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**ÚSTAV ANGLONONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR**

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**Jeanette Winterson`s Postmodern Historical Novels:**

***Sexing the Cherry and The Passion as Historiographic Metafictions***

**Postmoderní historický román Jeanette Wintersonové:**

**„Jak naštěpit třešeň” a „Vášeň” jako historiografické metafikce**

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## **Abstract**

Nineteenth and early twentieth century theorists believed that history was based on actual facts traced by written evidence which justified those facts' apparent objectivity. Later theorists, under the influence of the poststructuralists' ideas of textuality of reality, doubted those concepts assuming that the historical data cannot be perceived objectively. This led to the further assumption that history is a construct, a discourse created by the historian who narrates it to the others. Consequently, in the Postmodern understanding, history is a subjective rather than an objective concept.

Under those fairly new concepts the historical novels evolve into another form, a new kind of "fictional history". According to Linda Hutcheon, this form of Postmodern historical novel can be called *historiographic metafiction*. She uses that term to describe fiction which is both metafictional and historical: it is a specific form of metafiction that "draws attention to its status as an artefact" in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. Those fictions "situate [themselves] within historical discourse" while still claiming to be fictitious. Thus, they problematize the very distinction between history and fiction by showing the parallels between writing literature and writing history, suggesting that both are acts of construction that do not represent reality but reinvent it from subjective point of view.

Jeanette Winterson is usually named among those whose works can be called historiographic metafiction. Both Winterson's early novels *Sexing the Cherry* and *The Passion* fit Hutcheon's category by problematizing history in some similar ways. Firstly, they undermine "grand narratives" by narrating history from subjective perspectives; they problematize linearity of time and chronology. Secondly, both novels elevate the marginalized female versions of historic events. And lastly, they mix mystery and reality. Therefore, the aim of this work is to read two novels by Jeanette Winterson as examples of historiographic metafiction. The general features of this form will be tested on the specific cases with regard to their treatment of genre and history, the main focus is to be at the mutual interplay between theory and literary practice.

## **Abstrakt**

V 19. a na začátku 20. století se literární teoretici domnívali, že historie jako vědecká reflexe historických události je založena na skutečných faktech, jejichž existence může být potvrzena písemnými důkazy. Pod vlivem poststrukturalismu a jeho idejí o textualitě reality však pozdější teoretici začali tyto pojmy zpochybňovat, a poprvé se objevily myšlenky o tom, že tyto písemné důkazy nemohou být vnímané objektivně. Tyto myšlenky se promítly do dalšího předpokladu, že historie je konstrukce - diskurz vytvořený dějepiscem, který „předává“ historická fakta ostatním. Proto je z pohledu postmodernismu historie spíš subjektivní, než objektivní pojem.

Pod vlivem těchto myšlenek se historické romány vyvinuly v novou formu, v nový typ „fiktivní historie“. Linda Hutcheonová tuto novou formu postmoderního historického románu nazývá historiografickou metafikcí. Hutcheonová používá tento výraz pro popis fikce, která je historická a zároveň metafikční: jde o specifickou formu metafikce, která „poukazuje na svůj status jakožto artefakt“, a tak vyvolává otázky na vztah mezi fikcí a realitou. Takové fikce „se zařazují do historického diskurzu“, přičemž zároveň tvrdí, že jsou fiktivní. Zpochybňují odlišnost historie a fikce tím, že poukazují na společné prvky psaní literárních děl a historických záznamů; mají přitom za to, že obě tyto činnosti jsou v podstatě tvorbou diskurzů, které nepřestavují realitu, ale tuto realitu subjektivně konstruují.

Jeanette Wintersonová patří mezi autory, jejichž díla se často řadí mezi historiografické metafikce. Její dva romány, „Jak naštěpit třešeň“ a „Vášeň“, patří do této kategorie, neboť oba pojem historie podobným způsobem problematizují. Jednak tím, že vyvracejí pojetí „velkovyprávění“, protože historii subjektivně „převyprávějí“, čímž mj. problematizují časovou i dějovou posloupnost. A jednak tím, že oba romány objevují marginalizované ženské pohledy na historické události. Vposledku tak oba romány míchají realitu s fantazií. Cílem této práce je analyzovat dva romány Jeanette Wintersonové jako příklady historiografické metafikce. Hlavní prvky této literární formy budou prozkoumány na konkrétních příkladech se zaměřením na to, jak je v obou románech zacházeno se vztahem mezi historií a žánrem. Hlavní důraz přitom bude kladen na vzájemnou propojenost literární teorie a praxe.

**Key words**

postmodernism, historical novels, British literature, Jeanette Winterson, historiographic  
metafiction

**Klíčová slova**

postmodernismus, historické romány, britská literatura, Jeanette Wintersonová, historiografická  
metafikce

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## Chapter I. Introduction.

The first encounter of Jeanette Winterson's fiction can be an overwhelming experience. The bizarre mixture of real historical epochs, magical places and improbable people in her novels immediately destroy a reader's expectations. Winterson's experimentalism starts from the very first pages and is present throughout the whole work: the characters are peculiar and grotesque, the narration is fragmented and disrupted, the physical pages of the novel contain drawn pictures and different fonts. All of this makes it difficult for reader to identify her works as belonging to any particular genre of fiction.

When it comes to criticism, two main theoretical approaches to Winterson's fiction are those originating from feminism or from discourses of Postmodernism.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the genre of Winterson's works, the latter approach seems to be valuable for the present discussion. Jeanette Winterson is usually seen as a member of a group of authors (together with Salman Rushdie and Martin Amis, for example)<sup>2</sup> whose works are seen to represent the aesthetics of Postmodernism. Her works touch upon the subject of history and metatextuality, they are fragmented, self-reflexive, and full of irony and intertextuality. All of this leads to the classification of some of her works as examples of historiographic metafiction.

The term historiographic metafiction, which is closely associated with Postmodernism and historical fiction, was introduced by theorist Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s. That relatively recent theory speaks to a complex interdependence between literary and historical writings. Hutcheon wrote several works concerning the topic and the most prominent one was her book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. In order to detect the main features of that complex theory, the first part of the following thesis is devoted to the origins of the genre of historiographic metafiction. The development of thought about historical and fictional writing is traced through its main representatives (Leopold von Ranke, Sir Walter Scott, György

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<sup>1</sup> Sonya Andermahr, "Introduction: Winterson and her Critics", *Jeanette Winterson, A Contemporary Critical Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2007) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Andermahr, 5.

Lukács, and Hayden White), together with some concluding remarks on Hutcheon`s own theory.

The second part of this thesis is concerned with the examples of that remarkable genre in the oeuvre of Jeanette Winterson. That chapter is devoted to two of her novels – *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*. The choice of the novels is not arbitrary; not only were they published in close temporal proximity; they are also the ones which justly fit the category of historiographic metafiction. Both the setting in the historical epoch and the range of character who bear some similar features lend themselves to a comparison of those novels side by side. Each of the three subchapters of the present thesis (“Undermining History”, “Women`s Histories” and “Facts and Fantasies”) is devoted to one prominent feature of the genre and each of the novels is examined with regard to that feature and treatment within the genre. The two main chapters are followed by a short concluding chapter which summarizes these features of the novels and deduces the relationship between the novels and the genre of historiographic metafiction.

## Chapter II. Origins of the Genre of Historiographic Metafiction

### 1. Leopold von Ranke and Historicism

The creator of the term “historiographic metafiction”, Linda Hutcheon, in her book *A Poetics of the Postmodernism*, suggests that today’s division between history and literature as separate branches of study came with the ideas of Leopold von Ranke and his empiricist, archival-research based notion of historical writing.<sup>3</sup> It is usually suggested<sup>4</sup> that Ranke was charmed by Walter Scott’s descriptions of the chivalrous epoch in his novels and he turned to actual medieval sources to delve into the spirit of the era. After having done so, the Prussian historian was startled by the fact that Scott’s depictions significantly differed from the medieval life as it was recorded by the eye-witnesses, and he realized how much of Walter Scott’s novels were actually the writer’s imagination.

Thus, being a historian, he made the decision to restrict himself to writing only about the facts that have written evidence of their existence. In the methodological appendix of one of his books he “rejected any attempt to write history on the basis of other than primary sources”<sup>5</sup> and went as far as to accuse some of the earlier historical accounts of “failing totally to examine the evidence critically”.<sup>6</sup> He developed a method of source research, introducing the concept of primary sources, and that method was made a standard for professional historiography later on.<sup>7</sup> Ranke’s method of treating the historical data from particular facts to their synthesis and generalization<sup>8</sup> gained a lot of followers, and, as a science, Ranke’s realist historiography was largely popularized later on. He himself was a meticulous researcher and had a talent for communication of the facts, even though he acknowledged that his language

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism : history, theory, fiction*, (London : Routledge, 1995) 105.

<sup>4</sup> Hayden White, *Metaistorija: istoričeskoje voobraženije v Jevrope XIX veka*, trans. Je. G. Trubina, V. V. Charitonova, (Jekaterinburg: Izdatel’stvo Ural’skogo universiteta, 2002) 195.

<sup>5</sup> Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge (2nd Edition)*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005) 24.

<sup>6</sup> Iggers, 24.

<sup>7</sup> White 195.

<sup>8</sup> White 198.

might be “dry, ... colourless and tiresome” – unlike the vivid descriptions of Sir Walter Scott.<sup>9</sup>

Ranke stressed two concepts: *subjectivity* and *critical research*. He felt that historiography needed to gain the status of a science; it needed to be practiced by professionally trained historians;<sup>10</sup> and it needed to gain authority based on something other than “the authority of subjective opinion.”<sup>11</sup> So he persisted with the idea that professional historiographers should avoid any “value judgment”<sup>12</sup> while creating their historical accounts. This led to a paradox: for Ranke, history needed to be written objectively by the specialists but, at the same time, it needed to be written for the general public – essentially, to be both a scientific discourse and a source for popular culture.<sup>13</sup> He saw the interest in describing the individual events in all their peculiarity and originality, yet he also felt the necessity to establish a universal reasoning for the chains of events. Hence, he thought that the best way to represent history is through *the narrativization of historical process*, meaning that the professional historians compose the narrative accounts of historical events, which are the written representations of the processes in society.<sup>14</sup> The events included into the narration were distinguished by the fact that they were created by a human agent, and the historical field was seen as a series of conflicts which needed to end in some kind of resolution. Thus, the author of the historical account needed to uphold sympathy for all the sides of the conflict in the name of objectivity. And it was also necessary to create some kind of archetype myth or structure to shape that narration.<sup>15</sup>

## **2. Sir Walter Scott and the Birth of the Historical Novel**

However, roughly that same period of early nineteenth century is the time when

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<sup>9</sup> While 196.

