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„Klubko plné uzlíků“:

**Narativní strategie v rané tvorbě Jeanette Wintersonové
a jejich následný vývoj**

“A Ball of String Full of Knots”:

**Narrative Strategies in Jeanette Winterson’s Early Novels
and Their Later Development**

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Key words:

Jeanette Winterson, novels, British literature, narratology, postmodernism, feminism, narrator, embedded narratives

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je popsat způsob použití narativních strategií v románech Jeanette Wintersonové se zaměřením na jejich postupný vývoj. Konkrétně půjde o tyto romány: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry*, *Written on the Body*, *Art & Lies*, *Gut Symmetries* and *The PowerBook*. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* slouží jako zdroj témat pro všechny ostatní romány, a tudíž určuje dlouhodobé zaměření na problematiku spojenou s vypravěčstvím, časem a historií. Také obsahuje první naratologické experimenty, především vložené příběhy, které jsou pravděpodobně nejtěžnější ze strategií, které Wintersonová využívá, jelikož se v nějaké podobě objevují v každém z jejích románů. Důležitým příspěvkem románů *The Passion* a *Sexing the Cherry* je jejich historické zasazení, které zvýrazňuje konflikt mezi představivostí (vypravěčstvím) a fakty (historií). Kromě toho se objevuje druhý vypravěč, a tím jsou romány obohaceny o nový pohled, což umožňuje skrze vzniklou dualitu problematizovat kategorii pohlaví. Ve zbývajících čtyřech románech Wintersonová dosahuje vrcholu svého experimentování, vzhledem k tomu, že posunují témata předchozích románů ještě dál, jako by zkoumala, jaké jsou meze vypravěčství. Spletitost narativní struktury se prohloubila, vypravěči jsou často nespolehliví a se zastřenými identitami, což dohromady vyvolává celkový pocit zamlženosti a nejistoty.

Práce není myšlena jako pouhý seznam zmíněných strategií opatřený ukázkami, ale snaží se ukázat cestu, která zavedla Wintersonovou do této finální fáze, tím, že dává do souvislosti strategie jednotlivých románů, které nakonec ukazují zpět k *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. K tomu je potřeba nejenom analyzovat nové prvky každého navazujícího románu, ale také se ohlédnout za prvky románů, které již prodiskutovány byly, a uvažovat o tom, jak se jejich myšlenky přesunují do následujícího románu: zda jsou zopakovány, třeba s jistými nuancemi, nebo zda jsou odmítnuty, díky novému zaměření románu. Tato práce dokazuje, že u Wintersonové druhá možnost není příliš častá, protože její romány mají sklon stavět na románech předchozích, a tím reprodukovat mnohé z již známých myšlenek, ke kterým pak přidávají myšlenky vlastní. To se dá přirovnat ke sněhové kouli, která při kutálení nabírá hmotu, ale ponechává si stejné jádro. Stejně tak může čtenář cítit přítomnost *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* v srdci každého románu od Wintersonové, neboť od tvrzení tohoto románu nikdy neupustila, přestože nabyla četných, osvěžujících pohledů a nových způsobů, jak vyprávět své příběhy, tím, že detailně prozkoumala důsledky svého prvního románu.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to describe the employment of narrative strategies in the novels of Jeanette Winterson with the focus on their development over time. The specific novels to be addressed are: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry*, *Written on the Body*, *Art & Lies*, *Gut Symmetries* and *The PowerBook*. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* serves as the thematic source for all the other texts, thus determining the sustained concentration on the issues of storytelling, time history. It also contains first narratological experiments, most notably the embedded narratives that are arguably the most crucial of the strategies Winterson utilizes, for they appear in some form in all of her novels. A significant contribution of *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* is their historical setting, which accentuates the clash between fantasy (storytelling) and facts (history). Moreover, they introduce a second narrator in order to enrich the texts with an additional perspective and they use the ensuing duality of the narrators to problematize gender. In the last four novels, Winterson reaches the peak of her experimentation, since they take the themes of the previous novels even further, as if exploring what are the limits of storytelling. The complexity of the narrative structures has deepened, the narrators are now often unreliable and with obfuscated identities, all the features together evoking a general feeling of blur and uncertainty.

The thesis is not meant as a mere listing of the strategies provided with examples, but it endeavors to show the path that has lead Winterson to this final stage by drawing connections between the strategies of the individual novels, eventually linking most of the ideas back to *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. What is required to accomplish this goal, is not only the analysis of what new features each subsequent novel introduces, but also looking back at the features of the already discussed novels and deliberating how their ideas are translated to the next novel – whether they are reiterated, possibly with some nuances, or whether they are discarded, as the focus shifts elsewhere. The thesis demonstrates that the latter option is not very common in Winterson, because her novels have a tendency of building on the ones that came before them, thus echoing many of the already familiar ideas, to which they attach ideas of their own. This could be likened to a snowball gathering more mass as it rolls, while retaining the same core. In the same way, at the heart of every Winterson's novel the reader can sense the presence of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, for she has never abandoned its contentions, even though she did acquire numerous fresh perspectives and new ways of telling the story as she explored in depth the implications of her first text.

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Preliminary Remarks

Before commencing the analysis as such, there has to be a few preliminary remarks, one of which is the justification of the choice of primary sources for this thesis. The literary form of interest will be the novel, yet this denomination is not too accurate in the case Winterson, as she does not see herself strictly as a novelist:

What I am seeking to do in my work is to make a form that answers to twenty-first-century needs. A form that is not “a poem” as we usually understand the term, and not “a novel” as the term is defined by its own genesis. I do not write novels. The novel form is finished.¹

Winterson combines the novel form with poetry in the sense that her language is highly poetic and while her prose certainly has a plot, it alternates frequently with lyrical passages. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, the thesis will address the treated works as novels, since Winterson does not offer any alternative term to use.

Furthermore, asserting that the thesis will deal with Winterson’s novels does not disqualify some books which will not be included here, especially *Boating for Beginners* that was published after *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (henceforth abbreviated as *Oranges*), and therefore it would chronologically seem sensible to treat it along with *Oranges*. The first argument for not including it is that it does not share the overall attitude with Winterson’s principal novels, which are never written just for amusement:

This is a comic book with pictures. I published it 3 months after *Oranges* came out, and if that isn’t proof enough that it was never intended as a second novel, then what else can I say? Writers don’t publish their serious work three months apart in the same year and even if they wanted to, their publishers wouldn’t let them. [...] It’s a pity when something fun gets used as a rod to beat you with, but there are always people who will use whatever is to hand to prove their thesis.²

Not wishing to be implicated in a similar situation, the thesis will not draw from *Boating for Beginners*, however enjoyable the book is. There is a second reason as well, though, and that is the perception of the seven novels from *Oranges* to *The PowerBook* as one continuous, evolving body, as Winterson elucidates in an interview which was conducted after the publication of *The PowerBook*:

¹ *Art Objects*, 191

² Jeanette Winterson, “*Boating for Beginners*,” *jeanettewitnerson.com*. Web. 1 August 2015

Because all the books speak to each other. They are only separate books because that's how they had to be written. I see them really as one long continuous piece of work. I've said that the seven books make a cycle or a series, and I believe that they do, from *Oranges* to *The PowerBook*. And they interact and themes do occur and return, disappear, come back amplified, or modified, changed in some way, because it's been my journey, it's the journey of my imagination, it's the journey of my soul in those books. So continually they must address one another [. . .] that's why I say it is a series, and that's also why I say it's finished now with *The Powerbook* and there has to be a new beginning.

Winterson does not include *Boating for Beginners* in her cycle for the reasons stated above, even though it fits chronologically, and additionally, this classification separates the seven novels from what came later. This thesis aspires to explore this cycle and its continuity, focusing chiefly on the category of narrative strategies. In the process it will prove that the idea of the cycle is justified, since the novels do communicate between each other and, as a series should, they manifest a common point of departure and a common goal, collectively relating yet another narrative that does not unfold between their covers but between the individual texts. Naturally, it is not a narrative with a conventional plot; it is a narrative of the development of the novels – the common point of departure being the ideas proposed in *Oranges* and the goal being the rendering of those ideas through experimentation and increasingly intricate narrative strategies employed that experiment.

The seven novels will be separated into three groups, each representing a stage of Winterson's creative growth: 1. *Oranges* 2. *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* 3. *Written on the Body*, *Art & Lies*, *Gut Symmetries* and *The PowerBook*. Accordingly, the thesis will have three sections and these will be further divided into two chapters each; the first one will always engage with the current thematic context of the narrative strategies, while the second one will single out the most fundamental narrative strategies of the given group and provide a relatively in-depth analysis. It is apparent even given the grouping of the novels that *Oranges* occupies a special position in the cycle. It will have its own chapter, for even in the span of a single novel, the transition from *Oranges* to *The Passion* shows that a great progress has been made, making the novels quite distinct. But it also deserves this unique position, because it corresponds to the beginnings that are shared by all of the novels and that cannot be disregarded. Furthermore, since it is the first novel, more space will be needed to appropriately expounds its subject matter to a reader who might not be too familiar with Winterson's fiction, whereas in the study of the later novels, one can always return to *Oranges* for helpful parallels between the texts and so on. For these reasons, the first chapter

will be an introductory one, presenting the themes that will reoccur frequently throughout this thesis, as they do throughout Winterson's work.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

Introducing the Themes: Time, History and Storytelling

Understanding narrative strategy as the way the text is presented with some intention in mind, one has to concede that narrative strategies cannot be examined without focusing on the themes of the novels as well. Narrative strategy is goal-oriented; it intends to cause a specific effect and it is usually utilized to convey opinions on a certain topic. Without considering Winterson's themes and convictions, the examination of the narrative strategies would be either impossible, or dull and uninformative. Hence, the first step towards interpreting Winterson's novels is to grasp her views of time, history and storytelling.

It might be fitting to begin this exploration with the author's own introduction to the 1991 edition of *Oranges*. There it is made clear that "*Oranges* is an experimental novel: its interests are anti-linear."¹ This is a warning to the reader not to be deceived by the fairly straightforward story of coming-of-age, as the novel is so much more than that. Apart from narrating the story of Jeanette's maturation, it aspires to tackle questions of aesthetic, philosophical and social nature. The novel operates on several levels, or in several dimensions: the personal journey of Jeanette towards her self-discovery is interwoven with the fantastic worlds she creates, all the while being tinted by the ever-present biblical myth. To read the novel merely as a *Bildungsroman*, or even an autobiography, would be to ignore its most prominent and most valuable features, one of which is the experimental narrative approach. Winterson then proceeds to argue, that the novel is actually narrated in a spiral, finding it the most precise description of the narrative:

I really don't see the point of reading in straight lines. We don't think like that and we don't live like that. Our mental processes are closer to a maze than a motorway, every turning yields another turning, not symmetrical, not obvious. Not chaos either. A sophisticated mathematical equation made harder to unravel because X and Y have different values on different days.²

The way the novel is structured and narrated should more accurately render Jeanette's experience. Her life, her fantasies and the Bible are all parts of her reality and the Holy Grail of her journey is that she "gains knowledge of the plurivocal nature of reality, the complexity

¹ The introduction to 1991 edition of *Oranges*, viii, quoted in Marie Herholdt Jørgensen, *Empty Space and Points of Light: The Self, Time, Sex, and Gender in Selected Works by Jeanette Winterson* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2005) 23.

² The introduction to 1991 edition of *Oranges*, viii, quoted in Marie Herholdt Jørgensen, *Empty Space and Points of Light: The Self, Time, Sex, and Gender in Selected Works by Jeanette Winterson* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2005) 23.

of the past and the indeterminacy of the future.³ The concepts one deems unquestionable, such as history, truth and reality, are distorted and redefined in the novel, as it challenges the totalitarian tendency to impose universal values on individuals.

Consequently, according to Winterson, history represents only a social norm, one of the possible interpretations of the past, not a given truth. This is relatable to the contention of the New Historicists “that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature,”⁴ or to the growing “incredulity toward metanarratives”⁵ of exactness of history, science *etcetera* formulated by Jean- François Lyotard. However, in the context of history, the most relevant is Hayden White’s theory, especially his *Metahistory*. He claims that history necessarily involves a poetic element and even proposes that literary modes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony are applicable to historical works.⁶ In this way, history can be treated similarly to a work of fiction, because even though it is based primarily on strictly scientific approach, it also has a close relation to philosophy and language. Historians search for accounts of past events, but do not merely list them; they draw connections between them, try to explain them and give their work a sense of wholeness. Thus, their product is more comparable to a story, than to a chronicle.⁷

Moreover, a story requires a moral, a sort of resolution or at the very least a conclusion. These are supplied by the historian, they are not to be found in the historical “facts” themselves. The process of writing history is a process of interpretation, never a purely objective report, despite the aspirations and assertions of some. The same data are, consequentially, utilized differently by individual historians - variously designed analyses are employed, diverse conclusions are reached. At the same time no historian can claim authority on the precise interpretation of history, because what he presents is only his perspective, his personal approach. When compared with the work of other historian, both histories might be mutually exclusive, yet neither of them can be said to be more “realistic” than the other.⁸ Even though they might not vary in the evidence used, the authors would probably choose

³ Susana Onega, “‘I’m Telling You Stories, Trust Me.’: History/Story-telling in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Logomachia: Forms of Opposition in English Language/Literature*. E. Douka-Kabitoğlu ed. (Thessaloniki: Hellenic Association for the Study of English, 1994) 183.

⁴ Harold Aram Veaser, *New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989) xi.

⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) xxiv.

⁶ See the preface to Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) x.

⁷ See White, 6.

⁸ See the preface to White, xii.

distinct scientific approaches and even such a choice equips the work with personal bias. One can argue that historians only “find” the stories, while fiction writers “invent” them, but historians hugely influence the stories as well, since they are obliged to ascribe degrees of importance to events: some are stressed, some are omitted and they are processed and organized to fit into the historian’s theory.

Winterson takes the notion even further as she “proposes the construction of an utterly individualistic kind of history, one that equates the recording of the past to the individual memory of it.”⁹ As always, she supports individualism against limitations of expression, feeling and personal perception of the world. The conceptions of time, history and the relation of storytelling and reality are formulated in the short chapter called “Deuteronomy”, which is central to the novel. The chapter can be hardly attributed to the voice of young Jeanette, it more resembles Winterson’s essays, where she usually ponders upon art and related issues. It provides a theoretical framework for not only *Oranges* but arguably for all the subsequent novels as well, since, even though it discusses history, it is related to the fact/fiction relation and in the broader scope to the reality/imagination relation and there is not a novel written by Winterson that would not address these concepts.

The voice of “Deuteronomy” maintains that people need the concept of the unassailable truth of history “so that they know what to believe and what not to believe.”¹⁰ The totality creates a security, a comfort zone, where people are not forced to make their own assumptions; they are not required to invent their own views. History is a part of social system that opposes imagination, individual thought and provides only a limited perspective on what is reality.¹¹ History violently allots order, classification and meaning to the past, it serves “[t]o fit it, force it, function it, to suck out the spirit until it looks the way you think it should.”¹² Past is used as an argument to support a claim, or an ideology, and hence it has to be adjusted in ways described by Hayden White to be applicable: “when I look at a history book and think of the imaginative effort it has taken to squeeze this oozing world between two boards and typeset, I am astonished.”¹³ The historian works with reports that leave room for interpretation and can be bent, if needed. After all, the past cannot defend itself: “[t]ime is a great deadener”¹⁴ and “[t]he dead don’t shout.”¹⁵ All that remains to confront history is memory. Yet, memories are

⁹ *Onega*, 175.

¹⁰ *Oranges*, 93.

¹¹ For a description of such a society see the chapter “Imagination and Reality” in *Art Objects*, esp. 134-135.

¹² *Oranges*, 93-94.

¹³ *Oranges*, 95.

¹⁴ *Oranges*, 93.

¹⁵ *Oranges*, 94.

but stories of what happened one tells himself. He can never precisely reconstruct a particular moment, he might remember his attitudes or the influence an event had, however even these are susceptible to change over time. One can argue that there are factors of trustworthiness of history that one is generally capable of evaluating on his own, for instance the respectability of its source or its probability based on our knowledge, nevertheless such factors are highly biased. The hope to establish an objective history falters in the face of the disparity between the experiences of individuals; each assesses information differently, since each perceives reality in his own way. Winterson advocates that such integrity should be preserved:

And so when someone tells me what they heard or saw, I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own.¹⁶

Observing, yet not accepting a given version of the truth, one should then devise his own image of it, while employing his own reasoning and particularly his own imagination. Which is echoed in the concluding sentence of the chapter: “[i]f you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches.”¹⁷

While “Deuteronomy” disparages history, in the novel itself, Bible, the mother’s interpretation of it in particular, is more constricting for Jeanette. In contrast to it she introduces the Arthurian myth of the quest for the Holy Grail. History and the Bible impose their on the individual, claiming to present the truth of the world. In a similar way history is a codified story, religion is a codified myth. The Biblical texts are “not quite history and not quite storytelling, their position on any kind of fact-fiction continuum changes with the point of view of the observer.”¹⁸ Myths and religion should be adjustable for each individual, same as history. Myths are more akin to stories than religion; nevertheless Winterson is not radically opposed to the principle of it, since it operates with other dimensions of reality and therefore is not as narrow as history. Yet, the strict version of Christianity presented in *Oranges* that allows for no concession is absolutely smothering for Jeanette’s individuality and above all to her creative spirit, rebuffing her imaginative stories as foolish, if not as blasphemy. When she “rewrites”¹⁹ a biblical story using Fuzzy Felt, she is confronted by Pastor Finch:

¹⁶ *Oranges*, 95.

