic retelling of the well-known story, instead of being held captive by a witch, Rapunzel “went to live in a tower with an older woman” (S 52) – the princess who becomes Rapunzel’s lover and the narrator of this retelling. The pair was vilified and they retreated to the tower to protect themselves. The prince who is traditionally supposed to rescue Rapunzel is the villain here: he sneaks his way in, blinds and nearly kills Rapunzel’s partner and kidnaps the young woman. “After that they lived happily ever after, of course” (S 52), her lover comments, further emphasising the doubt and biting irony Winterson casts on the conventional fairy tale endings. These subversions constitute a warning against the power such narratives may wield and challenge the values they seem to promote.

To take the ironic commentary even further, a link is drawn between the twelve princesses and a pan of prostitutes living under strikingly similar conditions. They are kept in a barred house with seemingly no escape route, but are nevertheless able to leave at night by way of a stream that runs underneath it, and they secretly change places with nuns from a nearby convent (S 27–29). The prostitutes are thus able to be free during the nights and the nuns in turn get to make a fortune by robbing the clients and stealing from the house (S 28). The irony of associating “fairy tale” princesses and prostitutes, as well as prostitutes and nuns, and that of nuns stealing from rich men is palpable. Winterson depicts all these characters as women who are simply trying to survive and have good lives in spite of the patriarchal narrative whose aim is to take control away from them. All of these women are, in one way or another, imprisoned by the conventional narrative structures, yet they keep finding ways of escaping from them. These ways are often fantastical and absurd in themselves. The princesses fly through the window to a floating silver city, a stream runs directly from the brothel to the convent, where the prostitutes who jump in are being fished out with a giant shrimping net, and so on. Importantly and intriguingly, the oppressive and binding function of the fantastical stories simultaneously reveals the freeing power of fantasy. In accordance with Reisman’s observation, fairy tales as well as religious texts are somebody else’s stories that entail certain societal expectations. The author or her characters draw on a need to come up with alternative narratives that would make existence outside of these binaries and conventions possible.¹² Through the use of fantasy, Winterson opens new possibilities and new modes of being that defy the established order.

¹¹ French 232.

¹² Reisman 22.

One of the binaries Winterson vehemently problematizes is gender dichotomy. Cross-dressing and characters who do not fit within the binary are featured frequently in Winterson's novels, including *Sexing the Cherry*. Jordan himself cross-dresses for a time and is acutely aware of how binding gender norms can be: "I have met a number of people who, anxious to be free of the burdens of their gender, have dressed themselves men as women and women as men" (S 29). The Dog Woman has many traditionally masculine features, starting with the "phallic" symbol of a banana that introduces all her chapters, while Jordan's chapters are headed with a pineapple. As Jana L. French observes:

Jordan is the reconnaissance explorer and philosopher; however, he is also a dreamer whose travels take him into the feminized realm of fairy tales and whose cross-dressing allows him to enter female communities and gain first-hand exposure to the "conspiracy of women" [S 29]. The Dog Woman, on the other hand, defies sex and gender stereotyping not only because of her size and physical appearance, but also because of her independence from men.¹³

Another good example can be found in *The Passion*, where Villanelle, one of the two main protagonists, herself embodies a rejection of the traditional belief system¹⁴ by crossing the gender boundary on multiple levels: she is bisexual and has relations with both men and women, she frequently cross-dresses, stressing the performative aspects of gender, and she has webbed feet, which is established as otherwise an exclusively male feature. She is also the most active character in the novel. As French points out, Winterson "begins to deconstruct compulsory heterosexuality and gender dichotomy as cultural discourses,"¹⁵ that is as cultural and social constructs rather than incontestable facts of life.

Apart from the rejection of stereotypical gender roles, another element typical of canonical narratives that Winterson problematizes is the hero trope. Jordan's modern-day counterpart, Nicholas Jordan, keeps a *Boys' Book of Heroes* which contains a collection of his own childish heroes. It includes people like William the Conqueror, who was "an out-of-doors man, a hunter, a soldier, fierce and despotic," "[u]neducated," "had few graces" and invaded England in the early 11th century (S 133); Christopher Columbus; Francis Drake, "the master-thief of the Unknown World" (S 134); and Lord Nelson, who was allegedly described by the 1st Duke of Wellington as talking "all about himself and in really a style so vain and silly as to surprise and almost disgust me" (S 134).¹⁶ These names and descriptions suggest a certain idea of what it means to be a hero. According to Nicholas:

If you're a hero you can be an idiot, behave badly, ruin your personal life, have any number of mistresses and talk about yourself all the time, and nobody minds. Heroes are immune. They have wide shoulders and plenty of hair and wherever they go a crowd gathers. Mostly they enjoy the company of other men, although attractive women are part of their reward. (S 135)

¹³ French 243.

¹⁴ Hatice Eşberk, "History Rewritten in a Postmodern Novel: Opposed Views on History in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 4.4 (2015): 270, <<https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.4n.4p.268>> 21 Jun. 2022.

¹⁵ French 234.

¹⁶ According to the British military historian Richard Holmes, such a conversation seems to have actually taken place. Richard Holmes, *Wellington: The Iron Duke* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

Heroism is constructed here as being about self-presentation and appearance rather than actions and values. It relates to adventuring, risk-taking, choosing violence, looking a certain way and being adored and lauded by the crowds. It also seems to apply exclusively to men – women are simply “a reward,” objectified and only valued for their looks and for what they can offer the male “heroes.” These ideas are essentially what many canonical narratives and a large portion of popular culture help promote. Eventually, however, an encounter with the woman activist (who is Dog Woman’s present-day counterpart) forces Nicholas to revise his idea of heroism and conclude that “[h]eroes give up what’s comfortable in order to protect what they believe in” (S 160). Significantly, as French points out, this last statement is strikingly gender-neutral.¹⁷

In *Sexing the Cherry*, as well as in other Winterson’s novels, canonical narratives are presented as contributing to the repressive social order and culture, as bearers of rigid sexual, gender, religious, political and societal norms. At the same time, stories are also shown to be the source of freedom and rebellion. Through juxtaposition, Winterson’s own fantastical, irrational narratives expose, question and critique the “socially acceptable” stories for the implicit biases they hold and perpetuate. Through these personal narratives, it is also possible to create and validate alternative identities and ways of life that do not fit within the dominant order.

2.3 “I’m Telling You Stories, Trust Me”: Fictionalizing History

A discussion about Jeanette Winterson’s undermining of canonical narratives would be incomplete without mentioning her treatment of history or, more specifically, of the way history is recorded and interpreted. A critique of historiography is a prominent element of many, if not most, of her novels. The author constructs history as a story and emphasises that it is only knowable through narrative:¹⁸ *history* and *fiction* are not two mutually exclusive categories and trying to separate them as such is a foolish and pointless endeavour. As Winterson writes elsewhere: “History should be a hammock for swinging and a game for playing, the way cats play. Claw it, chew it, rearrange it and at bedtime it’s still a ball of string full of knots. Nobody should mind” (O 119). This view of history, included in the “Deuteronomy” section in *Oranges*, is in line with the idea of “invention” that Hayden White talks about in *Metahistory*:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by “finding,” “identifying,” or “uncovering” the “stories” that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between “history” and “fiction” resides in the fact that the historian “finds” his stories, whereas the fiction writer “invents” his. This conception of the historian’s task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian’s operations. The same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories [...].¹⁹

¹⁷ French 248.

¹⁸ French 231.

¹⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 6–7.

Winterson goes on to express her dissatisfaction with the discourse surrounding history and storytelling and the way people “like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact (...) so that they know what to believe and what not to believe” (O 120). History, to her, amounts to a “reducing of stories” and often serves as “a means of denying the past”: “To fit it, force it, function it, to suck out the spirit until it looks the way you think it should” (O 120). I will now discuss the execution and implications of these sentiments in *Sexing the Cherry*, reading the novel alongside *The Passion*, another of Winterson’s historical fantasies.

In these novels, Winterson clearly defines the historical periods in which the action takes place: specifically, London during the English Civil War in *Sexing the Cherry* (from the Puritan revolution of 1641, through the beheading of Charles I up until the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1661) and the Napoleonic period in *The Passion*. It would be wrong, however, to assume that her goal is to achieve historical accuracy. According to Hatice Eşberk, “the writer aims to re-construct that historical period in order to display the questionable objectivity of the history.”²⁰ When talking about Napoleon, Henri, one of the two narrator-protagonists in *The Passion*, remarks:

Nowadays people talk about the things he did as though they made sense. As though even his most disastrous mistakes were only the result of bad luck or hubris.

It was a mess.

Words like devastation, rape, slaughter, carnage, starvation are lock and key words to keep the pain at bay. Words about war that are easy on the eye. (P 5)

And later, he concedes: “I invented Bonaparte as much as he invented himself” (P 158), which links back to the self-fashioning aspect of the hero figure, mentioned above. The objectivity of historical records is being challenged here. History, it is argued, is discourse (in other words, storytelling), and as such it is subject to (re)construction, rewriting and recontextualization.²¹ José Francisco Fernández Sánchez points out in reference to *The Passion*:

Starting from a concrete historical situation, Winterson constructs a fantasy in which nothing can be taken for certain, questioning our idea of reality and the way history is considered. [...] There is in the novel a delight in telling and re-telling, history is transformed into stories that are told by the different characters, uncertainty is present [...].²²

The phrase: “I’m telling you stories. Trust me,” which is reiterated several times throughout the novel, perfectly encapsulates this sentiment. It keeps the reader on their toes and forces them to continuously question the accuracy of what they are reading, so the point gets across on the metatextual level as well.

Not only historiography but also the nature of time-keeping as such, our artificial construction of linear time and the strictly separated concepts of “past,” “present” and “future,” are subject to critique. While this idea permeates the majority of Winterson’s novels, some of its most overt expressions can be found in *Sexing the Cherry*: statements like “[t]here is only the present and nothing to remember,”

²⁰ Eşberk 269.

²¹ Asensio Aróstegui 8.

²² José Francisco Fernández Sánchez, “Play and (Hi)story in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion*,” *Atlantis* 18.1/2 (1996): 103, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41054816>> 22 Jan. 2021.

“[t]ime is a straight line,” and “[t]he difference between the past and the future is that one has happened while the other has not” are framed as lies (S 92). What this means for history and time-keeping is well exemplified by the following quote:

Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did. Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it. I have heard people say we are shaped by our childhood. But which one? (S 105)

If past is generally viewed as something “fixed,” Winterson disagrees. The past is everything but fixed in being dependent on how we record it and talk about it, as well as on *who* records it, and it changes with time as our memory, perception and takeaways change.

As mentioned above, Winterson’s portrayal of the earlier times does not aim to be “historically accurate.” Rather, the setting is populated by real historical figures as well as made up characters and it is infused with fantastical elements and irrationality. This strategy has several effects. Firstly, it helps emphasise history’s subjective nature, which in turn serves to undermine the conception of history as truth mentioned above. One of the methods through which that is accomplished is the use of multiple narrators and narratives (the alternating voices of Jordan and Dog Woman in *Sexing the Cherry* and Henri and Villanelle in *The Passion*). Each character perceives and retells the events very differently: Jordan’s and Villanelle’s narrations are more fantastical, almost fairy-tale-like and imbued with irrationality and poetic language, whereas Dog Woman and Henri are much more reason-oriented and factual in their stories. Dog Woman is very literal-minded and Jordan’s metaphorical way of experiencing the world is completely foreign and incomprehensible to her. Henri’s narration and his insistence on the past is closer to historical realism than that of Villanelle, who is much more focused on the subjective present and acknowledges its multiplicity. The focus is on the characters’ memories, feelings and subjective experiences, which are presented as in many ways more relevant and truthful than any “objective” facts (this point will be further addresses in the following subsection). Furthermore, as pointed out by Asensio Aróstegui, the historical events are often retold from the perspective of representatives of classes who typically do not have a voice in historical records. In *The Passion*, for instance, the narrators are a soldier-cook from Napoleon’s army and a Venetian bisexual woman who is forced to work as an army prostitute.²³ The same can be said about *Sexing the Cherry*, which is narrated by a female breeder of fighting dogs and her foundling son, and incorporates the voices of prostitutes and abused women. That again forces the reader to consider the historical period portrayed in the novel from a different angle and question the accuracy of historical records. Additionally, the real and familiar historical setting (as well as the inclusion of the parallel modern setting in *Sexing the Cherry*) helps Winterson “anchor her critique to the world outside the text.”²⁴ It calls into question the real-world implications of the previously discussed restrictive norms and brings attention to the way we “make”

²³ Asensio Aróstegui 8.

²⁴ French 234.

(as opposed to “find” or “uncover”) history. The flash-forward to modern times also helps make the matters more relevant to contemporary readers²⁵ and points to the timelessness of these issues.

In addition to the emphasis on the subjectivity of history, a characteristic element of Winterson’s writing is the combination of history and fantasy. There are documented historical events and figures existing next to such illogical locales as the city where buildings “are never in the same place from one day to the next” (S 43), or the equally mercurial city of Venice in *The Passion*. Napoleon Bonaparte may inhabit the same world as Villanelle, who has the ability to walk on water, and Charles I can share space with the giant and inhumanly strong Dog Woman. Such a combination, French argues, “would seem outrageous, a trivialization of the past in service to Romantic invention, were it not for its effect: to challenge the cultural authority of rationalism and the sometimes egregious public discourses it has fostered.”²⁶ Winterson does not go so far as to question history as a concept in its entirety; rather, her critique pertains to the (hyper)rationalism that has been governing the way history (and by extension, “reality”) is recorded and mediated.²⁷ In Winterson’s approach, the antidote which has the power to counterbalance the potentially dehumanizing effects and rigidity such excessive rationality can cause, is “[i]magination, with its more fluid conceptualizations of world and self.”²⁸ Imagination, unlike strict rationality, allows for subjectivity and emotion.