<sup>10</sup> Iggers, 25.

<sup>11</sup> White 198.

<sup>12</sup> Iggers, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Iggers, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Doran, *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 231.

<sup>15</sup> White, 198-199.

previously mentioned Sir Walter Scott created his novels, and in connection with the Scottish writer and his works, roughly the same period is thought to mark the birth of the Historical Novel – the genre which so deeply appalled the historian Leopold Von Ranke. The novel *Waverley* and the following “fictitious narratives, intended to illustrate the manners of Scotland” are considered nowadays as a starting point in the form of the ‘historical novel’.<sup>16</sup> It is fair to mention that the discussion about the relationship between the novel and history was present throughout the whole nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> This is partially connected with the fact that the novels of Walter Scott were introduced to a wide audience and were widely successful.<sup>18</sup> However, the form was strongly criticized by contemporary critics: the fact that the fictitious and factual elements of narration were not clearly distinguished was thought to be the main flaw of the genre. Surprisingly, another dimension of criticism originated in the fact that, on the other hand, the form was saturated with distinguished “factual truths” which differentiated the genre from other works of art by “destroying the unity” of it.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of all the criticism, the genre started to gain admirers, as some of the critics, for example, Alessandro Manzoni, felt that the inconsistency, the mixing of fact and fiction “may be innate to this mode of writing”<sup>20</sup>. He suggested that the reader, when confronting a text labelled ‘historical novel’, is fully aware that the text is partially invented and only partially true to historical fact – the reader acknowledges the complexity of the form and its attempts to balance “history and story”.<sup>21</sup> The belief that the historical novel is “inherently contradictory”<sup>22</sup> is significant for the understanding of the Postmodern forms of the historical novel.

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<sup>16</sup> Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2010) 17.

<sup>17</sup> Groot, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Groot, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Groot, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Groot, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Groot, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Groot, 31.

### 3. György Lukács and History as Mass Experience

The very fact of historical incorrectness in Scott's historical novel, which can be seen as the impulse for the creation of Rankean historicism<sup>23</sup>, was perceived about a century later as one of the key and significant elements of the genre itself. Marxist literary theorist György Lukács is usually regarded as one of the most influential literary critics who greatly contributed to the analysis of the genre.<sup>24</sup>

Firstly, in very general terms, György Lukács suggested that, before the Enlightenment, history was perceived as something static. "History" was understood as "unchanging and reified,"<sup>25</sup> without the dynamic sense of constant *process* and change.<sup>26</sup> It was not even perceived as "concrete precondition of the present."<sup>27</sup> Lukács suggested that the most problematic aspect was that human nature was also seen as something unchangeable and static, thus, history was just a shifting of scene around the same human character.<sup>28</sup> He suggested that, before Scott, historical works were "mere costumery."<sup>29</sup> He states that "the so-called historical novels of the seventeenth century ... are historical only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume."<sup>30</sup> Lukács admits that novels with historical themes were not unusual even before Sir Walter Scott,<sup>31</sup> but it can be argued that before the immense success of Scott's works, "history" did not exist "in a way that normal people might understand"<sup>32</sup> or relate to. György Lukács sees Scott's major contribution in his attempt to "[understand]... individuals historically",<sup>33</sup> by focusing on the individuals within history rather than mere historical details. Hence, for Lukács, the historical novel is a depiction of life

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<sup>23</sup> Hutcheon, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Groot, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Groot, 25.

<sup>26</sup> György Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976) 18.

<sup>27</sup> Groot, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Lukács, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Groot, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Lukács, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Lukács 15.

<sup>32</sup> Groot, 25

<sup>33</sup> Groot, 24.

through representative individuals whose lives are formed by social forces.<sup>34</sup>

György Lukács states that the Napoleonic wars and all the turmoil of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century “made history a *mass experience*”<sup>35</sup>, meaning that an interest in history might have emerged from nationalism; from the interest that was based on the nationalistic feeling that some things are “historically preconditioned” so that “there *is* such thing as history,”<sup>36</sup> a national *mass* history. The feeling that the past is closely connected with contemporary events is highly important, as it supported the idea that history influences not only the life of the whole society, but the life of every individual, and therefore, every individual is a part of the historical process.<sup>37</sup> It is important that the historical form of the novel genre goes further than simply depicting the factual historical data, but rather “gives insight into the mind of a member of past society” and, thus, arouses empathy and “a sense of [*continuous historical*] *process*”<sup>38</sup> in the audience. Hence, it was assumed that the novelists possess the ability to “generalize ... and communicate something more profound than the historian, confined to individual incident”.<sup>39</sup>

Going further with regard to individuals and individual historical process, Lukács suggested that Hegelian philosophy discovers the new concepts of seeing “man as a product of himself and his own activity in history,”<sup>40</sup> where “history itself is a bearer and realizer of human [actions and] progress.”<sup>41</sup> Lukács added that human progress develops from conflict of social forces, which brought about “awareness of the significant role of historical interpretation in the contemporary struggle.”<sup>42</sup> From that point of view, the works of Sir Walter Scott had an enormous importance, as they were innovative in the sense that the main character of the novel

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<sup>34</sup> Perry Anderson, “From Progress to Catastrophe: Perry Anderson on the historical novel”, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 33 No. 15 · 28 July 2011, 24-28, full text available at < <http://www.lrb.co.uk/> >.

<sup>35</sup> Lukács 20.

<sup>36</sup> Lukács 22.

<sup>37</sup> Lukács 20.

<sup>38</sup> Groot 25-27, italics mine.

<sup>39</sup> Groot 18.

<sup>40</sup> Lukács 27.

<sup>41</sup> Lukács 25.

<sup>42</sup> Lukács 25-26.

is a recognizable human who is put into the framework of a certain historical epoch.<sup>43</sup> It is important here that the character is definitely recognizable and has links with the contemporary reader while, at the same time, the amount of historical detail lets the author “communicate as much as is necessary of the past”.<sup>44</sup> As György Lukács puts it,

[w]hat matters therefore in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality.<sup>45</sup>

So, according to Lukács, the historical novel is not a “retelling” of historical events; it works to make the reader think about the reasons and motives for the actions of people in a certain historical epoch, who, with those very actions, contributed to the creation of historical reality. The “classic” historical novel, starting with *Waverley*, “is an affirmation of human progress, in and through the conflicts that divide societies and the individuals within them.”<sup>46</sup> That raises an important point that this kind of historical fiction undermines the concept of one true unified history and opens ways of seeing history from different, even subjective perspectives.<sup>47</sup>

#### **4. Hayden White and Metahistory**

Linda Hutcheon states in her book *A Poetics of the Postmodernism* that the very distinction between the historical and the literary, between Rankean historicism and the historical novel mentioned before, is being challenged nowadays.<sup>48</sup> It was clearly put into question by the literary critic Hayden White in the twentieth century. White, in his famous book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, explores the distinction between history and literature. It is usually suggested that history was scientized by Ranke. In order to gain the status of science, history had to be objective, deprived of all the

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<sup>43</sup> Groot 19.

<sup>44</sup> Groot 19.

<sup>45</sup> Lukács 42.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, 24-28.

<sup>47</sup> Groot 20.

<sup>48</sup> Hutcheon 105.

author's subjectivity. It was supposed to communicate the objective truths about reality and it has supposedly lost all its connection with literature and rhetoric – the historical accounts made by the professional historiographers were thought to be scientific discourse.

However, White asserts that, as long as the author of the historical text uses language, the core of the text is still literary and poetic.<sup>49</sup> His core argument for this is in the very essence of language: language is always equivocal, it is impossible to restrict a word to one single meaning. Thus, the doubleness of meaning is inevitable and, hence, every representation of the past, every thought or generalization made about a past event is still something very different from what is usually called scientific discourse.<sup>50</sup> Hayden White also cultivates the idea that, when historiography communicates the facts to the reader, it usually “adds” something to the core facts and that “something” is the literary constituent.<sup>51</sup> Every historical description is based on written evidence, whose contents let the historian create his own constellation of facts.

White distinguishes *chronicle* from historical narrative: a chronicle, according to White, is a mere chain of events, it has neither a beginning, nor an ending. It also does not imply any meaning to the events.<sup>52</sup> The historian does not create a chronicle; he usually takes the events from a chronicle and arranges them in a certain way to create a narrative discourse. In this sense, the historian is responsible for a certain order in which he arranges the facts. He is responsible for the exclusion or inclusion of certain data. Hence, the historian is usually creating a *story* out of the events from a chronicle; he has to decide where it starts and ends and he is also responsible for any intentional or unintentional stress he puts on some events.

It is important to mention here that White distinguishes *event* and *fact: events*

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<sup>49</sup> White 10.

<sup>50</sup> White 12.

<sup>51</sup> White 12.

<sup>52</sup> John S. Nelson, “Review Essays: *Metahistory*”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Feb., 1975), pp. 74-91, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2504605>>, 77.

happened in time and space, while *facts* are expressions of the events in the form of narration.<sup>53</sup> So, he suggests that, from that point of view, historical knowledge is a construct created by the historian because the historical characters and events cannot be verified or observed as they belong to the past – beyond our reach. Thus, all historical knowledge is a second-hand knowledge, based on hypothetical constructions, and their interpretation always needs methods of imagining. Therefore, history has more in common with literature than with any other kind of science.<sup>54</sup>

White stresses that in order to create a story out of a chronicle the historian usually uses one of the three “explanatory strategies”: argument, implotment or ideological implication.<sup>55</sup> For the present discussion it is important to mention that, according to White, each of these strategies has its counterparts among poetical tropes.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, each historian’s style can be described in terms of those model strategies. As White claims, the arrangement of data in each historian’s style is not dominated by a mere claim of objectivity, and, more importantly, there is no single *correct* view of the data, “but there are *many* correct views, each requiring its own style of representation.”<sup>57</sup>

## 5. Postmodernism and History

The fact that historiography’s authority in describing the events of the past had been questioned led to the later Postmodern *crisis of representation*.<sup>58</sup> In short, “the representation” was thought to include “one coherent symbolic system ranging over politics, thought, science and art”<sup>59</sup> which worked as a mediator between the object of depiction and its

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<sup>53</sup> White 12-13.

<sup>54</sup> White 12.

<sup>55</sup> John S. Nelson, 77.

<sup>56</sup> John S. Nelson, 77.

<sup>57</sup> John S. Nelson, 77.

<sup>58</sup> Groot 112.