¹⁷ *Oranges*, 95.

¹⁸ Laurel Bollinger, “Models for Female Loyalty: The Biblical Ruth in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994): 365.

¹⁹ *Oranges*, 12.

“What's that?”

“Daniel,” I answered.

“But that’s not right,” he said, aghast. “Don’t you know that Daniel escaped? In your picture the lions are swallowing him.”

“I’m sorry,” I replied, putting on my best, blessed face. “I wanted to do Jonah and the whale, but they don’t do whales in Fuzzy Felt. I’m pretending those lions are whales.”

“You said it was Daniel.” He was suspicious.

“I got mixed up.”

He smiled. “Let’s put it right, shall we?”²⁰

There is only one “right” interpretation of the Bible and Jeanette’s is not the one. Her fabrications have to be remedied; she needs to be set on the right path of conformism and limited imagination. After all, she is to become a preacher herself and as a future messiah, she cannot afford to question the Bible in any way.

Such a religion or a unified history, are too constricting models for imagination, and an individual should rather regard the past and faith as a personal collections of stories. Because it is storytelling that is the major focus of Winterson, its magical ability to create worlds is related to many ideas throughout Winterson’s career and in “Deuteronomy” it is linked to history, which is expanded upon especially in the following two novels. Storytelling offers unbounded freedom, which allows dismissing the demands for faithful representation of what is known and for being classifiable. Its very essence is nonconformist and individualistic, hence perfect for Jeanette, who holds no functional position in society. Refusing to regurgitate the verities of others, she constructs her own. For

[T]hat is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It’s a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it’s a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don’t believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It’s all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat’s cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more.²¹

Winterson opposes the insatiable need to rationalize everything one faces with a world of fantasy that is as vital as the “real” one. The question of authenticity is utterly out of place there, since Jeanette’s involvement in both worlds is comparable in degree. One should not attempt to disentangle the ball and stretch the string in a straight line. History epitomizes a

²⁰ *Oranges*, 12-13.

²¹ *Oranges*, 93.

failed effort of simplification that ought to be avoided. Instead, Winterson encourages participating in the creation of something new, which she herself certainly practices, considering the creativity of her novels. The metaphor of the ball of string full of knots might be also valid as a general description of her novels, or at least their narrative strategies. The narratives are not linear, like a stretched string, they are entangled in themselves, forming a ball, with various sub-narratives, the knots.

The discussed subject of *Oranges* has been summarized elegantly by Onega:

[I]t could therefore be stated that Jeanette Winterson rejects the traditional univocous and totalitarian concept of history and defends the right of the individual to contribute her own subjective version of it, insisting at the same time on the truth-revealing power of imaginative storytelling and the impossibility of separating fact from fiction, the real from the unreal, the desired from the actually lived.²²

Winterson provides an apparatus for the oppressed individual to liberate himself, yet her scope reaches even further. Imagination admits one to a world where seemingly opposite notions do not differ. Winterson labels this world reality, which is why for her oppositions like fact/fiction or real/unreal carry little meaning. They refer to the fashionable perception of reality as something that can be comprehended by the five senses, which she finds extremely limited and dull. “The reality of the imagination leaves out nothing. It is the most complete reality we can know.”²³ The material world is only a fraction of such reality. This considered, her statement “I see no conflict between reality and imagination. They are not in fact separate,”²⁴ seems completely sensible and logical. “Reality is continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible. The imagination alone can fathom this and it reveals its fathomings through art.”²⁵ Imagination and art are the gateways to alternative worlds that are largely unexplored and profoundly more rewarding. Winterson roams in these worlds, not bound by the conventional reality and as a consequence, her novels often include dreams, or other fantastic realms. Sensory perception is not enough to follow her on this journey; the reader must be open to new ideas, among others, to the experimental nature of the texts that is justified by the themes Winterson considers. Mingling and blending narratives, inserted stories, frame narratives, unreliable narrators, indistinct characters and many other strategies employed in the novels are often attributable to Winterson’s approach to storytelling, imagination and reality.

²² Onega, 183.

²³ *Art Objects*, 150.

²⁴ *Art Objects*, 142.

²⁵ *Art Objects*, 151.

The Embedded Narratives

The previous chapter was largely theoretical and served primarily to delineate Winterson's most important themes that influence the narrative structures of her novels, originating in *Oranges* and later becoming the hallmarks of her writing. With the basic knowledge of her views on history, time and storytelling, one is able to delve into the actual structure of *Oranges* and try to interpret it by inspecting individual instances, which is the primary focus of this chapter. The most prominent and the most discussed narrative feature of the novel are the embedded stories, which help the novel to avoid the label of a classic example of *Bildungsroman* or even that of an autobiography. Therefore, one of their functions is to distance the novel from the tradition that is associated with patriarchy, especially in the genre of *Bildungsroman*, and to associate it rather with postmodernist tendencies, which tend to undermine such traditions.

Interestingly enough, at the same time they indirectly support the coming-of-age theme, since they demonstrate the growth of the protagonist in the sphere of imagination and storytelling, which is a crucial, if not the most important, part of her development. As Elsie, who has a major influence on Jeanette, puts it: “‘There’s this world,’ she banged the wall graphically, ‘and there’s this world,’ she thumped her chest. ‘If you want to make sense of either, you have to take notice of both.’”¹ Thus, the novel moves away from what is usually called realistic depiction and transports the reader into Winterson's world, which builds on fantasy, storytelling and multiplicity of perspectives. After analyzing the embedded stories, one soon realizes that they are closely tied with the central narrative, even though they are usually quite self-contained. In this chapter the connection between the individual narratives will be examined, firstly focusing on the narratives that are found earlier in the text, before delving into the principal, longer ones that appear towards the end.

In her chapter “Levels of Narration,” Mieke Bal tackles the general questions concerning embedded narratives and the following analysis will be often based on her observations. Many of the features she concentrates on are highly relatable to *Oranges*, and so it would be fitting to start the examination by contemplating Bal's characterization of fabulas that resemble each other, which is the type of relation that is the most relevant to the novel in question:

¹ *Oranges*, 32.

If [the fabulas] resembled each other completely, we would have identical texts. In that case, the primary text would quote itself. Resemblance, however, can never be absolute identity [...] Even in passport photographs, taken with the express intention to show resemblance to the person portrayed, there may be different degrees of likeness. When can we speak of resemblance between two different fabulas? A simple and relative solution to such a problem is this: we speak of resemblance when two fabulas can be paraphrased in such a way that the summaries have one or more striking elements in common. The degree of resemblance is determined by the number of terms the summaries share.²

If one would do a similar test with the narratives of *Oranges*, he would discover that Jeanette's fantasies reflect her experiences and thoughts, as well as the novel's themes and motifs. Bal then considers the stories of Scheherazade that decide whether she lives or dies, and shows in this way how the embedded narrative can determine the central one. This is very much the case of *Oranges* as well; whenever Jeanette encounters a difficulty when dealing with others, it is highly probable that the reader will be confronted with a variation on the problem in the embedded stories to come, since it is there that Jeanette's actual decision-making takes place and where her personality is being shaped, as will hopefully be demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

The first narrative that is visibly separated from the central narrative³ introduces a princess that is described as beautiful, brilliant and overly sensitive. These are quite stereotypical qualities often associated with women, and by their inclusion Winterson questions and problematizes them, which is the same strategy she utilizes with biblical references, for instance.⁴ Even this first extremely short fairy tale contains a significant number of features that define the nature and purpose of the embedded stories. Because they are so suitably condensed here, it is worthwhile to quote the whole passage:

Once upon a time there was a brilliant and beautiful princess, so sensitive that the death of a moth could distress her for weeks on end. Her family knew of no solution. Advisers wrung their hands, sages shook their heads, brave kings left

² Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Incorporated, 1997) 55-56.

³ In most of the editions of Winterson's novels this is done by a specific graphic symbol. In *Oranges* three asterisks, or other symbols, between paragraphs signal that what follows will not take place in the dimension Jeanette shares with other people. Three asterisks appear again when the inserted feature ends. A single asterisk is used as well to structure a narrative, whether the central or the embedded one, into smaller chunks of text within the individual chapters.

The most interesting variant of this signaling of the transition between narratives was in my edition of *Sexing the Cherry* where there are two main narratives and one is introduced by a picture of a half-peeled banana and the other by a pineapple. Towards the end of the novel the reader is introduced with two additional narratives that both reflect the previous ones and they are introduced by a cut banana and a cut pineapple.

⁴ Paulina Palmer, *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, Desire, Difference* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993) 102.

unsatisfied. So it happened for many years, until one day, out walking in the forest, the princess came to the hut of an old hunchback who knew the secrets of magic. This ancient creature perceived in the princess a woman of great energy and resourcefulness.

“My dear,” she said, “you are in danger of being burned by your own flame.”

The hunchback told the princess that she was old, and wished to die, but could not because of her many responsibilities. She had in her charge a small village of homely people, to whom she was advisor and friend. Perhaps the princess would like to take over? Her duties would be:

- * (1) To milk the goats,
- * (2) To educate the people
- * (3) To compose songs for their festival

To assist her she would have a three-legged stool and all the books belonging to the hunchback. Best of all, the old woman's harmonium, an instrument of great antiquity and four octaves.

The princess agreed to stay and forgot all about the palace and the moths. The old woman thanked her, and died at once.⁵

First of all, even if the reader were not warned in any other way of the transition between narratives, the very introduction of the story immediately transports him to the land of fairy tales, away from the central narrative. In this world a new set of rules applies, or rather there are not many rules applied at all, and the only limitation is one's imagination. Secondly, a resemblance between Jeanette and the princess is also quickly established; her family does not know what to do with her, which correlates to her growing up in an orphanage at first and then with her new mother, the conflict with whom is treated throughout the whole novel. Similarly to the advisers, sages and kings of the short fairy tale, there are other people who attempt to help Jeanette's mother to overcome her daughter's issues, especially the members of the church community, for instance Pastor Finch. The reader has barely the time to acquaint himself with Jeanette before this story is presented. This clearly establishes the essential role Jeanette's imagination plays in her life, in her personal development and, consequently, in the novel as a whole. As soon as the reader has some notion of how Jeanette operates in what others call reality, it is time to introduce her other world, since it is at least as important.

The central and the embedded narrative are not linked only through Jeanette, since other characters of the main plot are reflected in the embedded stories as well. In the fairy tale about the princess, the hunchback is noticeably similar in some aspects to Jeanette's mother,

⁵ *Oranges*, 9-10.

especially in making lists and training Jeanette to become her successor as a leader for the “homely” people. The relationship between Jeanette and her mother is relatively overtly depicted again later in the Perceval/Arthur and Winnet/the sorcerer relationships, which will be also discussed. The hunchback shares some qualities with Elsie as well, who is also old and dies in the main story, after passing some of her knowledge and ideals on to Jeanette, in many ways kindling her awakening.

Furthermore, as it is expected, the narratives are affiliated through the same running themes and motives, but also through the same symbols that can be seen incessantly in all the narratives. The most striking ones involve oranges (even the color orange), stones, circles (and walls), threads, forests and cities. Often with each appearance of such a symbol, its reference is broadened or the perspective on it is shifted, sometimes only slightly, sometimes more radically. This can be illustrated on the chalk circle, which symbolizes a form of defense that requires specific abilities and is designed for those who are more adventurous and refuse to live behind immovable walls. However, later the sorcerer uses the chalk circle to trick and capture Winnet. Hence, as the single image is viewed multiple times from different perspectives, it accumulates associations with different concepts, in this specific case a chalk circle in turns evokes freedom (as opposed to the walls), individuality, some spiritual prowess, security and limitation. Additionally, other motifs, such as home, magic, religion and storytelling, immediately come to question. Thus, the symbolism of the novel creates a complex nexus that connects all its narratives and, correspondingly to the embedded stories, promotes the idea of multiple perspectives.

What is more, the stories are not simply embedded into the main narrative without transition or reflection of the immediate context. For instance, the quoted fairy tale is directly followed by this passage:

My mother, out walking that night, dreamed a dream and sustained it in daylight. She would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord:

- * a missionary child,
- * a servant of God,
- * a blessing.⁶

The central narrative unmistakably enacts the situation described in the fairy tale: Jeanette’s new mother seeks a novice and a successor, similarly to the hunchback. In addition, another list of three items is introduced, which delineates objectives that

⁶ *Oranges*, 10.

Jeanette is expected to fulfill and the transition between the narratives is often described as emerging from a dream. There is always some link between the narratives: one fairy tale is based on a sermon on perfection Jeanette heard, another embedded passage features a feast as a prominent motif and is introduced right after Jeanette volunteers to help to prepare a festival banquet, the next one originates from Jeanette's contemplation on the notion of walls, etc. The most remarkable and the most explicit transition between the narratives can be seen in the second major embedded narrative of the novel:

One day, I learned that Tetrahedron is a mathematical shape that can be formed by stretching an elastic band over a series of nails.
But Tetrahedron is an emperor....
The emperor Tetrahedron lived in a palace made absolutely from elastic bands. To the right, cunning fountains shot elastic jets, subtle as silk; to the left, ten minstrels played day and night on elastic lutes.⁷

The reader can perceive the transition of thought from contemplation on geometry, the laws of which would be applicable to the tangible world, to the realm of fairy tales, which transforms the concept in question entirely. There is also a change in the narration, since at first the first person is used, which is not done in the other embedded stories, and it is substituted for the third person when the narration changes into a fairy tale.

The story of Tetrahedron is also useful, for it directly invites the discussion of multiple perspectives. Usually the “gnomic fairy tales and allegorical stories function like verbal icons, echoing and ‘varying’ the main episodes of Jeanette's life-story, adding a wealth of symbolic connotations and fantastic overtones to the supposedly objective and factual ‘historical’ events.”⁸ They reflect and comment on the central narrative, offering new perspectives and sometimes even the sought illumination. The emperor Tetrahedron has many faces, hence he can view different things at once and from various angles, personifying precisely the mentioned multiplicity of perspectives.⁹ When Jeanette constructs her stories in this way, she rejects the “totalising and absolutist categories of truth and falsehood, of good and evil.”¹⁰ The refusal of the limiting concepts such as history and the adoption of the values of storytelling examined in the previous chapter

⁷ *Oranges*, 49.

⁸ Susana Onega, “‘I’m Telling You Stories, Trust Me.’: History/Story-telling in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Logomachia: Forms of Opposition in English Language/Literature*. E. Douka-Kabitoğlu ed. (Thessaloniki: Hellenic Association for the Study of English, 1994) 177.

⁹ Marie Herholdt Jørgensen, *Empty Space and Points of Light: The Self, Time, Sex, and Gender in Selected Works by Jeanette Winterson* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2005) 33.

¹⁰ Onega, 182.

are here clearly manifested by the insistence on multiplicity, which ultimately shapes the narrative structures of Winterson's novels.

As discussed, the narratives are tied logically as well as thematically and they share a significant number of their motives. Additionally, they further distort the linearity of the text by including not only retrospection, but also what appear to be glimpses of the future. One such example would be the warning "you are in danger of being burned by your own flame" uttered by the hunchback in the first story. This way the embedded narrative suggests a possible development of the main narrative, which can be proven false, of course, and therefore the suspense is maintained.¹¹ Not only they hint at how the central narrative might continue, but they at times even decide the fate of the narrative in which they are embedded in. This is because in them Jeanette actually communicates her vital, life-defining decisions and conundrums. The main story provides the reader with the description of Jeanette's situation and her general emotions, what is not as common, however, are her actual thoughts on the matter. They are often inferable, yet seldom openly deliberated. Therefore, when Jeanette sits through a sermon on perfection, she only states that she disagrees with it, and her understanding of the issue is given in the embedded story that appears right afterwards.

Towards the end of the novel, the embedded narratives become more frequent and the discussed elements more noticeable, for Jeanette has mastered the weaving of the stories and bringing them to life. Her final creations that the novel shares with the reader are the stories of Perceval and, most importantly, of Winnet, who feels like the voice Jeanette has been searching for. Jeanette's narrative skills are honed to the point where she is able to retell her life and the lives of others,¹² while she also comments on her present situation. One should pause to appreciate the level at which the text operates here: Winterson writes a novel which carries remarkable signs of autobiography and introduces a character that shares her first name, who in turn creates another character with a name that also echoes that of Winterson, each clearly exploring the life and thoughts of her creator. There is an episode when Winnet herself is having a dream, deepening the narrative nexus even further. Moreover, the content

¹¹ For an analysis of indications the embedded narrative may offer to its reader see Baal, 58-59.