As should be clear from the previous paragraphs, what is meaningful and “true” in Winterson’s novels when it comes to history is not accurate facts or material objects, but rather feelings and subjective experiences. This is even suggested by Henri, when his friend criticizes him for trying to keep records of the events they go through: “I don’t care about the facts, Domino, I care about how I feel. How I feel will change, I want to remember that” (P 29). According to Christy L. Burns, “[Winterson’s] fantasy connects to our context without necessarily reproducing ‘the real’ in its material sense. What is ‘real’ for Winterson and most salient to context and art is desire as emotion, that which must always face the gap between fantasy and reality and so forever throw itself into the place of possibility.”²⁹ I believe that, for better clarity, the latter word “real” used by Burns here ought to be replaced with the word “true” because, as Jana L. French rightly points out, Winterson makes an important distinction between *the true* and *the real*.³⁰ What this distinction means in the context of Winterson’s novels, as well as its extratextual implications, will be discussed in the following section.

²⁵ French 243.

²⁶ French 231.

²⁷ French 231.

²⁸ French 231.

²⁹ Christy L. Burns, “Fantastic Language: Jeanette Winterson’s Recovery of the Postmodern Word,” *Contemporary Literature* 37.2 (1996): 302, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1208876>> 23 Jun. 2022.

³⁰ French 249.

2.4 “Empty Space and Points of Light”: The Clash between the Real and the True

To begin this discussion, it is necessary to refer to Jeanette Winterson’s treatment of language. As almost everything in Winterson, this issue is somewhat paradoxical and contradictory. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on the power of words. In *Sexing the Cherry*, after being repeatedly told she was a vicious beast by her husband, one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses duly turns into a beast; in her words: “As your lover describes you, so you are” (S 59). Language can even get a physical form in this novel – people’s vitriolic words rise up and “form a thick cloud over the city, which every so often must be thoroughly cleansed of too much language” (S 11). Unwisely uttered words can have very palpable consequences, which is portrayed in a literal sense here: “Cleaners have been bitten by words still quarrelling, and [...] a woman[’s] mop had been eaten and [her] hand was badly mauled by a vicious row” (S 12). They even have the power to kill, as in the case of the two lovers who were suffocated by their own passionate words (S 13). On the other hand, something the author heavily emphasises in all her writing is the simultaneous insufficiency of language.

When trying to express something truly meaningful, characters tend to be betrayed by words and communication routinely fails between them. After Dog Woman is reunited with her adoptive son after thirteen years apart, she is utterly unable to express her feelings to him: “I wanted to tell him things, to tell him I loved him and how much I’d missed him, but thirteen years of words were fighting in my throat and I couldn’t get any of them out. There was too much to say so I said nothing” (S 126). Later in the book, Nicholas Jordan (Jordan’s modern-day incarnation) seeks out the woman eco-activist and finds himself in a similar situation: “I wanted to thank her for trying to save us, for trying to save me, because it felt that personal, though I don’t know why. But when I tried to speak my throat was clogged with feelings that resist words” (S 166). The most important things cannot be spoken, words are not enough when it truly matters. These excerpts help elucidate a key aspect of Winterson’s fiction: the idea that the most important part is that which is *not* said or written, that which is in between the words, because language either betrays us when we most need it or is inherently insufficient to capture these things. Interestingly, Jordan’s lines about being unable to voice his appreciation to the unnamed woman are directly followed by a seemingly complete digression: “There’s a painting I love called *The Sower*, by Van Gogh [...]” (S 166). It seems like a change of subject at first glance but in fact, the passage exemplifies a tendency to be found in many Winterson’s characters: turning to a “story” when ordinary words fail. Unable to voice his innermost feelings, Jordan instead starts to describe a painting that makes him feel a certain way, which in many ways allows him to express himself better. Metaphor proves more useful and powerful than realism, which reflects Winterson’s previously discussed affinity for imagination as a counterweight to rationalism and is to be taken as self-referential. This is a crucial aspect of stories and writing as a whole in Winterson, and it is where the metaphor of “the string” and “the holes” comes into play.

As described in the introduction to *Sexing the Cherry*:

You remember that definition of a fishnet as holes held together by string? I am interested in the holes. The string is the narrative but the spaces are what matters. It is the same with a Barbara Hepworth sculpture; the rock is there so that you can see the space. (S vii–viii)

In other words, storytelling is the tool that allows for the invisible to be seen. The same sentiment is iterated in different ways across many of Winterson’s novels: writing and storytelling are described in terms of an “empty space and points of light”; “energy converted into mass” (e.g. S x); “Words are the part of silence that can be spoken”;³¹ “inside the story told is the story that cannot be told. Every word written is a net to catch the word that has escaped” (SG 153). This idea is key in Winterson’s writing and it exemplifies her take on art and particularly writing. In her own words:

For me, art is about the invisible made visible. [...] What is communicated is more than He She What Where When How Why. [...] Once language is involved we forget that the story is still the string and that the string is there for the invisible space to become visible. Our innermost thoughts. Our inner life. The things we can’t say. Feelings we are afraid to feel. Longings. Dreams. *Not the journeys I made but the ones I might have made in some other place or time.* (S xi; italics original)

Thus, when it comes to negotiating the conundrum of the power vs. the insufficiency of language, the answer can be found in storytelling. Storytelling is also comprised of language, and as such it has the power to help make visible what words alone are otherwise unable to capture. Winterson concedes that language is often not sufficient in expressing what is essential, but it can be used as the metaphorical string that frames the holes, the light illuminating the empty space – and that is precisely where its power lies. On a larger, metatextual scale, it also has the power to influence things outside the text, to make its readers question real-world concepts such as history or social norms as addressed earlier in this chapter. This sentiment is the crux of a large portion of Winterson’s writing and – as the preceding paragraphs have demonstrated – it can be found on many levels and in many different instances in her novels.

Another interesting point that ties in with this concept is the way in which literal and metaphorical language often come into conflict in the novels. A parallel can be seen between the relationship of Jordan and Dog Woman in *Sexing the Cherry*, Jeanette and her mother in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Silver and Miss Pinch in *Lighthousekeeping*,³² as well as Villanelle and Henri in *The Passion*. To use the first pair as an example, they represent a clash between two different worlds (or, worldviews) – the “rational,” literal, narrow world of the Dog Woman and the more metaphorical, elusive, illogical world of Jordan and his travels where everything is possible. Dog Woman reflects on one of her conversations with Jordan as follows:

He said that the sea is so vast no one will ever finish sailing it. That every mapped-out journey contains another journey hidden in its lines...
I pooh-poohed this, for the earth is surely a manageable place made of blood and stone and entirely flat. I believe I could walk from one side to the other, had I the inclination. (S 19)

³¹ Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 151. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses (abbreviated as SG).

³² Jeanette Winterson, *Lighthousekeeping* (London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2004). All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses (abbreviated as L).

A similar clash can be found in *The Passion*, between the two alternating narrators. Where Henri's narration is fairly grounded in realism, Villanelle's embraces fantasy and illogicality. When these two intersect, however, it causes a significant crisis for Henri. He attempts and is ultimately unable to fully reconcile the fantasticality surrounding the young woman. This is probably best exemplified in his confusion about her lack of a heart which culminates in him literally carving the organ out of her husband's chest and thus killing him. According to French, this scene essentially marks the collapse between literal and figurative uses of language,³³ and "[w]ith the collision of the real and the fantastic in this scene comes a collapse of Henri's power to reason in a linear fashion."³⁴ By the end of the novel, he is left in a "madhouse," unable or unwilling to integrate back into society. Finally, such a meeting of literal and metaphorical language is reflective of the conflict between reality and truth that is so important in Winterson's novels.

Considering everything discussed above, the nature of Winterson's distinction between *the real* and *the true* should be slowly becoming clearer. As already established, Winterson is critical of realism and hyper-rationalism. According to Burns, "[b]rutal' realism is a lie, for Winterson, since it represses the need for fantastic imaginings and passion. Art, and for Winterson especially literature, provides the link between both the real and the imaginary through its medium: the Word"³⁵ – i.e. language. The author believes in conveying a truth through stories, metaphors, and posits that these can often be more truthful than what we conventionally consider as fact. In other words, *the real* (as pertaining to realism, rationalism, factuality) is contrasted with *the fictional*, but fiction and truth are not in opposition. Even a thing that is invented – such as a story, a piece of fiction – can express *true* things, things deeply subjective, emotional, personal, or profound. It has the capacity to voice what cannot be voiced otherwise due to the lacking properties of language, be it a mark of the speaker's incapacity or the fact that the concept in question, by its very nature, eludes rational, linguistic "grasp." This property of stories is well expressed by Emily Hutchison:

Stories can shed light on the shadiest of subjects, transforming how people see and understand. Irrespective of whether one is telling of perceived truths or of imaginative fictions, a well-constructed narrative can foster or deepen an understanding of situations and people that seems very different from "one's own". In doing so, stories illuminate inevitable human subjectivities and can reveal that dominant or long-held perceptions are only one of a multitude of highly contested ways of thinking. Ordinarily taken-for-granted political attitudes and perceptions may consequently be questioned. Any ensuing harmful political perceptions and behaviours may also be in turn rethought.³⁶

According to French:

³³ French 237.

³⁴ French 239.

³⁵ Burns 292.

³⁶ Emily Hutchison, "Unsettling Stories: Jeanette Winterson and the Cultivation of Political Contingency," *Global Society* 24.3 (2010): 351–352, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2010.485561>> 23 Jun. 2022.

This distinction between the true and the real is crucial to understanding Winterson's later novels. Indeed, it is what gives force to her use of fantasy as a tool not only for mediating the historical world, but also for critiquing the rhetorical strategies of realism as an ideological tool.³⁷

Winterson deliberately and provocatively toys with concepts like “the real,” “the true,” “story,” and “history” and blurs and complicates the lines between them: “Maps, growing ever more real, are much less true” (S 90); “People like to separate storytelling which is not fact from history which is fact. [...] This is very curious” (O 120). The idea of “[r]eality as something which can be agreed upon” and of “[r]eality as truth” are presented as lies in *Sexing the Cherry* (S 93). That forces the reader to ponder the relative nature of these concepts we tend to fixate on and take as absolutes. Now, by arguing that the real is contrasted with the fictional in Winterson's conception, I do not mean to say that one needs to be picked over the other. On the contrary – and this is a major point Winterson repeatedly stresses – what is needed is a harmonious integration of both.

Due to Winterson's celebration of the fantastical and her criticism of “pure” realism, she may be accused of mere escapism. However, the author cautions against such an unproductive use of fantasy and a complete self-enclosure in it.³⁸ According to Christy Burns:

Winterson is suspicious of full isolation within the fantastic world. If fantasy is for Winterson a necessary part of the process of stepping out over the water – a form of agency posited on belief – it also requires an encounter with the real, a point of interaction between the real and the imaginary such that signification, fiction, and art are not cut off from the contexts they address.³⁹

Arguably the best example of a pathological over-indulgence in fantasy can be found in *The Passion*. After failing to integrate the fantastical into his worldview, Henri's rational grasp on the world collapses and as a response, he locks himself in his imagination (or hallucinations) and memory. He ends up willingly staying in a mental asylum, refusing to face reality again. This self-enclosure may bring him some solace but it cuts him off from the real world, and thus it cuts off fantasy from its real-world contexts, turning it into unproductive escapism; in Villanelle's words, it seem that “he has lost himself” (P 150).⁴⁰ I would argue that the pathology stems precisely from Henri's inability to negotiate and integrate “fact” and “fiction,” which is what Winterson seems to suggest is essential. Fantasy, or fiction, is meaningful particularly in relation to reality, where it can help one make sense of and peace with said reality, find solutions to real-life problems, and where it can contribute to self-knowledge and self-actualization. It can also affect reality by influencing culture as well as individual readers, for example by making them question real-life concepts as demonstrated earlier in this chapter. Choosing fantasy

³⁷ French 245.

³⁸ Burns 291.

³⁹ Burns 291.

⁴⁰ In spite of this, I cannot claim Henri's eventual rejection of reality to be wholly and unequivocally negative, even though there is unquestionably a significant amount of pathology in his withdrawal. For example, there is a point to be made about his agency – once in the “madhouse,” he consciously refuses to leave because, as he expresses: “I stayed in the army eight years because I loved someone. [...] I stayed too because I had nowhere else to go. I stay here by choice. That means a lot to me” (P 152). Probably for the first time since joining the army, Henri is able to feel in control of his fate; and there is more to be said in defence of his ending. In Winterson's typical fashion, nothing is ever straightforward and unambiguous.

over reality will lead to withdrawal, isolation, perhaps the loss of self. An exclusive focus on “reality,” however, will keep one from self-realization and cause one to neglect the inner truths that escape reason and language. As a character from *Oranges* puts it: “If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both” (O 43). Thus, to harmoniously resolve this conflict, Winterson insists on an integration of the two sides rather than a complete and unconditional acceptance of one at the expense of the other.

3 THE STONE GODS: NEVER ENDING, ALWAYS BEGINNING

3.1 “A Repeating World”: Winterson’s Productive Irresolution

As discussed in the previous chapter, Winterson problematizes the linear nature of time and the language we use to talk and think about it; she repeatedly brings attention to the artificial nature of categories like past, present and future, exposing them as cultural constructs. Despite that, however, Winterson’s earlier novels themselves tended to progress in a fairly linear fashion, essentially following the structure of the “hero’s quest.” The motif of the journey, or quest, always informs the arcs of Winterson’s characters; it represents “the search after Self that marks the shape of all my work without exception,”¹ as the author herself notes in the foreword to *The World and Other Places*, a collection of short stories published in 1998.² In those earlier books, including *Sexing the Cherry*, time could be somewhat jumbled by the intersection of different time periods (see my analysis in 2.3) and the fixity of the past was repeatedly defied, but otherwise the plots themselves were quite unambiguously linear. Winterson’s experimentation with temporality becomes more radical in later novels such as *The Stone Gods*, which is the focus of this chapter. Most strikingly, the exploration of time does not stay at the thematic level here but is reflected on the narrative level as well. Replete with “false endings, circular stories and temporal tricks,”³ the novel’s structure is recursive, essentially forming a loop and avoiding closure in any traditional sense: instead of a progression towards a clearly defined or an expectable end, it is governed by endless repetitions.