<sup>59</sup> Harry Redner, “Representation and the Crisis of Post-Modernism”, *PS, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer, 1987)*, pp. 673-679, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/419349>>, 674.

representation. In the twentieth century, Modernism “arose as a revolt”<sup>60</sup> against previous “bourgeois” systems of representations and produced “a new aesthetic” – a work of art was perceived as purely formalistic, not representing anything in reality, neither subjectively, not objectively.<sup>61</sup> New systems of symbols and representations appeared which were no longer related by any logical bond – each system was “experimental” and claimed its validity in a certain discourse.<sup>62</sup> Because of this the “fragmentation of culture” was unavoidable because of the collapse of the previously undoubted “representational paradigm”.<sup>63</sup>

In light of that fragmentation, the later Postmodern thought went further, elaborating on the fact that the means of producing the representation can be as important as the origin itself – the way how the object is depicted may have the message in itself. Furthermore, if the way in which the object is represented can vary and if the way in which it is represented is significant, especially in mass culture, it is evident that there must be certain underlying motives behind this representation. That led the poststructuralist thinkers, such as Michael Foucault, to question “the hegemony of any single discursive system”<sup>64</sup> in order to expose the politics behind the use of it. Foucault argued that those discursive systems of representation constitute new forms of power and domination<sup>65</sup> and it is necessary to take into account possible political or ideological agenda behind them. Those poststructuralists` ideas were highly important for historians as they pointed to the discursive nature of any historical writing. Both the “referentiality” of the account of the past – the correlation between reality (events) and its description (linguistic expression)<sup>66</sup> – and the representation of the past by any sign, picture, discourse, etc. were questioned, which meant a total uncertainty about appropriate

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<sup>60</sup> Redner, 676.

<sup>61</sup> Redner, 676.

<sup>62</sup> Redner, 677.

<sup>63</sup> Redner, 677.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Bertens, *Idea of the Postmodern*, (London: Routledge, 1995) 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, entry “Michel Foucault”, full text available at <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/>>

<sup>66</sup> *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, entry “Postmodernism”, full text available at <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>>

ways of describing social reality. This, in its turn, caused Postmodern historical novelists to manipulate that representation, evoking greater “indeterminacy” about the past. And if the term “Postmodernism” is still very difficult to define, its most prominent feature for the present discussion, the “common denominator” is the crisis of representation: “a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real, in the widest sense. No matter whether they are aesthetic, epistemological, moral, or political in nature, the representations that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted.”<sup>67</sup>

In this regard, the name of Jean-François Lyotard deserves a special mention. According to his ideas based on the ideas of Hayden White and some other theorists such as Nancy Partner, Louis Mink, and Keith Jenkins, there are certain “grand narratives”. Those are “ordering ideological stories, totalizing explanations”<sup>68</sup> of the world that are created to systematize our knowledge in a certain way in order to control us and shape our perception of reality. History may also be seen as a “grand narrative”, in that it is trying to make sense of the events of the reality in a certain way. Moreover, the linguistic approach had already shown that “conventional history” is also a set of narrative tropes.<sup>69</sup> According to Lyotard,<sup>70</sup> those grand narratives are “oppressive” and people can no longer believe them, as they are usually aiming at a certain way of looking at the events and, more importantly, excluding “the other” – another point of view on the subject – from its perspective.

The above mentioned concept of undermining the “grand narratives” and the consequent search for the alternatives has caused the concept of *decentering*<sup>71</sup> to arise. In the simplest way, it can be understood as the process of putting into question all the “unifying notions”<sup>72</sup> such as hierarchy, homogeneity, centre, and continuity and seek for alternatives in

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<sup>67</sup> Bertens, 10.

<sup>68</sup> Groot, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Groot, 111.

<sup>70</sup> *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, entry “Jean-François Lyotard”, full text available at <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/lyotard/>>

<sup>71</sup> Groot 112.

<sup>72</sup> Hutcheon 57.

order to “explore a variety of issues”<sup>73</sup> from individual and authentic points of view:

[It] manifests itself in the concern with cultural formations not dominated by logocentric and technocratic thought, in the decentering of traditional notions of identity, in the search of women’s history, in the rejection of centralisms, mainstreams and melting pots of all kinds, and in the great value put on *difference* and *otherness*.<sup>74</sup>

Postmodernism tends to deny the modernist notion of one single “otherness” based on the pure opposition to the constructed centre.<sup>75</sup> And, according to Hutcheon,<sup>76</sup> Postmodernism is liberating in the sense that it refuses “the language of alienation (otherness)” and tends to talk about “decentering (difference)”. It is clearly applicable to the Postmodern historical novel, as “the novel’s action disperses the centre ... and moves the margins into the multiple ‘centres’ of the narrative”<sup>77</sup> – the Postmodern novel can be fragmented and each of the fragments seems to be a different narration with its own centre.

All the above mentioned processes made it possible to discuss something that has been called a ‘Postmodern turn’ in historiographic writing.<sup>78</sup> And very generally speaking, this all led to a renewed interest in fiction which represents the past, and in the ways in which that Postmodern fiction can represent the past.

## 6. Linda Hutcheon’s Theory

Linda Hutcheon, one of the leading theorists in Postmodern fiction, largely contributed to the discussion of the Postmodern historical novel. As mentioned before, the Postmodern crisis of representation, together with Lyotard’s influential ideas about the ideological subtext of every representation of the past, arose great scepticism and suspicion<sup>79</sup> about the past and the ways in which the past can be approached. According to Hutcheon, Postmodern novels such as *Shame*, *The Public Burning*, or *A Maggot* started to question the

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<sup>73</sup> Groot 112.

<sup>74</sup> Bertens, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Hutcheon 60-63.

<sup>76</sup> Hutcheon 62.

<sup>77</sup> Hutcheon 61.

<sup>78</sup> Groot 111.

<sup>79</sup> Hutcheon, 106.

conventions of the genre by adding the clear traces of subjectivity, ideology and artificiality to a narrative which still claimed to be somehow historic.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the historical novels produced in a rather large period of Postmodernity cannot be labelled as clearly “historical”, as they are both metafictional – meaning that they are constantly referring to their status as an artefact<sup>81</sup> – and historical, as they mirror, usually in a truthful ways, certain events of the past. According to Hutcheon, this is the new form of the Postmodern historical novel, which combines those two features and it can and should be distinguished from the traditional forms of the genre. Linda Hutcheon calls that “paradoxical beast” *historiographic metafiction*, attempting to cover by that name both the metafictionality and historicity of that new form.<sup>82</sup>

The most problematic aspect of Hutcheon`s theory is the fact that the two components of the term seem to contradict each other: the “metafictional self-reflexivity” of the work of art usually undermines its “historical veracity”.<sup>83</sup> In other words, it is difficult to assume that the event is described historically correct while the very narrative is constantly stating that it is an invented fiction. To somehow explain the concept and to marry the two seemingly opposite counterparts of it, Linda Hutcheon affirms that the Postmodern relationships between reality, history and fiction are highly complex and consist of mutual implication and influence.<sup>84</sup> She states that the recent theories tend to focus on the similarities of historical and fictional writing rather than trying to separate and define each mode by itself. She suggests that history and fiction share more than had been thought before and that there are several undeniable similarities between the writings of history and fiction as she states:

[the two modes of writing] both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of

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<sup>80</sup> Hutcheon, 106.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History", *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. O'Donnell, P., and Robert Con Davis, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 3-32, full text available at University of Toronto Library, < <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10252/1/TSpace0167.pdf>>, 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History", 4.

<sup>83</sup> Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History", 3.

<sup>84</sup> Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History", 4.

language and structure; and that appear to be equally intertextual.<sup>85</sup>

In other words, firstly, Linda Hutcheon seems to be in agreement with Hayden White's idea of the equivocality of language used both for writing history and fiction, mentioning that both modes of writing are "linguistic constructs". Furthermore, Hutcheon stresses the concepts of "verisimilitude" and "intertextuality": the events of the past can be approached only through texts, which, in their turn, are also partially of wholly fictional. For Hutcheon, it is "the return to the idea" that both literary and historical texts can "offer the sense of past" but that sense of past is highly uncertain, as the past can only be known from its texts. Hence, if history is constructed by means of language, it is open for revision and recontextualization.<sup>86</sup> The line between history and fiction blurs and thus historiographic metafiction can "situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction".<sup>87</sup>

In general terms, for Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction argues with the common methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction.<sup>88</sup> This type of metafiction refuses to see history as the only discourse that has "a truth claim."<sup>89</sup> Historiographic metafiction states that "both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity."<sup>90</sup> Historiographic metafiction turns to past that once existed to explore the possibilities of certain historical epochs, to look at the alternative versions of history and personages that must have been excluded from the historical accounts. And it is doing so by merging facts and fiction, the fantastic and the real; pointing out the contradictory nature of Postmodernity.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Hutcheon 105.

<sup>86</sup> Maria del Mar Asensio Arostegui, "History as Discourse in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion: The Politics of Alterity*", University de la Rioja, *Journal of English Studies, II (2000), 7-18*, full text available at <<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/203086.pdf>>, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History", 4.

<sup>88</sup> Hutcheon, 93.

<sup>89</sup> Hutcheon, 93.

<sup>90</sup> Hutcheon, 93.

<sup>91</sup> Arostegui, 7-8.

### Chapter III. Jeanette Winterson

#### 1. Historiographic Metafictions of Jeanette Winterson

Jeanette Winterson is usually named among those authors whose works can be placed under the term “historiographic metafiction”. She was raised in a strict Pentecostal Church environment and at the age of fifteen she became engaged in a love affair with a woman, which was strongly condemned by her church and led to her exclusion from the community.<sup>1</sup> She publicly came out as a lesbian, left home and worked at a variety of low-paying jobs to support herself, later attending St. Catherine's College at Oxford where, in 1981, she obtained her B.A. degree.<sup>2</sup> After finishing her education, she continued to work while writing her first significant novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, published in 1998. The novel was hugely successful and presented a semi-autobiographical story about coming of age as a lesbian and a writer.