¹² Winterson's narratives often work with retelling, see especially *Weight* with its theme of "telling the story again."

of the dream proves that Winnet's quest emulates the metaphorical journey of Jeanette within herself.¹³

Apart from the more self-assured voice, the reader can also observe Jeanette's attitudes and opinions more sharply stated in the Winnet stories. The comparison of magic and religion that the text has been hitherto toying with is now brought to completion. Magic is associated with creating new things and this is extended to include storytelling in the novel. Both Jeanette and her mother are brilliant storytellers, yet they differ significantly. Jeanette's mother uses stories to adjust the world she lives in; as Jeanette puts it, "my mother had painted the white roses red and now she claimed they grew that way."¹⁴ This manipulation done for the cause of religion, using its rigid doctrine as a guidebook, is what frustrates Jeanette the most and what she so vehemently opposes. She has no quarrel with storytelling as such, as is evident from her own stories, yet she recognizes the limitations, the one-sidedness and the exploitation that her mother utilizes as a misapplication of narrative prowess. As Gamallo, who focuses on the fairy-tale like aspects of the novel, puts it, "Her mother has taught her that there is only one right 'reading' and interpretation of the world, but Jeanette's answer is to contest it by writing and rewriting as many as she can."¹⁵ With her imagination, Jeanette creates new worlds full of fantasy and few limitations, whereas her mother seeks to change the only reality she knows according to some fixed rules. This, again, invites the discussion of Winterson's conception of storytelling and her opposition to constricting narratives. Jeanette questions the narratives of God, of society and especially of her mother, making instead stories of her own. This is, of course, also related to her quest for self-identification and maturation.

The sorcerer of the Winnet stories often uses words and magic (those two are intimately linked) as trickery to gain control over Winnet: the chalk circle entraps her within his influence, forcing her to reveal her name, therefore gaining power over her, since in Jeanette's worlds naming means power.¹⁶ After being deceived by the sorcerer, Winnet exclaims, "You tricked me,"¹⁷ and he answers, "Well it is my job you

¹³ See *Oranges*, 159-160.

¹⁴ *Oranges*, 136.

¹⁵ Isabel C. Anievas Gamallo, "Subversive Storytelling: The Construction of Lesbian Girlhood through Fantasy and Fairy Tale in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*" in *The Girl: Construction of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women*, ed. Ruth Saxton. (New York: St Martin's, 1998) 121.

¹⁶ *Oranges*, 142.

¹⁷ *Oranges*, 144.

know.”¹⁸ Additionally, same as Jeanette’s mother and the hunchback in the first embedded story, the sorcerer is a leading figure for those, who do not possess the gift of magic. Under his supervision, Winnet cultivates her skills to become a wizard herself and, like Jeanette, she learns “to interpret the signs and wonders that the unbeliever might never understand.”¹⁹ Winnet is trained to lead the village people the same way Jeanette is trained to be a preacher. Furthermore, it is apparent that the relationship between Winnet and the sorcerer is noticeably similar to that of Jeanette and her mother, and they both follow a comparable development. Palmer clarifies this even further by commenting on the transformation:

The representation of the bond between mother and daughter in terms of the attachment between a sorcerer and his apprentice emphasizes its irrational aspect, acknowledging the ‘magical’ power which it wields. The fact that a gender displacement occurs and the figure of the mother is represented not by the witch but by a male sorcerer, universalizes the theme of power relations between parent and child and illustrates Winterson’s refusal to be tied to biologicistic assumptions. In the ‘theatres of the mind’ gender differences are subverted and our desires and anxieties and fears acted out by myriad different figures, both male and female.²⁰

It is not important that the sorcerer is male, gender is often subject to change in Winterson’s novels, the most relevant aspect is the nature of the relationship. Interestingly, the sorcerer also has a distinctive view on time, as his age allegedly varies, for he experiences time as a whole, he is not limited to existence in a particular moment only. Hence, the reader is once more reminded of the unique understanding of time in Winterson’s works.

The story of Winnet is a recognizable parable to Jeanette’s life. Such a designation does not do the story justice, though, for, as Onega states, “this fanciful version of Jeanette’s story is indeed more truth-revealing than her own realistic report.”²¹ Jeanette’s fantasies are now so crucial that the central narrative appears to be removed to the background, as only one of the realities of Jeanette’s consciousness. The story of Winnet retells the fortunes of an adopted orphan with a mission from a higher power to change the world, learning a lot from her adopter, but eventually disuniting over

¹⁸ *Oranges*, 144. Also, the game of Hang the Man that Winnet loses to the sorcerer echoes the same game Jeanette plays with Elsie in the first chapter. Later, Jeanette also plays a game with her mother, wins and is called a cheater.

¹⁹ *Oranges*, 17.

²⁰ Palmer, 102.

²¹ Onega, 178.

ideological differences and a love affair. Before Winnet leaves, however, the sorcerer ties an invisible thread to her dress that denotes the link that still remains between them, as Jeanette has the feeling of being pulled back to her mother all the time, and she eventually does return to her in the end. Since the first Winnet story appears immediately after Jeanette leaves home, this, again, foreshadows what is about to happen in the central narrative.

Having recapitulated her experiences, Jeanette uses Winnet to comment on her present situation as it is unfolding. As Jeanette works unfulfilling jobs, Winnet interacts with the locals, each wasting her potential, doing so only as a way of providing for themselves. On the other hand, Winnet's subsequent journey to reach a fabled city documents Jeanette's mental activity, as she strives to find the answer to her problems within herself, not doing much in what others call reality, she too has a plan. Winnet sets sail on an open sea that is instantly associated with the uncertainty of the pursuit, as she has "[n]o guarantee of shore. Only a conviction that what she wanted could exist, if she dared to find it."²² This is the last the reader sees of Winnet, the concluding words of the embedded story being: "One thing is certain; she can't go back."²³ Which is then followed in the central narrative with: "Don't you ever think of going back?"²⁴ The following few paragraphs are remarkable, for even though they are most likely delivered by Jeanette, since her mother is mentioned, there is a striking concentration of the motifs of the previous stories. Jeanette has moved to a different city, which could be the equivalent of the city Winnet has been searching for and it is described in terms that have been encountered before, like stone walls, and paradise-like features. The thread that pulls her home is also discussed and the narratives are not traditionally separated.²⁵ Thus, it is possibly implied that the embedded narrative is now almost fully blended into the central one.

The interconnectedness of the various narratives is concluded in the stories of Perceval, two of which appear before the Winnet stories and two afterwards, which makes them the final embedded stories. The relationship of Jeanette and her mother is echoed once again in the bond between Arthur and Perceval; the motif of the thread is repeated, as a raven (the sorcerer turned into a raven in the Winnet story) cuts it in a

²² *Oranges*, 159.

²³ *Oranges*, 160.

²⁴ *Oranges*, 160.

²⁵ This third and final story of Winnet does not end with three asterisks, as it is done elsewhere, only a single asterisk is used, as if the narratives were on the same level. This is also true for the first Winnet story.

dream Perceval has; Perceval is initially lost in the forest and then comes to a castle just like Winnet; and what is more, in three of the Perceval stories, the hero sleeps and then the central narrative resumes with Jeanette waking up. Same as with Winnet's quest, Perceval struggles to reach a legendary ideal, this time the Holy Grail. Nevertheless, there are differences, the most prominent one being Perceval's despair as opposed to Winnet's resolve when thinking about their journeys. They might, therefore, embody two stances Jeanette has towards her struggle. Their endeavor is further contemplated by Marie Herholdt Jørgensen:

Jeanette's alter egos in the stories within the story, Winnet Stonejar [...] and Sir Perceval, are both questers who never reach the goals of their quests, but undergo a process of individuation, a process which will always remain unfinished. Likewise, the story of Tetrahedron [...] becomes a parable which expresses a lesson Jeanette learns on her quest: "that no emotion is the final one."²⁶

Jørgensen claims that once the questers would reach their goal and attain stability, they would yearn for other quests, other stories to tell. This is addressed most directly in one of the previous embedded narratives, where the Garden of Eden, the end of all quests, is described, for "[t]o eat of the fruit means to leave the garden because the fruit speaks of other things, other longings."²⁷ After leaving, one never knows if he can return, and even if he does, he will not be the same person, which beautifully mirrors the plot of the central narrative and stresses the somewhat cyclical, or spiral nature of the whole text.

While the stories that are visibly separated from the central narrative are the most prominent of the narrative features of the text and are accompanied with the most intriguing implications, the text also features other narratives that are embedded even more closely into the central one, since their boundaries, for instance, are often not as clearly delineated, and hence they are less self-sustained and more a part of the central narrative. These include, for example, the dreams Jeanette has and shares with the reader, or her rewriting of biblical stories using the Fuzzy Felt, that has been quoted in the previous chapter. These prove and strengthen the interconnectedness of the individual narratives. Moreover, the discussed "Deuteronomy" chapter, is an embedded non-narrative text²⁸ that offers a visibly different narrator, presumably an older and wiser Jeanette, whose voice can be heard elsewhere as well,

²⁶ Jørgensen, 28.

²⁷ *Oranges*, 123.

²⁸ See Bal, 60 and onwards. However, she discusses instances such as dialogues of the characters, or description, which can easily constitute the vast majority of a text.

for instance when describing her love affair with Katy: “We weren't cold, not that night nor any of the others we spent together over the years that followed. [...] She seemed to have no worries at all, and though she still denies it, I think she planned the caravan.”²⁹ It is clear that the narrator has knowledge that is not available to the Jeanette of the story at the time, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that the narrator is older and narrates the story after all the events of the novel have passed. This complicates the narrative structure slightly, since even the embedded narratives are probably not Jeanette’s own immediate commentary on her present situation, but have been written later.

Naturally, the whole book is pervaded with Christian narratives, containing even the books of the Bible in the titles of its chapters, but the narratives are also rendered in the form of songs and myths mentioned in the novel. The absolute authority of these is challenged as they are rewritten to accommodate other convictions of a lesbian feminist opposing the notion of a universal truth. It is important to note, however, that Winterson seeks to unite the various concepts, rather than aiming to discard spiritual belief and Christianity as a whole. Bollinger, for instance, analyses specifically the way *Oranges* retells the biblical story of Ruth: “[T]he interaction between the two versions reveals the points of tension between Jeanette and the Biblical tradition: Jeanette’s refusal of the tradition and her self-fashioning through it.”³⁰ By using the Bible as a starting point, or as a structural model for her own work, Winterson shows her distance from the tradition, as her text itself subverts many of Biblical tenets.

The great majority of Jeanette’s issues originate in the conflict with society and the world around her. By creating a new world, she avoids this conflict and achieves some satisfaction at the same time. However, that would imply that her storytelling is a mere escape, which is not the case. The relation between the narratives is not just one-way; Winnet can solve Jeanette’s problems as well, often more effectively. In her stories, Jeanette is in her element, there she has the strength to confront her issues. Therefore, the influence of storytelling on the central narrative is also explored, as well as its life-giving powers that seem almost divine.³¹ More generally, in the embedded narratives and by using her other narrative strategies, Winterson upholds her convictions that have been discussed in the previous chapter. Gamallo offers a brilliant summary of the rationale behind many of Winterson’s strategies:

²⁹ *Oranges*, 123.

³⁰ Laurel Bollinger, “Models for Female Loyalty: The Biblical Ruth in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994): 367.

³¹ See Bal, esp. 53, 55 and 59.

While discarding a single, autonomous, unitarian model of subjectivity, Winterson also conveys a clear awareness that experience – even autobiographical experience – cannot be explained or legitimised by a single overarching narrative and that there is no one single established and accepted path through experience. Consequently, in Winterson's text we can find no reliable or unique pattern, historical, linguistic, or otherwise, but are forced to remain painfully aware of the instability and lack of finality of any narrative we construct. Since the act of storytelling itself is the most basic of all techniques for establishing an identity, the self becomes a constantly shifting entity, a product of language and narratives, and ultimately, a narrative in itself.³²

Therefore, the embedded stories communicate the fluidity of any reality and the impossibility of a singular truth, or narrative, thus challenging many of the narratives that are already in place as traditional; they reflect and empower the growth of an individual, teaching him or her how creativity and self-expression often leads to problem solving; they raise the question of intertextuality; and offer a multiple-perspectives approach. It is no wonder then that various forms of distorting the narratives remain the principal features of Winterson's writing throughout her long career, even though the embedded narratives as such are not always the most prominent narrative strategy, as they are in *Oranges*.

³² Gamallo, 127.

*The Passion,
Sexing the Cherry*

Developing the Issue of Storytelling

Oranges set the concerns and themes of the novels to come and foreshadowed the path they would take. The following two novels of Jeanette Winterson that are to be discussed here, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, represent a major step in Winterson's creative development, which is not the final one though, as they can be easily distinguished from the subsequent novels, where the experiment is carried even further. The two novels will be treated together, for they share many features from the narratological point of view. In *Oranges* there were some shifts in terms of who narrates the text, but the narrative could be ultimately attributed to Jeanette at some point in her life. These two novels, on the other hand, feature parallel narratives from the perspective of different characters, who are also narrators. Both texts present the reader with two voices at the beginning that are opposing and complementing each other, even though the conclusion differs in each of the respective novels. Additionally, they push the conflict of history and storytelling into a more literal sphere of magical realism, as the boundary between facts and fiction is blurred even further and the surreal is no longer limited to separate narratives, but firmly incorporated into the main ones. Various shorter narratives are present as well, but they are usually framed by another, for they are narrated by a variety of characters that appear in the central narratives, thus being incorporated more firmly into the text.

There are two major topics to be addressed and, correspondingly, there will be two chapters dealing with these novels. This one will be concerned with the elements of storytelling and the next one with the dual structure of the text, which is brought about due to the sustained opposition of the two protagonists and narrators. This separation is, naturally, slightly arbitrary, for both of these correlate very much, since they both originate from the same postmodern convictions in respect to multiple perspectives and the challenging of the great narratives, as well as Winterson's problematizing of time, gender and truth, that have all been at least touched upon in the previous chapters. Some features could be dealt with in either of the chapters and it would not even be irrational to treat everything together in one longer chapter, yet the aim of this separation is to pinpoint the two most critical narrative features of the texts and describe their respective influence separately, in order to make clear which strategy accomplishes what effects.

It would be appropriate to examine first what happened to the embedded narratives of *Oranges*. *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* still contain copious amounts of digressions from the fabula in form of various stories. As the previous chapter strove to illustrate, the

embedded narratives of *Oranges* are not out of context even though it may seem like that at the first glance, and they reflect Jeanette's thoughts and development. Here, the stories also seldom seem to be moving the plot forward, yet they are more contextualized, since their narrator is usually explicitly indicated and appears as a character in the central narratives as well. Of course, there are still stories that are almost purely fairy tales and that are as if out of context, such as the "story about an exiled Princess whose tears turned to jewels as she walked,"¹ yet even they are not as clearly separated from the rest of the text. Therefore, when the reader encounters the Story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses in *Sexing the Cherry*, he is presented with eleven narratives (and later with the twelfth retold by Jordan) that are quite independent of the rest of the text, but they are not introduced on the basis of some free association, as it would be in *Oranges*, instead they are narrated by the princesses that Jordan meets in his narrative, even though the reader learns that Fortunata is "a woman who does not exist."² The stories he hears overturn traditional fairy tales, folk-tales, myths, or simply conventional conceptions of how a fairy tale should look like, thus challenging homophobia and patriarchy. Angela Marie Smith maintains: "These tales' strategies of reversal and humor reconfigure power structures: the women violently reclaim their right to freedom and to self-narrative, and their narratives question mythical norms."³ This is another example of Winterson's subversion of the grand narratives with the focus on gender and sexuality, for which Winterson often uses various myths, or other well-known narratives.

In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan is the chief mediator of the stories, as the reader learns about the stories of the people Jordan encounters and about the places Jordan visits during his travels, not unlike *Gulliver's Travels*, which actually also inspired *Sexing the Cherry* in some other respects.⁴ They are, of course, not to be taken too literally, because, similarly to Jeanette's stories, they are essential mainly due to their mapping of Jordan's progress on his psychological quest. In *The Passion* the stories appear quite similarly; the protagonists often begin narrating stories spontaneously, or include stories of other characters, notably these of Patrick, for instance, who "was always seeing things and it didn't matter how or what, it mattered that he saw and that he told us stories."⁵ The reader does not know which stories to

¹ *The Passion*, 84.

² *Sexing the Cherry*, 130.

³ Angela Marie Smith, "Fiery Constellations: Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Benjamin's Materialist Historiography," *College Literature* Vol. 32 No. 3 (2005): 28 .

⁴ See Susana Onega, *Contemporary British Novelists: Jeanette Winterson*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, pages 81 and 91.