The Stone Gods consists of three stories in four chapters: the first story takes place in what seems to be simultaneously a distant future and a distant futuristic past (more on this point later), where people from the ecologically devastated planet Orbus are preparing to colonize the newly discovered Planet Blue. The second is set in 1774, at the time of James Cook’s arrival at the Easter Island, and the third and fourth chapters take place in a near future on Earth, after the Third World War (a period termed

¹ Jeanette Winterson, *The World and Other Places* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), qtd. in Susana Onega, *Jeanette Winterson*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 154.

² Those are generally characterized by the most important quests taking place internally while being mirrored by the external, physical journeys the characters undertake. A good example is Jordan’s constant journeying with Tradescant in *Sexing the Cherry*, which parallels his fantastical internal journeys that finally lead to self-discovery and an affirmation of his place in the world.

³ Adeline Johns-Putra, “The Unsustainable Aesthetics of Sustainability: The Sense of an Ending in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*,” in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, eds. Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham, and Louise Squire (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 178, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1wn0s7q>>.

“Post-3War” in the novel). The separation between the three timelines is somewhat elusive. It could be argued that, in essence, they represent a single, though multi-layered, story that refuses to end. The rejection of finiteness which can be found in Winterson’s previous works⁴ is taken to another level here; every ending is also a new beginning and there is always another story involved. In the introduction to *Oranges* from 2014, Winterson writes that “nothing has to end the way it does. That it does end the way it does – and often badly – need not be the final answer. Even those words, ‘final’ and ‘answer’ are faulty. The human process is continuous. And dimensional. Answers happen as movement, not stasis” (O xiii); this idea seems to heavily inform *The Stone Gods*. The main characters in the first and the third story are a young woman named Billie Crusoe and a female robot (or Robo *sapiens*), called Spike, who become the sailor Billy and his half-Dutch, half-native “guide” Spickers in the second story, set on Easter Island, and they all stand witness to the destruction of an environment. In each of the partial narratives, a close relationship brews between the pair, which changes the course of their lives (in the first two in particular, that relationship is romantic). The stories all end with a death or a loss (in the first two, Spike/Spickers dies in Billie/Billy’s arms, the third ends with the death of Billie herself). However, when the first Billie and Spike are certain to die, Spike remarks: “This is one state – there will be another” (SG 108), which is then echoed after Spike’s “death”: “Close your eyes and sleep. Close your eyes and dream. This is one story. There will be another” (SG 113). As Adeline Johns-Putra summarizes: “The novel insists, almost mantra-like, on birth instead of death, dream instead of sleep, and beginnings instead of ends [...]. Closure is resisted, renaissance anticipated.”⁵ This is deliberate: such a narrative strategy allows Winterson to foreground the thematic concerns of the novel, specifically the almost religious obsession with progress and the environmental devastation it leaves behind.

Indeed, the idea of the “retrograde myth of progress”⁶ is central. It was “in the name of progress and economic growth” (SG 38) that the planet Orbus was left gutted and its environment dying. The discovery of Planet Blue, which can sustain human life, is seen as a chance for people to “begin again,” a phrase that is in some form reiterated more than ten times throughout the novel. However, such a “new beginning” only seems to lead to the same mistakes. Captain Handsome, the “swashbuckling freelance predator with semi-official sanction” (SG 56) who first discovered Planet Blue, and his crew came across a dead and desolate planet on their space voyage, which they termed Planet White (SG 62–64). As is suggested in the novel, Orbus was likely preceded by this planet, and it seems that Planet Blue is only next in line for the same fate (SG 68). That proves to be essentially correct: in an attempt to create conditions for humans, Handsome redirects an asteroid to hit the planet and thus eradicate the dinosaurs living there, which consequently triggers an Ice Age and makes the planet uninhabitable. Just as the

⁴ See, for instance, in *Sexing the Cherry* where “[a]ny proposition that contains the word ‘finite’ (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves...)” (S 93) is explicitly framed as a lie. Similarly, in *Lighthousekeeping*, Pew insists that “[t]here’s no such thing in all the world [...] [a]s an ending” (L 49), and “there’s no story that’s the start of itself” (L 27).

⁵ Johns-Putra 186.

⁶ Johns-Putra 188.

environment of Orbus is exploited and destroyed, Billy and Spickers in the second section witness the destruction of Easter Island's last trees. This ecological devastation is committed for the sake of erecting and later tearing down the *moai* – the titular “Stone Gods” (SG 130) – in a religious power struggle.⁷ The third set of Billie and Spike inhabit a planet devastated by a nuclear war and also heading for (or already in the midst of) an ecological disaster. On the narrative level, this idea of endlessly repeated mistakes and the illusion of progress that is in fact regressive is underscored by the paradoxical temporal structure of the story. Orbus seems to be a futuristic version of planet Earth (there are references to events and especially literature from “our” history, such as James Cook, John Donne, or Shakespeare). At the same time, though, Planet Blue seems to be a variant of Earth from the distant past, considering not only its name but also the presence of dinosaurs and their subsequent extinction by asteroid. According to Abigail Rine: “Orbus, then, is in Earth’s future as well as Earth’s past; *The Stone Gods* is the story of a repeating world that always ultimately destroys itself.”⁸ In addition, the first Billie and Spike send out a signal from Planet Blue that the last Billie and Spike receive on Earth in the twenty-first century. Thus, the paradoxical timeline reflects the timelessness of these issues and the circular structure of the novel is representative of how humanity’s mistakes and inability to learn from them keep us stuck in vicious circles of self-destruction.

Additionally, this critique of the obsession with progress is emphasized through the use of canonical stories. Firstly, the main character’s name – Billie Crusoe – clearly alludes to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, the tale of a man ship-wrecked on a seemingly deserted island culminating in his triumphant survival. Apart from the shipwreck metaphor pointing primarily to Billie’s loneliness, the reference calls up an image of Robinson’s successful but ethically questionable appropriation of the island (at least from today’s standpoint). Robinson’s story is very much a story of progress. He starts out as a desperate castaway who gradually builds and expands his small “empire” on the island, eventually extending his sphere of influence to other people and becoming their *de facto* slaver and a colonizer of the island. His narration is excessively rational and matter-of-fact and his “progress” rather exploitative, opportunistic and greedy. Thus, the allusion supports the key concerns of *The Stone Gods*. In addition, other tales of conquest and colonization are evoked, for example through a passage which appears verbatim at least four times across the book and which seems to be a patchwork of names of such “new worlds” and the ways we discovered them:

The new world – El Dorado, Atlantis, the Gold Coast, Newfoundland, Plymouth Rock, Rapanai, Utopia, Planet Blue. Chanc’d upon, spied through a glass darkly, drunken stories strapped to a barrel of rum, shipwreck, a Bible Compass, a giant fish led us there, a storm whirled us to this isle. In the wilderness of space, we found... (e.g. SG 8; italics original)

⁷ This also helps solidify the connection between “progress” and religion, at least in its fundamentalist, fanatical form. The literal “Stone Gods” from this section are replaced by figurative ones in the first and third stories, represented by the massive and all-controlling company aptly named MORE.

⁸ Abigail Rine, “Jeanette Winterson’s Love Intervention: Rethinking the Future,” in *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture*, ed. Ben Davies and Jana Funke (Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 75.

Each of these “new worlds” had most likely already been inhabited by someone or something before the respective “discoverer” made a claim to it and started exploiting it. All of the places listed in the quotation (real or imaginary) are associated with some kind of destruction, be it colonial exploitation or devastation in the name of “progress” or some other cult. It reflects the repeating nature of the world and civilization and the endlessly repeated mistakes that human beings tend to make. The fact that the passage is reiterated several times throughout the text strengthens this impression. Moreover, it confounds real and made-up places and evokes adventurous or “drunken” stories, which compromises the believability of these accounts. Relating to what was discussed in the previous chapter, this excerpt calls up history and yet again puts it into question by subtly undermining the glory of these voyages and conquests. That brings up another important aspect of the novel, which is its perspective of “reality” (often represented by history) and “truth.”

When compared with earlier novels like *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson’s key ideas about these concepts seem to have stayed more or less consistent. *Sexing the Cherry* in particular represents a rejection of the idea of “[r]eality as truth” (S 93), and this sentiment remains uncontested in *The Stone Gods*. In general, the latter novel is much less concerned with the subjective nature of history and reality which the previous books stress. What is emphasized, however, is multiplicity and fluidity of meaning, of the universe – or, reality – and the infinite number of possibilities it presents, even if most of them remain unrealized: “This is a quantum universe, [...] neither random nor determined. It is potential at every second” (SG 75); “Every second the Universe divides into possibilities and most of those possibilities never happen. It is not a universe – there is more than one reading” (SG 83). Moreover, as has already been suggested, the narrative stresses the continuous and unending nature of things. When Billie and Spike are stuck on the now icy Planet Blue and they are making peace with their fate, the Robo *sapiens* remarks that “life never believes it will end”; Billie calls it a self-delusion, while Spike argues: “Or perhaps [it is] the truth. This is one state – there will be another” (SG 108). The idea of the universe as a memory, or an “imprint,” is a concept that has not been explored in Winterson’s earlier works. “Some religions call life a dream, or a dreaming, but what if it is a memory? [...] Perhaps the universe is a memory of our mistakes” (SG 105–106). This demonstrates a noticeably more negative outlook than the previous books represented, one that points to humanity’s endless cycle of self-destruction. The sentiment that “[e]verything is imprinted for ever with what it once was” keeps reappearing throughout the novel and it is also expressed in its very last line. In an interview with Sonya Andermahr, Winterson elaborated on this idea as follows:

I don’t believe we need be in thrall to the past [...] but I do believe that the past is the territory we have to work with if we want to develop as human beings. Art began as a memory-system. Before we knew how to write, the oral tradition allowed important events to be preserved. [...] Weirdly now, in our CCTV world, where everything is documented, we are in danger of losing continuity with the past.⁹

⁹ Sonya Andermahr, *Jeanette Winterson* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 125.

The idea of reality as amounting to a set of memories of our past further complicates temporality and it also, along with Winterson's statement, provides a deeper insight into the book's stance on the past. In the previous books, past was established as neither fixed nor separate from the present or future. That was done mainly as a way to destabilize these time-keeping categories, and with them, the way history is constructed. In *The Stone Gods*, the idea is taken one step further: the past is not separate from the present or future in that we need to keep "continuity with the past." In the book itself, this is shown for example through the great literature from the past, which Captain Handsome and his crew came across on one of their space voyages and which they managed to salvage. Great value is placed on literature by the main characters, which stands in sharp contrast to mass illiteracy on Orbus, a by-product of extreme technological advancement. This abandonment of reading, which is one aspect of severing the ties with the past, is implicitly presented as contributing to the society's decay. Thus, the classical books and poems are a link back not only to the past, but to humanity. The importance of art is crucial here. As Winterson goes on to say in the same interview, "art has an important part to play now in helping us all to remember what it means to be human. We are in great danger of forgetting ourselves as human beings as science and the machine claim to do everything for us."¹⁰ This seems to be one of the key concerns of the novel, and it is closely related to the nature of truth as explored in the novel.

In keeping with the earlier works, truth is not something incontestable and universally understood, and it is not contradicted by fiction; the capacity of stories to tell the truth, to express what eludes words, is reaffirmed: "Stories are always true [...]. It's the facts that mislead" (SG 64); "it's possible to be telling the truth even in the moment of invention" (SG 145). According to Susana Onega, "for Jeanette Winterson, the discourse of art is more truth-revealing than traditional science, geography or history precisely because of its capacity to focus reality from different perspectives, including intangible ones."¹¹ The idea of holes held together by a string or "empty space and points of light," which I discussed in the previous chapter, is reiterated here as well: "Words are the part of silence that can be spoken" (SG 151); "inside the story told is the story that cannot be told. Every word written is a net to catch the word that has escaped" (SG 153). The first Billie is very rational and Spike is her "other" who opens her companion's eyes to the possibilities that transcend what can be scientifically proven and logically understood.¹² However, Winterson expands on the theme of truth and "true stories" by proposing that "[t]rue stories are the ones that lie open at the border, allowing a crossing" (SG 106).

As demonstrated above, the book is heavily self-referential – it is separated into three parts, but the same sentiments keep being reiterated across them, with lines or entire passages echoed or quoted word-for-word. As Johns-Putra points out: "Each new tale in the novel [...] performs this idea self-referentially, suggesting that the previous story is, somehow, still open."¹³ This goes back to the rejection

¹⁰ Andermahr 126.

¹¹ Onega 171.

¹² Arguably, the catalyst of this intervention of the "illogical" but "true" is love; more on that topic in the following subsection.

¹³ Johns-Putra 188.

of closure mentioned earlier in this chapter, as well as the importance of keeping a link to the past. Just like the present is incomplete when separated from the past, a story is incomplete when cut off from its contexts, and truth can get lost when people attempt to fix it in place and claim it to be singular and incontestable. The iterative structure of the narrative and the rejection of a denouement underscore the whole idea of truth (as well as history) as a necessarily unfinished process.

In this chapter, I have talked about the constant repetitions and the lack of closure that characterise *The Stone Gods*, which may give a rather bleak impression of the novel's message. However, the book is not merely a pessimistic statement about humanity's incorrigibility and the hopeless state of the world. As Rine points out: "[Winterson] does not view the lethal repetition of the past as inevitable, but presents the possibility of a love intervention that can disrupt the endless replication of the past."¹⁴ This idea will be discussed in detail in the following subsection.

