

Jeanette Winterson's Fiction: A Postmodernist Fabulation

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Abstract: *The present paper examines Jeanette Winterson's works in relation to postmodern theories of narrative and history and, critically analyses the indeterminate identity of the subjective narrator. It explores how Winterson in her oeuvre has self-consciously explored the ambiguous status of objective reality and has also questioned the suppositions about narratorial identity. Her use of deconstructive strategies to interrogate the assumptions about sex and gender and her deconstruction of binary oppositions like fiction/history, art/lies and male/female also form a purview of this study. A detailed postmodernist analysis of her novels *Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body* is made to exemplify postmodern aesthetics and the high degrees of self-reflexivity, pastiche and intertextuality in her works. In addition to it, the postmodern themes of constructed and performative nature of identity, gender and sexuality is also looked at in these works.*

Key texts: *Sexing the Cherry, Written on the Body*

Key Words: *postmodernism, deconstruction, historiographic metafiction, binary oppositions*

Jeanette Winterson is a prominent contemporary British writer who self-consciously explores the ambiguous status of objective reality in her works. Her postmodern credentials have never been in doubt and since her debut novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1984), she has been widely described in academe as a part of British postmodern stylists which includes Angela Carter, Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie. The metafictional assumptions about narratorial identity and fictional artifice are continuously questioned in her fiction. She produces fictional narratives that deconstruct deep-rooted cultural binaries and hierarchical discourses, presenting a crisis of legitimation. Postmodern fiction reveals how the past is always ideologically and discursively constructed, what Linda Hutcheon describes as "historiographic metafiction", that narratives foreground the recognition and "narrative is not objective and that any representation of history is always an ideologically laden discourse." (Grice and Woods 27). It is a fiction that is directed both inward and outward, concerned with its status as fiction, narrative or language, and also grounded in some historical reality. Postmodernism tends to "use and abuse, install but also subvert conventions through the use of either irony or parody." (Woods 56) The stories and narratives of postmodernist writers push at and play with the limits of fictionality and become complex forms of complicity between author, text and reader. Such fiction shows a plurality of forms, skepticism towards generic types and categories, ironic inversions with a strong

inclination towards pastiche and parody, and a metafictional insistence on the unpredictability of the text's power to signify.

Winterson in her fiction constantly foregrounds narrativity, whether it is in the pattern of narrative or in the fictional representation of history. In an interview she once said: "People have an enormous need ...to separate history, which is fact, from storytelling, which is not fact...and the whole push of my work has been to say, you cannot know which is which." (Harthill 1990). Her refrain throughout her novel *The Passion* says, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" points directly to her assertion that the world is both fictive and historical. Similarly, Winterson's fictional works such as *The Passion*, *Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body* combines the self-referentiality characteristic of metafiction and the pleasure in epistemological hesitation characteristic of the fantastic with a seemingly contradictory realism-enhancing interest in history and the traditional aspect of storytelling. Her novels not only seek to change the world, but to make one from language. Fiction, therefore, is no longer mimetic in her works but constructive and representation is no longer to be seen as a form of mirror-like reflection, but more a form of construction, of creating something new. So, postmodern fiction seeks to "insert the crevices of history, censored, forgotten, marginalized or otherwise eccentric aspects, and makes its narratives by supplementing history, by filling it out." (Grice and Woods 31). In *The PowerBook* section of her website she cautions that:

We can't go on writing traditional nineteenth century fiction, we have to recognise that modernism and postmodernism have changed the map, and any writer worth their weight in floppy discs will want to go on changing that map. I don't want to be a curator in the museum of Literature, I want to be part of what happens next.

The literary evolution – "the part of what happens next" – necessarily involves postmodernism, and Winterson's relationship to postmodernism remains complex, a "contested category". On the one hand, postmodernism conflicts with the more materialist, lesbian-feminist matrix of Winterson's work and on the other, her novels exemplify postmodern aesthetics, revealing high degrees of self-reflexivity, pastiche and intertextuality in addition to frequent mimetic and temporal dispersions. Her dominant themes and tropes which include existential contingency and spectacle, the performative nature of gender and identity, and the ontological burdens of love are also quintessentially postmodern.