⁵ *The Passion*, 107.

trust, for some are presented as being confirmed by others, such as Patrick's magical eye,⁶ but after another story the narrator warns: "Don't believe that one."⁷ The purpose is to subvert any notion of a singular truth and to promote storytelling as a process of liberation and self-fulfillment, as seen in *Oranges*. The truth of the stories does not have to be tested, and for this reason they often begin with phrases like "they say...", "there is a story..." or similar vague expressions. The attitudes towards truth are summarized by Henri: "It may or may not be true. / It doesn't matter."⁸ Understandably then, the novel is full of invented events and facts, the characters do not hesitate to lie and this is presented as a virtue, since, in the end, the factual reality of what happened is only one of the available versions, endeavoring to usurp the position of singularity.

The Passion produced one of the most central statements, one that is frequently cited in critical works, and not only those that concentrate on *The Passion*, since the quote is easily applicable to other novels of Winterson as well. "I'm telling you stories. Trust me,"⁹ characterizes in just a few words much of Winterson's attitude towards storytelling. The reader is not supposed to be evaluating the credibility of a certain story, but should rather appreciate the fluidity of reality and forsake the need for a universal truth. Therefore, in Angela Marie Smith's words, "[f]or Winterson, memory and storytelling are no more guarantors of some kind of truth or authenticity than is 'historicism.'"¹⁰ The mentioning of memory is important, as Winterson extends the denial of authenticity to time and human experience. Memory plays a crucial role in *The Passion*, since at least Henri's narrative is presented as him retrospectively reading, rereading and rewriting his diary:

It was after the disaster at sea that I started to keep a diary. I started so that I wouldn't forget. So that in later life when I was prone to sit by the fire and look back I'd have something clear and sure to set against my memory tricks. I told Domino; he said, "The way you see it now is no more real than the way you'll see it then."¹¹

The goal is not to forget, yet it is not about retaining the facts, but rather the feelings.¹² However, Domino questions the need to record anything, as it is not representative of the truth; Henri's perception of the world will change but that does not make the original perception any more, or less, accurate, just different. This can be related to Domino's peculiar

⁶ *The Passion*, 21-22.

⁷ *The Passion*, 23.

⁸ *The Passion*, 158.

⁹ *The Passion*, 5, 13, 40, 69, 160.

¹⁰ Angela Marie Smith, 35.

¹¹ *The Passion*, 28.

¹² *The Passion*, 29.

view on time, for he is the one that tries to teach Henri that “[t]here is only the present and nothing to remember,”¹³ which is also repeated in *Sexing the Cherry* as the first of a set of lies:

LIES 1: There is only the present and nothing to remember.

LIES 2: Time is a straight line

LIES 3: The difference between the past and the future is that one has happened while the other has not.

LIES 4: We can only be in one place at a time.

LIES 5: Any proposition that contains the word ‘finite’ (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves...)

LIES 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon.

LIES 7: Reality as truth¹⁴

Hence, not only has reality no claim on truth, but the common linear perception of time is questioned as well. The centrality of the present is undermined as the novels claim that one exists simultaneously also in the future and the past. *Sexing the Cherry* goes as far as to suggest that differentiating between the three could be culturally determined, as Jordan also visits the Hopi tribe that have no grammatical distinctions in their language between tenses.

The views on time and memory the novels express contribute significantly to the way they are narrated. The reader is occasionally reminded that Henri’s account is produced after the events of the novel by referring to the frame narrative in passages such as this one: “I have to stop writing now. I have to take my exercise.”¹⁵ The reader does not have access to Henri’s original diary, but to a version of it that has been most likely rewritten numerous times during Henri’s incarceration in the asylum. Onega ponders the effect of this while drawing the attention to some literal allusions that can be seen in the text:

And as *The Passion* reveals its condition of textual labyrinth, Henri transforms himself from Theseus into Dedalus, both the mythical builder of the Cretan labyrinth and Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, who, like Henri, built his own textual labyrinth and begot himself as an artist by rewriting his diary as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.¹⁶

Henri’s narrative is a treatment on storytelling about a man confronted with the world of fantasy trying to convey his experience through his own narrative abilities. No wonder, then, that it is so incomparable to what the reader might call reality. Onega suggests that Henri’s retelling of what happened is even a kind of treatment that helps Henri to overcome his

¹³ *The Passion*, 43.

¹⁴ *Sexing the Cherry*, 83.

¹⁵ *The Passion*, 81.

¹⁶ Onega (2006), 75.

mental problems.¹⁷ In any case, he is applying the knowledge that he has acquired from Napoleon, fellow soldiers, Venice and Villanelle, which makes the narrative what it is.

Jordan also mentions his log book where he “meticulously”¹⁸ documents the factual side of his journeys, however, he continues:

I’ve kept a book of my own, and for every journey we have made together I’ve written down my own journey and drawn my own map. I can’t show this to the others, but I believe it to be a faithful account of what happened, at least, of what happened to me.

Are we all living like this? Two lives, the ideal outer life and the inner imaginative life where we keep our secrets?¹⁹

Similarly to Henri’s description of his feelings, Jordan writes about his internal journeys. Even though Jordan’s writing does not overtly create a frame narrative, as Henri’s does, it effectively mirrors the duality between facts and fiction of the whole novel and effect the way the reader approaches the text, as many of the introduced stories and places are predominantly parts of Jordan’s quest for personal growth. Additionally, even for Jordan memory is an issue:

Did my childhood happen? [...]

There are others whom I could ask, but I would not count their word in a court of law. Can I count it in a more serious matter? I will have to assume that I had a childhood, but I cannot assume to have had the one I remember.

Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did. Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it. I have heard people say we are shaped by our childhood. But which one?²⁰

The despair of the realization that facts cannot account for everything is palpable here as Jordan strives to utilize the rules of the tangible world, the world of facts, to rationalize the fantastical blur of his memory. This, unsurprisingly, proves impossible, for memory of his childhood is vague and ever-changing, much like Henri’s diary. Consequently, such are the novels themselves: refusing the traditional conceptions of time, reality and truth, their episodes seem random and confusing, until the reader agrees to play their game.

The basic rule of such a game is to refuse the equation between what is real and the nature of one’s experience that simply cannot be formulated within the limits of what is generally understood by “reality.” Bal concerns herself with the fantastic, as opposed to realistic in narratological terms:

¹⁷ Onega (2006), 74-75.

¹⁸ *Sexing the Cherry*, 102.

¹⁹ *Sexing the Cherry*, 102.

²⁰ *Sexing the Cherry*, 92.

Another objection to postulating the ‘real-life’ homology is that, in certain types of narrative texts - for example, fantastic, absurd, or experimental - such a homology is absent; in fact, these texts are characterized by their denial or distortion of the logic of reality. This objection can be addressed in two ways again. The denial, distortion, or, as is now often said, ‘deconstruction’ of a realistic story-line is something altogether different from its absence. On the contrary, there is clearly something worth denying. The objection can also be countered with the argument that readers, intentionally or not, search for a logical line in such a text. They spend a great amount of energy in this search, and, if necessary, they introduce such a line themselves. Emotional involvement, aesthetic pleasure, suspense, and humour depend on it. No matter how absurd, tangled, or unreal a text may be, readers will tend to regard what they consider ‘normal’ as a criterion by which they can give meaning to the text, even if that meaning can only be articulated in opposition to that normality.

Textual descriptions of postmodern novels, for example, clearly point in this direction. In order to understand a text, some sort of logical connection is needed.²¹

This contrast between the fantastic and the “real” becomes increasingly vital, since unlike *Oranges*, the two novels under discussion take place in specific historic periods and the protagonist are involved in some iconic events of the times, thus engaging with the genre of historical fiction. However, it cannot be argued that they attempt to maintain historical accuracy, let alone some overall believability. Quite conversely, it would be more precise to claim they are even openly “calling into question the nature and knowability of history,”²² instead of trying to conform to its rules. They exhibit numerous transgressions between historical reality and fiction that serve, as if, to exacerbate the issue, drawing attention to the disparities and similarities of the two, as described by McHale:

“Classic” historical fiction from Scott through Barth tries to make this transgression as discreet, as nearly unnoticeable as possible, camouflaging the seam between historical reality and fiction [...] Postmodernist fiction, by contrast, seeks to foreground this seam by making the transition from one realm to the other as jarring as possible. This it does by violating the constraints on “classic” historical fiction: by visibly contradicting the public record of “official” history; by flaunting anachronisms; and by integrating history and the fantastic.²³

Neither *The Passion* nor *Sexing the Cherry* can be characterized as “classic” historical fiction, even if the fantastic that is present was the only violation of the genre. In order to present the ideas of *Oranges* in a direct confrontation with history, the genre of historical fiction is

²¹ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Incorporated, 1997) 176.

²² Martha Tuck Rozett, “Constructing a World: How Postmodern Historical Fiction Reimagines the Past,” *Clio* Vol. 25 no. 2 (1996): 160.

²³ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (N.p.: Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2004) 90.

introduced and immediately subverted, pointing to the deficiencies of the whole concept behind it as a result.

Considering all of this, it is unsurprising that *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* “may be described as fantastic ‘historiographic metafiction’ in Linda Hutcheon’s terms, for they combine fantasy with a self-conscious relish in the storytelling aspect of fiction and with an apparently paradoxical interest in re-writing history.”²⁴ Historiographic metafiction is a useful term encompassing much of what has been deliberated here, as can be demonstrated by quoting Hutcheon herself:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.²⁵

This might seem familiar, as it is related to the questioning of the great narratives that is associated with New Historicists who were mentioned in the first chapter. History is one of the problematized narratives, but there are more, although they are logically linked. Even though it would be enough of an explanation to undergo this merely for the sake of storytelling, the intent is a little more pragmatic, for Winterson, along with many others, politicizes the discussion about human imagination and the notion that history is only one of the available narratives. By metaphorically dethroning history and many other conventions, the stage is cleared for those that have been confined to the background: “What is official history the history of? Of the winners, says Stanley Elkin; of the male sex, says Grass. So each attempts to redress the balance of the historical record of writing histories of the excluded, those relegated permanently to history’s dark areas.”²⁶ In this way, there is a smooth transition from questioning history to feminist and lesbian agenda.

The clash between the fantastical and the certain amount of realism that is needed when setting a novel into a specific historical period brings magical realism to mind as well. The term is highly applicable to the novels, as the fantastic is a natural part of the life of some characters. Interestingly, some settings include more of the magical than others; while Henri is confronted with Patrick’s supernatural eye, most of the fantastical is restricted to the stories

²⁴ Susana Onega, “*The Passion*: Jeanette Winterson’s Uncanny Mirror of Ink,” *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 14 (1993): 2.

²⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (N.p.: Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2004) 93.

²⁶ McHale, 90.

the soldiers share with each other, yet when he reaches Venice he is overwhelmed by all the stories that actually materialize and are taken literally. In a similar way, Jordan's voyages feature some incredible encounters, whereas London is depicted far more realistically, however unsuitable the word is, considering Winterson's fiction. But the fantastical is usually accepted in a matter-of-fact fashion and the reader is invited to acquiesce:

One of the unique features of magical realism is its reliance upon the reader to follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level. It relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter how different this perspective may be to the reader's non-reading opinions and judgements.²⁷

If the reader does not open his mind to the worlds the novels depict, he will hardly agree with the ideas they propose. The texts are formed by what they promote; the inclusion of the fantastic is a direct practical application of the stance they take towards reality. Consequently, magical realism can be effectively used as a method of subversion of traditional concepts: "Magic(al) realist writing, moreover, has become associated with the modernist techniques of the disruption of linear narrative time and the questioning of the notion of history."²⁸ Needless to say, both *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* fully utilize the subversive potential and are more vigorous in accentuating their points than *Oranges*, not only owing to taking advantage of what magical realism offers.

To summarize, storytelling is used to problematize all of the themes mentioned in the first chapter, intensifying the questions that have been asked before and suggesting new ones. By presenting Henri and Jordan as writers who are "telling us stories," the novels broach the subject of memory and thus also time. Additionally, the fantastical in contrast with the historical settings of the novels calls for the discussion of historiographic metafiction, while the absence of a distinction between fantasy and realistic depiction evokes magical realism. Storytelling influences the novels further, for instance in their treatment of gender or multiperspectivity, yet given that these are very much connected to the opposition and complementarity of the narrators, they will be addressed in the following chapter which focuses specifically on the duality of the texts.

²⁷ Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (N.p.: Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2005) 3.

²⁸ Bowers, 7-8.

Introducing Multiple Narrators

As the reader must appreciate by now, *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* are essentially not as different from *Oranges*, as one might claim after a cursory examination. Even the motif of the inner quest does not disappear, considering that especially the male characters undergo significant development, which consists of accepting many of the values held by the female characters. The previous chapter was centered on how the two texts are affected by these values, especially in regards to storytelling. This will be carried over to this chapter as well, however the emphasis will shift toward the multiplicity of narrators that enables a more direct treatment of the dualities of facts/fiction and male/female, as well as the constructing of a more intricate structure full of mirroring and opposition. It would not be fair to say that *Oranges* had only one identical narrator throughout the text, as there is a perceivable difference between the narrator of Jeanette's life and the embedded narratives, not to mention the "Deuteronomy" chapter. On the other hand, they can all be attributed to Jeanette herself, whether at various points in her life or in another frame of mind. All of the narrations cooperated to present their common arguments, supporting each other, each brimming over to the next one. In these two novels, the narrators do that as well, to some extent, but at other times they are in explicit disagreement. Essentially, their relationship is an intricate one, since it is not stable and each narrator contains aspects of the other. What can be said with certainty is that their similarities and dissimilarities enrich the texts with added perspectives, which was something *Oranges* discussed, yet never fulfilled on the narrative level, for everything was presented from Jeanette's point of view, as she was effectively the sole narrator of the book.

Before the discussion of the contention between the narrators starts, one has to recognize that the disagreements between them are rather ideological, for the style of the narrations themselves can be said to be similar. The themes are the same most of the time and often even the experiences of one narrator/character are reflected in the second narration, the narrator/character of which experiences or witnesses something comparable. Onega puts it simply when analyzing the narrations of *The Passion*, "The striking complementarity of the two characters' narrations is enhanced by the similarity of what they narrate: they often use the same words, expressions and refrains, share the same or complementary thoughts and do the same or similar things."¹ Apart from "I'm telling you stories. Trust me,"² another

¹ Susana Onega, *Contemporary British Novelists: Jeanette Winterson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 57. Read further for examples.

² *The Passion*, 5, 13, 40, 69, 160.

significant refrain is, for instance, “You plan you win, you play, you lose. You play,”³ both of which appear in Henri’s as well as Villanelle’s narrative,⁴ therefore promoting the same ideas, though in different contexts. The multiperspectivity that this implies is featured in the way the novel treats mirroring as well, for not only the narrators mirror each other, but they are themselves mirrored in various objects (e.g. Henri in a copper pot, Villanelle in a lagoon) and perceive some scenes through a mirror, the image being often distorted or multiplied in the process.⁵ The manifold reflections call to mind the emperor Tetrahedron from *Oranges*, where it also symbolizes multiple perspectives. Seaboyer also remarks that *The Passion* manifests a musical structure, where two diverse voices look at the same themes, alternating and interweaving as the novel progresses.⁶

In *Sexing the Cherry*, the themes are also often shared and the narrators take over each other’s thoughts. For example, when Jordan contemplates the memory of his childhood,⁷ Dog-Woman follows his example in the narrative that follows,⁸ and when Dog-Woman discusses love, Jordan follows with a story that addresses the issue.⁹ This interference is almost identical with *Oranges*, where the episodes of Jeanette’s life prompt her to narrate relatable stories. However, the shared refrains do not appear in *Sexing the Cherry*, primarily because Dog-Woman’s narrative is more practical, as opposed to Jordan’s loftier one, which does include the refrains (e.g. “My name is Jordan,”¹⁰ “This is the first thing I saw.”¹¹). Overall, the narrators in *Sexing the Cherry* are more in contrast to each other and less interconnected than in *The Passion*. Still, the opposition is complex, since no side represents a single precise position, inasmuch they either share features or manifest features that would be associated with the exact opposite of what one might expect from the respective narrator/character. To speak more specifically, the duality is the most noticeable in the subjects of gender and storytelling, which are correlated. In the two novels, the reader witnesses the discrepancy between gender and sex that is postulated by Butler:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed

³ *The Passion*, 66, 73, 133.

⁴ For more examples see Judith Seaboyer, “Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion*,” *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 38 (Fall 1997): 494.

⁵ See Seaboyer, 501-502.

⁶ Seaboyer, 493.

⁷ *Sexing the Cherry*, 92.

⁸ *Sexing the Cherry*, 107.

⁹ *Sexing the Cherry*, 36.

¹⁰ *Sexing the Cherry*, 9, 47, 93, 121, 142.

¹¹ *Sexing the Cherry*, 9, 93, 95.

bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies.¹²

A male body does not denote male gender and the same applies for women as well. Without separating the cultural and social projection and the actual, biological property, the gender of the narrator/characters is considered quite puzzling, as will be demonstrated in the following examples.