3.2 "Love Is an Intervention": Love and Storytelling

Despite its focus on ecological catastrophes, planetary devastation, the horrors of war and the seemingly unstoppable cycle of human self-destructivity, *The Stone Gods* is also a multifaceted love story. Indeed, love is at its core, and it goes far beyond mere sentimentality. It infuses the story with hope and proposes that there is a possibility to intervene in the cyclicity of time and history. The idea of love as an intervention is iterated several times, and is first explicitly explored in the following excerpt:

Every second the Universe divides into possibilities and most of those possibilities never happen. It is not a universe – there is more than one reading. The story won't stop, can't stop, it goes on telling itself, waiting for an intervention that changes what will happen next.
Love is an intervention. (SG 83)

In this subsection, I will explore the role of love in the context of *The Stone Gods* and the implications of the excerpt above, as well as the crucial link between love and fiction/storytelling.

All three incarnations of Billie and Spike form a bond of love. Their relationship is transgressive in nature: firstly, in the obvious queer sense that they are the same gender. Secondly, beyond gender, it is a cross-species relationship in the first and third stories – between the human Billie and the Robo *sapiens* Spike.¹⁵ In the Easter Island section, an interracial romance between an English sailor and a half-Dutch, half-native man may be read as equally transgressive, as both kinds of relationships break taboos of their respective societies. Thirdly, it is the act of selfless, boundless love itself – "[n]ot romance, not sentimentality, but a force of a different nature from the forces of death that dictate what will be" (SG 217) – that differentiates the pairs from their respective environments stuck in self-destructive cycles in the name of progress. Another thing worth pointing out is that contrary to the world

¹⁴ Rine 78.

¹⁵ Particularly on Orbus, inter-species sex is one of the last remaining sexual taboos; it is punishable by death (SG 18).

surrounding them, which has become sexually perverted and defined by sameness as outlandish cosmetic and gene-modifying procedures have become the norm, the relationship between Billie and Spike is defined by difference. Billie herself describes her lover as “unknown, uncharted, different in every way from me, another life-form, another planet, another chance” (SG 90).¹⁶ According to Rine: “Just as people have become either sexual predators or mere objects of sexual fulfilment, the planet itself has been reduced to an object for the use and pleasure of humankind. Billie and Spike, in contrast, develop a relationship that thrives on the differences between them.”¹⁷ Unlike the society that exploits the environment and has no regard for people either, Spike and Billie’s love, which “does not appropriate or objectify,” is a radical force that has the capacity to “disrupt the lethal repetition of the normative order.”¹⁸

As Johns-Putra points out, “[t]he novel makes explicit the similarities between loving planets and loving people.”¹⁹ This parallel is emphasized when lovers (and the love they share) are likened to land, planets or the world: “the stretch of the body-beloved is the landmass of the world” (SG 110). Elsewhere, Billie remarks in reference to Spike and their relationship: “One word, and a million million worlds close. One word, and for a while there’s a planet in front of me, and I can live there” (SG 83–84). The connection is solidified through the inclusion of lines from John Donne’s poem “The Sun Rising,” which are quoted at least seven times throughout the novel: “*She is all States, all Princes I, Nothing else is*” (e.g. SG 31; italics original). These lines are first used to market Planet Blue to the public and later between Billie and Spike, this time referring to the lovers and their relationship; even later, the words are used in reference to the third Billie’s relationship with her mother – another form of love.²⁰ First published in 1633, this poem is addressed to the sun, which is treated as an unwelcome intruder on the poet and his lover. Especially significant for my argument are the last lines of the piece, where the pair and their love have figuratively “become” the world:

Thou sunne art halfe as happy’as wee,
 In that the world’s contracted thus;
 Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee
 To warme the world, that’s done in warming us.
 Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
 This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare.²¹

¹⁶ Johns-Putra 185.

¹⁷ Rine 79.

¹⁸ Rine 79–80.

¹⁹ Johns-Putra 184.

²⁰ So far, I have mainly talked about the romantic love between Billie and Spike, but their incarnations in the last story are different from the first two pairs in this respect. While their relationship could be read through the lens of romance, it seems to be closer to a friendship or a different platonic kind of bond; indeed, the two never become nearly as close and intimately involved as in the previous two stories. The core of love in that last section is Billie’s love and longing for her mother (and her mother’s love for her, at least as Billie imagines it), who was forced to give her up a month after Billie was born. Hence, it is not only romantic love that Winterson stresses, it can also be the love between a mother and a child.

²¹ John Donne, “The Sun Rising,” in *The Collected Poems of John Donne*, ed. Roy Booth (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2002), 4.

This likening of the beloved to the land, planets, or the world links the central themes of the story – the personal and the global-scale narratives, love and the destruction of planets. According to Abigail Rine, “Winterson [...] underscores the parallel between how individuals think of and act towards each other, and the way humankind as a whole acts towards the planet.”²² In that context, as Johns-Putra observes, “the unloved Orbus presents as the victim of an abusive relationship.”²³

It can be argued that the planet and the person are also linked through the concept of “home.” The last Billie craves a place to return; she is in constant search of a “landing-place” (e.g. SG 175). Her biological mother was forced to give her up for adoption twenty-eight days after Billie was born, and ever since then Billie’s life has been defined by loneliness and the never-ending search for the love she had lost. As she explains to Spike: “Loneliness is about finding a landing-place, or not, and knowing that, whatever you do, you can go back there. The opposite of loneliness isn’t company, it’s return. A place to return” (SG 175). This is essentially a definition of home and, indeed, later, Billie reveals that this landing-place is not really a place – “it’s a person, it’s you” (SG 200) (with “you” in this context most likely referring to Billie’s mother). This longing for a landing-place is essentially the longing for home, which need not be a place at all; it can be represented by the beloved person, defined by love. The destruction of a planet and the loss of a mother both imply the loss of a home. This reading is supported through the metaphor of a star and how it is used in the novel. Sometimes, it represents the beloved person – a lover (“I will set you in the sky and name you” [SG 112]) or the mother (“Is that her, at the end of the street, smaller and smaller, like a light-years-away star?” [SG 150]; “There she is, a star the size of a city” [SG 154]). For Spickers, the star represents his home as a place – Holland – while also immediately becoming associated with his lover:

“Where is Amsterdam?” I asked, for sake of play.

[...]

Spickers pointed up to a bright and steady star close to the moon. With his other hand he held mine and kissed it. “Holland,” he said, kissing my fingers, one by one by one by one, and until my hand became a five-pointed star. (SG 129)

The star represents the thing searched for and yearned for – the mother, the lover, broadly a home, a place/person to return to. It is the final link between the place and the person; it is where these two concepts meet. In addition, these “stars,” being both real and fantastical in nature, bring up a very important point: the interplay between the fantastical and the real.

As discussed earlier, Winterson places a lot of emphasis on the integration of these two concepts, and that is where another important role of love is revealed. In many respects, love is precisely what bridges the gap between the real and the fictional, what allows for the necessary crossing. Love can make impossible things happen, such as the robot Spike physically developing a heart through her relationship with Billie. She comments: “I know it’s impossible, but so much that has seemed impossible

²² Rine 79.

²³ Johns-Putra 184.

has already happened” (SG 110). This phenomenon of love manifesting as matter or otherwise physically affecting the world can be seen in other novels as well: in *The Passion*, Villanelle falls in love and her heart literally, physically, stays with her lover. When the otherwise literal-minded Dog Woman talks about her mother in *Sexing the Cherry*, she recounts:

When I was a child my father swung me up on his knees to tell me a story and I broke both his legs. [...] But my mother, who lived only a while and was so light that she dared not go out in a wind, could swing me on her back and carry me for miles. There was talk of witchcraft but what is stronger than love? (S 21)

As can be observed, the realm of love is often where the barriers between literal and metaphorical language break down, and thus where the “real” and the “fantastical” intersect. It suggests that it can make impossible things happen in the “real” world too. In that way, love has a lot in common with art, particularly with writing and storytelling. That brings me to a crucial point in Winterson’s fiction – the parallel between love and writing.

To borrow Sonya Andermahr’s expression, “the metaphor of lovemaking as writing” is an extremely common trope in Winterson.²⁴ It is very palpable even in all the previous novels. In essence, love and art share the same functions. One of these is self-recognition and self-reflection, which also reflect our relationship to the rest of the world – in literature, “as we travel deeper into the strange world of the story, the feeling we get is of being understood. [...] Books read us back to ourselves” (O xi); “It’s a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained” (O 119). Equally, in love, one can find oneself and the world through the other person. For example, Henri in *The Passion* describes falling in love with Villanelle as follows:

When I fell in love it was as though I looked into a mirror for the first time and saw myself. I lifted my hand in wonderment and felt my cheeks, my neck. This was me. And when I had looked at myself and grown accustomed to who I was, I was not afraid to hate parts of me because I wanted to be worthy of the mirror bearer. Then, when I had regarded myself for the first time, I regarded the world and saw it to be more various and beautiful than I thought. (P 154–155)

Despite originating from different novels, these excerpts well exemplify the role and power of love in *The Stone Gods* as well. The relationship with Spike parallels Billie’s relationship to the world at large and her love for the planet; like with Henri in *The Passion*, it is this parallel that allows her to see the universe as “[a] universe of potentialities” (SG 244). With the dying Spike in her lap, a pietà-like Billie muses: “This new world that I found and lost weighs nothing at all. Is this the universe, lying across the knees of one who mourns?” (SG 112). Love also mirrors a function of storytelling discussed in chapter two – namely, it serves as “a vehicle for transgression,”²⁵ as Julie Ellam observes. Just like stories, love has the capacity to transgress the dominant order, as alluded to earlier in this section. Conversely, stories can be the vehicle for love. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Lighthousekeeping*, a novel which largely revolves around love as well as its association with storytelling. As Julie Ellam points out, the

²⁴ Andermahr 26.

²⁵ Julie Ellam, *Love in Jeanette Winterson’s Novels* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 227.

blind lighthouse-keeper Pew tells stories to his young apprentice and protégé Silver as a form of love,²⁶ and equally, Silver later expresses her love for her unnamed romantic interest by way of narrating stories. Similarly, Spike and Billie can be seen discovering, exploring and showing their love for each other through literature, and particularly poetry. According to Ellam: “The making of fiction and the communication of it is an act of love and necessary for staying alive.”²⁷

Importantly, this act of love can extend beyond the covers of the book itself. According to Rine: “Not only can human beings, on an individual and communal level, create new worlds through love; Winterson’s novel also suggests that the love between reader and text can likewise open new worlds.”²⁸ Love without conditions or tendency to appropriation, love that is

radical enough to let the other exist fully and autonomously [...] is possible not only between two people, but between a work of literature and its reader. When this love is fertile enough, it can open an ‘alternative paradigm’; it can intervene in the (re)production of the normative order.²⁹

This idea circles back to the aforementioned transgressive power of love and writing.

Love, in Winterson’s works, is a generative force. Like poetic language, it creates new worlds, yields new possibilities, new meanings. It has the ability to intervene in lethal cycles and “affect the outcome” (SG 244), “[change] what will happen next” (SG 83). And it is the absence of such transgressive creativity, Winterson seems to suggest, that prefigures the downfall of societies. Books are no longer a part of the Post-3War world, most people no longer read (SG 193). On Orbus, there is “State-approved mass illiteracy” (SG 15), people cannot read or write and language has been reduced to its most basic, utilitarian functions. According to Abigail Rine:

These dying worlds have lost their connection to poetic language and art – they have forgotten how to imagine beyond the world of the present, to create new worlds through language. This is as much a destructive influence on Orbus and Earth as nuclear war and environmental devastation; without creativity, an intervention is not possible.³⁰

This loss of connection to poetic language and art can be read as another symptom of the loss of continuity with the past discussed earlier. Significantly, not only poetic language but also love has largely been abandoned. On Orbus, the main driving force has become sexual gratification and personal pleasure in general – that is, transactional and selfish pleasure with no mutuality. On Post-3War Earth, the third Billie expresses: “Neither art nor love fits well into the economics of purpose, any more than they fitted into the economics of greed. Any more than they fit into economics at all” (SG 169). In opposition to that stands Billie and Spike’s love, which is closely associated with language and art. The creative, imaginative power of these two forces constitutes the necessary intervention in the established and destructive order which has abandoned these values.

²⁶ Ellam 213.

²⁷ Ellam 217.

²⁸ Rine 82.

²⁹ Rine 83.

³⁰ Rine 82.

It is worth mentioning that, as Rine points out, “[t]hough Winterson does present the possibility of a love intervention, she expresses severe pessimism about humankind’s ability to *choose* to intervene.”³¹ As much is iterated several times throughout the novel: “The problem with a quantum universe, neither random nor determined, is that we who are the intervention don’t know what we are doing.” (SG 217); “Love is an intervention. Why do we not choose it?” (SG 244). In Rine’s words: “Human beings, according to Winterson, have the potential to affect the course the universe takes, but as can be seen in her depiction of endlessly repeating worlds, this potential remains unrealized.”³² All the love stories in the book end in tragedy, with the death of at least one of the lovers; the novel itself seems to be stuck in a vicious circle. Either way, as Winterson suggests, the capacity to intervene is there. This intervention is closely associated with creativity and art – it pertains to embracing the fantastical and allowing for a productive border-crossing.

3.3 “Tell Me a Story, Spike”: Words for Comfort

In spite of all its parallels with storytelling, love (and emotions in general) are messy – unstable, unpredictable, unattainable, and potentially dangerous. The Nietzschean distinction between the Dionysian and Apollonian principles comes in useful here. The Dionysian refers to unbridled passion, the wild, chaotic, instinctual, emotional, creative energy; the Apollonian represents order, logic and harmony.³³ Art, or writing/storytelling, can then be seen as their productive fusion: at its core is the creative Dionysian passion, which is given shape and a certain (Apollonian) order through language. In that sense, storytelling, with its structures, conventions, and certain degree of reliability, can provide a much-needed sense of stability and comfort, not only in relation to the chaotic world at large but also the world of love. It offers a lot of freedom in its fictionality, and thus can describe the ambivalence of love and emotional states truthfully or authentically, while at the same time having cathartic and curative effects. In Jeanette Winterson’s work, such healing or comforting function is another important role that stories are shown to perform.