The very first novel of Jeanette Winterson constituted an interwovenness of reality with the elements of mystery and fantasy, surprising and puzzling the reader by the sudden interruptions of the narrative with seemingly unrelated fairy-tales and parables. It was a rather experimental piece, yet it was well-received and brought significant fame to the author. Since the publication of her first novel, Jeanette Winterson has been regarded as a feminist writer, as her first work was clearly defending and exploring what, at the time, were not yet well-articulated issues of gender identities and coming of age. It was even suggested that the feminism of her works was problematizing the contemporary patriarchal society,<sup>3</sup> as it was focusing on the gender construction of a young girl, who was clearly excluded and marginalized by her people. This very first novel is of interest because the marginalized female protagonist became a common theme of her work. In this sense, the attempt to explore and problematize gender identities can be traced to her later work *Written on the Body* (1992)

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<sup>1</sup> "Jeanette Winterson," *Gay & Lesbian Biography*, ed. Michael J. Tyrkus and Michael Bronski, (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), Literature Resource Center <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/>>

<sup>222</sup> "Jeanette Winterson," *Gay & Lesbian Biography*, ed. Michael J. Tyrkus and Michael Bronski, (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), Literature Resource Center <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/>>

<sup>3</sup> Arostequi, 9.

which goes as far as challenging gender identities entirely by refusing to specify whether the narrator is male or female.

After the first novel, Winterson`s experimentalism of intermingling fact and fiction continued and the next significant publication of two novels, *The Passion* (1987) and *Sexing the Cherry* (1989); these novels being the ones which most clearly fit under the label of historiographic metafiction. Both of these novels are loosely set in historically important periods of time: it can be assumed from certain details and personalities mentioned in the novels that *The Passion* is set in the Napoleonic era while *Sexing the Cherry* deals with the seventeenth-century England. Those two novels are of the period when Jeanette Winterson became convinced of the “indissolubility of fact and fiction”<sup>4</sup>: both of the works represent intricate narratives in which the real historical figures co-exist in a fictive reality with fairy-tale magic, while the multiple narrators of the plot contradict each other and try to claim the validity of their perspectives by simply saying that the reader should trust them.<sup>5</sup>

It is stated that Jeanette Winterson is “conscious[ly] undermining ... history”<sup>6</sup> which lets her explore alternatives in the representation of a certain historical epoch by seeking for an individual, usually marginalized perspective; namely for the perspective of a woman in a historical epoch – which is a typical feature of the feminist Postmodern fiction.<sup>7</sup> Both Villanelle from *The Passion* and Dog Woman from *Sexing the Cherry* articulate their own female versions of the events and their versions can be seen as truthful. The expected linear narration of the novels, which claims to be historical, is usually abruptly interrupted by the insertions of parables, such as The Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses segment in *Sexing the Cherry*. The metafictionality of the narrative is constantly highlighted in *The Passion* by the reiterated phrase “I`m telling you stories. Trust me.”<sup>8</sup> It becomes obvious in those two novels that

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<sup>4</sup> "Jeanette Winterson," *Gay & Lesbian Biography*, ed. Michael J. Tyrkus and Michael Bronski, (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), Literature Resource Center <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/>>

<sup>5</sup> Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion*, (London: Vintage, 1987), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Groot, 137.

<sup>7</sup> Groot, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 13.

Jeanette Winterson uses the methods that, according to Linda Hutcheon, undeniably refer to the Postmodern historical novels, namely to the genre of historiographic metafiction: firstly, the genre undermines “grand narratives” – the unified versions of history – by presenting a variety of possible versions in order to “prevent the history from being conclusive”;<sup>9</sup> secondly, in the historiographic metafiction, the main characters are usually marginalized and are able to communicate “the unwritten histories”<sup>10</sup> – females` histories in case of Winterson; and, lastly, historiographic metafiction is usually defined by the blurred line between the real and the fantastic, as magic, myth and mysticism are not understood as something unnatural for the narration.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Challenging History

It has been mentioned before that one of the key features of the Postmodern historical novel and, namely of the genre of historiographic metafiction, is undermining “grand narratives” – rewriting history. Even though different historical periods are usually described differently, history, as a unified narrative, usually presents a certain unquestioned version of events. Both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* subvert that notion of history in similar ways: both novels retell history from the individual perspective (namely from the point of view of an individual of a “silenced”,<sup>12</sup> unimportant group), they both challenge the unified version of history by providing an alternative perspective on well-known events; and, finally, both of the novels challenge typical historiographical accounts by a disrupted, non-linear narration. However, by doing so those two novels do not merely create another dimension to the well-known events by inserting the unknown perspective to the acknowledged historiographic description – the process of undermining grand narratives rather implies that any concept or

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<sup>9</sup> Hutcheon, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Groot, 112.

<sup>11</sup> Hutcheon, 110.

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Kirca, *Postmodernist Historical Novels: Jeanette Winterson`s and Salman Rushdie`s novels as Historiographic Metafictions*, Ph.D. Dissertation, (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2009), full text available at <<https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12610813/index.pdf>>, 2, 12 Aug 2015.

narrative is “constructed” thus is open to subversion, as, following the poststructuralist notions, language itself is “inherently unstable”.<sup>13</sup> Postmodernism generally doubts that there is “any single way of accounting for everything that happens around us.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the incredulity<sup>15</sup> about the events in the past is played on and enhanced by Winterson in her novels both by inserting the individual perspective and simultaneously by problematizing that perspective. In this sense, the two novels are perfect examples of the interplay between fact and fiction, as suggested by Linda Hutcheon.

### **2.1 *The Passion***

The very first pages of *The Passion* locate the events of the narrative in Napoleonic France – a period of bloody conflicts and great historical personalities. This period was clearly important for France in particular, and for Europe in general, as it was a long period “from the French Revolution to the rise and fall of Napoleon’s Empire”.<sup>16</sup> The influence of the Napoleonic Wars on society cannot be easily estimated, as the change took place on both cultural and social levels; and its influence and expansion reached far beyond the borders of France. Narratives about the period are expected to cover military themes together with obvious reflections on heroism and the courage of the soldiers which contributed to the initial success of Napoleon’s expansion.<sup>17</sup> Discourses about the period usually explore the personality of Napoleon, highlighting his leadership skills and his political ambitions.

However, in the case of Winterson’s novel, though it is put within the well-known epoch, it is not a story about Napoleon and his military success – it is not a story about “the most powerful man of the world”<sup>18</sup> as he is called in the book. It is a story of a man, relatively unimportant for the general discourse of the events. The reader meets the main protagonist in

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Watkins, *Twentieth-Century Women Novelists: Feminist Theory into Practice*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 98.

<sup>14</sup> Watkins, 123.

<sup>15</sup> Watkins, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Arostequi, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Arostequi, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 13.

the first pages of *The Passion* and he is a character rather distant from the battlefield: even though he is a soldier, he works in a kitchen providing the Emperor with huge amounts of chicken which Napoleon desires for breakfast, lunch and dinner.<sup>19</sup> The narrator is a young man called Henri who had wished to be a drummer in the army, marching in front of a “proud column”,<sup>20</sup> but ended up in a cold tent serving food for the Emperor. Henri explains in the novel that he sacrificed his initial dream in favour of his current position in the kitchen after having been inspired to become a cook “for Bonaparte himself”.<sup>21</sup> It is obvious that the idea of serving the greatest man of the time at first appealed to Henri. The awe and admiration for Napoleon was huge and his reputation was maintained by the members of the society to preserve the power of their leader: Henri states in the novel that they, the soldiers, were almost in love with Napoleon<sup>22</sup> – highlighting how much they all believed him to be the greatest man among them.

Inspired and eager to be in Napoleon’s army, Henri soon realizes that reality drastically differs from his expectations. Surprisingly, Henri describes the period of his service to Napoleon in a highly sarcastic manner, highlighting the flaws of the Emperor, showing his oppressiveness and bad temper – Napoleon is described as keeping only “small servants and large horses”<sup>23</sup> due to his own insecurities. According to Henri, Napoleon is also almost incapable of feelings, as he loves his Josephine just in the same way as he loves his chickens on the plate; he is more in love with himself<sup>24</sup> than with anyone else – an extreme description of egocentricity. Napoleon seems to be rather rude, never talking to even the closest of his servants, while being terribly picky when he chooses them – he got rid of a significant amount of grooms for the seemingly silly reasons that the coat of the horse “did not shine enough”.<sup>25</sup> The conditions of the kitchen in which Henri and his fellow servants have to perform their

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<sup>19</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 3.

duties are terrible. It is stated that “there is no heat, only degrees of cold”<sup>26</sup> in the kitchen and everybody has “red noses and blue fingers.”<sup>27</sup> The initial stimulus of joining the army had disappeared already by the time the narrative unfolds, and Henri is already exhausted serving Napoleon. He states that the red noses, blue fingers and white skin of the weak soldiers constitute “the tricolour”<sup>28</sup> – the symbolic essence of the nation. This peculiar metaphor seems to highlight the idea that the supposed glory and honour of the nation’s army constitute nothing more than a group of tired and scared young soldiers. It becomes clear that Henri’s story disagrees with the universally acknowledged version of the historical events.

The universally acknowledged account of Napoleonic era is undermined by the story of one particular individual who belongs to a relatively unimportant group of low-rank workers – the war from the perspective of a soldier-cook is not a popular version of history. However, Henri does not simply communicate his own different version of the events. He himself claims that his story is true, and the truthfulness of Henri’s accounts is supported by his position as an eye-witness of the events, which is evidenced by the insertion of several actual historical facts into his narration. For example, the existence of the camp at Boulogne, to which Henri and others head, is historical reality. The French Army actually gathered on the coast of the English Channel in preparation for the invasion of England. Still, together with truthful descriptions of historical data, the narrator, without any change of tone, starts to discuss what exactly they knew about English, and that is that the latter “ate their children and ignored the Blessed Virgin,”<sup>29</sup> a rather doubtful concept. It becomes clear that Henri’s accounts have a good amount of stereotyping which undermine the veracity of his stories. The reliability of his memories cannot be justified simply because he is an eye-witness of a famous epoch. The reader is left with a biased narrator, unsure of whether he should or should not believe Henri. The story clearly constitutes a diary which Henri was attempting to write truthfully while

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<sup>26</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 8.

serving for Napoleon, still the obvious transgressions and strong subjectivity prevent the story from being perceived as completely truthful.