The problematization of gender is evident even by simply browsing through *Sexing the Cherry*, for Jordan’s narrative is signaled by a picture of a pineapple and the Dog-Woman’s by a banana, both of which are more suggestive of the opposite gender than the one of the introduced narrators. At the heart of the novel is the quest, the voyage, and it is Jordan’s voyage; Dog-Woman stays at home, as would be traditional, at least at the time. However, Jordan fails in his role of a male conqueror, because he is refused by Fortunata, the object of his search. Additionally, he encounters no real danger, unlike Dog-Woman in London, therefore the traditional narrative of a male warrior protecting the weak female is transformed into a narrative of “women who stay at home, yet live dangerously, and the men who voyage, yet face no threat.”¹³ When Jordan voices his aspirations, it is clear that he yearns to be a part of the male tradition, yet he uses his mother as an example of some qualities he would like to achieve, demonstrating in the process how little he actually understands her:

I want to be brave and admired and have a beautiful wife and a fine house. I want to be a hero and wave goodbye to my wife and children at the docks, and be sorry to see them go but more excited about what is to come. I want to be like other men, one of the boys, a back-slapper and a man who knows a joke or two. I want to be like my rip-roaring mother who cares nothing for how she looks, only for what she does. She has never been in love, no, and never wanted to be either. She is self-sufficient and without self-doubt. Before I left I took her down the Thames and out to sea but I don’t know if it made any impression on her, or even how much she noticed. We never talked much. She is silent, the way men are supposed to be.¹⁴

Dog-Woman’s violence and strength are quite male-like, and so are her independence and her direct impact on history. This is evident, when she fuels the Great Fire of London: “I did not start the fire - how could I, having resolved to lead a blameless life? - but I did not stop it. Indeed the act of pouring a vat of oil on to the flames may well have been said to encourage

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010) 9.

¹³ Elizabeth Langland, “Sexing the Text: Narrative Drag as Feminist Poetics and Politics in Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*,” *Narrative* Vol. 5, No. 1 (January, 1997): 104.

¹⁴ *Sexing the Cherry*, 101.

it.”¹⁵ While such an action evidences her independent agency, she repeatedly dismisses her involvement in anything major and assumes the position of an obedient woman, who stays at home, busying herself “as a good woman should, cleaning the hut and brushing down the dogs.”¹⁶ In addition, she wants Jordan to be “[s]afe, sound and protected”¹⁷ at home; she does not want him to risk his life, even though risk is consistently viewed as positive by Winterson, for “what you risk reveals what you value.”¹⁸ Dog-Woman is even less progressive when it comes to her opinions on grafting and monarchy, which is surprising, since female characters are usually more progressive in Winterson’s fiction, sometimes even setting an example for the males, which is somewhat exemplified by Jordan himself.

Not only Jordan and Dog-Woman, but Henri and Villanelle are also like the grafted fruit, which Dog-Woman claims has no gender, as opposed to Jordan who claims it is female, which could be related to the narrators/characters as well, in the view of the fact that there is a noticeable inclination toward the feminine in both novels. Henri differs from Jordan, as he is not as eager to pursue the narrative of a hero and is being even more contextualized as female. He prefers the reflection of his mother’s copper pot to his father’s shaving mirror, the novel thus establishing the connection between the feminine and multiplicity, since unlike the copper pot, the shaving mirror offers only a single, more precise image, which can be attributed to the male rationalizing and delight in facts, as opposed to feminine storytelling and fantasy. Furthermore, Henri serves as a cook to Napoleon, instead of being a regular soldier, and some critics attribute his insanity at least partly to shell-shock, which has feminine connotations.¹⁹ Correspondingly, Villanelle is a woman, yet she possesses webbed feet which are typically the pride of male boatmen and she is fond of cross dressing. Seaboyer deliberates the effect of this:

Villanelle’s amphibious, sexually ambiguous body and the paradoxical, amphibious body of Venice both refuse the neat binary oppositions of true and false, good and evil, masculine and feminine, and against such paradoxical grounds, Winterson begins to trace disruptive, transformative possibility.²⁰

The blurriness of the lines between genders, then, serves to link the feminine to the fantastic storytelling, which is based on denying the tendency towards simple dualities, let alone singularities. This is supported by linking Villanelle and Venice, which is clearly feminized

¹⁵ *Sexing the Cherry*, 143.

¹⁶ *Sexing the Cherry*, 135.

¹⁷ *Sexing the Cherry*, 83.

¹⁸ *The Passion*, 83, 91, but also *Sexing the Cherry*, 134.

¹⁹ See Seaboyer, 505.

²⁰ Seaboyer, 506.

and associated with the fantastic. It is “the city of disguises,”²¹ distorting the boundaries of gender through cross-dressing, which can be related to the frequent lies and the telling of stories, except there is no truth hidden beneath, as the truth value is irrelevant.

Jordan is an excursionist in the female world, cross-dressing and listening to the stories and advices of the concubines, Fortunata and the rest of the dancing princesses. In the same way, he is an explorer of the fantastic. Himself not being physically extraordinary, his narrative is full of the fantastic, while Dog-Woman embodies the fantastic, being a giant with superhuman strength, yet her narrative is more pragmatic:

While the young man has a perfectly normal physical appearance, his narration is wholly concerned with his travels to unreal cities and his relationship with fantastic characters. By contrast, the Dog Woman, who is a resilient materialist and has never travelled beyond London, is a fantastically huge giantess, who, like the awe-inspiring ogres in fairytales, has murdered or maimed thousands of men, including her own father.²²

This is aptly rendered when Jordan sits with Dog-Woman to tell her about his adventures and show her the pineapple and she asks him, whether he brought any gold.²³ Similar interaction exists between Henri and Villanelle; Henri is a regular man, whereas Villanelle has webbed feet, can walk on water and lives in the fantastical Venice, “the city of madmen.”²⁴ Mad is precisely what Henri becomes, confined into an asylum, for he cannot contain the split of his personality, as he (and Jordan) pursues both the real, factual masculine, as well as the unreal, fantastical feminine. Even though the two narratives in each book share the thoughts, the themes and situations, they are ultimately incompatible and therefore the dual perspective on every issue is valuable due to its diversity. This is why when Villanelle says, “I’m telling you stories. Trust me,”²⁵ she is perfectly serious, in contrast with Henri whose identical words have a tint of irony.²⁶ Similarly, Henri loses his heart in the face of the atrocities of war and gives his heart to Villanelle only figuratively, but Villanelle loses her heart literally. Henri follows her example and in Venice he searches for her heart and later gives her cook’s heart, literally this time. The heart of the cook is representative of his own heart, since he realizes that he is like the other males, like Napoleon, like the cook: “No longer able to deny that the violence he abhors is internal as well as external, Henri is confronted with a split self that he

²¹ *The Passion*, 56, 92, 100, 150.

²² *Onega*, 80.

²³ *Sexing the Cherry*, 130.

²⁴ *The Passion*, 112, 121, 158.

²⁵ *The Passion*, 5, 13, 40, 69, 160.

²⁶ See *Seaboyer*, 485.

cannot accept and retreats from a world that has become intolerable.”²⁷ He has become oppressive, possessive and at the end even violent, fulfilling Villanelle’s generalizing words “[m]en are violent. That’s all there is to it.”²⁸ He replaces the cook in his position in the army kitchen; he wakes up at night dreaming of being strangled by the cook with his own hands on his own throat; he repeats cook’s behavior towards Villanelle; and he ends up detained on an island, like Napoleon.

Jeffrey Roessner accentuates how *Sexing the Cherry* celebrates irrationality, illustrating it on a saying of alchemists “the third is not given,”²⁹ which denies any possibility to rationally determine the outcome of a reaction: “[T]he alchemical transformation cannot be rationally controlled or documented: occurring in a realm beyond logic, it signals the ascendancy of the irrational in *Sexing the Cherry*.”³⁰ Opposed to the irrationality, the male tendency for rationalizing is personified by Napoleon in *The Passion*:

Where Bonaparte goes, straight roads follow, buildings are rationalised, street signs may change to celebrate a battle but they are always clearly marked. Here, if they bother with street signs at all, they are happy to use the same ones over again. Not even Bonaparte could rationalise Venice.
This is a city of madmen.³¹

Napoleon is in direct contrast to Villanelle and Venice, yet it is not as straightforward, for he, too, is a story maker, however, comparably to Jeanette’s mother, his storytelling is oppressive. He is not a man without imagination, yet he is limited to the tangible world and he tries to materialize his dream there, imposing it on the whole Europe, which is, of course, unacceptable in Winterson’s view: “We should have turned on him, should have laughed in his face, should have shook the dead-men-seaweed-hair in his face. But his face is always pleading with us to prove him right.”³² The soldiers, or the French in general, are in love with Napoleon, but again, this is not the passion Winterson upholds. Unable to channel their passion in the way Venetians do, the French turn to nationalism and war, which brings only suffering and death. Henri is in love with Napoleon as well as with Villanelle, with France and home as well as with Venice, with facts as well as storytelling; being both male and female he is torn and fails to contain his conflict, breaking in the end. The opposite of Napoleon is Venice: “For Winterson, Venice is a site within which the neat binary

²⁷ Seaboyer, 506.

²⁸ *The Passion*, 109.

²⁹ *Sexing the Cherry*, 131, 134.

³⁰ Jeffrey Roessner, “Writing a History of Difference: Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter’s *Wise Children*,” *College Literature* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter, 2002): 106.

³¹ *The Passion*, 112.

³² *The Passion*, 24-25.

oppositions of true/false, pious/sinful, mind/body, masculine/feminine, Thanatos/Eros collapse into a mixture that is at once confusing and stimulating.”³³ Female Venice eliminates all of these oppositions in a blend, being fluid like the water it is built on and also being as convoluted as an ever-changing labyrinth (of stories, disguises and lies), which elucidates its other label, “the city of mazes.”³⁴ The city is fundamentally postmodern, as its function is not to reveal the lies, since even though it discredits the myth of history, it itself revels in deception. This is tied to the point Linda Hutcheon is makes about how “[t]he eighteenth-century concern for lies and falsity becomes a postmodern concern for the multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s),”³⁵ which epitomizes much of the spirit of Winterson’s fiction.

The duality and the opposition of the narrators invite the question of primacy. One has to wonder whether the narratives are equal, or whether one is contained within the other. In *The Passion*, Henri is undisputed as the main narrator in the first chapter and Villanelle dominates the second chapter, yet in the third chapter the voices interweave. Still, Onega argues that Henri has the upper hand even there:

The meeting of Henri and Villanelle in Russia is reflected structurally in the alternation of narrative voices in Chapter 3, where Henri acts as first-level narrator and Villanelle as second level narrator – that is, at a certain moment, Henri hands over the narrative role to Villanelle, who starts narrating her life story to Henri and his two friends, Patrick and Domino.³⁶

And this persists to a lesser degree in the last chapter as well:

In this chapter, Henri’s and Villanelle’s narrations again alternate, but now Villanelle’s status as narrator is not subordinated to Henri’s, since she directly addresses the reader, as in the second chapter. However, it is Henri who opens and closes the narration in the novel and, in this sense, Villanelle’s narration is psychologically contained within that of Henri.³⁷

If one concludes that Henri is the principal narrator of *The Passion* and then considers the similarity of their style, the refrains, the mirroring of their lives, he must concede that there might be a reading of Villanelle as Henri’s fantasy; she might be his best story. Onega contemplates this interpretation, adding that there is a strong parallel between Henri and

³³ Seaboyer, 484.

³⁴ *The Passion*, 49, 52, 109.

³⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (N.p.: Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2004) 108.

³⁶ Onega, 57.

³⁷ Onega, 57.

Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, who, inspired by a woman with bird features,³⁸ composes a villanelle:

The logical implication of this intertextual relation is that Villanelle and by extension the fantasy world she represents are only figments of Henri's imagination, a reading that enhances the psychological interpretation of Villanelle as a projection of Henri's ideal woman/anima.³⁹

Thus, *The Passion* would correspond to *Oranges* and *Sexing the Cherry*, where the fantastic serves as a metaphor for the journey of the self that is enacted through the imagination of the protagonist. Even so, as was proven with *Oranges*, narratological superiority does not imply greater importance of the central narrative. Jeanette and Henri are the ones who are making progress and it could be said that that is the focus of the novels, yet it can be also argued that their imagination is more fascinating and more at the heart of the novels than the progress they make in their actual lives.

The reader is left to make his own assumptions in *The Passion*, if he ignores Winterson's repeated message that there is no correct answer to anything, as there is never a single truth. Nevertheless, in *Sexing the Cherry*, this point is stressed even more. One could argue that it is Jordan who undergoes the quest, the maturation and the exploration of the fantastic, but another might object that Dog-Woman is closer to the ideal and hence she is the one who should be considered as the central character. Choosing either of the positions would be to discard the whole issue of the complicated relations between male/female, facts/fiction and essentially any other binary opposition. Angela Marie Smith deftly concludes:

The novel's oscillation between the narratives of Dog-Woman and Jordan, then, challenges linear historicism, but refuses to simply replace it with a singular and privileged narrative form of its own. Rather than an idealized articulator of stories in a divine plan, Dog-Woman is, despite her embodiment of female historical agency and empowerment of the oppressed, "a fantasist, a liar and a murderer" as much as any of the victors who have written history. Jordan's questioning explorations of narrative and interpretive uncertainty emphasize the impossibility of any true and totalizing rendering of history.⁴⁰

Winterson habitually poses many questions without providing enough answers, which is in line with the postmodern problematizing of traditional concepts and the tendency to offer multiple perspectives. Consequently, it would then be wrong to superordinate one narrative,

³⁸ Villanelle webbed feet make her partly animal as well, see Seaboyer for a discussion of the animal side of *The Passion*, especially 494, and for additional links between Winterson and Joyce.

³⁹ Omega, 75.

⁴⁰ Angela Marie Smith, "Fiery Constellations: Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Benjamin's Materialist Historiography," *College Literature* Vol. 32 No. 3 (2005): 36.

as even though male narrators/characters are the ones that undertake the revelatory journey; their female counterparts are the ones who show them the way, exhibiting their superior knowledge of the way things are in Winterson's world.

What is more, the dynamics between Dog-Woman and Jordan is taken even further, because, unlike *The Passion*, where the last chapter offers a frame narrative, *Sexing the Cherry* introduces two new narrators from the modern time, one corresponding to Jordan and the other to Dog-Woman. Nicholas Jordan begins by talking about his obsession with heroism, the famous navigators and conquerors he used to write a book about as a child and his own recruitment into the navy. Yet, as he reads about a female activist in the newspaper and his narrative begins to merge with Jordan's, he deserts the male ideal of conquest to join the female resistance alongside the activist:

Awareness of an intimate relation to the past prompts a reconsideration of relation to the present and the future; both Jordan and Nicolas, initially dreaming of heroic journeys like those that underwrite historicism, are drawn instead to the "countless lives" and histories obscured by the foreground of historicism.⁴¹

The challenger to the oppressive, male historicism is an unnamed activist fighting against the corporations polluting the environment. Her narrative starts thus: "I am a woman going mad. I am a woman hallucinating. I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant."⁴² Poisoned by the mercury in the rivers and lakes she is monitoring, she constructs Dog-Woman as her *alter ego* that has the power to topple the organizations she hates so much. Her hallucinations invite the possibility that the narrative of the activist is a frame narrative for the narrative of Dog-Woman, and by analogy Nicholas Jordan's narrative would be a frame narrative for the one of Jordan. Whether one decides to read the text in this way or not is not as significant as the statement the inclusion of these two additional narratives makes about the interconnectedness of present, past and future. One does not only lead "[t]wo lives, the ideal outer life and the inner imaginative life where we keep our secrets,"⁴³ but also multiple lives diffused throughout time.

All four narratives conjoin when the activist heads with Nicholas Jordan to burn down the factory that pollutes the river and Dog-Woman fuels the Great Fire of London. Through this a cycle is completed: "[F]rom a mythical perspective, the Great Fire of London becomes an

⁴¹ Angela Marie Smith, 30-31.

⁴² *Sexing the Cherry*, 121.

⁴³ *Sexing the Cherry*, 102.

apocalyptic fire signaling the end of the historical cycle initiated by the Puritan revolution.”⁴⁴ The book does not represent a cycle only in a mythological sense, given that it ends and begins with Jordan encountering himself as he wanders through a foggy field with outstretched arms. The novel is, then, a circle, for the scene in the field is the “first thing [Jordan] saw,”⁴⁵ even though only metaphorically, as he explains during his conversation with Fortunata: “LIES 8: It was not the first thing she saw, how could it have been? Nor was the night in the fog-covered field the first thing I saw. But before then we were like those who dream and pass through life as a series of shadows. And so what we have told you is true, although it is not.”⁴⁶ The encounter in the fog symbolizes the culmination of Jordan’s spiritual growth, as he literally finds himself. His narrative is, therefore, the explanation of how he has reached that point, much like how Henri’s narrative explains how he has found himself in the asylum, where he is writing and re-writing the story the reader reads.