The characters in her novels often have recourse to stories in moments of crisis. In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the protagonist Jeanette often tells herself stories to make sense of and peace with her reality; in *The Passion*, Henri and the other soldiers tell themselves and each other stories to help them survive the horrors of war; in *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan’s fantastical stories help him express his feelings and navigate the difficult questions he grapples with. Billie in *The Stone Gods* aptly summarizes the role of stories, describing them as

one way of defying chaos – the kind of Chaos, with a capital C, that can’t be avoided; the exuberant, unfolding, unpredictable universe, expanding when it should be contracting, made largely of

³¹ Rine 84; italics original.

³² Rine 78.

³³ Robert Wicks, “Nietzsche’s Life and Works,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2021 Edition, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/nietzsche-life-works/>> 11 Jul. 2022.

something that is not something but nothing – dark energy, anti-matter. A thing unconfined. What to say when the certainties fail?
Words are the part of silence that can be spoken. (SG 151)

Indeed, “when the certainties fail,” stories are often the source of solace in *The Stone Gods* as well as in Winterson’s earlier novels. When stranded on Planet Blue, Billie and Spike take “only the most useful items” to help them survive in the hostile environment – which includes two books, Cook’s *Journals* and Donne’s poems (SG 100).³⁴ When Spike is dying in her lover’s arms, Billie reaches for a book to find a sense of comfort (SG 112). Similarly, the sailor Billy comforts the dying Spickers with made-up stories of his home (SG 140).

Nowhere is the comforting and even lifesaving capacity of stories explored more keenly than in *Lighthousekeeping*, published three years before *The Stone Gods*. Heavily associated with lighthouses, stories in this novel serve “as markers and guides and comfort and warning” (L 41). The book is interspersed with short dialogues between Pew and Silver, most of which begin with the following words in the first half of the book, as the young girl reaches out for comfort, stability and love: “Tell me a story, Pew” – and Pew duly obliges her. The same motif is reflected in *The Stone Gods*, when, certain to die soon on the now-hostile Planet Blue, Billie asks her lover: “Tell me a story, Spike” (SG 109). In *Lighthousekeeping*, Pew – the lighthouse-keeper and quintessential storyteller – tells Silver about a shipwrecked sailor who, to save himself from drowning like his mates did, “was telling himself stories like a madman, so that as one ended another began.” Holding on for dear life, “he began to tell himself as if he were a story, from his earliest beginnings to his green and deep misfortune,” and after glimpsing a lighthouse in the distance, “he knew that if he became the story of the light, he might be saved” (L 40–41). Pew teaches his young apprentice that “if you tell yourself like a story, it doesn’t seem so bad,” (L 27). The concept of “telling oneself like a story” is common in Winterson’s works and it relates to the psychological effects of storytelling as well as the self-engendering aspect of language and plots in general. It can have a healing and comforting function, as it allows one to make sense of one’s life and give it meaning.

The third Billie Crusoe, true to her surname, describes her birth as a shipwreck and herself as the “cargo for salvage” that nobody thought worth salvaging (SG 146–147). Grappling with the loss of her mother at an early age, she tells herself a story – and through it, she tells herself *as* a story – to create a mother who loved her deeply but had no choice but to leave her behind. As painful as the story is, it

³⁴ These two pieces of literature are themselves symbolic. Donne’s poetry is associated with metaphysical musings on love (and other topics) and the poetic language in general (the importance of which is discussed above). Cook’s *Journals* have diverse associations. Firstly, they reflect the endeavour of finding a “new world” – initially through Captain Handsome’s perspective as literally colonizing the new planet (“This one is my favourite – I read it again and again. [...] The record of where he sailed – Tahiti, New Zealand, Brazil. I feel I know him. I feel he would understand what we’re trying to do now” [SG 59]). Later, the meaning is transformed by Billie and Spike – Spike is the new world Billie discovers (and subsequently loses) (SG 112). Another association is the motive of shipwreck and the search for a landing-place, which is essentially confirmed by the third Billie later on: “I took a book from the shelf – James Cook, *The Journals: At daybreak I sent a Ship to looke [sic] for a landing-place*” (SG 193; italics original).

can lend her a sense of comfort, however small, in allowing her to believe that she was loved. Billie also explicitly describes her life in terms of a narrative: “Twice turned out – once from the womb-world, once from her, and for ever – banishment became its narrative equivalent, a story I could tell” (SG 153). She even describes herself as “a lost manuscript, surfacing in fragments, like a message in a bottle, a page here, a page there, out towards an unknown shore” (SG 153). The motif of the message in a bottle reappears several times throughout and suggests the search for hope and comfort; sending out a signal in the hopes that it will reach somebody. The third Billie also sends out such a signal, literally in the form of a story – but it is sadly left unanswered. In the most radical instance of self-referentiality in the book, she finds a manuscript on the London Tube – the manuscript of *The Stone Gods*. Later, she admits that she was the one who wrote it and left it there in the first place, going “round and round on the Circle Line” in “[a] repeating world”; “[a] message in a bottle” that nobody picked up (SG 241). The fact that the manuscript seems to be, in some respect, the novel itself may be pointing to the idea of self-making and world-making through narrative, life and living as a creative, inventive process. As Pew and Silver in the earlier novel repeatedly assert, one’s life story is not fixed – it “depends [...] [o]n how I tell it” (L 129). Billie is the author of the manuscript and of her own life story; in a radical sense, then, she has indeed construed herself and her life as a story. Moreover, at a certain point, she is also shown to be her own reader, which circles back to the idea that it is comforting (if not life-saving) to perceive one’s own fate as a narrative. It also brings back into focus the relationship between reader and text while asking the reader to actively engage with the work in front of them. In Winterson’s writing, stories often provide hope, and hope helps people survive the uncertainties and disorder of the world. In this sense, it is irrelevant whether the stories are “true” in some verifiable way – they are meaningful because they offer a tool to cope with reality. They have the capacity to express complex and chaotic emotions and states, which is where their “truthfulness” lies.

4 FRANKISSSTEIN: INVENTING REALITY

4.1 “Reality Is... What?": Relativizing the Material World

As the title suggests, *Frankissstein*, first published in 2019, is a reimagining of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which was written almost exactly 200 years earlier, in 1818. Structurally, there are two alternating timelines: half of the book is set in the 19th century and its narrator-protagonist is a fictionalized version of Mary Shelley herself. Stuck in a vacation house at Lake Geneva due to heavy rains, along with her husband Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Byron’s physician Polidori and Mary’s half-sister Claire Clairmont, Mary begins writing her well-known novel. For the other half of Winterson’s book, historical fiction switches over to speculative fiction and the plot is transported to post-Brexit Britain and follows a young trans doctor Ry Shelley, who falls in love with the charismatic “mad scientist” Victor Stein. Stein is a big proponent of transhumanism and believes in a “post-human” future – a “world of AI [...] where the physical limits of our bodies will be irrelevant.”¹ He performs secret experiments with the aim of uploading a human mind to a non-biological medium – a computer – and thus separating consciousness from body and, in effect, overcoming mortality. As the source material might suggest, *Frankissstein* ponders the implications of emergent scientific advancements, the associated issue of an inventor’s responsibility for their invention, and asks the question of what it even means to be human. Winterson’s retelling is not so much science-fiction or purely a revisionist take on an earlier canonical narrative (though it is subversive in its own right), but rather an open-minded assessment of the new (transhumanist) reality that suggests itself with the latest scientific and technological developments. It asks what a future co-inhabited by humans and machines might be like and, most importantly, what it might mean for humanity. It also provocatively probes the question of the relationship between fiction and reality, which I will discuss in the following subsection.

As the previous chapters have shown, the nature of truth and reality, their mutual relationship and their association with fiction are some of the key concerns found in Jeanette Winterson’s work in general. Fictional stories and metaphorical language, or literature and art in general, have the capacity to address themes and express truths that the discourses of realism and rationalism might fail to grasp. *The real*, in Winterson’s conception, generally refers to that which pertains to the material world and which is mediated through rationalistic discourses. As established in 2.4, the notion of reality as truth, and the notion that there is a single, objective reality, has been refuted as early as in *Sexing the Cherry* (S 93). There, the effect was not necessarily to do away with the concept of reality itself, but rather to suggest that “[i]n trying to describe the real world, we are limited by language, which avails us a way of thinking and talking about it, but which is always limited, conditional, and both historically and

¹ Jeanette Winterson, *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (London: Vintage, 2019), 73, Kindle. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses (abbreviated as F).

culturally specific.”² In other words, Winterson’s aim was to deconstruct the notion of reality as an objective and verifiable fact that people can agree upon and to criticize the overly rationalistic discourses we use to mediate it, which always ultimately fail to truthfully reflect the world and our lived experience. As will be demonstrated shortly, this is taken to another level in *Frankissstein*, where the concept of reality as a whole is problematized. The novel is one of Winterson’s most controversial works to date, among other things due to how it treats (and problematizes) the real. The question “What is reality?” informs the entire novel and represents one of its main concerns. Winterson’s approach reflects the instability of the future humanity seems to be headed for, as well as the instability brought about by current social and political situations. The book is permeated by ambiguity, pondering both the promising and the destructive potential of the new emerging reality. Furthermore, by fictionalizing the real, Winterson is putting stories on the same footing as the material world, which speaks to the capacity of fiction to address and shape the world we live in.

The novel is divided into chapter-like sections, each beginning with a statement or a question about reality, such as “*What is the temperature of reality?*” (F 184), “*Humankind cannot bear very much reality*” (F 55), “*Reality cannot bear very much of humankind*” (F 71), “*Reality is now*” (F 148), “*Reality is not now*” (F 197), and so on. Some of them are meditations about reality’s supposed physical properties, such as “*Reality is water-soluble*” (F 1), which foregrounds the intangibility of this concept and also stresses how changeable what we experience as “real” is and how heavily the perception of the material world is influenced by circumstances and our subjectivity. The setting in which the statement quoted above is uttered is the incredibly rainy area of Lake Geneva, where “the rocks, the shore, the trees, the boats on the lake, had lost their usual definition and blurred into the long grey of a week’s rain” and “[e]very solid thing had dissolved into its watery equivalent” (F 1). These musings serve to destabilize the concept of reality we tend to perceive as solid and delimited by our sensory experience, while giving no definite answer as to its actual character; instead of offering a denouement, the final meditation simply poses the question (signalling both countless options and exasperation): “*Reality is... what?*” (F 317). About halfway through the book, Ry and Victor have a discussion on the topic of reality, where Victor proposes:

[...] just as consciousness appears to be an emergent property of brain function – you can’t pinpoint consciousness biologically – it is as elusive as the seat of the soul – but we would agree that consciousness exists [...]. So perhaps reality is also an emergent property – it exists, but it is not the material fact we take it to be. (F 115)

This is an important idea – reality as something which does exist, but which is not a material, objective fact but rather an “emergent property.” This circles back to Winterson’s earlier assertions about reality not being something universally truthful or historically provable, something which people

² Jana L. French, “‘I’m telling you stories.... Trust me’: Gender, Desire, and Identity in Jeanette Winterson’s Historical Fantasies,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10.3 (1999): 251, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308390>> 22 Jan. 2021.

could agree upon. In *Frankissstein*, the author destabilizes the concept of reality to reflect how our reality – the times we live in now and the future we are facing – is itself unstable and ambivalent. The emerging future is full of promise, with the potential of new technologies to enhance our quality of life and allow us to overcome the physical limitation of our bodies; on the other hand, it comes with many dangerous implications, such as AI threatening our sense of identity or the commodification and mechanization of sex suggesting new forms of dehumanization. Equally, it is a reaction to topical issues, such as the current political climate in the UK. The novel itself is set in the Brexit era, which threw the country into chaos and uncertainty about its future and the real consequences of which were yet to be felt at the time the novel’s publication. Winterson’s treatment of reality is deliberately confusing and destabilizing, leaving readers uncertain about the answer to the question *what is reality*, which reflects the feelings of uncertainty about *what humanity’s new reality will be like*. Additionally, as the shape of reality is cast as largely depending on us (our consciousness or imagination), so the shape of the future is in our hands, the author seems to suggest (more on this aspect later).

Beyond the plot level, these kinds of uncertainties are reflected in the structural elements of the novel. As mentioned earlier, the book’s two timelines are both separate and intertwined. The characters from the 19th century section of the story have their clear counterparts in the 21st century section: Mary Shelley is reflected in Ry Shelley (“Ry” being, indeed, “short for Mary” [F 83]); Lord Byron turns into Ron Lord, the lewd and comic sex-bot developer; Polidori becomes Polly D., a female *Vanity Fair* reporter who is trying to uncover Stein’s secrets; and Claire Clairmont appears as a devout Christian woman simply named Claire.³ The two timelines are in dialogue with each other, with the characters (particularly the narrator-protagonists, Mary and Ry) expressing similar thoughts, often using strikingly similar language, and even seemingly catching glimpses of the other timeline and “reality” at times. In a typical Wintersonian self-referentiality, certain lines – or their slightly altered echoes – tend to appear across the book. Alternating timelines, of course, can be found even in Winterson’s earlier novels, including *Sexing the Cherry* and *The Stone Gods*. In *Frankissstein*, however, Winterson goes even further: there is in fact a third “reality” here, that of Mary’s Shelley’s *Frankenstein* – and all three of these “plotlines” are interconnected, with unclear (or even non-existent) boundaries between them. The main character of Shelley’s story, Victor Frankenstein, reappears as Victor Stein in the 21st century, which puts this borrowed fictional character on a par with all the others. At points, Frankenstein even physically interacts with Mary, stepping out of the confines of the tale he was written into. Making Mary’s story within the story just as tangible as the other two settings significantly obscures the boundary between *the real* and *the fictional*, between real life and story.