The situation is complicated further when it becomes obvious that the actual voice of the narrator is the voice of an adult Henri, who is imprisoned and disappointed with the course of history – it is suggested that he started to doubt Napoleon and his rule after seeing plenty of his fellows killed; and from the New Year of 1805 he starts to disagree with almost everything about Napoleon`s rule. Older Henri is clearly disillusioned with his service to Napoleon, thus, he is revising the events of his life from a later perspective. Despite all his efforts Henri fails to be objective. The fallacy is confirmed when he states that it is own story and he is just “telling stories”<sup>30</sup> – hinting to the artificiality of his accounts. Henri`s ability to be a decent historian writing down the actual facts about the period is further questioned within the novel by his fellow soldier Domino: “Look at you, ... What makes you think you can see anything clearly? What gives you the right to make a notebook and shake it at me in thirty years, if we are still alive, and say you`ve got the truth?”<sup>31</sup> These questions are answered by Henri, who claims that he doesn`t care about the facts, he cares only about the feelings and that is what he wants to remember.<sup>32</sup> This is a very self-reflexive moment in the narration, which is further enhanced by the constant reiteration of the phrase “I`m telling you stories. Trust me.”<sup>33</sup> Sometimes Henri even talks to his readers, giving his value judgment of a story told to him by a fellow soldier: he asks his readers not to “believe that one”.<sup>34</sup>

The reliability of his account is further destabilized by a constant disruption of the linearity of events. Firstly, Henri is usually reminiscing in a sentimental way about the pre-army years of his happy childhood, which seem to be a rather harsh comparison with his years serving in the army: Henri states that he missed everything about home from the very

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<sup>30</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 23.

beginning, even the “things he hated”<sup>35</sup> because in the army he felt unsafe and miserable. The soldiers were for Napoleon as those chickens he could swallow entirely<sup>36</sup> – there are entries in the diary when Henri claims that “two thousand men were drowned” and fresh ones immediately march in to replace them.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, the linearity of the historical account is further disrupted by the story of a completely different protagonist – Villanelle – who takes turns with Henri in the part called “The Zero Winter” and who is offering an alternative, almost fantastic story of her own life.<sup>38</sup>

Henri’s story “undermine[s] the grand narrative”<sup>39</sup> – his story is a retelling of the supposed truths about the period from an alternative, minor perspective; Henri’s diary becomes the “parodic rewriting” of the dominant patriarchal discourse.<sup>40</sup> Still, however doubtful his story may seem, in the era of Postmodernity it is as valuable and truthful as any other account in history.

## **2.2 Sexing the Cherry**

The novel *Sexing the Cherry* is also set in a historical period, in this case in seventeenth-century England. The period which is covered in the book lasts for, approximately, forty years – from 1630 till 1666. This important period in the acknowledged version of history is marked by the English Civil War, the consequent beheading of King Charles I, and the later restoration of his son, King Charles II, to the throne. Those events, together with the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London, constitute the milestones of the novel – those years and the events mentioned by the narrators agree with the official version of history. The great personalities of the epoch, for example, King Charles himself, also play an important role; they act on the pages of *Sexing the Cherry*, which is also a strategy to enhance the seeming

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<sup>35</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Groot, 137.

<sup>40</sup> Kirca, 46.

authenticity of the narration. However, the overall account of the events originates, just as in *The Passion*, from a rather insignificant character in history. In the case of *Sexing the Cherry*, the main protagonist of the story, who is communicating the historical data to the reader, is called the Dog Woman. She is a huge, atrocious female who lives in a hut near the Thames river<sup>41</sup> and breeds dogs for a living, which contributed to her nickname. In the case of this novel, the main protagonist is not only an insignificant character in history – such a woman is a rather improbable character. However, it is not possible to state that her version of events is somehow less legitimate; the Dog Woman`s probable non-existence cannot be fully proved so that her version of the events is as legitimate as anybody else`s.

An obvious similarity with *The Passion* can be seen in the fact that the Dog Woman also retells for the reader historical data without claiming to be trustworthy, yet her accounts seem to be quite objective at first. She usually starts with a neutral tone of narration, trying to be objective and trying to recount as much as she can: “As far as I know it, and I have only a little learning, the King had been forced to call a Parliament to grant him money...”<sup>42</sup> She admits that she has a very limited knowledge of the situation. However, that seems to be acceptable at first, simply because, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, all the historical knowledge is a second-hand knowledge, and all the historical accounts are limited to a certain perspective. Nevertheless, it quickly becomes clear that the Dog Woman`s vision of the events is in no way objective, as she is guilty of invading her accounts with emotion,<sup>43</sup> namely, by adding immensely dramatic comments and adjectives to her narration. For example, she continues the previously mentioned phrase by claiming that the money was “for ... [the king`s] war against the kilted beasts and their savage ways.”<sup>44</sup> This phrase reminds of Henri`s description of the English – The Dog Woman, just as Henri, lacks knowledge about another nation, falls victim to propaganda, and thus communicates stereotypes to her readers. This can

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<sup>41</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 3-5.

<sup>42</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Kirca, 68.

<sup>44</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 22.

be seen as another of Winterson`s subversions: stereotypes have always been part of official discourse, still official historiography does not pay much attention to them. When describing the “kilted beasts”, the Dog Woman`s tone switches from neutral to emotionally-coloured and the account no longer resembles a historiographic one. She never tries to follow any particular pattern to shape her narration, unlike Henri, who at least tried to mimic diary entries by putting dates on the pages. However, both Henri and the Dog Woman fail to record the temporal order of the events – as opposed to official historiography, which claims to be accurate with temporality. Henri`s diary entries are not logical; he sometimes has several entries on the same day while then no dates are mentioned at all. The Dog Woman`s accounts can only be roughly framed by historical events. However, their versions of history seem to be as truthful as anybody else`s despite this temporal fallacy.

The reader sees that the Dog Woman`s story constitutes an individual view of the events rather than an attempt to objectively describe reality – just as Henri in *The Passion*, the Dog Woman communicates only the things she wants to communicate. The Dog Woman usually lets her immediate feelings about the person or event influence her opinion, describing the historical personalities and events as she herself perceive them: “The innkeeper was a Loyalist and had no truck with those po-faced, flat-buttocked zealots who had declared the King a traitor to his own people.”<sup>45</sup> In this sense, The Dog Woman`s story seems to be even more radical and subjective as opposed to Henri`s, as she never attempts to be somehow objective.

Undeniably, the Dog Woman`s account of events seems to be truthful because she, just as Henri, was an eye-witness to the events – she saw the beheading of the king herself<sup>46</sup> and she described it with plenty of details, including the test on a sheep which was made before the execution of “those of noble birth”.<sup>47</sup> She outlived John Tradescant, the king`s gardener, met Charles II, survived the Great Plague, and participated in the most important historical

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<sup>45</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 76-77.

<sup>47</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 76.

events of the epoch. She seems to have witnessed the greater part of the changes in the society – in this sense she might have been a good source for describing historical reality, yet, her subjectivity never goes away. The Dog Woman describes the events as she sees them immediately, or as she has heard of them, judging by rumours circulating in society. She also usually adds a good amount of her own reflections on the subject and her reasoning behind them. Consequently, those cause-and-effect relations she tries to communicate prove to be quite erroneous,<sup>48</sup> which undermines the veracity of whatever she states. On one hand, The Dog Woman seems to be trying to retell rumours and thus be somehow realistic in her descriptions: “They said that the King was a wanton spend-thrift...”<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, her own groundless reasoning and commenting, which she herself never questions, quickly floods the narrative. This reminds us of Henri’s statement in *The Passion*, that more truth about the past can be told by retelling what is felt at the very moment of the events. The veracity of the Dog Woman’s account is further questioned by the fact that the real historical figures, such as, for example, John Tradescant, become the acting characters in the Dog Woman’s story, which can never be justified from history’s point of view, as their personalities are not something clearly recorded in any trustworthy sources. So it is speculation and invention on the author’s part.

The fact that the narration in *Sexing the Cherry* is carried out by a woman suggests that history in this case is retold, just as in *The Passion*, from a rather marginalized individual, but in the case of this novel, it is complicated by gender issues. Just as in *The Passion*, in *Sexing the Cherry* history corresponds to a patriarchal version of it,<sup>50</sup> while the female accounts are usually neglected, which makes the Dog Woman’s story important in challenging a male version of history. She seems to be in opposition to a patriarchal society, not only because of her monstrous appearance,<sup>51</sup> which will be discussed later, but also because she presents her own improbable female’s version of history which she fearlessly narrates. Another thing which

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<sup>48</sup> Kirca, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Kirca, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Kirca, 67.

contribute to challenging the official history is in the fact that, just as in *The Passion*, the linearity of the Dog Woman's narrative is disrupted by the alternation of two voices in the narrative, and the second voice belongs to her adopted son, Jordan. Jordan usually offers an alternative, fantastic version of the events in a similar way as Villanelle in *The Passion*. It becomes obvious in *Sexing the Cherry* that time is not perceived as a straight line: even though the Dog Woman's story is framed by the years which logically follow the timeline of acknowledged history, the constant interruptions by Jordan refer to different times and different realities. All of this causes a stronger case of fragmentation in the novel; the book is not logically divided into several parts as *The Passion* was, the two narrator's voices mix and blend, making it sometimes impossible to distinguish between them. Furthermore, in the second half of the book, a couple of new and unknown narrators take their turns in expressing their own stories – among them are Fortunata, Nicolas and a woman, who supposedly lives close to the present day. The latter narrator is of particular interest because that young woman “finds strength through her fantasy” of an alter ego in that gigantic Dog Woman, who lives “oblivious to social conformism of the seventeenth century.”<sup>52</sup> In moments of despair, this young woman imagines that she is the Dog Woman, and she immediately feels the strength to oppose the repressive social reality. Fragmentation, pastiche and breaking the timeframe of the Dog Woman's narration enhance instability and breaks coherence, which altogether work to disrupt, “challenge and subvert the patriarchal and heterosexist discourses”<sup>53</sup> which is the acknowledged history.

### 3. Women's Histories

As it was mentioned in the previous subchapter, historiographic metafiction undermines “grand narratives” in favour of “petites histoires” – as they were called by Lyotard

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<sup>52</sup> Christy L. Burns, “Fantastic Language: Jeanette Winterson's Recovery of the Postmodern Word”, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), pp. 278-306, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208876>>, 30 Aug 2015, 285.

<sup>53</sup> Andermahr, 6.

– “mini-stories” as opposed to one unifying history.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the notion of one unifying history is put under question, and different versions of it claim to exist, leads to “decentering of [the so-called] central master narratives”<sup>55</sup> in the period of Postmodernity. Through this the authors of the Postmodern texts are able to explore different issues. One of those issues is, as Groot calls it, “marginalized and hitherto unwritten histories”<sup>56</sup> – Postmodern historical fiction is constantly attempting to “insert into the crevices of history” censored, forgotten, even eccentric versions of it.<sup>57</sup>

But whose are those histories? It becomes obvious that the concept of “marginalized” or “silenced” groups in history can refer to a plenty of subjects – black people, homosexuals, native peoples and ethnic groups – all constitute types of people whose multiple responses to situations in history<sup>58</sup> were customarily neglected by scientific historiography. The 1960s brought many of those counter-cultures<sup>59</sup> and, thus, their histories into the spotlight which contributed to the voicing of their versions of history. Describing historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon mentions that the concept of decentering suggests a multiplicity and plurality of subjective opinions.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, some critics argued that the Postmodern fiction “allows marginalized people to emerge as equal historical subjects and narrators”.<sup>61</sup>

Undoubtedly, women belong to that category of the ex-centric by being “partially excluded [from history] by the dominant [male] cultural ideology”<sup>62</sup> and their untold experiences in different historical epochs become subject of perusal for Postmodern historical fiction. However, exploring the woman`s position within history just in mere opposition to the male`s historical accounts seems to be too straightforward for the Postmodern authors. The reinscribing of women`s stories to history has been complicated in Postmodernity by the very fact

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<sup>54</sup> Helena Grice and Tim Woods, “Winterson`s Dislocated Discourses”, *Jeanette Winterson, A Contemporary Critical Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2007) 28.