In numerous essays Winterson has attacked the tenets of classical realism, and over the course of ten novels she has "evolved a signature blend of postmodern prose, a mélange of Linda Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction', Diane Elam's 'postmodern romance' and Amy J. Elias's 'metahistorical romance.'" (Keulks 147). In *Art Objects*, which is a theoretical manifestation of her works, Winterson claims that she does not write "novels" and that "the novel form is finished." (191) By "novel" she means a wholly realistic genre, born alongside the development of patriarchal humanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, achieving its

height in the Victorian period and its point of exhaustion with the advent of modernism. What Winterson seems to dislike, then, is the banality of the Victorian attitude to art, which she describes as the absurd attempt of Victorian writers to transform art into “a version of everyday reality.” (31). Her suspicion of realism is so visible that she is ready to forego one of her most valuable and distinctive gift, that of storytelling. Thus, she self-consciously justifies the inclusion of “stories within stories” in her fiction as “a trap for the reader’s attention”, insisting that she is “not particularly interested in folk tales” and that she is a “writer who does not use plot as an engine or foundation.” (189).

Although, Winterson’s themes range widely, conforming the richness of her imagination, yet, the quest for the self or identity is one of the central themes of her fiction, for it is through them that Winterson attempts the metaphorical mapping of the self that resides at the base of her fiction as well as postmodernism itself. Moreover, there is always one theme to which she invariably returns: the power of stories to shape desire, to defend against the weight of inevitable loss and to move towards love. “Love” is a “grand-narrative” that occupies a predominant position in Winterson’s trope and re-occurs quite frequently in Winterson’s oeuvre. Winterson told her former partner, the Australian critic Margaret Reynolds in an interview that, in her work, the same 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.” (Andermahr 7)

Winterson’s work has always pushed at the boundaries of storytelling in order to stretch language, to show what language can do. Her concern with the transgressive clearly includes crossing and re-crossing the conventional limits of narrative. And as she highlights the fictionality of her work so she also foregrounds the practices of reading. Winterson is archly aware of the fact that her books only take on existence when read; that is, that reading re/creates the text: “When I talk about writing I have to always come back to reading” (2006). In *Art Objects* (1996) Winterson convincingly argues that reading is itself an art, one that is difficult to acquire and has to be practiced and refined. The non-linear narratives and temporal eclecticism in her novels insist that the reader is conscious of the practice being enacted; indeed, Winterson deliberately makes her readers aware of the fact that one is reading, “I’m telling you stories.” In addition to the ways in which her novels make the reader work, Winterson’s characters themselves are often readers and their reading skills, or lack of them, become central to the unfolding of story/ies. Thus reading is highlighted in two different ways – one, the texts demand attention and interaction from the reader and simultaneously the texts explicitly represent readers and reading. Another very pertinent aspect that has to be kept in mind is Winterson’s own reading and her representation of canonical works. Her writing abounds with intertextuality and literary allusion as she reworks both traditional stories and traditions of storytelling. These aspects work together to blur the conventional distinctions between author, reader and text. “The

author is also the re/reader; the reader 'writes' the work; the text is a site that shifts its significance, that is continuously in flux." (Carpenter 70).

It seems unnecessary to state that in Winterson's works, writing and reading are inextricably linked. The connection is not, however, always explicitly made. Winterson's novels demand that the reader is active and engaged. In Barthesian terms her work broadly conforms to the characteristics of the "writerly" text in that reader is not a passive recipient of the story but rather participates in the creation of meaning. The reader's relationship with the text fluctuates and thus interpretation remains open-ended, this will become clear by a postmodernist reading of her works *Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body*.

Sexing the Cherry

Winterson's fiction constantly rewrites history and myths. *Sexing the Cherry* describes how the narrator constantly feels her subjectivity escapes her, the narratorial 'I' in the novel shifts, from the Dog Woman to her son Jordan. In *Sexing the Cherry*, the narrators Dog Woman and Jordan are autodiegetic, that is, they are both narrators as well as protagonists, reporting their life stories in retrospect in a manner characteristic of Bildungsroman. Thus, the novel simultaneously moves in two opposite directions. On the one hand, the physical journey of narrator progresses from past to present along a chronological time. On the other hand, their minds move backwards as they try to recover the lost memories and repressed desires of a past that seems fragmentary and incomprehensible to them. As early as 1994, Paulina Palmer situated Jeanette Winterson with Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter in "a postmodernist trend characterized by the delination of subjectivity as fractured and decentred." (Palmer 181) In *Sexing the Cherry*, explorations into the nature of subjectivity lead to theories of the self as able to transcend time and space in the construction of a new concept of time and space as flexible and at the command of the self: "Time has no meaning, space and place have no meaning, on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited. In a single day the mind can make a millpond of the oceans." (80) The novel concerns spaces that remain as yet undiscovered despite the explorations taken by humans on earth. This in turn affects the conception of time in the novel, as it repeatedly dislocates our conventional understanding of time, questioning the metaphysical conceptions of time erected by language. Within this dislocation of space-time, the novel asks one of the central postmodern questions about the relativity and certainty of epistemology: "Maps are being re-made as knowledge appears to increase. But is knowledge increasing or is detail accumulating?"(81) Winterson's world is not simply one of facts, but one of stories and narratives, which are folded within each other; hence, the realms of the aesthetic and the imagination assume a new importance. The novel extols the realm of the aesthetic, set against the pure empirical world, realizing the realm of the imagination to form other important and acceptable places that need exploring. *Sexing the Cherry* is about the insertion of fantasy into what is taken to be reality, or history, and the supposed fixed oppositions of these two categories.