Winterson has Mary and her husband agree that “we are shaped by our thoughts” and that “our thoughts are our reality,” to which Mary confesses that the story she is working on “has become [her]

³ In addition, one of Ron Lord’s sex-bot models is also named Claire (F 84), which reflects how Claire is treated by Byron in the 19th century part of the story – essentially as a sex object who is given very little respect or acknowledgement otherwise.

reality” (F 147). At one point, a definition of “story” appears in the book: “Story = a series of connected events, real or imagined. Imagined or real.” The latter part of the definition is then immediately revised – the conjunction “or” is replaced with “and,” and the three words are emphatically split into three separate lines:

Imagined
And
Real (F 23)

Again, the real and the imaginary are made barely distinguishable and one is not given prominence over the other. At the very end of the book, in an author’s note, Winterson includes probably the most radical statement addressing this subject: “This story is an invention that sits inside another invention – reality itself” (F 345). If reality is just as much of an “invention” as a story, the distinction between these two concepts is essentially erased and the idea of “the world around us [as] solid” (F 216) completely destabilized. To revert to the point made by Asensio Aróstegui, referenced in chapter two, Winterson “emphasizes the discursive and plural nature of all narratives and insists on the fact that reality may be endlessly rewritten because it is nothing but a linguistic construct.”⁴ Indeed, reality is to a large part mediated by the “stories” we use to structure it, make sense of it and communicate this sense to others. But *Frankissstein* seems to go beyond that, giving words and stories an actual material presence. If “reality can be endlessly rewritten,” maybe (the narrative of) our future, too, can be written and rewritten. If our reality is shaped by our thoughts, then perhaps we have the power to shape our future. Importantly, this blurring of lines forces the reader to ponder the “real” issues fiction can bring to the forefront, suggesting that it has the capacity to speak about real-life issues in a meaningful, truthful way (that also ties back to the discussion on the relationship between truth, reality and fiction in 2.4).

In an interview for *The Guardian* in 2019, Winterson stated: “We live in the times that we live in. You can change your nationality, your gender, but you can’t change the fact you have to live in this world at this time.”⁵ The same sentiment is expressed in *The Stone Gods*, where one of the characters muses: “You can change everything about yourself – your name, your home, your skin colour, your gender, even your parents, your private history – but you can’t change the time you were born in, or what it is you will have to live through” (SG 237). This implies that while what we perceive as real might in large part depend on our subjective experience, there are certain aspects of that experience we have no power over. Those are the “real” things. As Mary laments after the loss of her husband, “I cannot rewrite what has happened to him. What has happened to us” (F 289). However, as Winterson goes on to say in the same interview, “[a]t the same time, writers are trying to shape the world – I mean,

⁴ María del Mar Asensio Aróstegui, “History as Discourse in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion: The Politics of Alterity*,” *Journal of English Studies* 2.2 (2000): 17, <<https://doi.org/10.18172/jes.54>> 21 Jun. 2022.

⁵ Jeanette Winterson, “I didn’t see this coming,” interview by Johanna Thomas-Corr, *The Guardian*, December 22, 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/22/jeanette-winterson-frankissstein-interview>> 25 Jul. 2022.

the way people think and feel.”⁶ There are things from which stories cannot offer us escape, but world events and the course the future will take can still be influenced through stories. By giving “reality” and “story” the same amount of credibility, *Frankissstein* stresses that fictional narratives can generate real and relevant discussions on pressing subjects, and they can help “shape” the reality by affecting readers; in a self-referential sense, that is also what Winterson does through her novel.

To circle back to the idea of reality as an “invention,” the two meanings of the word – i.e. something made up, like an idea or a story, and a scientific invention – are connected in this book, to the point of essentially blending together at times. At the beginning of the novel, Mary Shelley claims: “though I am not an inventor of machines I am an inventor of dreams” (F 3), which sets the stage for this close association later on. This linguistic trick foregrounds how we are “inventing” our reality – and with it, our future – both in the imaginative sense and in the sense that we are shaping it through technological inventions; in the words of Winterson’s Percy Shelley, “what if we are the story we invent?” (F 55). Such a power to shape our reality implies the potential to achieve progress, self-realization and control over one’s own “narrative,” but it also comes with a heightened sense of responsibility, instability and confusion. The human condition is fundamentally flawed, and so are the inventions we make and the ways we interact with them, which is where the question of responsibility becomes most pressing. This ambivalence reflects the feelings of uncertainty regarding the “new” reality co-inhabited by people and machines, where the foundational ideas of what it means to be human are being put into question.

4.2 “The Teller or the Tale?”: Reimagining the Monster

The question offers itself of what motivated Winterson to retell the story of *Frankenstein* specifically. Rewriting existing narratives is something the author does frequently, as seen in the amount of references to and subversions of canonical and non-canonical narratives found in her work, as well as in her various “Cover Versions”⁷ of traditional tales.⁸ In the introduction to *Weight*, a reimagining of the myth of Atlas and Heracles from 2005, the author herself admits: “I like to take stories we think we know and record them differently. In the re-telling comes a new emphasis or bias, and the new arrangement of the key elements demands that fresh material be injected into the text.”⁹ *Frankenstein* seems to be an ideal contender for such a retelling, especially in our current time: as Ry points out: “Tech. AI. Artificial Intelligence. *Frankenstein* was a vision of how life might be created – the first non-human intelligence” (F 27). Shelley’s novel ponders the dangers of radical scientific advancements and artificially created “intelligence,” as well as the issue of a creator’s responsibility for their creation.

⁶ Winterson, interview.

⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *Weight* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018), xvi.

⁸ To name a few examples, *The Lion, The Unicorn and Me* (2009) retells the nativity story, and *The Gap of Time* (2015) is a reimagining of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.

⁹ Winterson, *Weight*, xvi.

These themes are explored in Winterson's version as well, this time particularly in relation to new technological developments. While the messaging is riddled with ambivalence, as stated above, it ultimately reads more as a warning against the dangers that our "inventiveness" will pose if treated irresponsibly. To begin this discussion, it is important to examine the identity of Winterson's version of the "monster" and its implications.

At the forefront of the novel is the question of death and reanimation – or of bringing to life something which has never been alive. Winterson makes a clear connection between Dr. Frankenstein's reanimation of a dead body and Victor Stein's effort to reanimate the mind of his deceased mentor. This brings forward the concerns of transhumanism and the issue of artificial intelligence. In the present time, science and technology are advancing at an unprecedented rate and humanity seems to be headed for a future defined by machines. Using *Frankenstein* as a medium allows Winterson to ponder the potential consequences of such a reality, where human beings might not to be the only "intelligence" anymore. The author debates the positive potential of such a future while at the same time warning about the dangers it might entail in regards to the increasingly muddled boundaries between human and non-human; if a machine is given a human mind, where does the machine end and the human begin – or is there even a distinction at all? Winterson does not offer any clear answers to these concerns. Unlike with *Frankenstein*, we do not see Victor Stein succeed in his experiment, so we can only debate the potential consequences.

Apart from this obvious parallel between Frankenstein's "undead"/"non-alive" creature and modern artificial intelligence, Winterson draws a connecting line between Mary Shelley the author and the reanimating scientist. Through writing them, Mary brings her characters to life, which even lends them physical existence on the page. This association is explicitly pointed out by Mary:

I feel the like agony of mind of Victor Frankenstein; having created his monster, he cannot uncreate him. Time has no pity. Time cannot unhappen. What is done is done.
And so it is that I have created my monster and his master. My story has being. (F 127–128)

Furthermore, on an even larger, metatextual scale, a similar thing can be said about Jeanette Winterson and her own novel: through her writing, she is "reanimating" *Frankenstein* and its characters, as well as Mary Shelley and other historical figures. According to Elena Sheppard, "Shelley wrote her story to bring the dead to life, and Winterson carries that idea one step further by bringing the imagined to life too"; "Winterson is the mad scientist here, her book the monster."¹⁰ Just like the body of Frankenstein's creature, her novel is also composed of many different parts – historical facts, made-up events and characters, allusions, direct quotes from a variety of sources including the original *Frankenstein*, Shakespeare, song lyrics, quotes from real persons, and so on.¹¹ Apart from solidifying the link (or the

¹⁰ Elena Sheppard, "Reanimating 'Frankenstein': On Jeanette Winterson's 'Frankissstein,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 23 Oct. 2019, <<https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/reanimating-frankenstein-on-jeanette-wintersons-frankissstein/>> 14 Jul. 2022.

¹¹ Sheppard.

lack of boundary) between reality and fiction as discussed in the previous section, this approach extends the issue of a creator's responsibility for their creation even to the realm of writers and their work, as will be discussed shortly. This also ties back to the two associated meanings of the word "invention."

Additionally, the novel consistently complicates the distinction between creator and creation. When Victor Frankenstein appears in the story, he tells Mary: "I am the monster you created" (F 214); he goes on to assert that he and the monster are one and the same (F 215). This relationship is further reinforced when Frankenstein admits that he does not know "if [he is] the teller or the tale" (F 194), a question that was raised by Ry a few pages earlier (F 189). Frankenstein is the creator, but he is simultaneously the creature; so is Mary Shelley, through Winterson's "resurrection" and re-creation, and, arguably, so are all the other characters as well. As Elena Sheppard reminds us:

"Frankenstein was the name of the doctor, not the monster." That refrain is a building block of common literary conversation, so oversaid that it almost always warrants an eye-roll. But Winterson's novel takes that truth and scrambles it. Frankenstein was the doctor, but he was the monster too, as was Shelley, as was Ry, as are we all. The human condition is flawed, and in building the artificial intelligence that will dominate the future, we are at once creating a monster and becoming one.¹²

Indeed, we as humans are inherently fallible, and such major technological advancements that could potentially be used for our benefit could also cause harm and be destructive if treated irresponsibly. That is precisely why the question of responsibility is so important. According to Amal Al Shamsi: "While Winterson acknowledges that both past and present Victors' intentions are pure, they are fallible because of their humanness, with 'so many good ideas' and 'so many failed ideals' [F 165]."¹³ The "monstrous" is not inherent in the new technologies, but rather in us. "[T]he sum of all [Frankenstein's creature] has learned is from humankind" (F 128), and similarly, "machine-learning is deeply sexist in outcomes" (F 76). While Stein might believe in "a utopia where artificial intelligence frees us of our sexist and homophobic or transphobic biases," as Jacob Anderson-Minshall points out, "real world research [suggests] that AI learns our bigotries."¹⁴

When talking about Winterson's take on the monster, it is important to mention Ry's status within the story's framework. Ry is associated with Mary Shelley, through name and their¹⁵ role as a

¹² Sheppard.

¹³ Amal Al Shamsi, "Reimagining *Frankenstein*: Otherness, Responsibility, and Visions of Future Technologies in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*," *Screen Bodies* 6.2 (2021): 84, <doi.org/10.3167/screen.2021.060206> 14 Jul. 2022.

¹⁴ Jacob Anderson-Minshall, "Sex Bots and Monsters," *Advocate* 1106 (Dec. 2019): 40, *EBSCOhost* <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=a9h&AN=139697740&lang=cs&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> 26 Jul. 2022.

¹⁵ Ry's gender identity is never made entirely clear in the novel. They are male-presenting, the first thing they express about their gender is "I am now a man, although I was born a woman," and they later describe themselves as "female-to-male" – all of which seems to suggest that Ry is a trans man. However, throughout the book, they also say things like "what I am is not one thing, not one gender. I live with doubleness"; "I am [a man]. Anatomically I am also a woman"; "I am fully female. I am also partly male," and so on. That seems to point towards a more non-binary identity. At one point, Ry even explicitly says: "I don't think of myself as part of the binary," which solidifies this reading. When it comes to pronouns, there are only about three instances where any

“maker,” but in their case, they are “making” themselves. As a trans person undergoing gender-affirming care to align their body with their inner perception of themselves (in their own words, “it really is my body. I had it made for me” [F 122]), Ry “is characterised in the novel as an exemplar of a broader cultural interest in self-making,” as Emily McAvan, points out.¹⁶ Indeed, Ry’s transness and the “re-making” of their body is explicitly associated with transhumanism in the novel, which creates some rather problematic implications. Ana Horvat discusses the issue of Winterson’s portrayal of a trans character in depth. According to her:

The problem with seeing trans people as posthuman individuals is that they can be celebrated by certain groups of people for being cyborgs and showing the power of technology, they can at the same time be viewed through the lens of technology as dehumanized, as science gone too far.¹⁷

Such identity-affirming “self-making” that Ry represents has been largely celebrated in Winterson’s previous works, and indeed it has many positive aspects that are not glossed over in *Frankissstein*. Despite that, Horvat’s point is very pertinent particularly considering that in the novel, Winterson does indeed seem to be warning against unrestrained application of science and technology. It is worth pointing out that it is mostly Victor Stein who makes the association between transness and transhumanism, and his obsession with Ry’s body reads as fetishizing and somewhat dehumanizing. It would therefore seem that this association is not something the novel necessarily promotes. Regardless, as suggested above, not only the characters but the narrative per se make this connection between Ry’s transness, transhumanism and the Frankensteinian monster, which has been viewed as highly problematic, not least in an author who has dedicated her career to promoting difference and alterity. Horvat points out in reference to the novel that “[i]n a cis writer’s hands, the connection between transness, technology, and monstrosity becomes an uncomfortable addition to TERF¹⁸ rhetoric,” and she stresses that “[w]riting about minority characters comes with a responsibility.”¹⁹ This is quite ironic, since one of the widely recognized concerns of the original *Frankenstein* is the inventor’s responsibility for their invention – which, as already mentioned, is also extended to authors and their stories in Winterson’s retelling. Al Shamsi claims that *Frankissstein* offers “a meta-commentary about the responsibility of telling particular stories of precarious marginalities and how these kinds of creations

pronouns at all are used for Ry; the pronouns are always he/him and it is always another character using them. Ry never corrects anyone nor suggests any other option, so it would be valid to assume those to be their preferred pronouns. However, for the reasons stated above (and since the situation where Ry refrains from correcting people who misgender or misname them arises quite often in the novel), I opted for the gender-neutral they/them instead.