<sup>55</sup> Groot, 112.

<sup>56</sup> Groot, 112.

<sup>57</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

<sup>58</sup> Hutcheon, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Hutcheon, 62.

<sup>60</sup> Hutcheon, 62-63.

<sup>61</sup> Groot, 116.

<sup>62</sup> Groot, 148.

that the Postmodern “difference clearly rejects polarities”,<sup>63</sup> it is, in its turn, “plural and provisional.”<sup>64</sup> This complicates the notions of gender and gender dualities to the extent that some critics suggested that Postmodernity reaches for the “genderlessness” of its subjects.<sup>65</sup> In this sense, the Postmodern historical novels by Winterson can serve as perfect examples of Postmodern historical fiction that both tries to articulate the female histories and experiences within history, and, simultaneously, in a typically Postmodern manner, complicates the issue of gender polarity altogether.

### **3.1. *Sexing the Cherry***

As we know from traditional historiographic accounts, the position of a woman in seventeenth-century England was largely limited by the dominant male culture: most women were attached to households, leading lives of busy housewives being an inestimable help to their husbands. The role of the woman was somehow limited to the family realm and a woman was expected to contribute mainly to the household, being fully focused on the prosperity of the family and, more importantly, of her husband. The ideas of natural gender differences were prominent and such virtues as, for example, morality, innocence, and timidity were thought to be naturally female. Education was thought to diminish those virtues and therefore was not advisable for a woman. Moreover, at this time, a woman who decided to publicly proclaim her unacceptable lifestyle, such as being unmarried or participating in politics, would surely be ostracised by society. The first substantial attempts to establish feminism in a modern sense of the word happened much later in the eighteenth century. Accordingly, in the seventeenth century women`s role in any “male” intellectual activities, such as politics, was almost non-existent, and, consequently, a woman`s role in history was almost negligible.

The seventeenth-century woman, the main protagonist of *Sexing the Cherry*, is the

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<sup>63</sup> Bertens, 195.

<sup>64</sup> Hutcheon, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Lucie Armitt, “Storytelling and Feminism”, *Jeanette Winterson, A Contemporary Critical Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2007) 14.

one whose individual story within the historical framework constitutes the largest part of the novel. However, The Dog Woman, who is probably expected to reflect the typical features of a woman of a time, happens to be an exceptional one. Firstly, her lifestyle drastically differs from an exemplary one: she is not married; she has no family, except Jordan, her adopted son, whom she found in “the stinking Thames” and gave him “a river name”.<sup>66</sup> She is a low-class woman, literally ex-centric – excluded from middle-class society. She has no property and she lives in a hut on the bank which she has built herself. She has no interest in creating a family or being bound to housekeeping. Except for Jordan, she cares only about her thirty dogs she breeds for a living and she takes them with her wherever she goes.<sup>67</sup> All of that suggests that the Dog Woman utterly refuses to “pander to patriarchal sensitivities”; to the patriarchal norms of living accepted by seventeenth-century society.<sup>68</sup>

Her appearance is another astonishing thing. As she states herself, she is a “hideous” creature with a flat nose, heavy eyebrows, a few rotten teeth, and face covered with huge smallpox marks.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, she is the size of an elephant<sup>70</sup> – huge and scary to everyone who sees her. As she states herself, she is “too huge for love” as everyone, “male or female” has never “dared to approach” her.<sup>71</sup> She is an example of the female grotesque;<sup>72</sup> the very existence of the Dog Woman subverts the established order. She knows the effect her appearance has on people and she leads a lonely life – there are only few people around her that she can rely on. The whole life of the Dog Woman seems to be harsh. She states that her childhood was a “bleak and unnecessary time, full of longing and lost hope.”<sup>73</sup> The relationships between her and her parents were cold – it can be seen in the fact that the Dog Woman’s mother never talked about anything love or family-related, she talked to the girl “in

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<sup>66</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Armitt, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 32.

<sup>72</sup> Jane Haslett, “Winterson’s Fabulous Bodies”, *Jeanette Winterson, A Contemporary Critical Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2007) 42.

<sup>73</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 125.

the same tone of voice she used to tell [the Dog Woman] how to feed the dogs.”<sup>74</sup> Consequently, the Dog Woman knows almost nothing about love and romance or about the romantic relationships between people. Her attitude towards love is summarized by her son: “She has never been in love ... and never wanted to be either”.<sup>75</sup> When she is accosted<sup>76</sup> on the streets by some man she ends up biting off his penis.<sup>77</sup> However, that did not seem as a revolt against men, the Dog Woman simply seems to be lacking any wishes for any kind of relationships – she simply thinks that “there are worse things than loneliness.”<sup>78</sup>

Both the Dog Woman’s appearance and lifestyle situate her on the margins of society. But the character is not an epitome of suffering – the Dog Woman is clearly lacking morality. Her narration is full of vulgarisms and strong language – another feature which is unusual and probably more suitable for a man. She goes as far as stating by the end of the book that she has always enjoyed fights<sup>79</sup> and is a murderer herself – the first victim was her father, whom she killed in order not to be sold to a one-legged man.<sup>80</sup> The Dog Woman’s character resembles a man’s character to the extent that her son undoubtedly states that “she is [usually] silent the way men are supposed to be”<sup>81</sup> and that “she is also self-sufficient and without self-doubt,”<sup>82</sup> which, in the light of the epoch, are the traces of character more suitable for a man.

It becomes obvious, that this woman is a “complex caricature of villainy, sexual naivety, brutality and endeavouring charm.”<sup>83</sup> She can be seen to “champion female resistance” in the male dominated historical epoch, yet her main function in the novel is to be telling her own personal story, the tale of an individual in history, in this case, a story of a very peculiar individual. The Dog Woman seems to possess one of the most important features, and that feature is rather genderless: she is always ready to take responsibility for her actions, for her

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<sup>74</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 124.

<sup>75</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 116.

<sup>76</sup> Armitt, 19.

<sup>77</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 40.

<sup>79</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 67.

<sup>80</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 124.

<sup>81</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 116.

<sup>82</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 116.

<sup>83</sup> Armitt, 20.

cause.<sup>84</sup> Rather than talking about a clearly feministic approach to history, Jeanette Winterson seems to highlight that the Dog Woman`s character is not clearly attached to *women*, and is not a representative of the community of women; she seems to be an individual, rather than a representative of any kind, and that could be seen as one of the major issues Winterson raises in the novel.

It is that peculiar woman, who resembles a woman less than her son, who is the one who has “made do with seeing and remembering”<sup>85</sup> and then narrating almost all the historical data in the novel. The Dog Woman`s story not only disagrees with the typical male version of history – it also fails to fulfil the role of the female account. Clearly, she is not only marginalized as a female in a male dominated world of the seventeenth century, but also as a peculiar creature, ostracised by society due to her monstrous appearance. Her monstrous appearance and man-like behaviour in their turn challenge all the notions of femininity, leaving place for speculation about the veracity of her existence and her account of history. Clearly, the Dog Woman`s version of the historical events are somehow adjusted by the subjectivity of her marginal position. This is the subversion that Winterson`s novel offers its readers: the unbelievable story fills the empty space in historiography while managing to seem truthful, yet fictional at the same time.

While the Dog Woman is a marginalized female who undoubtedly bears some male features, problematizing gender issues, her son Jordan`s identity seems to complicate the situation even more. In the scene when the Dog Woman, John Tradescant, and Jordan cross-dress in order to attend the King`s trial, which was “free to all, except supporters of the King”,<sup>86</sup> it is Jordan and Tradescant who “dress as drabs.”<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Jordan`s “fine mincing walk...and a leer”<sup>88</sup> made him resemble a woman so much that he is the one who got

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<sup>84</sup> Armitt, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 122.

<sup>86</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 73.

<sup>87</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 73.

<sup>88</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 73.

them all passes to the event by begging a preacher as a common woman.<sup>89</sup> Peculiarly, it was Jordan who “felt [the pastor’s] oily hand slide under his skirts.”<sup>90</sup> It is noteworthy that to hide her identity, the Dog Woman only covers herself in black rags and puts on an old wig, which is enough to make her look completely unrecognizable, while Jordan successfully pretends to be a woman. Jordan, who is obviously male, a fragile-looking young man with “thin wrists,”<sup>91</sup> “crow-black hair and a quiet voice”<sup>92</sup> is the second important protagonist. Just as the Dog Woman, he is in no way a typical male of the time; he dreams about far-away places and is in love with the mysterious Fortunata. Jordan is on a constant search, a constant journey, which always remains unfinished.<sup>93</sup> His alternative reality is in the constant state of flux: time, history and even physical properties change during his voyages.<sup>94</sup> He travels through mystical places in search for a woman-dancer and he is the one who opens up the female world-view to the reader: a world-view in which women see men as “children with too much pocket money”.<sup>95</sup> He states that he “ha[s] met a number of people who, anxious to be free from the burdens of their gender, have dressed themselves men as women and women as men”.<sup>96</sup> It is fair to state that rather than talking about female histories or history rewritten to “highlight the gender bias” and trying to understand the women’s role in history,<sup>97</sup> one should consider *Sexing the Cherry* as a novel about the past, whose characters fare as individuals<sup>98</sup> subverting any historically conditioned gender opposition in a typically Postmodern way.

### **3.2 *The Passion***

Unlike the protagonist in *Sexing the Cherry*, the main protagonist of *The Passion*, Henri – the one whose story seems to be somehow historically correct – is a male. As

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<sup>89</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 74.

<sup>90</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 74.

<sup>91</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 125.

<sup>93</sup> Armitt, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Armitt, 19.

<sup>95</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 29.

<sup>96</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 29.

