

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