¹⁶ Emily McAvan, “Frankenstein Redux: Posthuman Monsters in Jeanette Winterson’s *Frankissstein*,” *M/C Journal* 24.5 (Oct. 2021), <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2843>> 27 Apr. 2022.

¹⁷ Ana Horvat, “‘Trans is Hot Right Now’: On Cisgender Writers and Trans Characters in Jeanette Winterson’s *Frankissstein* and Kim Fu’s *For Today I Am a Boy*,” *Gender Forum* 79 (2021): 89, <<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/trans-is-hot-right-now-on-cisgender-writers/docview/2582440899/se-2>> 14 Jul. 2022.

¹⁸ Trans-exclusionary radical feminist. From Dictionary.com: “an advocate of radical feminism who believes that a trans woman’s gender identity is not legitimate and who is hostile to the inclusion of trans people and gender-diverse people in the feminist movement.” “TERF,” *Dictionary.com*, <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/terf>> 1 Aug. 2022.

¹⁹ Horvat 92.

can be just as devastating as Frankenstein's [...] or Victor's."²⁰ Yet this responsibility is simultaneously somewhat overlooked on Winterson's part.²¹

The question of self-making is also one of the probable motivations for Winterson's reimagining of Shelley's work. In the previous books, world-making and self-making, along with the rejection of diverse binaries, were shown as predominantly positive forces, as acts of self-actualization, power and freedom. Even the monstrous was portrayed in a much more positive light. *Sexing the Cherry*, for example, "embraced the pleasures of monstrosity,"²² as McAvan points out. Dog Woman's inhuman size and strength, as well as the deviation from gender and social norms it entailed, allowed her to stand up against the dominant order and serve as a disruptive force. According to Judith (Jack) Halberstam: "The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities."²³ It is important to stress that the term "monstrous" is highly ambivalent in *Frankissstein* – it is not wholly negative nor entirely positive. However, here Winterson explores more keenly what might happen if such desire to (re)make the self, particularly in relations to science and technology, is taken too far or perverted. And it is precisely the proximity of transhumanism and transgender in the plot that makes the presentation of Ry so hard to swallow for many trans and non-binary readers and critics. It raises the question of Winterson's possible intentions in combining the theme of AI and musings on technologies and transhumanism with a transgender (non-binary) protagonist.

I do not believe that the novel should be read as the author's warning about gender transitioning by making it look monstrous, as much as she seems to be warning us against the possible impact of AI gone out of control. As suggested above, the concept of the monstrous is not necessarily and completely negative in Winterson; it implies the disruption of repressive orders and binaries. The author had celebrated self-making in her previous novels, and Ry seems to represent those positive attributes more than anything else. Through Ry, Winterson is able to foreground the promising, attractive, identity-affirming aspects of such self-making, possible only thanks to the new scientific and technological

²⁰ Al Shamsi 85.

²¹ For a more in-depth discussion of Winterson's problematic portrayal of transness in *Frankissstein*, see Ana Horvat. By contrast, Al Shamsi argues against Ry's association with the monster and provides a more positive (if less in-depth) reading of Ry's presence in the story; see Amal Al Shamsi, esp. 82–83. Despite the criticism I shared above, it is important to point out some of the aspects that strictly differentiate Ry from Dr. Frankenstein's monster. For example, unlike the creature, they are confident in their "hybrid" (F 83) body and embrace it and themselves, which cannot be said about Frankenstein's creature (the shame about its own monstrosity is in fact one of its defining characteristics). In addition, Ry is very actively involved in the process of their (self-)making, it is all done by choice, whereas the monster had no say in being created and even swore vengeance on the scientist who brought it to life. Finally, unlike the monster, who is symbolically nameless, Ry gave themselves a name; "[n]aming is power" (e.g. F 26), as is repeatedly asserted in the novel, and thus Ry gains a level of agency and control over their narrative. The above is by no means an exhaustive list of the positives nor the problematic aspects of Ry's portrayal. This discussion should serve as further demonstration of the ambiguity that permeates Winterson's novel and of its provocative, controversial nature.

²² McAvan.

²³ Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 27.

developments. It is one of the reasons the novel presents such an ambivalent picture. On the one hand, figures like Victor Stein, with their radical ideas and plans, seem to be mostly critiqued, their visions of the future portrayed as unsettling and dangerous. It would be very easy to unequivocally present these technological concerns in a negative light, had that been Winterson's intention. Yet, on the other hand, thanks to characters like Ry, it is possible to simultaneously recognize that such advancements cannot simply be cast as wholly negative and harmful – they have the potential to save lives, to allow people to live authentically as themselves, to transcend the physical limitations of our bodies, which has an incredible liberating potential, for example in the context of disability or gender identity. Despite their love for Victor Stein, Ry is fairly sceptical about the new future the scientist proposes and the idea of disposing of bodies altogether unsettles them. However, even they do not believe that the effects of bots on mental health and relationships will be necessarily and wholly negative (F 98). Whenever the novel foregrounds the destructive and dangerous futuristic ideas, it goes hand in hand with the promise they entail. The presence of Ry in the story allows for a more nuanced discussion about these issues. Winterson does not give an answer, because it is not simply black or white, good or bad. It is promising, it is also dangerous; most importantly, she stresses that we need to be responsible with the inventions we make.

But there is another reason for the association between Ry and the monster, and that is the marginalization they both experience as a result of their difference. In fact, Winterson is not the first author to have drawn the connection between Frankenstein's monster and transness.²⁴ Being a self-proclaimed "hybrid," Ry does not fit in the widely accepted binary categories and, as a result, they often experience misunderstanding, misnaming, harassment and other forms of bigotry. It could be said that in a way, Ry often gets treated *as if* they were a "monster" by the people around them. Anderson-Minshall points out that "in Shelley's novel the real monster is [...] the bigotry of small-minded townsfolk who become bent on wiping the 'abomination'—that they fear out of ignorance—from the earth."²⁵ This can be read as a parallel to the LGBTQ+ marginalization that Ry experiences in *Frankissstein*. Finally, as established above, Winterson seems to suggest that not only Ry, but all of us have an element of the monstrous in us, due to our flawed nature and the way we are becoming more and more tied with technologies. We could therefore conclude that Ry is not singled out to represent the creature.²⁶

²⁴ See for example Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1.3 (1994): 237–254. <<https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>> 26 Jul. 2022.

²⁵ Anderson-Minshall 40.

²⁶ All of these points are, however, not meant to deny the potentially problematic, offensive or harmful aspects of Winterson's portrayal of a trans character (many of which I do not have the space to address in this paper); this discussion has a lot of nuance and would deserve an entire chapter of its own. Since I am by no means in a position to speak on trans issues and the accuracy of their representation in media, I will not attempt to formulate a definite answer.

Yet again, despite its ambivalence, *Frankissstein* ultimately seems to be warning about the dangers of new technologies for humanity more than it highlights their merits. It can be argued that a more pessimistic take on the concerns of self-making than the earlier novels presented is to be seen already in *The Stone Gods*. The normalization of genetic fixing (i.e. “fixing” one’s body at a certain age and thus preventing it from getting any older) and other cosmetic procedures, which allow the people on Orbus to essentially choose or construct their “ideal” bodies, has caused the society to stagnate by preventing growth and change. Despite that, as McAvan points out, *The Stone Gods* was, for example, “much more positive about the possibilities of cyborg sexuality”²⁷ than *Frankissstein*, where Ron Lord’s sex-bots effectively encourage the dehumanization and objectification of women. In *Frankissstein*, “these emerging forms of self-making” are situated “in a lineage of the monstrous [...] that suggests the posthuman itself to be a kind of monstrosity.”²⁸ McAvan goes on to argue: “For Winterson, the contemporary monster is one bound up in technologies of self-making, an ambivalent process of both promise and danger that entangles us with monstrosity: ‘Frankenstein in the monster ... the monster in Frankenstein’” (F 130).²⁹ Stein’s future, in which humans would be able to choose their physical form and where “binaries [would] belong to our carbon-based past” (F 72), could indeed be in many ways liberating. At the same time, however, such a complete abolition of binaries would do away with not only the dichotomies like male/female and gay/straight, but also “such foundational binaries as [...] dead/alive, human/machine, human/animal [...]”³⁰ Doing away with physical bodies would mean a significant destabilization of identity, and with the erasure of these boundaries, a post-human future puts into question the very foundation of what it means to be human.

To sum up the previous discussion, in *Frankissstein*, Winterson uses fiction – in this case the well-known story of *Frankenstein* – and retells it differently, adding her own subversions, in order to point out some real and pressing concerns. Specifically, she explores the issues of artificial intelligence and other emergent scientific and technological developments and forces the readers to think about their potential implications in the real world, without providing a definitive answer. However, I would subscribe to Al Shamsi’s view that “[r]ather than foregrounding technological concerns” as such, Winterson “turn[s] to the human response to technology’s inflicted imbalance and devastation.”³¹ While such advancements in science have a great potential to make our lives better, allow us to overcome the limits of our bodies and liberate us from restrictive binaries, they also come with many dangers, even potentially threatening our very humanity. In the words of Emily McAvan: “For Winterson, the power of new technologies that re-shape bodies, minds and desires is one that is profoundly fraught. While there is the pleasure of self-determination (as for Ry), and the potential to transcend human limits, there

²⁷ McAvan.

²⁸ McAvan.

²⁹ McAvan.

³⁰ McAvan.

³¹ Al Shamsi 85.

is also the possibility of new forms of de-humanisation.”³² Despite being sympathetic to such desires to “reshape the self,” Winterson seems to be, “ultimately mostly pessimistic about the possible social consequences of the posthuman turn”;³³ at the same time, she remains essentially hopeful about our capacity to influence the future for the better, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 “The Human Dream”: Accepting the New Reality

Despite the aforementioned pessimism, Winterson appears to be more or less resigned to the emerging future.³⁴ *Frankissstein* can be read as one way of coming to terms with the “new reality” of a world co-inhabited by humans and AI, which takes us back to the original question of the relationship between truth, reality and fictionality. The future of technological advancements is coming whether we want it or not: “The march of the machines is now and forever. The box has been opened. What we invent we cannot uninvent. The world is changing” (F 135). Winterson’s novel addresses this reality and forces the readers to seriously consider the concerns it highlights. “In reviving a familiar story and embedding it with grimly accepted social realities, such as [...] AI futures,” Al Shamsi aptly observes, the writer compels “the reader out of their numbness to reflect on how the future or its retellings can be reclaimed.”³⁵

If Winterson’s novel presents this “new reality” as possibly constraining, Emily McAvan argues that its purpose is to show how “modern subjectivity in itself has become defined by hybridity, a mixing between human and non-human elements that problematises many of the boundaries of selfhood that Enlightenment humanism valourised for so long.”³⁶ The Frankensteinian monster is itself a hybrid, stitched together from different (human and non-human) parts. To circle back to McAvan’s argument which I quoted earlier, Winterson suggests that by being increasingly bound up with technology, we too might be becoming, in a sense, “monstrous,” with both the promising and threatening implications it entails.³⁷ That ties back to the earlier discussion about the distinction between the monster and the maker and the fundamentally flawed nature of human beings. Most importantly, as McAvan points out, “the monsters are not just the ones with bolts in their necks or sex bots or hormone injections in their veins—they are, now and always have been, all of us.”³⁸ As discussed above, monstrosity itself is a greatly ambivalent term; it is not wholly negative nor necessarily liberating – and it has the potential to be either. Viewed in this light, not only are all the characters monstrous, but they are all also human.

That suggests the question of what it even means to be human. What is it that differentiates us from machines, animals and other non-human entities? Different answers to this question are proposed

³² McAvan.

³³ McAvan.

³⁴ McAvan.

³⁵ Al Shamsi 77

³⁶ McAvan.

³⁷ McAvan.

³⁸ McAvan.

throughout the novel but (as with all the other concerns it addresses) in the end no definite answer is given. Some characters suggest it is the capacity to love, even though Victor Stein disagrees, proposing instead that “love is not exclusively human – the higher animals demonstrate it – and more crucially we are instructed that God is Love. Allah is Love. God and Allah are not human. Love as the highest value is not an anthropomorphic principle” (F 160). Other characters argue it might be psychological suffering that “is something of the mark of the soul” – after all, “[m]achines do not suffer” (F 68). However, it seems rather depressing, not to mention dangerous and potentially self-destructive, to define our identity by suffering alone. Another suggestion relates to our bodies. To Victor Stein, the body might be “an obstacle to overcome,” merely a “life support system for the brain” (F 184), and according to him, “[t]o be free from the body completes the human dream” (F 296). Winterson’s Percy Shelley believes that “the body is not the truth of what we are” (F 15). On the other hand, Ry expresses the sentiment that “[w]e are our bodies” (F 148); i.e. bodies in large part constitute our sense of identity. In the end, however, it is made fairly clear that the human experience transcends the physical body. Two parallel scenes appear, where, after getting their hearts broken by the loss of their respective lovers, Mary and later on Ry talk about the human heart as an organ, in a “cold,” scientific way. These segments imply that such realistic, rationalistic discourses do not encapsulate what the heart represents for us – heartbreak, subjectivity, feeling, love. While our biology is an important part of us, at the end of the day we are more than the sum of our organs and bodily functions. This ties back to Winterson’s belief, discussed in chapter two, that metaphorical language – and art in general – is better suited for the expression of the truth of human experience than rationalistic discourses. Thus, imagination and the capacity to create art are proposed as that which might differentiate us from other life-forms, as staples of our humanity.