<sup>97</sup> Grice and Woods, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Armitt, 25.

previously explained, he describes the well-known events of Napoleon's expansion from the subjective perspective, yet it may seem at first sight that his accounts do not complicate the gender issues at all, as he does not belong to a marginalized group. That is partially true, because he is male, he is a soldier, hence, his story should not drastically differ from the official version of history. The reader can see examples of Henri behaving in accordance with what is expected of him when he sceptically describes the new soldiers, starting his description in a fashion expected from a battle-hardened warrior: "The recruits have arrived, most without moustaches, all with apples in their cheeks. Fresh county produce like me."<sup>99</sup> Surprisingly, he never continues in that fashion, admitting that he is different, he is not like his fellow soldiers: "Odd, the difference that a few months make. When I came here I was just like them, still am in many ways, but my companions are no longer the shy boys with cannon-fire in their eyes. They are rougher, tougher. Naturally you say, that's what army life is about."<sup>100</sup> This passage is peculiar not only because Henri hints at the metafictionality of his accounts because he is addressing his future readers, but also because he somehow admits that he himself is lacking those typical male features which should have become more prominent when a boy faces the difficulties of army life.

One can see the reason for a lacking of masculinity in the work that Henri does for the Emperor: Henri stays in the kitchen most of the time – in the environment that is usually associated with women. It is true that the working conditions of the kitchen are horrible and Henri suffers from that, yet he never voices any disagreement with his position or any wishes to join the soldiers on the battlefield. The reader might suspect that Henri enjoys working in the kitchen, where he performs less masculine labour as opposed to the soldiers who fight and die on the battlefield.

The attentive reader may see that one of the reasons why Henri enjoys his work is the closeness to the Emperor himself. It has been mentioned before that the soldiers admired

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<sup>99</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 26.

the Emperor because of his immense talent for persuasion: “He was great. Greatness like his is hard to be sensible about. ... He stretched his hand ... and made England sound as though she already belonged to us. ... That was his gift.”<sup>101</sup> They were obviously devoted to him to the extent that when two thousand men were drowned because of the Emperor’s eagerness to conquer England, “[n]o one said, Let’s leave him, let’s hate him.”<sup>102</sup> The devotion and admiration were enormous. However, the reader can easily see that Henri’s love for Napoleon is a little bit different than anybody else’s. There is a very peculiar scene in the book where the Emperor visits the kitchen and singles out Henri because of his readiness to do whatever it takes to serve Napoleon – he and Domino were caught trying to drag the drunk cook out of the kitchen: “...Bonaparte came towards me and pinched my ear so that it was swollen for days. ... Captain, see to it that this boy waits on me personally.”<sup>103</sup> That was not a mere honour for Henri, he thought it was “more perfect than any ordinary miracle”.<sup>104</sup> He felt chosen and special to the extent that he immediately wrote to his friend, a priest, about that occasion.<sup>105</sup> During the days Bonaparte stayed at Boulogne, Henri felt privileged and Bonaparte became the focus of Henri’s life.<sup>106</sup> While the Emperor was away the days were boring and meaningless for Henri.<sup>107</sup> The love Henri feels for Napoleon goes further than the simple devotion of the soldier to the general. There is something undeniably feminine in Henri: working in the kitchen, fragile, constantly remembering calm times at home, having a deep love for Napoleon, being unable to participate in battles, the main protagonist in *The Passion* is also the subversion of the subjective character in history – the narrator is a male participating in war who bares so many feminine features.

Opposed to Henri, another narrator, Villanelle, a beautiful Venetian, is a woman.

Just as Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry*, Villanelle lives in the same historical period as the main

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<sup>101</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 30, 19.

<sup>102</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 19.

<sup>105</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 22-23.

protagonist, Henri, in the time of the Napoleonic Wars, yet the story she tells and the life she lives is completely different. Even though she is a beautiful woman, the quintessence of female sexuality,<sup>108</sup> she has a serious flaw: she is a daughter of a boatman and there is a tradition in her family that men are born with webbed feet.<sup>109</sup> When Villanelle is born with webbed feet herself, her mother and the midwife vainly try to cut the webs between her fingers.<sup>110</sup> It is Villanelle's stepfather who states that those webbed feet are not visible when she wears shoes and the girl lives with that typically male webbed feet. Villanelle is not as monstrous as the Dog Woman, she is not ostracized by society due to her webbed feet, yet that flaw gives a clue to her peculiar character.

Later in the book, while working in the brothel Villanelle crossdresses both for her own pleasure and for economic profit<sup>111</sup>:

I dressed as a boy because that's what the visitors like to see. It was part of the game, trying to decode which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste. ... I made up my lips with vermilion and overlaid my face with white powder. I had no need to add a beauty spot, having one of my own just in the right place. I wore my yellow Casino breeches with the stripe down each side of the leg and a pirate's shirt that concealed my breasts. This was required, but the moustache I added was for my own amusement.

It becomes clear that *The Passion*, just as *Sexing the Cherry*, refused to see genders in their subjective polarity, the subversion of historical subjectivity is put into practice by mixing the genders and attitudes of the two main protagonists, who not only challenge the unifying history, but are themselves the subverted subjectivities who challenge the very notions of masculinity and femininity in history.

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<sup>108</sup> Jane Haslett, "Winterson's Fabulous Bodies", *Jeanette Winterson, A Contemporary Critical Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2007) 44.

<sup>109</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 118.

<sup>110</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 51.

<sup>111</sup> Haslett, 46.

#### 4. Facts and Fantasies

As it has been seen in the previous two subchapters, the Postmodern apocryphal<sup>112</sup> historical novels, the novels that use apocryphal history in order to contradict the acknowledged official history, usually juxtapose the official version with “the dissimilarly different version of the universe”.<sup>113</sup> They claim to supplement something that has been lost or omitted in the official historical records, to fill “the dark areas” of historiography. The individual perspectives, individual views on what has been established as history, constitute that decentering element of the Postmodern fiction.<sup>114</sup> However, Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* go further by questioning the subjectivity itself – the narrators do not simply offer a female version of history, but their voices are mixed and genderless. In the typically Postmodern way, “all sorts of certainties” in the novels collapse, or they are put under severe pressure and questioned.<sup>115</sup>

It has been mentioned before that Linda Hutcheon sees history as a human construct, and moreover, a fictional construct<sup>116</sup> which makes it possible to rework and rewrite the contents of the past. It has been mentioned by some critics that Winterson’s fictions, namely *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, no longer want to simply mimic or render<sup>117</sup> the world, the reality; they no longer expect to represent the reality because the “reality” is another concept which has become problematic in the Postmodern world. The novels work to “deconstruct the ontological boundary between the real and the fantastic,”<sup>118</sup> opening the way to re-write and re-contextualise historical data giving way to historical fantasy. For Winterson, the objective reality is “shaped and fashioned” by stories<sup>119</sup> – the world of the novel is not one of facts, but one of stories and narratives, thus, imagination becomes more important in the

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<sup>112</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2003) 90.

<sup>113</sup> McHale, 90.

<sup>114</sup> Hutcheon, 58.

<sup>115</sup> Grice and Woods, 39.

<sup>116</sup> Grice and Woods, 30.

<sup>117</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

<sup>118</sup> McHale, 90.

<sup>119</sup> Grice and Woods, 27.

world created out of narratives.<sup>120</sup> The officially-accepted history is juxtaposed with an imagined, usually radically different version of reality, which seems to work both to undermine and confirm history.<sup>121</sup> The constant “intersection between the real and the imagined” seems to have become Winterson`s trademark.<sup>122</sup>

#### **4.1. *Sexing the Cherry***

*Sexing the Cherry* is a novel which juxtaposes seventeenth-century England with all its political turmoil with the alternative fantastic quest of Jordan, who tries to find a female dancer he loves from first sight. However, Jordan`s fantastic voyages are not simply inserted into the narration – they are carefully interrelated with the semi-realistic and semi-linear narration of the Dog Woman. From the first glance Jordan`s stories of travelling to imagined places seemed to be purely fantastic, as he states that those places he returns to are “in his mind”.<sup>123</sup> He states that he feels “that [his] own life was squashed between the facts”<sup>124</sup> and he feels the need to escape by flying through the window every night.<sup>125</sup> The reader gets the impression of the dream which Jordan usually has; it looks as if it is only Jordan`s imagination that works to create those peculiar places he visits – the city of words, the city where there is no floor, or the city where love is the curse which has killed the population three times in a row.<sup>126</sup> However, when mentioning those fantastic places, Jordan also mentions the water around him and the fact that he left his mother on the river Thames,<sup>127</sup> which seems somehow realistic and logical at first, but perhaps not logical enough to believe those stories somehow correlate with the historical reality.

In the novel, all of Jordan`s peculiar stories about fantastic places are marked with the image of a pineapple. From the very first pages of the novel, the parts of Jordan`s narration

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<sup>120</sup> Grice and Woods, 34.

<sup>121</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

<sup>122</sup> Grice and Woods, 28.

<sup>123</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 2.

<sup>126</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 82.

<sup>127</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 11.

are separated by that image, while the Dog Woman's parts are marked by a banana. While the Dog Woman mentions relatively early in the novel that she remembers how she took Jordan to see the first banana in England, the relation of the fruit to her account becomes somehow justified. However, Jordan's pineapple remains a mystery until the latter part of the book. In the last part, "Some Years Later", a new and unknown narrator Nicolas mentions the painting of some unknown Dutch author which is called "Mr Rose, the Royal Gardener, presents the pineapple to the Charles the Second".<sup>128</sup> The narrator tries to imagine how it felt to bring something completely unknown to the court. The reader of *Sexing the Cherry* can easily find the painting – it exists in reality and it somehow affirms that somebody brought the fruit to England and that the gardener showed it to Charles II. It is the point in the book where the facts seem to correspond to the novel's reality. Yet, the actual personality who brought the fruit remains mystery to history, the "dark" unexplored area. The reader of *Sexing the Cherry* quickly acknowledges in the novel, as the semi-reliable account of the Dog Woman suggests, that it was indeed Jordan who brought the pineapple: "It was 1661, and from Jordan's voyage to Barbados the first pineapple had come to England."<sup>129</sup> Could it happen so? Certainly Jordan, as an apprentice of the royal gardener John Tradescant, went on a journey to far-away places to bring miraculous fruits to the court of the King. During the voyage, Tradescant dies and Jordan takes on the responsibility of leader of the expedition.

However, that complicates the issue of Jordan's travels. When Jordan comes back and the Dog Woman meets him on the shore, the tired traveller tells her the story of his meeting the Hopi tribe whose language "has no grammar in the way we [in England] recognise it," more particularly, they have no sense of time – no tenses for past present and future.<sup>130</sup> It suddenly becomes clear that those previous journeys of Jordan's may not be creation of his imagination. The pineapple, as a recurring motive, ties those magical stories together with a reliable story of bringing the fruit to the court. Hence, the reader is left questioning whether those magical

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<sup>128</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 129.