What appears to be a history of the English Civil War, and the early seventeenth century, turns out to hide the myths of the Dog Woman and the twelve dancing princesses.

The magic is a way of decentring the realism, or suggesting an alternative way of life. Winterson is always interested in those aspects that are covered up by narratives. At the beginning of her novel *Sexing the Cherry*, the protagonist states:

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys I wish to record I wish to record. Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time.
(2)

The defining characteristic of postmodernist art is its paradoxical nature, its deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions and to raise questions about or render problematic the commonsensical and the natural. Indeed *Sexing the Cherry* may be set to belong to Hutcheon's category of "historiographic metafiction, a paradoxical type of postmodernist novel that combines "self reflexivity with history." Thus, its main story line is situated in the 17th century, at a time of extraordinary upheaval in English history, but the historical events that take place in *Sexing the Cherry* are not focused from the generalist and totalitarian prospective required by world history but rather from the subjective prospective of two marginal narrator characters, a huge dog breeder who lives by the bank of the Thames, nicknamed the Dog Woman, and her foundling son, Jordan.

The fact that Jordan can cross the boundary separating the world of common day reality from the world of fantasy suggests the complementarity and reversibility of real and the unreal, of the imagined and the actually lived. Moreover, the merging of events and characters widely separated in time in what appears to be an atemporal present successfully challenges the chronological notions of past, present and future in favour of the cyclical temporality of myth. Further, the weird coexistence of real and fantastic worlds is reflected in the paradoxical characterisation of the Dog Woman and Jordan. 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 in *Sexing the Cherry* is described as a flexible materialist and has never travelled beyond London and is a fantastically huge giantess, who, like "the awe-inspiring ogres in fairytales, has murdered or maimed thousands of men, including her own father." (107) She herself constantly alludes to her grotesque Swifitean parentage. For instance, she refers to her body as "the mountain of my flesh," and when a frustrated lover complains that she is too big for sex, she resorts that all her bodily parts are "all in proportion" to each other (107). Her huge body and her ugly face with a flat nose, a few broken black teeth and skin covered with pock marks as big as caves where fleas live (24) provoke in male onlookers a misogynist nausea. The Dog Woman shows a most benign and

protective side towards her numerous female friends, including nuns, prostitutes and the wives of the Puritan men she loathes.

Winterson's powerful depiction of communities of women and her presenting an alternative female symbolic realm beyond "heteropatriarchy" shows how while existing in the realm of fictional myth, these are politically powerful images for women. The postmodern critics and queer theorist's foregrounding the deconstructive potential of sexual identities and gender blurring in her works. Drawing on Butler's theories of gender as performance and queer models of transgendered body, Dog Woman's grotesque body can be described as a "queer body" which challenge sexual stereotypes and deconstructs the concepts of natural body, and thus presents a new sexual politics based on difference, diversity and plurality, all tenets of postmodernism.

Indeed, it is only with men, especially Puritans with a double standard of morality, that she displays the all-devouring and deadly facet of her Mother-earth personality. To this type of man, the Dog Woman appears to be, literally, a monster. Thus, her parson has forbidden her to enter the church on the contention that "gargoyles must remain on the outside" (SC 14). And, on seeing her for the first time, the half-wit who kept the gate of the royal gardens tells Tradescant in utter discomfiture that the "garden had been invaded by an evil spirit and her Hounds of Hell" (29), thus comparing her, as Patricia Waugh acutely notes, "to Milton's Sin with her brood of hungry dogs."