Indeed, the future Winterson ponders in the novel is not only the future of humanity, but also literature. As the author claims in an interview with Andermahr, from which I quoted in the previous chapter, art is an important reminder of our humanity, especially in a high-tech world where “science and the machine claim to do everything for us.”³⁹ This fundamental role of art (or literature specifically) can be traced in all the previous books. Going back to Elena Sheppard’s comment about *Frankissstein* being Winterson’s “monster,” “the stitched together body of multiple literary works,” this also makes the novel “an all-encompassing consciousness of literary culture.”⁴⁰ In Sheppard’s words: “While her characters seek eternal existence, Winterson’s writing suggests that that has already been found in literature. [...] Words are not trapped within a lifespan of human years: they exist forever just as they were written down.”⁴¹ Again, as already demonstrated in the chapter discussing *The Stone Gods*, literature is established as something which connects us to our past, while at the same time extending

³⁹ Jeanette Winterson, qtd. in Sonya Andermahr, *Jeanette Winterson* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 126.

⁴⁰ Sheppard.

⁴¹ Sheppard.

into the future, and which can thus help us preserve the link to our humanity. Additionally, the past is crucial for our present and future in that it represents a record of our past mistakes and as such, a potential learning opportunity. Mary herself experiences this as she realizes that “[i]n the progress of my story I am educating my monster. My monster is educating me” (F 127). With this, we come to another reason for Winterson’s choice to retell the 1818 novel and situate its central themes into the modern age.

In the source material, Dr. Frankenstein creates his monster and subsequently abandons any responsibility for it, which leads to the creature going on a killing spree, leaving chaos and destruction in its wake. As mentioned earlier, Winterson’s book ends before Victor Stein’s experiment comes to fruition, so the ending is left essentially open, just as the future itself is still open. This implies the hope that perhaps, the new future need not end in tragedy like it did in Frankenstein’s case. In the interview cited earlier in the chapter, Winterson admits that she is indeed hopeful about the future: “I’m always optimistic [...]. I suppose my faith is always in young people to get it right and to take over where my generation have made such a terrible mess.”⁴² At one point in the book, Mary Shelley expresses the belief that the desire to leave something behind, in the form of a work of literature in this context, is not caused by mere vanity, but rather hope: “Hope that one day there will be a human society that is just” (F 9) or, in the words of Billie from *The Stone Gods*, “[a] human society that wasn’t just disgust” (SG 242). As Winterson has been showing us throughout her career, the hope that people can be better, do better, perhaps even learn, is deeply ingrained in literature which serves as a vital link to our past, a caution about the future, and a reminder of our humanity.

⁴² Winterson, interview.

5 CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored Jeanette Winterson's use of stories and storytelling, with a particular emphasis on how the author represents the complex relationship between "fiction" and "truth." The analyses of *Sexing the Cherry*, *The Stone Gods* and *Frankissstein*, read alongside some of Winterson's other works, have revealed a multi-layered picture. First of all, it is important to point out that the author makes a distinction between "the real" and "the true," where the former generally refers to the empirical reality, the outside world that we tend to mediate by discourses of realism and rationalism, and the latter can be understood as that which is authentic, genuine, even meaningful on a deep, largely subjective level. Winterson's writing suggests that literary fiction, or art in general, has the capacity to convey truths that often elude reason or ordinary language; narratives can serve to illuminate the "empty space," i.e. that which cannot be put into words. As her characters so often admit, there are certain aspects of life and kinds of knowledge that defy words and which we "cannot say, except in the form of a story" (F 67).

Fiction is in many ways crucial in relation to reality, as it has the ability to not only address but also influence the outside world. Canonical stories like fairy tales help socialize children by teaching them about communal and cultural expectations, gender roles, and so on. Yet, Winterson uses fiction to comment on the restrictive effects of such narratives and challenge dominant discourses. The biases ingrained in these conventional instructive and cautionary tales are exposed through juxtaposition with Winterson's own fantastical stories, as can be seen particularly in *Sexing the Cherry*. Oppression and marginalization on the basis of gender or sex is also an important topic the author explores, particularly in *Frankissstein*. Additionally, Winterson addresses topical issues like humanity's obsessive pursuit of progress and environmental destruction, as seen in *The Stone Gods*, or concerns induced by new technologies, as in *Frankissstein*. She foregrounds them by using an iterative narrative structure and by subverting well-known tales, thereby blurring the lines between reality and the story. This highlights the ability of fiction to affect and address real-world concerns in a meaningful, productive way – to generate discussions on topical issues and directly influence the real world, to serve as vehicles of change.

Fiction can open up new worlds and allow one to at least momentarily escape from the established order and the socially acceptable conventions. It creates space for alternative experiences and ways of being that do not fit within the dominant order, spaces where one may freely construct and explore one's identity and authentically, truthfully be oneself. Stories also allow us to deal with reality – they can provide comfort and through them, we are able to give our lives a sense of meaning and even find solutions to real-life problems. In order to fulfil that function, Winterson stresses that we must not cut fiction off from the real-world contexts it addresses, lest it become mere unproductive escapism; a point of interaction between the fantastical and the real is always very important.

The author also critiques historiography, or more specifically our tendency to take history as absolute, as a repository of facts and a truth that casts stories off as "mere" fiction. However, according

to Winterson, both of these modes are equally “invented.” This forces the readers to question historiography and other received, canonized “tales” that we tend to take for granted by exposing them as cultural and social constructs that rely on conventions rather than any inherent truth-telling qualities. Despite this criticism, Winterson also insists on the importance of keeping in touch with the past. Her treatment of history represents a critique of the discourses that often surround the past and our tendency to take it as fixed, objective and incontestable. Attempting to fix its “truth” in a place leads to misrepresentation; to Winterson, history is often “a means of denying the past,” a refusal “to recognise its integrity” (O 119). Truth, just like history itself, is an unfinished process.

As the previous chapters have highlighted, in her narratives Winterson foregrounds and critiques how we are so obsessed with what is “real” that we tend to overlook what is “true.” As she advises in *Sexing the Cherry*: “Stop worrying about what is ‘real’ and find out what is relevant” (S x). The things we tend to take without question as given or “true” – be it gender and sexual binaries, historical records, or realistic, scientific discourses – are revealed as socially, culturally or linguistically determined fabrications. Winterson puts more emphasis on relevance, authenticity and genuineness, which can be found in art in general or literary fiction in particular. As the author suggests in her writings, the traditional ways of thinking about and recording “reality” are reductive because they leave no space for feeling, passion, ambiguity – i.e. the deeper, subjective “truths” about our lives and experiences. She stresses the importance of fiction and its capacity to convey these “truths” and felt knowledge in many ways more efficiently than scientific or rationalistic discourses. Furthermore, literature represents a vital link to the past, and with it, a learning opportunity and a hope for the future.

In addition, the dividing lines between fiction and reality are constantly being questioned in Winterson’s novels, for instance by the inclusion of fantastical elements or made-up characters in historical settings, as can be seen in *Sexing the Cherry*. The later novels take this premise even further: in *The Stone Gods*, the protagonist writes a manuscript which, on some level, represents the novel itself, and in *Frankissstein*, reality and story blend on the page when book characters appear in the world of their author. As the distinction between the two is obscured, reality and story are put on the same level of credibility and relevance, which stresses the power we have in “inventing” – shaping, influencing – the reality we live in, and most of all the capacity of literature to do so. A point Mara Reisman makes about *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* can be applied to Winterson’s work in general: “One of the revolutionary aspects of Winterson’s novel is how reality affects fantasy, and because fantasy in turn influences culture, this reciprocally influential relationship suggests that ‘anything is possible’ not only in the sphere of enchantment but also in reality.”¹ In *Frankissstein*, the author also emphasizes the responsibility associated with our ability to shape our present and future. Finally, Winterson presents the creation and communication of fiction as an act of love, accenting its transgressive power. She

¹ Mara Reisman, “Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Rocky Mountain Review* 65.1 (2011): 33, *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289361>> 14 Apr. 2022.

proposes that the affect created in the reader by the text has the capacity to open new paradigms of thinking and behaviour where intervention in the normative order can occur. Jeanette Winterson's imaginative prose emanates the love of language and literature, which transfers to the reader, making them fall in love with the world she invents on the pages and prompting them to engage actively with her texts. Far from passively criticising established social structures, received discourses and stereotyped relations, the author imbues her novels with "an energetic core of hope" (O xiii). Her writing calls to the writer and storyteller in all of us, foregrounding the creative power we have in shaping our identity and life story and, on a larger scale, our present and future – and the transgressive, transformative power of art in its centre.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Jeanette Winterson:

- Winterson, Jeanette. *Frankissstein: A Love Story*. London: Vintage, 2019. Kindle.
- . *Lighthousekeeping*. London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2004.
- . *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, 2014.
- . *Sexing the Cherry*. London: Vintage, 2014.
- . *The Passion*. New York: Grove Press, 1988.
- . *The Stone Gods*. London: Penguin Books, 2008.
- . *Weight*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Other works cited:

- Al Shamsi, Amal. "Reimagining *Frankenstein*: Otherness, Responsibility, and Visions of Future Technologies in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*." *Screen Bodies* 6.2 (2021): 76–86. <doi.org/10.3167/screen.2021.060206> 14 Jul. 2022.
- Andermahr, Sonya. *Jeanette Winterson*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Anderson-Minshall, Jacob. "Sex Bots and Monsters." *Advocate* 1106 (Dec. 2019): 40. *EBSCOhost*, <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=a9h&AN=139697740&lang=cs&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> 26 Jul. 2022.
- Ankersmit, Frank. "Truth in History and Literature." *Narrative* 18.1 (2010): 29–50. *JSTOR*, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25609383>> 28 Jul. 2022.
- Asensio Aróstegui, María del Mar. "History As a Discourse in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*: The Politics of Alterity." *Journal of English Studies* 2 (May 2000): 7–18. <<https://doi.org/10.18172/jes.54>> 21 Jun. 2022.
- Baghramian, Maria, and J. Adam Carter. "Relativism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Spring 2022 Edition. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/relativism/>>. Accessed 29 Jul. 2022.
- Burns, Christy L. "Fantastic Language: Jeanette Winterson's Recovery of the Postmodern Word." *Contemporary Literature* 37.2 (1996): 278. <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1208876>> 23 Jun. 2022.
- Currie, Mark. *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Davies, Ben, and Jana Funke, eds. *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture*. Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. <<https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230307087>>.
- Dictionary.com*. "TERF." <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/terf>>. Accessed 1 Aug. 2022.
- Donne, John. *The Collected Poems of John Donne*. Edited by Roy Booth. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2002.
- Ellam, Julie. *Love in Jeanette Winterson's Novels*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.
- Eşberk, Hatice. "History Rewritten in a Postmodern Novel: Opposed Views on History in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 4.4 (Jul. 2015): 268–72. <<https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.4n.4p.268>> 21 Jun. 2022.

- Fernández Sánchez, José Francisco. "Play and (Hi)Story in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*." *Atlantis* 18.1/2 (1996): 95–104. *JSTOR*, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41054816>> 22 Jan. 2021.
- French, Jana L. "'I'm Telling You Stories.... Trust Me': Gender, Desire, and Identity in Jeanette Winterson's Historical Fantasies." *Source: Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10.3 (1999): 231–52. *JSTOR*, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308390>> 22 Jan. 2021.
- Glanzberg, Michael. "Truth." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2021 Edition. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/truth/>>. Accessed 27 Jul. 2022.
- Halberstam, Judith (Jack). *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Holmes, Richard. *Wellington: The Iron Duke*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Horvat, Ana. "'Trans Is Hot Right Now': On Cisgender Writers and Trans Characters in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* and Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*." *Gender Forum* 79 (2021): 79–96. <<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/trans-is-hot-right-now-on-cisgender-writers/docview/2582440899/se-2>> 14 Jul. 2022
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.
- Hutchison, Emma. "Unsettling Stories: Jeanette Winterson and the Cultivation of Political Contingency." *Global Society* 24.3 (Jul. 2010): 351–68. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2010.485561>> 23 Jun. 2022.
- Johns-Putra, Adeline, et al, eds. *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.
- Kroon, Fred, and Alberto Voltolini. "Fiction." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Winter 2019 Edition. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/fiction/>>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2022.
- Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Levenson, Michael, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- McAvan, Emily. "Frankenstein Redux: Posthuman Monsters in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*." *M/C Journal* 24.5 (Oct. 2021). <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2843>> 27 Apr. 2022.
- Onega, Susana. *Jeanette Winterson*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006.
- Preda, Alina. "Crossing the Boundaries between Modernist and Postmodernist Poetics: The Critical Reception of Jeanette Winterson's Novels." *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 5.2 (Dec. 2019): 22–39. <<https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcest.2019.8.02>> 21 Jun. 2022.
- Reisman, Mara. "Integrating Fantasy and Reality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*." *Source: Rocky Mountain Review* 65.1 (2011): 11–35. *JSTOR*, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289361>> 14 Apr. 2022.
- Sheppard, Elena. "Reanimating 'Frankenstein': On Jeanette Winterson's 'Frankissstein'." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 23 Oct. 2021. <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/reanimating-frankenstein-on-jeanette-wintersons-frankissstein/>> 14 Jul. 2022.
- Sim, Stuart, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

- Stryker, Susan. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1.3 (1994): 237–54. <<https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>> 26 Jul. 2022.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Fiction." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 17 Jan. 2019. <<https://www.britannica.com/art/fiction-literature>> 28 Jul. 2022.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- Wicks, Robert. "Nietzsche's Life and Works." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2021 Edition. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/nietzsche-life-works/>>. Accessed 11 July 2022.
- Winterson, Jeanette. "I didn't see this coming." Interview by Johanna Thomas-Corr. *The Guardian*, 22 Dec. 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/22/jeanette-winterson-frankenstein-interview>>. Accessed 25 Jul. 2022.
- Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.