It has hopefully been elucidated how the fact that Winterson’s novels no longer have a single narrator influences the novels on the whole, especially how it serves to communicate the ideas of the texts. It greatly facilitates the juxtaposition of male/female and history/storytelling. However, though only having two (or four in the case of *The Sexing the Cherry*) principal narrators, they do not deal with simple binary oppositions, because each of the narrators/characters combines features from both sides of the spectrum. The result is a problematized issue with a lot of unanswered questions, as the texts refuse to offer a definite substitute for the uprooted tradition, merely urging to respect the multiplicity of perspectives. This state of vagueness and indistinct boundaries recreates the atmosphere of Venice in *The Passion*, as the text structurally reflects its content. The role of storytelling familiar from *Oranges* remains, as well as the embedded narratives of subordinate narrators like the twelve princesses in *Sexing the Cherry*, or Patrick in *The Passion*, but the similar topics are further convoluted. The subsequent novels will continue this trend, complicating also the identity of the narrator and introducing even more complicated narrative structures, which will be handled in the following chapters.

⁴⁴ Onega, 99.

⁴⁵ *Sexing the Cherry*, 9, 93, 95.

⁴⁶ *Sexing the Cherry*, 95.

Written on the Body,

Art & Lies,

Gut Symmetries,

The PowerBook

From Fantasy to Relativity

The following two chapters will contemplate the next four novels, specifically *Written on the Body*, *Art & Lies*, *Gut Symmetries* and *The PowerBook*, which represent a third stage in Winterson's writing. Dealing with four novels simultaneously will necessarily limit the space available for the individual works, yet treating them separately would be highly repetitive, since they are by all means very similar. Additionally, general statements might be slightly misleading, when applied to four novels at once, but on the other hand, it would be unfortunate to omit their interconnectedness and their debate on old and new themes. Furthermore, they all accept what has been established in the previous novels and build on it, which allows them to be more experimental, considering that the evolution towards a more experimental level is smooth enough for a reader acquainted with Winterson's previous work. They represent the limit to which Winterson pushes her ideas; the furthest she has ventured to this day. Their experiments will be examined dually, in the same way as previously. Firstly, there will be a more general discussion of how the themes of fantasy, history and time of the previous novels develop and how they are represented in the narrative structures of the texts. Secondly, the next chapter will focus predominantly on the narrators and the implications for the texts stemming from their character.

From among the four novels, *Art & Lies* is the one that deviates the most from the rest and for this reason, it will be used as a transition from the previous two novels, even though it is *Written on the Body* that was published after *Sexing the Cherry*. Hence, *Art & Lies* is closer to the novels of the previous chapter not chronologically, but rather in terms of content. It would be fair to say that the move from *Sexing the Cherry* to *Art & Lies* is smoother than that from *Sexing the Cherry* to *Written on the Body*. In the other three novels, "Winterson employs metaphors from post-Einsteinian physics to describe the intricacies of same-sex desire, love, and pleasure."¹ That is not the focus in *Art & Lies*, which, as the title suggests, concentrates on art, on the effect of the tradition of all the artists that came before and, of course, on the fictionality of art, which, in fact, does not separate it from other constructs, such as history, memory and time, as was already discussed. Christy L. Burns comments on how the magic realist fantasy is translated into the realm of art, and especially literature:

¹ Madelyn Detloff, "Living In 'Energetic Space': Jeanette Winterson's Bodies And Pleasures," *English Language Notes* Vol. 45 No. 2 (2007): 149.

If, then, Winterson's most fantastic novels - *Boating for Beginners*, *Sexing the Cherry*, and *The Passion* - have led her toward a critical reconsideration of the indulgence of fantasy, rather than abandoning fantasy, she incorporates it more completely into her critique of contemporary desensitization and alienation, directing attention toward its application to the reader's own "real" political and social context. Winterson achieves this by disrupting the reader's escape from reality, persistently haunting her characters' voices with references to reading, writing, and the impact of art. Metafictive motifs like "I'm telling you stories, trust me" (from *The Passion*) run through many of Winterson's works, and *Art & Lies* engages even more explicitly in this form of direct address that disrupts suspended disbelief.²

Instead of the embedded narratives or the magic realism, *Art & Lies* includes multiple narrators who read each other's narratives, enacting in this way the debate between the various works of the literary canon – no new book can be written without participating in the discussion. The scope of storytelling is thus narrowed to artistic representation, but the conflict with the "real" remains, as does the impossibility to locate the truth.

The metafictional motifs the quote mentions are ubiquitous, the reader being repeatedly reminded of the fictionality of everything he reads. In the following quote, Handel, as one of the narrators/characters, examines the account about Doll Sneerpiece that provides the link between the other narrators: "A fiction? Certainly, although I see from the extravagant and torn frontispiece that it parades itself as autobiography: 'The Entire and Honest Recollection of a Bawd.' / Entire? Honest? I doubt it, but why should I?"³ A reflection on facts and fiction, similar to those the reader of Winterson is already familiar with, follows, this time quite blunt and culminating in an extreme self-reflection: "When I am alone, and the experience, the emotion, the event, was mine and mine alone, how can I say *for certain* that I have not invented the entire episode, including the faithful memory? / It could be that this record set before you now is fiction."⁴ If *Art & Lies* comments on the untrustworthiness of all fiction, it inevitably questions itself in the process. In the same way the reader was unsure in the earlier novels whether to trust the fantastic elements, he now cannot trust the text itself. In this way, fantasy is substituted by art: "In *Art & Lies*, fantasy is more drastically altered, and the question of what "the real" is emerges. Gone is the ironic resistance to immersion in fantasy, for fantasy now *is* art, and other possibilities for fantasy are swept aside."⁵ Consequently, it is hard to find anything strictly fantastic in the text, though many improbabilities persist. It would be more precise to claim that the fantastic is present, nevertheless it is being

² Christy L. Burns, "Fantastic Language: Jeanette Winterson's Recovery of the Postmodern Word," *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 37 No. 2 (Summer, 1996): 292.

³ *Art & Lies*, 29.

⁴ *Art & Lies*, 30.

⁵ Burns, 301.

suppressed, as is evident when in Picasso's narrative, which is always colorful, characters remark on orange rain and purple snow, which are expressions of Picasso's state of mind; it is her narrative after all. However, the family tries to rationalize what they see: "'It must be the power station,' said father,"⁶ and later even: "'For God's sake Matthew, the snow is NOT purple.'"⁷ Hence, the elements cannot be considered as fantastic as Villanelle's feet or Dog-Woman's body.

The rationalizing of fantasy is evident in *Written on the Body* as well, where narrator's lover Louis questions the stories that she hears: "'You're making it up.' / Am I?"⁸ Even more commonly it presents the improbable stories in a veil of uncertainty, which forces the reader to conclude that he is not able to say whether a given event happened; it probably did not, but it might have. Such blurring can be exemplified on the unsexed and unnamed narrator's account of how s/he spent a night with Louis:

What did we do that night? We *must have* walked wrapped around each other to a café that was a church and eaten a Greek salad that tasted like a wedding feast. We met a cat who agreed to be best man and our bouquets were Ragged Robin from the side of the canal. We had about two thousand guests, mostly midges and we felt we were old enough to give ourselves away.⁹

The reader does not believe that this is what actually happened and the narrator does not even insist that the story is true. The fantastic is veiled in uncertainty, discrediting the reliability of the narrative as well as of the narrator. A more substantial example is found at the end of the book, where it is not obvious whether Louis truly returns to the narrator, or whether the narrator creates a world in his/her imagination where s/he can be with her. Similarly, in *Gut Symmetries* Alice sees a ship that is not there:

I saw the silver prow pass over me and the sails in tattered cloth. Men and women crowded at the deck. There was a shuddering, as though the world-clock had stopped, though in fact it was our own ship that had thrown its engines into reverse. In the morning my father told me that we had identified an unknown signal, thought to be a vessel just ahead of us, though nothing at all was found.¹⁰

She claims that she did see the ship and yet concurrently it is rationally deduced that there was no ship, which casts doubt on what can be called "real" and what tools are available for its measurement. This happens to such an extent in the texts that there is only a fine line

⁶ *Art & Lies*, 48.

⁷ *Art & Lies*, 48.

⁸ *Written on the Body*, 22, 60.

⁹ *Written on the Body*, 19. Italics addend.

¹⁰ *Gut Symmetries*, 73.

separating these events from metaphors and other poetic devices, where the reader understands that what is being described is only “as if.” Since nothing is given and reliable in the texts, they are challenging to read, but at the same time the feeling of freedom that the storytelling provides is energizing. What is more, the reader is not alone in doubt, for the narrators wanders through the haze of uncertainty with him, for instance in *Written on the Body*: “‘It’s as if Louise never existed, like a character in a book. Did I invent her?’”¹¹ Actually, Louise *is* a character in the narrator’s story and it is debatable to what extent this has distorted her image for the reader, who knows Louise only through the narrator, and even s/he becomes increasingly conscious of the fact that s/he is projecting only his/her image on Louise, instead of describing her.

However, Winterson has not removed all of the fantasies proper. In *Art & Lies*, what fantastic elements there are, can be found in the narrative about Doll Sneerpiece, and therefore Winterson returns to restraining the fantastic to specific narratives, like in *Oranges*. The narratives are not as clearly separated, though, for it is often not easy to quickly distinguish who is speaking/narrating at a given moment and, moreover, to push the theme of intertextuality, the novel contains various other texts into which it regularly switches, as the narrators open and close different books, frequently without a warning. Significantly, the narrative about Doll Sneerpiece is distinctly labeled as a fiction within a fiction and accordingly it is not required to obey any laws of reason. Such a notion is cultivated in *The PowerBook*, where most of the novel is explicitly fiction, as it takes places in the virtual reality of e-mails. This is made clear from the beginning: “This is an invented world,”¹² states the novel on its second page. In *Gut Symmetries*, the precise opposite appears: “This is a true story,”¹³ asserts the first page after the introductory chapters. The self-confessed fictionality of *The PowerBook* gives the stories a completely free hand and nobody is at pains to maintain the decorum of reality, not even the characters of the stories, as one of them exclaims, “‘This is a story – you, me, the Muck House, the treasure.’”¹⁴ *The PowerBook*, being the last novel of the “series,” fittingly exhibits the extremes of what storytelling can achieve. It can transform people, it transgresses the boundaries of space, time and truth, and as a result it allows to rewrite what has happened, what has been said and what has been written.

¹¹ *Written on the Body*, 189.

¹² *The PowerBook*, 4.

¹³ *Gut Symmetries*, 9.

¹⁴ *The PowerBook*, 229.

The employment of scientific theories in the novels was heralded already in *Sexing the Cherry*, where contemplations on matter and time were not uncommon. Now they are also combined with the established themes of time, storytelling and multiplicity, yet more wholly, above all in *Gut Symmetries*, where two of the three narrators are scientists and that necessarily causes the novel to be littered with science, plus the “gut” of the title also stands for Grand Unified Theories. The connection between science and storytelling is illustrated in *The PowerBook*:

In quantum reality there are millions of possible worlds, unactualised, potential, perhaps bearing in on us, but only reachable by wormholes we can never find. If we do find one, we don't come back.

In those other worlds events may track our own, but the ending will be different, sometimes we need a different ending.

I can't take my body through space and time, but I can send my mind, and use the stories, written and unwritten, to tumble me out in a place not yet existing – my future.¹⁵

Quantum physics offers a perfect metaphor for the postmodern multiplicity and fluidity, as well as being near to Winterson's conception of time and space, since they are inseparable in quantum physics: “Space and time cannot be separated. History and futurity are now.”¹⁶ To grasp the world around her, Alice, a narrator/character of *Gut Symmetries*, chooses to become a scientist:

Past. Present. Future. The rational divisions of the rational life. Always underneath, in dreams, in recollections, on the moment of hesitation on a busy street, the hunch that life is not rational, not divided. That the mirrored compartments could break.

I chose to study time in order to outwit it.¹⁷

She hopes that science will offer the answers through precise measurement and rationality, which are always at odds with storytelling and fantasy for Winterson, as has been seen in *The Passion*, where Napoleon embodies the oppressive rationalizing, which is the main antithesis of the fantastic Venice. In her essay on the fuse of gender issues with science in *Gut Symmetries*, Ann McClellan examines the position of Alice as a female scientist, and claims that science and rationality “provide [Alice] with the tools and mechanisms by which she can (falsely) categorize self/other, fantasy/reality, truth/fiction.”¹⁸ Evidently, the opposition between storytelling and rationalizing is still the central concern here.

¹⁵ *The PowerBook*, 53.

¹⁶ *Gut Symmetries*, 219.

¹⁷ *Gut Symmetries*, 20.

¹⁸ Ann McClellan, “Science Fictions: British Women Scientists and Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*,” *Women's Studies* Vol. 33 No. 8 (2004): 1068.

For Winterson, the arch enemy in *Gut Symmetries* are the Grand Unified Theories. They strive to curb the world, measure it and sort it into neat categories. It is not surprising that Winterson opposes them, given her postmodern views, yet McClellan considers also their social aspects:

Previous Grand Unified Theories have succeeded in dividing human experience into the Western binaries of male/female, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, good/evil—all of which have been used negatively to police social behavior and regulate/relegate identity. Winterson raises the question of whether there can be ‘good’ meta-narratives of the universe, human experience, and identity or whether all Grand Unified Theories are illusory in nature.¹⁹

There are challengers to the system and one of them is Jove, a second, male, narrator and Alice’s lover. However, although his theory would uproot the GUT, he refuses to acknowledge that there might be some truth in other theories than his, which makes him the Napoleon of *Gut Symmetries*. The third narrator is Jove’s wife and also Alice’s second lover Stella. Her convictions are more open to relativity in the sense that there is no definite truth, she is more mystical and open-minded, which is related to the fact that she is not a scientist but a poet. The love triangle serves to magnify Alice’s attempt to reconcile science with feeling and personal experience. Winterson herself takes care that she does not become oppressive herself and, as usual, she does not resolve the binary conflict with a victor:

Rather than reinforcing the traditional (literary) hierarchy of the artist over the scientist, Winterson shows us how the two approaches can be mutually informing. In fact, she uses Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity—one of the foundational theories of twentieth-century science—as narrative theory and as a way to conceptualize personal identity.²⁰

Therefore science in these novels is what religion was in *Oranges* and history was in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* – a beneficial perspective, yet it should not usurp the sole right to truth. In *The PowerBook* science is also omnipresent, considering that virtual reality is the creation of modern science. In *Art & Lies* this is not as blatant, but Handel is a doctor, “not a sentimentalist,”²¹ and he treats life too seriously, resisting passion, because he rationalizes it, waiting for the genuine feeling, instead of “the fake attentions and easy affections of a world unmoored from its proper harbour.”²² It is not until the end of the book that he opens to the world and sings, expressing himself through art the way Sappho and Picasso, the other two narrators, do.

¹⁹ McClellan, 1068.

²⁰ McClellan, 1073.

²¹ *Art & Lies*, 21.

²² *Art & Lies*, 15.

The tyranny in *Written on the Body* is particularly worth examining and science has a role in it as well. A considerable portion of the text the narrator spends in a library, amassing all the information there is about human body and then mingles it with a poetic image of coursing through Louise's body. This is a reaction to Louise being diagnosed with cancer and the subsequent breakup that the narrator initiated, so that Louise could be treated by her husband Elgin, who is a top oncologist. The narrator hopes that by studying every detail of her body, s/he could be with Louise all the time:

If I could not put Louise out of my mind I would drown myself in her. Within the clinical language, through the dispassionate view of the sucking, sweating, greedy, defecating self, I found a love-poem to Louise. I would go on knowing her, more intimately than the skin, hair and voice that I craved. I would have her plasma, her spleen, her synovial fluid. I would recognise her even when her body had long since fallen away.²³

Though the love for Louise is undeniable, it has a dark underlining tone, for some critics argue that the endeavor to know Louise so intimately is in essence possessive. Through science, specifically medicine in this case, the narrator strives to rationalize her and hence control her – to know her is to have power over her. One of the critics that hold such a position is Francesca Maioli:

The narrator, while proposing to celebrate a female body, ends up turning it into a palimpsest through a process of narrative colonization. This results from a narrative language that is not 'genderless': in being sustained by a violent and dominating attitude to the female body, it can be defined as male or patriarchal. The body is not described *per se* but through a rich intertextual web merging literary references, medical terminology and geographical imagery. All of these discourses are used to recall the process of inscription of social norms and codes onto female bodies in order to keep women under control, a process that both society and its artistic forms have been engaged with since the beginning of the Modern Age, and one in which the narrator becomes complicit. Therefore, in spite of most readers' perceptions, the genderless narrator turns out to be everything but a feminist device as it speaks with a definitely male voice. The novel shows that there can be no such a thing as 'genderless' narrator, since 'ungendered' ends up coinciding with 'universal', and, in western culture, it stands for 'male'.²⁴

In this ruthless reading, the narrative voice is identified with the masculine oppression of the previous two novels. The effort to free Louise from the marriage with Elgin is in this way reinterpreted as a conflict of two authorities over Louise, where her own well-being is

²³ *Written on the Body*, 141.