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have pointed out how the monstrosity of mythical female hybrids such as sirens, harpies and sphinxes is invariably located in the lower half of their bodies, thus symbolising men's fear of female sexuality and power. Similarly, the Dog Woman's monstrosity is located in her lower half and is associated with her sexual power. The day she lifts her skirts over her head to show the public that she is not hiding any weights, before competing with an elephant in a fair attraction, she provokes "a great swooning amongst the crowd" since she is "wearing no underclothes in respect of the heat" (25). From Lacan's perspective, the Dog Woman's colossal inability to understand the metaphors of patriarchy further augments her position in the unsymbolised realm of the imaginary and confirms the epigraph's assertion that language is the decisive battle ground for the transformation of the symbolic order. Added to her grotesque monstrosity, the Dog Woman's literal-mindedness situates her in a strategic position to reshape patriarchy's false picture of the world, since it is only by transforming the metaphors of patriarchy that she can aspire to create a new symbolic order capable of responding to her own, more feminine and authentic picture of the world.

Jordan also compares his secret book to the invisible letters written by the ancient Greeks, remarking that they were "written in milk" (10). This remark adds crucial insight into the type of individuation process he is initiating, since it points to Jordan's invisible book as an example of *écriture féminine*, the type of writing written with *langue lait*, the 'white ink' of "mother's milk" that Helene Cixous proposes as an alternative to the 'phallogocentric' writing of

patriarchy, carried out as she asserts, with a pen/penis. As becomes clear at the end of the novel, Jordan's individuation process involves his understanding of the constructedness of binary oppositions like father/mother; man/woman; culture/nature; head/hearth and the eventual revelation of his bisexuality. Dog Woman's only fear is not that Jordan might be bodily injured in the course of his journeys, but that he might lose "his heart. His heart" (41), knowing as she does that "he has not my common sense and will no doubt follow his dreams to the end of the world and then fall straight off"(40). If Jordan has to find his own identity, then, he will have to overcome his feeling of incompleteness, symbolised by his obsessive search of Fortunata, and acquire his mother's androgynous completeness.

Thus, one can examine the intersection of lesbianism and postmodernism in *Sexing the Cherry*. Winterson fully uses both lesbian-feminism and postmodernism to deconstruct the sexual identities of her characters and displays how the template of sex and gender can be opened up and the identities can become unstable and fluid. Further, the alternation of narrative voices in the novel complicates its basic pattern, as does the undercutting of the narrative flow by the interpolation of additional texts. In these metanarratives, that is, a narrative within a narrative, fictional discourses such as fairytales, fragments of romance, poems and religious and mythical texts are juxtaposed with the objective discourses of history, medicine, psychology, critical theory, Greek philosophy, Newtonian science, the New physics and so on. The trespassing of narrative and ontological boundaries and the juxtaposition of realistic, fictional, mythical and biblical variations on the same events is a postmodernist narrative technique consciously employed by Winterson to subvert and question the earlier texts and histories.

Written on the Body

Written on the Body, Winterson's fifth novel, presents a narrator which questions gender identity through a complete absence of gender identification. There is no physical description of the narrator's body throughout the novel – it remains invisible. The lover's body in *Written on the Body* is invisible to any objectifying gaze. It can be seen as female, male, hermaphroditic, transgendered, differently abled, from any culture in the world, with any sexual preferences or any combination of the above. With this non-specific narrator, Winterson is evading the consequences of gendering that Monique Wittig, in her article "The Mark of Gender," expresses clearly: "Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it." (78) Winterson evades the enforcement of a gender-bound heterosexual concept of love by giving the lover an invisible body, which is fabulous because it cannot be classified nor it can be put into neat compartments, moreover it is enigmatic and full of endless possibilities.

Jeanette Winterson's language opens up imaginative possibilities rather than delimiting them, perhaps because as Winterson writes, "the important things are often left unsaid; rather, they are inferred, between the lines, or written on the body." () In part, this is because Winterson most often avoids the conventions of realism as for her they point to "a terror of the inner life, of

the sublime, of the poetic, of the non-material, of the contemplative.” () Winterson uses the poetic, the fantastic, the imaginary and the magical in her fiction and evinces a commitment to revivify and transform language.

In the novel, the body is positioned as a text that can be both written and read. Or, conversely, the text is represented as a body and, as such, as an animate object that is constantly changing and that can exert not only intellectual but also physical pleasure, and, conversely, pain upon the reader. The relationship between reader and text is located as more than a cerebral activity; it is intimate, embodied and has the potential of changing lives. The idea that the body can be read and re-read, written and rewritten is the central motif of *Written on the Body*. The novel tells of a love affair between a married woman Louise and the unnamed narrator. The gender and physical aspect of the autodiegetic narrator are never made explicit and the identity of the narrator is problematised, thus suggesting that s/he enjoys the type of bisexuality Jordan achieved in *Sexing the Cherry* at the end of his quest for individuation. The programmatic nature of the narrator’s bisexuality in *Written on the Body* has not always been interpreted differently by different critics. Thus, Rachel Wingfield considers the narrator’s androgyny as an example of formal experimentation, the result of the author’s “postmodernist pre occupation with writing about writing.”