<sup>129</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 120.

<sup>130</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 156.

places could exist even though it is impossible to believe that there is a city where people's words "rising up, form a thick cloud over the city, which every so often must be thoroughly cleansed of too much language."<sup>131</sup>

Jordan himself famously states that, "[e]very journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys [he] wishes to record".<sup>132</sup> Jordan is an explorer, but he does not only wish to explore places on earth – the journey which can be traced by putting the finger on the map and marking the places with flags.<sup>133</sup> Jordan refuses to see the world as consisting only of facts; in *Sexing the Cherry* both history and reality include not only facts, but also stories and narratives. To Jordan, "time has no meaning, space and place have no meaning. ... All times can be inhabited, all places visited. In a single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans."<sup>134</sup> Thus, even the most fantastic journeys of the mind which transcend reality are important; they are true in the sense that they happened and existed in our minds – in that sense, they *happened* to us. The list of lies<sup>135</sup> about universe which is presented in the book enhances that idea and subverts "all the essentialist theories, objectivist theories, totalizing theories, ontological theories."<sup>136</sup> The fantasy is inserted into what has been perceived as solid history, or into what seemed to be a real story about the explorer bringing back some peculiar fruits. History starts to include the mythical tales of twelve dancing princesses, the stories of cities which move every night and people who can cover the skies with their words.

Those fictive tales do not simply contradict reality – sometimes those fictional insertions work to provide an alternative view on what has been seen as reality. As Jordan states, he could have told the readers "the truth as you will find it in diaries and maps and log-books"<sup>137</sup>, he even states that he himself kept the log book for the ship, "meticulously".<sup>138</sup> He

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<sup>131</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 11.

<sup>132</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 2.

<sup>133</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 2.

<sup>134</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 89.

<sup>135</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 92-93.

<sup>136</sup> Grice and Woods, 34.

<sup>137</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 2.

states that he has written down his own journeys and thinks that those stories are truthful, at least what happened to him personally. Yet, he says that when the ship comes home full of new fruits and spices, crowds of people meet the sailors and every time the sailor tells the story of his voyages it “will be a little more fanciful.”<sup>139</sup> So what is the real story then? Interestingly, in this light Jordan`s mystical stories cannot be seen as totally untruthful simply because everything everybody says is a certain subjective version of something in the past, which nobody knows anymore. In this sense, those magical stories again work at subverting and decentering<sup>140</sup> realism, suggesting an alternative reality, an alternative way of life and way of thinking. These magical journeys of Jordan`s becomes the metaphor for seeing something unknown when looking at very familiar things and well-known facts from another perspective.

#### **4.2 *The Passion***

In a similar style with *Sexing the Cherry*, the novel *The Passion* provides two seemingly parallel stories which, as the book proceeds, intermingle when the main characters meet in Russia during Napoleon`s campaign: one story is Henri`s semi-reliable diary of serving in Napoleon`s army, the second one is “a narrative that supplements”<sup>141</sup> Henri`s version, and that is Villanelle`s story, the story of a beautiful Venetian woman who was sold to one of the generals by her husband.<sup>142</sup> Villanelle also lives in the same period of Napoleonic Wars, however, she presents an imaginative version of Napoleonic Europe.<sup>143</sup> The obvious parallel between the imaginative journey of Jordan from *Sexing the Cherry* and the alternative reality of Villanelle is in the fact that both of those stories are located in magical, unreal places. Particularly, in case of Villanelle, that imagined city is Venice – an actual existing city, which you can still find on the map. However, just as is was with Jordan`s travels, reality is

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<sup>138</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 117.

<sup>139</sup> Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, 117.

<sup>140</sup> Grice and Woods, 32.

<sup>141</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

<sup>142</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 99.

<sup>143</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

interconnected with myths and Venice gains the status of a mythical city because it is full of magic: boatmen there have webbed feet and thus can walk on water; a person's heart may be physically stolen from its possessor, the streets change, and the canals appear and disappear on their own.<sup>144</sup>

It has been mentioned before that Villanelle herself is an individual who does not fit into the conventions of a realist narrative – she is a magical figure with masculine webbed feet and dislocated gender identity.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, the place she lives in also does not fit any historiographic description; the city is floating, changing, unstable. In this case, just as in *Sexing the Cherry*, “magic [in the novel] is a way of decentering the realism, ... suggesting an alternative way of life”<sup>146</sup> which exists in the novel's reality, side-by-side with the realist historical reality of Henri's. Just as in *Sexing the Cherry*, those two versions of reality mix when Henri meets Villanelle; they become close and the soldier and the Venetian escape to the magical city of Venice.<sup>147</sup> There Henri sees all the magic himself. Sceptical at first, he has to acknowledge the changing mystical reality around him and even give up some of his realist assumptions: “‘I need a map.’ ‘It won't help. This is a living city. Things change.’ ‘Villanelle, cities don't.’ ‘Henri, they do’”.<sup>148</sup> Villanelle serves as a guide for Henri to the mystery of Venice, while she is full of secrets herself, as she never shows her webbed feet to anyone and she has had her heart stolen by the woman who won in the Casino with the Queen of spades card.<sup>149</sup>

The coexistence of magic and reality in Venice can be seen in the clearest way in the fact that the city is permanently changing; the city's streets are inconstant, they cannot be grasped by any map.<sup>150</sup> The real Venice is a city that is sinking under water; the city itself might become history in a couple of decades, a thought which has occupied the imagination of

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<sup>144</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 119.

<sup>145</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

<sup>146</sup> Grice and Woods, 31.

<sup>147</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 109.

<sup>148</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 113.

<sup>149</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 59.

<sup>150</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 113.

mankind.<sup>151</sup> In this sense, for Winterson, this city of secrets that slowly fades away into history becomes “the theatre” where all the concepts of reality, truth, and objectivity can be questioned.<sup>152</sup> It is usually suggested that this city “has long served the Anglo-American imagination as a metaphor for the past as lost object of desire”.<sup>153</sup> To catch that disappearing beauty, mankind vainly tries to represent Venice through city maps, paintings and literature, so much so that the city becomes familiar to us even though we may have never been there. The question remains: how do we represent reality, which soon becomes history and disappears into the unreachable past? It may be suggested that *The Passion* goes as far as to question another example of the “dark area” of history: how do things become unknown and unfamiliar, how do they become history?<sup>154</sup>

Henri`s character is used to see these places clearly, as he was in the army where every move was calculated and mapped – every move of the army was “clearly marked”.<sup>155</sup> Following this metaphor, maps usually represent solid spaces, stable, unmoving. In the universe of Postmodern historical fiction, those stable maps represent acknowledged reality; they can be understood as ideologically constructed spaces which totally ignore human experiences.<sup>156</sup> To subvert and question this notion, Winterson states that every real map conceals an unknown journey, which was mentioned by Jordan in *Sexing the Cherry* as the place which exists only in the mind – the place that consists of experiences and emotions felt in that particular place. And in Winterson`s reality, that imagined place full of personal stories and narratives is no less real than the streets of Venice.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan departs from the real to the magical realm, while in *The Passion*, it is the real city of Venice that represents the unknown, unfamiliar and magical place. It has been questioned in the book, “how is it that one day life is orderly and you are

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<sup>151</sup> Judith Seaboyer, “Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson's "The Passion", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 483-509, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208976>> 5 Nov 2015, 483.

<sup>152</sup> Seaboyer, 484.

<sup>153</sup> Seaboyer, 484.

<sup>154</sup> Grice and Woods, 33.

<sup>155</sup> Grice and Woods, 33.

<sup>156</sup> Grice and Woods, 32.

content, a little cynical perhaps ... and then without warning you find the solid floor is a trapdoor and you are now in another place whose geography is uncertain and whose customs are strange.”<sup>157</sup> If the geography of the existing reality shows so many flaws, the historical reality seems to have even more secrets and mysteries. Histories are a very problematic thing to believe, yet, they are the only way we can create our reality, a concept which goes back to the very essence of Postmodernity<sup>158</sup> – everything is a narrative, a discourse, a construct. *The Passion*’s world is both “resolutely fictive” and “undeniably historical”,<sup>159</sup> as it is a paradoxical narrative that embodies both truths and lies, facts and fiction, which makes this novel, together with *Sexing the Cherry*, undoubtedly fit the genre of historiographic metafiction.

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<sup>157</sup> Winterson, *The Passion*, 68.

<sup>158</sup> Grice and Woods, 33.

<sup>159</sup> Grice and Woods, 28.

#### **Chapter IV. Conclusions.**

To sum up, it has been seen in the previous chapters that both of Jeanette Winterson's novels, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, claim their historical truthfulness by describing historical reality from the point of view of an individual living in that epoch. Still, both of the novels cannot be perceived as fully historiographical, as they do not surrender their status as invented fiction. The unreliable narrators constantly remind the readers that the novel they are reading is just a story, they fail to record anything clearly and the reality of the novels is interrupted by magic and fantasy. Those two main features – historicity and metafictionality – constitute the core of Linda Hutcheon's embodiment of the genre. Thus, it is fair to state that those two novels by Jeanette Winterson are the perfect examples of Postmodern, paradoxically historical fiction, which Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction".

However, it has been mentioned in the chapter devoted to the analysis of women's histories that Winterson's fiction does not only subvert "master narratives" and doubt the division between history and literature. It does not simply offer an alternative way of looking at history, reality, and historical knowledge. The leading motive is the creation of a paradox: the real and the fantastic, the acknowledged and the apocryphal, female and male at once – all these concepts are mixed and blurred in Winterson's historic fiction, which makes everything uncertain, doubled, questioned and, thus, exciting. According to Linda Hutcheon, this is the essence of Postmodernism – a permanent subversion *and* affirmation of concepts, ideas, and discourses. Jeanette Winterson adds her own perspective by obviously focusing on problematizing gender issues and female subjectivity in history. The ways in which Winterson's fiction can be read and analysed are endless and it might be reasonable to state that even though Jeanette Winterson's novels *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* clearly fit Hutcheon's theory, they might go beyond that, enriching the genre in the long term.

Even though Hutcheon's theory is justified, as is seen in the second chapter, and

even though it has its roots and has already been acknowledged by Academia, the fact that it is still relatively recent and is trying to describe the concepts of present-day reality makes it highly possible that the genre will develop, acquire new patterns and, perhaps, even subgenres. So the further development of the genre is possible thanks to the authors such as Jeanette Winterson who write within the genre still adding some characteristics of her own.

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