



FACULTY OF ARTS  
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report on B. A. Thesis

**Fiction and Truth in Jeanette Winterson's Novels**

by Eliška Zunová

Jeanette Winterson has been recognized as one of the most prolific British novelists of the last thirty years and a relentless critic of societies defined by blind adherence to received traditions and moral codes. Yet, she has also used her writings to anatomize the self-destructive and self-preservative mechanisms of human nature, and to highlight the remedial power of art in general and literary fiction in particular. It is with emphasis on the latter two aspects of the novelist's work that the present thesis explores the oeuvre. Over the space of three main chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion, it offers a comprehensive account of Winterson's thematic range and narrative techniques, while pointing to the limits of empirical knowledge and language as used in communication, as well as highlighting the creative and epistemological possibilities of narration and imagination.

The central thesis is that "truth" and "fiction" – two concepts systematically foregrounded and problematized by Winterson – do not stand in clear-cut opposition but rather coexist in a productive tension. Ms Zunová claims that this tension is constitutive not only in terms of the author's works, in which it often figures as a palpable yet unfounded clash between "imagination" and "reality", but in the art of storytelling as such.

Through the discussion of three major works from three different stages of the novelist's career, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), *The Stone Gods* (2007), and *Frankissstein* (2019), the thesis traces the essential binary of "truth" and "fiction" throughout Winterson's work up to now. By way of focussing on different narrative approaches and techniques (adaptation, parody, iteration, cyclicity, etc.) Ms Zunová brings attention to the thin dividing line between fact and fabrication in Winterson's texts. She determines that the novelist eludes standard concepts of narrative continuity and closure for two closely related reasons: to free storytelling imagination from its association with canonical narratives and their sets of morals and "truths", and to offer caustic commentary on various social injustices and common notions of progress and normalcy. This interpretative arc culminates in Chapter Four, with the analysis of Winterson's most controversial and "visionary" work to date, *Frankissstein*, which provides glimpses of a



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doomed or, alternately, better future marked by the humanity's growing dependence on technology. As it manifests the liberating as well as potentially dehumanizing effects of self-creation enhanced by AI technologies and bioengineering, the novel remains intentionally but problematically unresolved on issues such as rights to personal identity and commodification of gender and other minorities. Ms Zunová enhances the value of her own observations by including references to various critical voices, agreeing with some and polemicizing with others. In this, as in many other respects, she demonstrates her capacity to combine meticulous research with original, critical thinking.

The thesis is clearly structured and written in excellent English. The style is lucid and consistent and great attention has been paid to the formatting of references in the footnotes and bibliography. In the process of the thesis' gestation, Ms Zunová proved to be a focussed, independent thinker, yet she was always willing to incorporate suggestions and able come up with new and improved versions of the individual chapters. As the thesis clearly shows, her knowledge of Winterson's oeuvre is extraordinary and she supports her arguments with examples from many of the author's works, while drawing on a wealth of relevantly chosen secondary sources. Apart from Wintersonian scholarship, these recruit from various other fields, including historiography (White), narratology (Hutchinson) and aesthetics and philosophy of literature (Lamarque and Olsen). Ms Zunová's incorporation of Hayden White's theory in her discussion of Winterson's creative approach to historical facts and narratives (p. 13), and the reference to Nietzsche's Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy in a passage that explores Winterson's ideas of storytelling as both subversive and restorative (p. 31) are just two examples of the candidate's skilful and intelligent integration of sources.

While this is an ambitious project that extends the requirements of a B. A. thesis in terms of both its scope and methodology, Ms Zunová's dedication to her chosen topic and her exemplary application during the research phase and composition have yielded a successful and valuable study.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it "excellent"/1.

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