²⁴ Francesca Maioli, "Palimpsests: The Female Body as a Text in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*," *European Journal of Women's Studies* Vol. 16 No. 2 (2009): 144.

secondary. While the interpretation might seem harsh, it is undeniable that in the narrator's description of Louise a recurring motif is that of a bountiful land to be colonized and mapped:

Louise, in this single bed, between these garish sheets, I will find a map as likely as any treasure hunt. I will explore you and mine you and you will redraw me according to your will. We shall cross one another's boundaries and make ourselves one nation. Scoop me in your hands for I am good soil.²⁵

The colonizing narrative is evident, though the reciprocity of the process can hardly be ignored. The narrator offers to undergo the same treatment, which is not something an oppressor would do. But there is more, since the narrator explicitly denies the role of the colonizer: "Did Columbus feel like this on sighting the Americas? I had no dreams to possess you but I wanted you to possess me."²⁶ Using the arguments of the narrator is problematic, insofar as s/he can hardly be objective and was proven to be unreliable. However, the narrator's despotic propensities are definitely not as uncomplicated as Elgin's. It might help to turn to consider similar ideas in *The PowerBook*:

Let me in. You do. In this space which is inside you and inside me I ask for no rights or territories. There are no frontiers or control. The usual channels do not exist. This is the orderly anarchic space that no one can dictate, though everyone tries. This is a country without a ruler. I am free to come and go as I please. This is Utopia. It could never happen beyond bed. This is the model of government for the world.²⁷

It would seem that the primary concern is to become one with the beloved, to cross each other's boundaries and merge. This is a motif of blending of the characters that is common to all four novels and will be studied in the next chapter.

Nonetheless, the arguments for the oppressive treatment of Louise do not end there, because the narrator continuously describes her in relation to other things.²⁸ Most commonly she is related to the narrator him/herself, implying that the most significant characteristic for the narrator is how she makes him/her feel. What is more, the narrator makes decisions for Louise, most strikingly when s/he decides to leave her to Elgin's care without consulting her first, which is the point that Gregory J. Rubinson stresses:

In addition to the excessively possessive nature of the narrator's discourse, the narrator's precipitous, unilateral decision to leave Louise to Elgin denies Louise the right to exercise her own agency. In the end, we know very little about Louise: that she has red hair, that she's Australian. Nearly everything

²⁵ *Written on the Body*, 20.

²⁶ *Written on the Body*, 52.

²⁷ *The PowerBook*, 175.

²⁸ Maioli, 149.

else is the narrator's subjective construction of her as an erotic object. For Elgin, also, she is an object, albeit more ornamental. Louise's role in the novel is principally as an object to be fought over. The power struggle between the narrator and Elgin is played out in their attempts to claim Louise through opposed discourses of the body: each armed with a preferred narrative, they battle over who will decide Louise's destiny, whose discourse is more authoritative. Neither the narrator nor Elgin gives Louise the chance to communicate her own version of her story. And yet Louise exercises her agency in the most decisive way in this book: she takes off on her own, refusing to play into Elgin's ploy despite the fact that the narrator does.²⁹

The narrator objectifies Louise in a similar Elgin does, and it is when s/he realizes it that s/he is symbolically rewarded by Louise's return. By failing to find her, it is proven that the narrator does not actually know Louise all that well, which is further supported by the fact that s/he is unable to anticipate her reaction to Elgin's plan. When the narrator understands that the acquired knowledge is useless or insufficient, s/he has to concede that he has no power over Louise. After the end of the whole narrative narrated exclusively by the authoritative narrator, there is a possibility that the unheard story of Louise might begin.³⁰

Madelyn Detloff offers another reading; though less concerned with gender, she writes about the cyclical nature of the text, which is a structure Winterson employs regularly. The almost chronic obsession with the past and especially with the ex-partners fixes the narrator in a cycle of self-harm:

In *Written on the Body*, the narrator seems at first to be stuck in a deterministic relation to the past, repeatedly taking the "measure of love" by producing its loss in a seemingly interchangeable series of painful affairs with unavailable partners. These repetitions are viewed by the narrator as essential to resisting the tired old clichés of serial monogamy. Although the narrator, not surprisingly, manages to resist these tired clichés, s/he cannot escape more sensational forms of replication. The love triangle narratives seem to cycle (or recycle) so much that one begins to believe that the ending is already predetermined, written in the script.³¹

Used to such an ending and expecting failure, the narrator ends the relationship with Louise, perceiving it as something that was bound to happen from the start. Even with this reasoning, the argument that the narrator's knowledge is false stands and when s/he admits it, Louise returns, breaking the cycle. Madelyn Detloff views this as turning away from the past and looking into the future.

²⁹ Rubinson, Gregory J. "Body Languages: Scientific and Aesthetic Discourses in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*." *Critique* Vol. 42 No. 2 (2001): 226.

³⁰ Rubinson, 230.

³¹ Detloff, 153-154.

The “tired clichés” are another serious obstacle in the novels, “because they only offer categorization, generalizations, and prescription and rob language of its vitality.”³² They are yet another unifying system that attempts to simplify the world and is largely successful, given that one does not even think about them anymore. Jennifer A. Smith analyses the clichés in detail, especially in their relation to love, where there are the most manifest:

[B]ecause the discourse of love—in other words, romance—is an example of a “master narrative” or metanarrative, Winterson’s characters are featured struggling to express their feelings with authenticity, since metanarratives are systems that attempt to explain cultural phenomena in terms of a single, unifying principle or truth so as to impose an order in human experience.³³

Love is seen extremely positively in Winterson, yet so is the ability of original self-expression, and loving in an original fashion is complicated even by language. Whenever there is a uniform way of doing things, Winterson is there to challenge it. The problem occurs in *Art & Lies*: “It will not be enough to say I love you. I know you have heard it before,”³⁴ complains Sappho. Language fails the poet, for its ultimate expression of affection seems cheap and tasteless. Jennifer L. Hansen illustrates the difficulty beautifully:

This is a paradox: how can we use language, which does not allow for private expression, to speak the precise truths of our heart? Will speaking those three words “I love you” ever capture the fact that I, a unique individual, love you, a unique individual. The distinctiveness of our love, can it be spoken in a language for everyone? Perhaps on such matters we should just remain silent? But when it comes to love, we cannot keep silent.³⁵

The narrator of *Written on the Body* definitely cannot be silent on the issue, as one of his/her refrains is “It’s the clichés that cause the trouble,”³⁶ and on the very first page s/he observes that “‘I love you’ is always a quotation.”³⁷ Subsequently, another interpretation arises, since seeing the importance of the originality of love, the narrator’s affair with Louis is also a story about why it is dangerous to merely copy the romances one sees in popular culture. The narrator struggles in vain to not succumb to the pressure and realizes only at the end of the book thanks to the illumination from the good-hearted Gail, who claims that many of the relationships the narrator has had

³² Jennifer A. Smith, “‘We Shall Pass Imperceptibly Through Every Barrier’: Reading Jeanette Winterson’s Trans-Formative Romance,” *Critique* Vol. 52 No. 4 (2011): 419.

³³ Jennifer A. Smith, 418.

³⁴ *Art & Lies*, 139.

³⁵ Jennifer L. Hansen, “*Written on the Body*, Written by the Senses,” *Philosophy & Literature* Vol. 29 No. 2 (2005): 369.

³⁶ *Written on the Body*, 10, 71, 155, 189.

³⁷ *Written on the Body*, 9.

were ended, because the narrator followed the example of a traditional romance and a true romance is always tragic.³⁸

It is no surprise that Winterson has not abandoned the themes of storytelling and fantasy even in the last novels of her “series.” *Art & Lies* enhances their discussion by linking them to art and particularly to intertextuality. *Written on the Body* introduces new perspectives in the realm of uncertainty, somewhere in between “meatspace” and fantasy. “Meatspace” is the term for the construct of reality that is used in *The PowerBook* to distinguish it from the virtual world, where most of the novel is set and where storytelling has leeway to unleash its full potential, bending identity, space and time. *Gut Symmetries* is the novel that fosters the relationship between fantasy and science the most, even though all the three other novels do that as well to some extent. While Winterson concurs with quantum physics on various topics, the science as a whole is at the same time associated with the same oppressive roles as religion or history in the previous novels. Still, there are other oppressive narratives, most notably in *Written on the Body* where love is treated as another metanarrative and Louise is repressed by her husband as well as her lover, who both suppress Louise’s perspective by their self-centered and authoritative affection. The authority of the narrator is just one of the aspects that will be picked up in the following chapter, along with his participation in obscuring and relativizing the texts and his relationship with the reader.

³⁸ Jennifer A. Smith, 420.

Complicating the Role of the Narrator

In *Oranges*, the reader followed the development of a single narrator, in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, the central piece was the contrast between the worldviews of the two narrators. Through their complementarity, the narrators explored the themes of gender, rationalizing and fantasy. The core questions of the themes remain, seeking new perspectives and horizons, focusing more on science and in *Art & Lies* on art. The narrative strategies, on the other hand, change considerably, especially in terms of experimentation with the narrators. While *Art & Lies* and *Gut Symmetries* continue in the trend of increasing the number of narrators, both introducing three voices, *Written on the Body* has a single narrator that appropriates the narrative for him/herself the way the previous chapter demonstrated and *The PowerBook* has a sole principal narrator as well, yet his lover and reader Tulip occasionally co-narrates the various stories. The common feature of all the novels is the impression of a blur; many things that the reader presupposes are taken away from him and he is compelled to search the fluid texts for a solid foothold. The narrative structures are complex, the narrators are often unreliable and the events described are not certain to have happened. Additionally, the relationship between the reader and the writer is augmented with more frequent address of the reader and a fuller incorporation of the reader into the creative process.

The structural potential of the multiplicity of narrators is arguably the most developed in *Art & Lies*, which is probably the most inaccessible text of all Winterson's novels. The other texts follow a fairly straightforward, usually about a love affair, or a personal quest, that anchors the text and provides the backbone which then frays into copious digressions. The narrator/characters of *Art & Lies* instead meet only in passing before their final reunion at the end, which is nothing like the narrative duos of Jordan/Dog-Woman and Henri/Villanelle, who share the narrative space for half of the text. The fragmentariness caused by the breaks in the narratives makes one feel as if he were examining individual shards of a shattered mirror, wondering how they fit together. Retaining the strategies of the earlier novels, such as flashbacks, embedded stories and ruminative passages, the flow of the text is complicated further by rapid shifts between narratives, and their overlapping. It requires considerable effort on the part of the reader to keep track of what text is he currently reading and who is narrating, given the regular abrupt swings between the first and third person. The aim of

providing more perspectives remains, but the final goal is to render the interconnectedness of (works of) art – the three narrators even personify music, visual art and literature (poetry).

It would be unjust to claim that the narrators of the previous works were not complicated and were absolutely reliable; especially Jordan and Henri confessed that memory is a highly imperfect tool, making anything one remembers questionable and Henri even reveals that he rewrote his account multiple times. Nonetheless, the narrator of *Written on the Body* takes things further, since his/her narrative is quite one-sided and full of uncertainties, as the previous chapter attempted to show. The question of unreliability is posed by the narrator him/herself: “I can tell by now that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator.”¹ Yet, the narrator’s most special aspect is the obscurity – the reader does not learn the name, or the sex. This might be a deliberate act on the part of the narrator, for s/he confesses, “I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story.”² Where *The Passion* uses lying, disguises and cross dressing, *Written on the Body* merely obfuscates the information, without committing to a specific version of the story. Accordingly, the novel “implies that such information is or should be irrelevant,”³ asserts Rubinson. This argument is reintroduced by Ali of *The PowerBook*, when Tulip inquires about Ali’s identity:

You said, “Who are you?”
 “Call me Ali.”
 “Is that your real name?”
 “Real enough.”
 “Male or female?”
 “Does it matter?”
 “It’s a co-ordinate.”
 “This is a virtual world.”
 “OK, OK – but just for the record – male or female?”
 “Ask the Princess.”
 “That was just a story.”
 “This is just a story.”⁴

By refusing to provide any definite information, Ali rejects the need of reason to classify, and therefore limit, everything it encounters. Suitably, Ali and Tulip are just aliases that are, in all probability, fake substitutes to mask the real names. Even when the two meet in “meatspace,” neither of them feels the urge to know the truth, as even Tulip understands by now its

¹ *Written on the Body*, 24.

² *Written on the Body*, 89.

³ Rubinson, Gregory J. “Body Languages: Scientific and Aesthetic Discourses in Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*.” *Critique* Vol. 42 No. 2 (2001): 220.

⁴ *The PowerBook*, 26-27.

inconsequentiality. Name and sex do not matter, for they can change at any time in the story along with everything else. And they do in the novel, because Ali becomes also Alix, Lancelot, Francesca and Giovanni in the stories she tells, her sex being adjusted as necessary.

In the first story she narrates, she wears a tulip as a substitute for a penis, but to her surprise the tulip works and is used in the subsequent intercourse with the Princess. The cross dressing that was just a mask in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, is now a literal transformation. The virtual reality allows *The PowerBook* to go beyond categories like sex: “Take off your clothes. Take off your body. Hang them up behind the door. Tonight we can go deeper than disguise.”⁵ Stripping one’s identity extricates him from the norms of society and empowers him, or rather *her*. The consequences of this in terms of gender are deliberated by Mine Özyurt Kılıç: “With the help of some fantastic images, *The PowerBook* serves as a book of power from which readers can draw strength to deconstruct the established gender roles assigned by patriarchal ideology.”⁶ Thus, what has been done before with the binary opposition of gender reflected on the two narrators is now accomplished with only one. Fiona McCulloch considers primarily the spatial relations in the novel, nevertheless, she cannot gloss over the issue of identity:

[I]dentity too is shown to be very much an imagined state. Selfhood remains elusive, oscillating between numerous character positions of gender and sexuality, like the divisions between narrator, reader and character that shift continually, to even incorporate the stories of characters beyond the text, such as Lancelot and Guinevere. [...] [I]t would be fair to say that the characters in *The PowerBook* are more shapeshifting functions of language than pertaining to the air of flesh-and-blood rotundity. Indeed, the voices in the text are hybrids, composed of multiple possible identities in a fictional space navigating a route beyond gender divisions.⁷

She touches upon the relationship with the reader, which will be tackled later, but she also mentions the instability of identity that culminates in transgressing the boundaries of individuals and their mingling. Obscuring the identity causes its edges to become indistinct and this in turn allows for a breach.

It has been stated, that some narratives of *The PowerBook* are co-narrated. This generates remarkable interactions, for instance when one narrator is seducing the other one, who defends herself by narrating another version of the story:

⁵ *The PowerBook*, 4.

⁶ Mine Özyurt Kılıç, “Transgressing Boundaries: The Function of the Fantastic in Jeanette Winterson’s *The Powerbook*,” *English Studies* Vol. 89 No.3 (2008): 287.

⁷ Fiona McCulloch, “‘Boundaries. Desire’ - Spatial Inter-Acting in *The Powerbook*,” *English: The Journal of the English Association* Vol. 56 No. 214 (2007): 60.

You kissed my throat.
The boy was dancing.
 You kissed my collarbone.
Two taxi drivers were arguing in the street.
 You put your tongue into the channel of my breasts.
*A door slammed underneath us.*⁸

This intensifies for some time and in the end Ali succumbs. The first sentence after the act is narrated only by Ali again: “The next morning I woke late and turned to kiss her. / She had gone.”⁹ The second person “you” changes to “her” because Ali is now alone in her narrative. Emotionally devastated, she reviews the events of the night, but her memory is blurred: “Who was I last night? Who was she?”¹⁰ The relation of the co-narrators grew so intimate that their positions became interchangeable and indistinguishable, even for themselves. A similar fusion occurs in *Gut Symmetries*, where the narrators form a love triangle and they are not sure where of the boundaries between the personalities: “Did I say that? No she did. I sometimes think my personality is a troopship’s atoll; invade me,”¹¹ says Alice. Elsewhere, she elucidates her feelings about this state:

It would not be the first time that Jove and Stella had covered the traces of where I began and where they ended. I liked the playfulness of the lovers’ argument: who are you and who am I? Which of us is which? Liked it less when the erotic twinhood devolved into forged letters and faked signatures.

It had begun as a game. Post-coital ludos lathered with champagne. Bubbling with love I had shown Jove how to calligraph himself as me. If he could turn his wrist to mine, he might become me, he might free me. If he could be let go into myself, then I might be let loose into another self. He might displace me as a heavy solid displaces water.¹²

Alice’s indecision between Jove’s rationalism (he is identified as solid in contrast with the female fluidity) and Stella’s mysticism is therefore literal; she has to resolve who she will *become*. The interchangeability of the narrators is manifested especially in the recurrent drama-like passages, where the utterances of the individual characters are denoted only by personal pronouns ME/YOU/SHE/HE:

ME: Do you want me to go away?
 SHE: No. No, actually I want you to stay.
 ME: Who with?
 SHE: Sometimes I wonder which is which. Where I begin. Where he ends.¹³

⁸ *The PowerBook*, 56-57.