It seems that Derrida’s insight is clearly shared by Winterson, as one of her most characteristic narrative strategies is to place language in quotation marks, as if it were, and in so doing to reframe meaning. She writes:

My work is full of cover versions. I like to take stories we think we know and record them differently. In the re-telling comes a new emphasis or bias, and the new arrangement of the key elements demand that fresh material be injected into the existing text. ()

Importantly, then, while meaning is contextually bound, contexts are boundless. As Winterson insists, “there is no limit to new territory....Reality is continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible”

Winterson has remarked that art has the capacity to allow us to apprehend more than the visible world. In her work, she explores desire, the “valuable, fabulous thing” that remains difficult to articulate. Winterson is trying to establish the same thesis as put forth by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* that identity is not something one is born with, but a fluid, ever-changing and complex ideological process, determined by the individual’s relationship with other individuals. We cannot refer to the narrator as a “she”, meaning hereby that narrator can’t be referred to as a woman/lesbian because that will ignore the text’s insistence that we use the slashed forms “s/he” and “her/his” even if having to use the slashes is irritating, precisely

because it is this irritation that will challenge and set into question the objectivity of patriarchal assumptions about identity.

As the title suggests, *Written on the Body* is a self-conscious experiment in écriture feminine, carried out by an autodiegetic author-narrator, whose aim, as Ute Kauer has succinctly put it, is “no longer self-discovery, but rather self-construction.” (6) In this sense, it is important to realise that, like earlier Winterson autodiegetic narrators at the beginning of their narration, the nameless narrator of *Written on the Body* is a purblind hero/ine engaged in a quest for self-individuation. The novel begins with the narrator presenting her/himself as a reckless Lothario (20) involved in numberless love affairs with partners of both sexes that only last for a brief span of time, either because of the partners’ various oddities; because of sheer incompatibility or, more often, because the narrator’s sexual partner is a married woman who tries to lessen the unhappiness and monotony of her married life by indulging in a secret and passionate sexual affair, without ever, however, contemplating the possibility of setting her marriage at risk. This is a source of endless suffering for the narrator, who hopes for a more stable and affective relationship and invariably ends up heartbroken, feeling misused, objectified and forced to find refuge in her/his own private “island” (27). The narrator's rakish behaviour unexpectedly comes to an end when s/he meets Louise Fox, a beautiful Australian woman who has splendid red hair. Unlike the narrator’s earlier partners, Louise falls in love with her/him, sees no reason to hide their relationship and is ready to divorce her husband, Elgin Rosenthal, a well-to-do cancer specialist, whose orthodox Jewish background is made to symbolise his uncompromising patriarchal ideology. After several months of shared bliss, the narrator learns that Louise is suffering from leukaemia and makes the unilateral decision to leave her in the hands of her husband so that she can undergo specialist treatment in his private Swiss clinic.

After telling this story, the narrator raises the question of her/his own reliability, addressing the reader in a self-conscious frame-break: “I can tell by now that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator.” (24). The narrator repeatedly addresses the reader with this type of questions, so that, as Kauer has noted, s/he “ironises his/her own role constantly as well as the role of the reader [and] plays with the moral objections the implied reader might raise by anticipating them.” Near the end of the novel, the narrator, who is now living alone in a remote cottage in the Yorkshire countryside and is feeling quite sick with yearning for Louise, overtly acknowledges the fictionality of her/his account, when s/he admits that s/he is “making up my own memories of good times” (161). This remark confers a circular structure on the novel and situates the author-narrator in the position of earlier Winterson protagonists like Jordan and Henri, who also wrote the stories of their lives in retrospect and warned their addressees that they were telling stories or reporting imaginary voyages, not facts.