⁹ *The PowerBook*, 58.

¹⁰ *The PowerBook*, 59.

¹¹ *Gut Symmetries*, 121.

¹² *Gut Symmetries*, 139.

¹³ *Gut Symmetries*, 124.

The pronouns are useful for rendering the relationship of the narrators, because they are not stable. In the quoted passage, SHE stands for Stella and ME for Alice, who is the current narrator, but when Stella assumes the position of a narrator, she is not denoted as SHE, but as ME. However, there are also dialogues between HE and SHE, or even simply between ME and YOU. Additionally, Jove is never identified as ME, even if the dialogue is within his narrative. The absence of an overt system emphasizes the fluidity of the personalities, which would be lost if the dialogues were identified by proper names.

Returning from the instability of the narrators to gender, *Art & Lies* approaches the subject in an already familiar fashion, since Handel is castrated and hence symbolically not entirely male and Picasso, even though she is a painter, she is not male, as one would expect considering her name. Interestingly, it is only the masculine that is complicated or feminized, unlike the reciprocal problematizing witnessed in the other novels, for Sappho, the third narrator, fulfills the expected image of a lesbian poet. In the preceding chapter, McClellan analyses the way that gender roles influence the live of Alice from *Gut Symmetries*. This has an impact on her perceived gender as well: “As a minority in her profession, both as a woman scholar and as a woman scientist, Alice is in-between male and female.”¹⁴ Moreover, she admits it herself: “Here I am, man overboard, woman too.”¹⁵ Learning from the example of her mother, Alice views her femininity as incompatible with science: “Alice learned from her own familial environment that gender (read: woman) does not work well with intellect (read: male).”¹⁶ Her self-esteem is tattered by her constant seeking of approval from her father, who wanted a son, and so she tries to be one, excelling in her studies, therefore, “[w]hen Alice does achieve brilliant marks at Cambridge, Winterson suggests that she is not acting like a woman.”¹⁷ Consequently, gender is still a focus in all of the novels and it is approached by complicating the identity of the narrators.

Still, the most debated in this respect is the narrator of *Written on the Body*. His/her genderlessness causes many critics to conclude that there is a specific gender of the narrator, it is just not stated. They then initiate a thorough search of the text for any hints, or “hidden clues,” as if the novel were meant as a challenge to the reader to try and decode it like a

¹⁴ Ann McClellan, “Science Fictions: British Women Scientists and Jeanette Winterson’s *Gut Symmetries*,” *Women’s Studies* Vol. 33 No. 8 (2004): 1063.

¹⁵ *Gut Symmetries*, 19.

¹⁶ McClellan, 1065.

¹⁷ McClellan, 1065.

murder mystery.¹⁸ They are exactly like Tulip in the quoted passage from *The PowerBook* - they demand to know the particularities, so that they can neatly assort the narrator to a specific category, with all the associated prejudices and expectations. Bearing in mind Winterson's distaste for binary oppositions, it is obvious that searching for the "truth" completely misses the point. There are two other, more plausible interpretations, both representing the refusal to conform to the classification – either the narrator does not belong to any gender, thus repeating that gender should not matter, as in *The PowerBook*; or that the narrator displays features of both genders simultaneously, or, even more likely, alternately identifying as male and female. Smith identifies the narrator as transgender “- one that displays characteristics of both genders without stably aligning with one or the other.”¹⁹ Reminiscent of the fluid and ever-changing Venice, the identity of the narrator cannot be pinpointed.

Smith carries on, noting that by including less information about the narrator, the text allows the reader to enjoy “a more symbiotic relationship with the narrator and his/her narrative.”²⁰ In agreement with Smith, Jennifer L. Hansen maintains, “We are not just watching a performance in front of us that takes us through fear and pity. We are less able to distinguish clearly what is us from what is the protagonist.”²¹ This calls to mind the love relationships between the narrators of *Gut Symmetries* and *The PowerBook*. Indeed, Tulip is no so much a narrator, but rather a reader who has a considerable power over the narrative, and therefore she embodies all the poles of the writer/reader/lover image that Winterson is fond of:

In her work, reading, translating, and loving are not metaphors for each other, but rather mutual processes of engagement with others that exceed the self and prompt the reader/lover to evolve. In other words, reading is a form of transformative loving for Winterson.²²

The relationship between the reader and the narrator is strengthened by the self-referencing of the narrator and the narrative, but chiefly by inserting direct addresses to the reader, which have greatly multiplied in these four novels. One of the most notable is the refrain of *Gut Symmetries*: “Walk with me,”²³ which is followed by various additions: “Hand in hand

¹⁸ For common arguments in favor of either female or male identity of the narrator see Jennifer A. Smith, “‘We Shall Pass Imperceptibly Through Every Barrier’: Reading Jeanette Winterson’s Trans-Formative Romance,” *Critique* Vol. 52 No. 4 (2011): 413.

¹⁹ Jennifer A. Smith, 415-416.

²⁰ Jennifer A. Smith, 417 .

²¹ Jennifer L. Hansen, “Written on the Body, Written by the Senses,” *Philosophy & Literature* Vol. 29 No. 2 (2005): 370.

²² Madelyn Detloff, “Living In ‘Energetic Space’: Jeanette Winterson’s Bodies And Pleasures,” *English Language Notes* Vol. 45 No. 2 (2007): 153.

²³ *Gut Symmetries*, 20, 24, 25, 27, 101, 117, 118, 157, 215, 218, 219.

through the nightmare of narrative,”²⁴ “Walk with me, memory to memory, the shared path, the mutual view,”²⁵ “Walk time in its skeleton,”²⁶ “Walk the broken past, named and not.”²⁷ The reader is clearly being invited to engage with the narrator: “Hear me. Speak to me. Look at me.”²⁸ What is more, the narrators are conscious of the influence of the reader on their narrative: “It is just as likely that as I invent what I want to say, you will invent what you want to hear. Some story we must have,”²⁹ and “Did I write this story, or was it you, writing through me, the way sun sparks the fire through a piece of glass?”³⁰ Ultimately, the reader is at times explicitly granted the narrative power: “Here are two endings. You choose.”³¹ As with everything else, Winterson does not want to impose an authoritative narrative and to prove that, the reader is invited to participate, which is the moral that the narrator of *Written on the Body* realizes in the end. Similarly to the focus on art in *Art & Lies*, examining the relationship between with the reader further extends the scope of Winterson’s perpetual theme of storytelling, which has underwent many a transformation since the *Oranges*.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the increased fragmentariness of the narratives is caused also by introducing elements of various genres, such as the drama form of some dialogues in *Gut Symmetries* that emphasize the fluidity of personality. This appears also in *Written on the Body*, where the narrator uses the dramatic form to describe the repeating script of his/her affairs,³² or at the end of *Art & Lies* when all three protagonists finally meet.³³ The dramatic form helps to disembodify the voices and in *Art & Lies*, it introduces another art form, or literary form, into the mix, since the novel is a homage to and study of art. Another, more playful example of mixing genres can be found in *The PowerBook*, where Ali uses a recipe to describe not only the actual process of cooking, but her current emotions as well.³⁴ Apart from these additions, one can still encounter the regular embedded narratives scattered around the texts, often with some unifying theme. For instance, in *Written on the Body*, instead of Jeanette’s fantasies, or Jordan’s adventures, the reader learns the stories behind various love affairs of the narrator, their beginning often being signaled by the phrase “I had a girlfriend

²⁴ *Gut Symmetries*, 24, 157.

²⁵ *Gut Symmetries*, 20.

²⁶ *Gut Symmetries*, 101.

²⁷ *Gut Symmetries*, 117.

²⁸ *Gut Symmetries*, 157.

²⁹ *Gut Symmetries*, 25.

³⁰ *The PowerBook*, 209.

³¹ *The PowerBook*, 205.

³² *Written on the Body*, 14-15.

³³ *Art & Lies*, 204-205.

³⁴ *The PowerBook*, 182-183.

once.”³⁵ In *Art & Lies*, Doll Sneerpiece’s narrative resembles the sustained embedded narratives of *Winnet*, or *Perceval*. The majority of the stories from *Gut Symmetries* are taken from the childhood experiences of the narrators, and thus are retrospective in nature, like in *Written on the Body*. *The PowerBook* is distinct, as the stories take up a great portion of the text, not leaving much space for the life outside of them. When compared to *Oranges*, it would be as if Jeanette’s fantasies were interrupted by major events in her life, rather than the other way around.

In conclusion, the four novels are characteristic for the sense of blur they evoke. The narrators of the texts contribute greatly to this general feeling, due to their obscurity and instability that are perfectly exemplified on the narrator of *Written on the Body*. S/he is unsexed and unnamed and thus resists the categorizing tendencies that are represented most vividly by the Grand Unified Theories in *Gut Symmetries*. Rather than to proclaim the narrator’s gender as unknown, one should acknowledge that it is instable, existing only in a state of constant flux. The obscurity and the resulting instability can cause interblending of personalities of narrators/characters and this is explored in all four novels, yet especially in *Gut Symmetries*. There, each member of the love triangle has difficulties in recognizing his own boundaries and therefore instead of three individuals, the novel presents a single mixture of personalities flowing into each other. The indistinct relations generate the consideration of the reader/writer relationship, the most advanced ideas on the matter being proposed in *The PowerBook*, which treats the relationship in romantic terms. The reader’s power over the narrative is established and it becomes clear that reading, and reading Winterson in particular, can never be a passive experience.

With *The PowerBook* the seven book “series” is completed and the present analysis of Winterson’s narrative strategies ends here as well. If it did not, it would probably focus on another four novels: *Lighthousekeeping*, *Weight*, *The Stone Gods* and *The Daylight Gate*. These successfully continue the tradition of the search for fresh perspectives and unexplored context so as to display the old themes in a new light – *Lighthousekeeping* returns to the style of the three early novels, and with renewed strength once more delves into the world of storytelling; *Weight* retells the myth of Atlas and foregrounds the motifs of boundaries, desire, fate and weight, which have been encountered before; *The Stone Gods* samples the genre of science fiction, which allows it to look into the future as well as into the past, thus finally involving all the parts of the past/present/future relation that has been discussed so many

³⁵ *Written on the Body*, 12, 19, 59, 75.

times, additionally it celebrates the power of language, similarly to *Written on the Body*; and at last *The Daylight Gate* takes the reader back to the time of witch hunts in England. They are all beautifully written and are certainly enjoyable, yet they cannot be said to introduce any groundbreaking innovations as far as narrative strategies are concerned. *The Stone Gods* has the most potential out of these due to the mentioned extension of the debate on time, but also because there are three narratives that reflect each other, even though they are set in widely different times and one of them even takes place on a different planet. At the end, the narratives conjoin, bringing past, present and future together.

Conclusion

Returning to the very beginning of Winterson's journey, it is possible to now reflect on it as a whole. *Oranges* represents Winterson's manifesto, where she states her ideas and provides the framework for her future work. The novel is remarkably distinct from the other ones because though it is highly anti-linear and by no means traditional, the other novels simply take its ideas further, illuminating more points at once. Still, this does not undermine the significance of *Oranges*, because without *Oranges*, there would be no *Sexing the Cherry*, let alone a novel like *The PowerBook*. Thanks to *Oranges* being more moderate and not hurrying its readers to take in its themes and practices, other novels were not compelled to include lengthy explanations of their ways, since often all that was needed to clarify them was already said in *Oranges*. That is not to say that the reader cannot read *The Passion*, for instance, without going through *Oranges* first, though it would certainly help to grasp the text better. Arguably, even for the writer it must be liberating to have her positions declared in a published and successful book that works on its own. Knowing that could provide some security when writing new novels, for one recognizes that what has been accomplished is functional, and now it can be developed further, which is the attitude of most of Winterson's novels.

There is no merit in simple reiteration and it is fair to say that Winterson's novels are far from being mere reiterations of their previous versions, although the texts are highly resonant of each other. For instance, *Oranges* devises the embedded narratives, which cleverly follow Jeanette's "real" life; it sets out to defy the tradition of history and the repressive storytelling embodied by religion, all the while problematizing the way one thinks about time. Without a doubt, it is quite a list, nevertheless, when one considers *Sexing the Cherry*, he discovers that every single one of these issues is present there as well and there is more, e.g. the extensive treatment of gender. There is also a perceivable trend of turning theory into practice, as can be seen for instance in the multiplicity of perspectives that was important in *Oranges*, yet it is more fully materialized in *Sexing the Cherry* on its dual narrators and it also animates the conflict between history and storytelling by including a historical setting as well as fantastic elements, which allows the direct confrontation of the concepts. Another perceivable development is the tendency to take the elements that are already present in the previous novels to the extreme. Hence, where Jeanette has a fantasy world that is incredibly fanciful and unstructured, but clearly separated from the rest of the text, *Sexing the Cherry* unleashes

the fantastic into the central narratives, making it a part of everyday life of the protagonist, or even a part of their identity, as is the case with Dog-Woman.

In the later development, even *Sexing the Cherry* is surpassed and what has been seen as experimental in comparison with *Oranges* now seems like a rather limited view. Now, seeing the extent of the experiment at this stage, it would be impossible to radicalize all of the aspects of *Sexing the Cherry* and still maintain a coherent text, therefore the features are distributed among the subsequent novels, each one demonstrating how far is Winterson able to go in a certain direction. Consequently, *Art & Lies* pushes the narrative structure created by the multiple narrators and narratives to more extreme levels, while *Gut Symmetries* takes up the relationships between them and *The PowerBook* liberates the fantastic even more, making the “fantastic narratives” the prevalent reality, rather than being the seasoning of the “meatspace” like in *Oranges*.

Some features of the texts might seem to appear without a direct precedent in *Oranges*, such as the “blurriness,” or the scientific discourse of the last four novels of the cycle. Actually, if one considers the history/storytelling dilemma, one of its principal arguments is that the scientific method used in historiography is not nearly as objective as it should be in order to justify the position of history as the truth about the past. *The Passion* picked up this thread, not only with the magic realist elements, like *Sexing the Cherry*, but also by opposing the freedom of fantasy (the core component of storytelling) with the rationalizing forces embodied by Napoleon, who endeavors to write history as well. From there the link is established between reason and science, considering the added value of quantum physics being concord with some of Winterson’s notions. What is more, history is in fact a science and therefore it can be argued that the scope of *Oranges* was merely widened to incorporate new perspectives and new connections.

The “blurriness” is comprised predominantly of instability, unreliability and obscurity of the text, its narrators and narrative. All of these are necessary byproducts of storytelling and though they might not be specifically addressed in *Oranges*, they are at least implied there. By identifying history as a kind of fiction and by decrying its ability to pinpoint the truth, follows that no fiction in general can attempt that, and hence it cannot be trusted. This is relatable to the fact that storytelling has the power to make the narrative what one wills and this is highlighted, for instance by the narrator of *Written on the Body*, by not identifying his/her gender, therefore leaving both options open, not committing to a single fact. In refusing to be classified and labeled, the narrator utilizes the power of storytelling to combat

the rigid social constructs that entail discrimination of certain groups. This device was especially provocative, as the body of criticism concerned with the issue proves. The instability associated with storytelling was extensively explored in Venice of *The Passion*, a city that changes overnight and instead of a solid foundation, it is built on water. The narrators, who are by definition connected to storytelling, analogically become fluid themselves and their boundaries fade, allowing for overlapping and fusion of their identities. So, all of these do ultimately indirectly originate from *Oranges*, as most of the aspects of any Winterson's novel. Therefore, talking about the seven novels as belonging to one cycle, or series is very fitting and helpful, in the view of the fact that the novels are linked through a continuous line of evolution of themes and strategies. The other six novels aim to exemplify the theory that was proposed in *Oranges* and fulfill it to its full potential.

On the whole, Winterson's techniques of communicating her convictions are very creative and engaging. Her experiment feels playful and light, while continuing to ask weighty questions about the nature of reality, distrusting its very definition. Thus, even if the reader does not share the same beliefs, he can surely appreciate the beautiful language and the literary worth of her novels. Due to being highly enjoyable to read, to which Winterson's narrative strategies contribute greatly, the novels have a greater chance of persuading the reader. This is underlined by the gradual elaboration and maturation of the novels that this thesis has been striving to delineate. The reader that reads *Oranges* first and works his way through Winterson's oeuvre in the order in which they were written, apart from the experience offered by the individual works, which is undoubtedly amply pleasant by itself, he will have the opportunity to observe the development of the overall contention. Such a reader is more likely to be captivated and convinced to accept Winterson's ideas, for his reading process can be equated to listening to a well-structured line of reasoning, instead of examining individual arguments for the same cause. There is a difference between listing one's claims and evidence, as opposed to incorporating them into a consistent and complete system, drawing connections between the specific notions and providing a transparent progress from the basis of the argument to its far-reaching implications.

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