Once the fictionality of the memoirs is taken into account, it is easy to see that the one-dimensionality of the narrator’s lovers is that of well-worn literary types. Inge, for example, is a butch in the invert tradition of the butch/femme couple of early lesbian fiction. By contrast,

Jacqueline, the narrator's latest partner, is a clear example of lesbian 'femme' She is described as a "sort of household pet" (25), and we learn that she installed herself in the narrator's house and assumed the role of housewife without asking first. Other lovers mentioned by the narrator are equally one-dimensional and parodic. The novel *Written on the Body* opens with the question: "Why is the measure of love loss?" (9). This question reflects the narrator's state of mind at the time of writing, which is of utter despair and misery after having lost Louise. This is the question the narrator tries to answer by writing her/his fictional "memories" and the sentence that, according to Jeanette Winterson, concentrates the "single image" around which the whole novel develops (*Art Objects* 169-70). Once posed, the question triggers off what can be described as the narrator's "remembrances of things past." Structured chronologically in the form of diary entries, the evolution of the narrator and Louise's relationship follows the natural rhythm of the seasons through the year, thus suggesting that it has the wholeness of a cosmogonic cycle: it begins with the happy memory of "a certain September" when Louise declared her love; reaches a climax of passion in an August ; is interrupted when the narrator decides to leave Louise to save her as she is suffering from leukaemia on "Christmas Eve" ; and concludes in October with the lovers' reunion .

In the first entry we find the narrator struggling for the right words to write about love. As s/he reflects in *Written on the Body* that, "love demands expression" but it is difficult to express love adequately, since "I love you" is always a quotation (9) and there are too many clichés surrounding the question of love:

Love makes the world go round. Love is blind. All you need is love. Nobody ever died of a broken heart. You'll get over it. It'll be different when we're married. Think of the children. Time's a great healer. Still waiting for Mr Right? Miss Right? And maybe all the little Rights?

It's the clichés that cause the trouble. (10)

Susana Onega in her full-length study, *Jeanette Winterson: a Contemporary Critical Guide*, has said that the narrator's words bring to mind Umberto Eco's definition of post-modernist irony by reference to love in the *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*:

I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her "I love you madly" because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence.(67)

According to Eco, then, the only way in which we can still use the well-worn words of love with the purity and intensity of their pure meaning is by having recourse to irony. From this perspective, the jokes made by the narrator of *Written on the Body* in the recounting of her/his absurd sexual feats and her/his acknowledgement of the fictional nature of the events narrated acquire the double irony, for, although s/he makes constant use of literary clichés to describe her/his sexual feats, the narrator seems to be frankly unaware that s/he is behaving according to these clichés. The lack of self-directed irony in the narrator's report surely is what produces a distancing effect in the readers, revealing the narrator's moral bluntness. This is made evident, for example, when, surprised by the realisation that Louise is not reacting like her/his previous married partners, the narrator says that she is not following the set directions: "This is the wrong script. This is the moment where I'm supposed to be self-righteous and angry." (18). In her/his relationships with numberless married women, the narrator invariably assumed the role of pleasure-giver and victim. When the narrator realises that Louise is not behaving like other married women, that she is in fact offering her/him a relationship built on terms of equality and love, s/he is panic-stricken about living an experience that does not respond to the habitual scheme: "Yes you do frighten me. You act as though we will be together forever. You act as though there is infinite pleasure and time without end. How can I know that? My experience is that time always ends" (18). If s/he is to grow morally and spiritually, then, s/he will have to become aware of the seriousness of Louise's proposal and of the artificiality and wrongness of her/his sexual behaviour.

Before falling in love with Louise the narrator was bisexual in the sense that s/he had sexual intercourse both with women and men, but the relations with her/his partners followed traditional patriarchal patterns of binary opposition and inequality. Her/his bisexuality simply meant that s/he could switch sexual roles: s/he could be the victimiser and the victim, the butch and the femme, the rakish Don Juan/Lothario/Casanova and the masochistic sexual toy of middleaged married women. It is this fear of "infinite pleasure", then, that the narrator must overcome if s/he is to acquire the wholeness and maturity of Cixous's "other bisexuality" which Jordan achieved at the end of *Sexing the Cherry*. Thus, Winterson subverts the traditional gender roles and binary oppositions in her postmodernist text to show that gender and identity are social constructions by her introduction of a narrator whose name, sex, gender and age are intentionally kept hidden so that "heteropatriarchy" and binary oppositions can be questioned and hence deconstructed.

Thus, the novels *Sexing the Cherry* and *Written on the Body* provide a politically useful postmodern unsettling of fixed boundaries and gendered identities. Winterson by employing postmodern techniques construct her narratives in such a way that it questions the social constructs of sex, gender and sexuality. She fruitfully exploits the techniques as well as the ideology of postmodern historiographic metafiction to challenge and subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses and ultimately provides an oppositional but positively forceful critique.

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